

# The Armenian question in Turkey's domestic and international policy

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## Abstract

Even if the Armenian question does not have the importance of the Kurdish question for Turkey's domestic policy, it plays a central role for Turkey's self-understanding. What lies at the center is not primarily the everyday discrimination of Armenians which emanates from the population. Rather, it is the combat against those who want to designate the widespread deaths of Armenians in the course of the alleged resettlement of Armenians during World War I as genocide. It has only been since the massive opposition by governments and parliaments of numerous countries that Turkey has initiated research into genocide at all. Together with the discrimination of religious minorities, this has become a stumbling block for entry into the EU.

**Keywords** Turkey, Armenian, genocide, policy.

## 1. Introduction<sup>2</sup>

“Who still talks about the extermination of Armenians?”<sup>3</sup> With these words in an address before Wehrmacht (German armed forces) supreme commanders, Adolf Hitler justified what began a few days later as the obliteration of Poland. What appears

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<sup>2</sup> Translated by Dr Richard McClary from “Die Armenierpolitik in der türkischen Innen- und Außenpolitik”. S. 77-88 in: Bernd Rill (ed.). *Türkische Innenpolitik. Argumente und Materialien zum Zeitgeschehen* 86. Hanns Seidel Stiftung, Munic, 2013. ISBN 978-3-88795-420-8. I not only owe thanks to colleagues in Turkey and Germany for much information in the form of literature and discussions. I also owe thanks to the Patriarchats Vicar Archbishop Aram Ateşyan; to Aram I, Catholicos of Cilicia of the Armenian Apostolic Church, residing in Lebanon; to the ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I; and to the Syrian Orthodox Metropolitan Yusuf Çetin, the former and the new Mufti of Istanbul as well as Turkish and Armenian discussion partners. The latter individuals do not wish to be named. All web links were checked on 5 July 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik. Serie D: 1937 – 1941. Bd. VII. Berlin, 1961, p. 193.

to have actually been forgotten then has today become the object of a worldwide, highly political, and academic controversy.<sup>4</sup>

Prior to and during World War I, ethnic 'cleansings' were planned ahead in Germany, France, Russia, and other European nation states.<sup>5</sup> In the process, what was primarily involved was a situation with population exchanges, i.e. certain areas were to be reserved for certain ethnicities and they would thus be sorted out. However, it was within the crumbling Ottoman Empire where such ideas were implemented for the first time in modernity in a manner, whereby resettlements ended in widespread deaths.<sup>6</sup>

"Between 1915 and 1917, the oldest Christian people group [TS: in Asia Minor] was almost completely annihilated."<sup>7</sup> Just 100 years ago, 25% of the population in Asia Minor and one-half of the inhabitants of Constantinople were Christians. Today, officially 99% of the inhabitants of Turkey are Muslim. The number of Armenians, the largest Christian minority in Turkey at that time as well as today, has shrunk from about 2.1 million to an estimated 60,000, thus representing fewer than 0.1% of all Turkish inhabitants. Approximately 75% of those who openly identify themselves as Armenians in Turkey live in Istanbul.<sup>8</sup>

The 2.1 million Armenians who were living in the Ottoman Empire in 1895, representing 38.9% of the population, comprised the largest population group in the six Armenian provinces of the Empire, ahead of Turks and Kurds.<sup>9</sup> In the 19th century, for instance in 1895/1896, there had already been pogroms against the Armenians with thousands of deaths in each case, and these resulted in the emigration of many Armenians.

"For centuries, Armenians lived as a Christian minority among Muslims in the Ottoman Empire, in Constantinople. Above all, however, they lived in six East Anatolian provinces in what is present-day Turkey. Then, however, in 1908 the revolution of Young Turks shook the country. Generals Talat Pascha, Enver Pascha, and Cemal

<sup>4</sup> The discussion as to the extent to which the displacement of Armenians can be correlated to the Jewish Holocaust, as a model or a precursor, is in high gear; see the articles in Fritz Bauer Institut, Sybille Steinbache (ed.), *Holocaust und Völkermorde: Die Reichweite des Vergleichs*. Campus: Frankfurt am Main, 2012. Placing it on an equivalent level can be found in Yücel Güçlü, *The Holocaust and the Armenian case in comparative perspective*. Univ. Press of America: Lanham, Md., 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Schwartz, *Ethnische "Säuberungen" in der Moderne*. Oldenburg: München, 2013, pp. 32-60.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 61-114.

<sup>7</sup> Karen Krüger, 'Völkermord an den Armeniern,' *FAZ*, April 10, 2010. <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/debatten/integration/voelkermord-an-den-armeniern-das-letzte-was-ich-von-den-kindern-sah-1582205.html>.

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of the numbers Cf Tessa Hofmann, "Wer in der Türkei Christ ist, zahlt einen Preis dafür". *Märtyrer 2007: Das Jahrbuch zur Christenverfolgung heute*. VKW: Bonn, 2007, pp. 156-184, download under <http://www.bucer.de/institute/iirf/maertyrer.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Anne Elizabeth Redgate, *The Armenians*. Oxford, 2000, p. 271.

Pascha took over power. They promised equal treatment for all minorities, but they had something completely different in mind: a great empire in which only Turks live, united by blood, religion, and ethnicity. The gathering storm of World War I leveled the way for them. Germany, at that time a co-belligerent, looked on silently: 1.5 million people became victims of genocide between 1915 and 1917. Up to the present day, Armenians around the world commemorate April 24, marking the date as the beginning of the genocide.”<sup>10</sup>

Whoever writes on this topic actually would have to treat the pre-history of the Christian minority in Turkey, in particular after the dissolution of the millet system in the 19th century<sup>11</sup> and would have to treat all Christians, indeed all minorities in Turkey, and would have to describe the present situation of the Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, and other long-established Christian minorities. Since this is done in other parts of Baum's book and space is limited here, we have to restrict ourselves to the present times and to the Armenian question.

It would be fitting at this point to summarize the current research results on Armenian genocide,<sup>12</sup> to report on the more recent disputes regarding the genocide question,<sup>13</sup> to