

# Turkish Armenian Relations

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The 1915 relocation was undoubtedly a great tragedy for Ottoman Armenians. But this tragedy was mutual. I hope that two Eastern nations, who slaughtered each other as a result of British imperialism and German militarism, will take a page from history and will not sacrifice themselves once more in the 21<sup>st</sup> century for the neo-imperialists' interests in the Caucasus.

At a hearing on June 18, 2008 at the Foreign Affairs Committee of the US House of Representatives, US Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Fried argued that Armenia should recognize its border with Turkey and that Turkey should open its border with Armenia and come to terms with a dark chapter of its history. In short, I believe Fried meant to say: "Turkey should recognize genocide and open its border so that Armenia will recognize its border with Turkey."

## **Demands from Turkey**

At various meetings, Armenian officials have been putting forth a number of demands to Turkey for the improvement of bilateral relations:

- Taking the Sevr Treaty rather than the Kars Treaty as a basis to redraw the border between Turkey and Armenia
- Have Turkey pay reparations to the relocated Armenians who were allegedly subjected to genocide
- Have Turkey desist from seeking a solution that favors Azerbaijan over the Karabakh conflict and from saying that there was no genocide (Hurriyet, January 2, 2008)

The Dashnak Party issued a declaration claiming 16 and half Turkish provinces as "Western Armenia" and was able to put a reference to this declaration into the Armenian constitution thanks to the efforts of Robert Kocharian, also a Dashnak party member. In this context, one ought to ask Fried and Armenian politicians the following: Please let us know if you wish to draw the Turkish-Armenian border along Giresun-Sivas-Mersin or through Trabzon-Malatya-Hatay! It is incomprehensible that government representatives of these two countries can put forth such lawless and unserious proposals.

## **The Text of the “Treaty”**

First, a reminder is needed that

1. For a text to become a treaty, the sides have to sign it and then the respective parliaments need to ratify it and finally the respective heads of state need to sign it and publish it for the treaty become executable. Mr. Danied Fried and Armenian politicians ought to know at least as much as I do that the Sevr Treaty only made it to the first stage and that no other signatory country except for Greece proceeded to the second stage, which basically renders Sevr closer to a “draft” rather than a treaty.

2. In addition, preceding the Kars Treaty, the Ankara government signed the Gumru Treaty with the then independent Republic of Armenia on December 2, 1920 represented by the Dashnak Party’s former Minister of Finance Avram Gulhandanyan, former Prime Minister Alexander Hadisyan and Deputy Minister of Interior Istepan Gurganyan. The Gumru Treaty stipulates in Article 2 that the current Turkish-Armenian border has been recognized with minor adjustments, Article 3, dealing with the legal status of the territories left with Turkey according to this agreement, speaks of the “undeniable historical, legal and ethnic relations of Turkey” to these territories. Article 4 stipulates “the cessation of acts that violate the order and security and are a result of the instigation and encouragement of imperialist countries.” Article 6 regulates that “The Signatories allow for the return of all refugees to their homes left inside the old borders, except for those who have joined enemy armies and took up arms against their own state or have participated in wholesale massacres in occupied territories...” and in Article 10 that the “Yerevan Government accepts the Sevr Treaty, which was rejected categorically by the Turkish Grand National Assembly, as null and void and commits to recall (Armenian) representative delegations in Europe and the United States, who have become instigation tools in the hands of some imperialist government and political circles in a bona fide effort to remove all ill thoughts between the two countries. The Republic of Armenia commits to not include ill intended and violent individuals with imperialist designs who have jeopardized peace and security between the two nations.”

The Kars Treaty of October 13, 1921 ratified the border between Turkey and Armenia with minor changes and also recognized Turkey’s international/national borders. The treaty was signed on behalf of the Republic of Armenia by Foreign Affairs Commissioner Iskinaz Mravyan and by Interior Affairs Commissioner Bogos Makisyan.

As the treaty reveals, the Dashnak party officials have formally reiterated on behalf of the Armenian government that they do not recognize the Sevr Treaty. In a sense they also confess to Ottoman Armenians’ collaboration with the imperialists and to the fact that they committed massacres. Therefore, Armenia’s political leaders should know that the one of the two conditions of defining an administration as a “state” is “continuity” and the other is “recognition” and that these two conditions complement each other. It must also be known that the Ankara Government, which signed the Gumru Agreement, also managed to have all three conditions required by international law satisfied by the signatories of the Lausanne Treaty and turned this Treaty into the deed of the Republic of Turkey and into a taboo.

In this legal framework, one does not need to be a foreign minister or deputy or even an academic like me to know that demanding land from Turkey or Armenia or from any other “sovereign state” is a casus belli. Every educated and rational person can understand that. But occasionally, it can happen in every society that some rather educated albeit dim witted

individuals make claims to Eastern Anatolian lands or that others claim Armenia to be an ancient Turkish Khanate and demand land from Armenia.

### **Lausanne and the Property Debate**

As we discuss the Lausanne Treaty, it may be fit to evaluate the demand voiced in the Armenian National Assembly's session on December 19-20, 2007. Reportedly demanded by the former Armenian Ambassador to Canada Ara Papyan, Turkey was responsible to pay reparations in the amount of 14.5 million USD. The 1915 Law for Relocation and Resettlement, since being a provisional law, required the government to hold an inventory of the property belonging to Armenians in anticipation of their return after the war. This was followed in 1918 with the Repatriation Law. As also stipulated in Article 3 of the Gumru Treaty, the exiled were given the right to return to their homes within three years. Armenian properties were also subject to lengthy discussion during the Lausanne Conference culminating in a determination that while Ottoman citizens who left their places of residence during the war had a right to their property upon their return, the statute of limitations had expired and that they had lost their property rights.

Furthermore, the Addendum to the Lausanne Treaty outlined an amnesty for all crimes committed during the war for political and military purposes committed during the war and determined that no compensation was due to Armenians who died during the war.

### **The Karabakh Debate**

According to the latest reports, Foreign Minister Oskanyan stated, "Turkey's demands from us to end the Karabakh problem in Azerbaijan's favor and drop our genocide allegations, aside from the legal perspective, had no moral basis." (Taraf, January 4, 2007). Moral values carry a philosophical definition that may differ among societies and can be subject to debate. But as far as I know, Karabakh came under Ottoman rule during the reign of Sultan Murat III, entered a time of turmoil as it constantly switched changed hands among Turkey, Russia and Iran during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. When the Turkish army left the region after the Mondros Armistice, the British entered and in 1920 declared Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan. Then again in 1923, the Soviet Union declared Azerbaijan's sovereignty over Karabakh. While the Armenians in Karabakh petitioned the Soviet Union in 1929 to annex Karabakh to Armenia and settle Armenians from outside of Armenia there and continued to do so at every occasion, these demands were rejected by the Soviet Union.

After independence, both countries pledged to adhere to the OSCE principles with respect to Karabakh and to support the peace finding efforts of the UN and other international institutions. However, after the Armenian offense which resulted in the ethnic cleansing and deportation of 1 million Azeris from and particularly in 1993 following the massacres of Azerbaijanis in Hodjali, Turkey changed its policy of regarding the problem as a mainly an internal issue of the Soviet Union and remaining uninvolved. Henceforth, Turkey engaged in a policy that evolved around seeking regional peace in the Caucasus and received assurances from the OSCE that Karabakh's official status was recognized as an autonomous region within Azerbaijan and requested that this status would not be permitted to be changed by means of aggression.

## **The Concessions Package**

Russian Foreign minister Sergeev Lavrov presented a new concessions package to solve the Karabakh problem to Armenian Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanyan prior to the OSCE Foreign Minister's Assembly on November 29, 2007.

Called the "Framework Agreement" by the Minsk Group, this document outlined that

1. Armenian forces must withdraw from the other seven Azerbaijani provinces they occupied in addition to Karabakh
2. Refugees will return
3. Karabakh's status was to be determined

These provisions in the Framework Agreement under which the status of Karabakh has yet to be determined, show clearly that Turkey's policy is in line with international law and that it is not pursuing a policy that favors Azerbaijan.

In the same meeting, Foreign Minister Oskanyan also reportedly stated that "Turkey missed the opportunity to normalize relations in 1991 when the Soviet Union broke apart and when Turkey started membership talks with the EU." Turkey was on the top of the list of countries to recognize Armenian independence in 1991. It was also due to the insistence of then Turkish Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel that Armenia was admitted to the Organization on Black Sea Economic Cooperation, against the objections of others that Armenia was not a littoral country to the Black Sea.

I will not even mention the aid given by Turkey to prevent further embarrassment. If Mr.Oskanyan indeed gave such a statement, I assume he must have forgotten the 1991 chain of events due to interview anxiety. With respect to the legal dimensions of the allegation that Armenians were subject to genocide: Such an allegation can only have legal consequences once there it is adjudicated by a court of law. In the 26 years that I conducted archival research on this issue, particularly in the Russian, British, US and French archives, court decisions, Western commission reports, diplomatic dispatches and others, the events between 1890-1918 are referred to as mutual massacres. If there is a document in the archives in Yerevan and with Mr.Oskanyan that shows these events to be a genocide, I would surely like to use it. There is no doubt that the 1915 Relocation is not an "auspicious event" for the Ottoman Armenians, it is a big tragedy. But this tragedy has been mutual. I hope that two Eastern nations, who slaughtered each other as a result of British imperialism and German militarism, will prove that history only repeats itself for fools and will become the main actors in the new balance of power which is being shaped in the region.

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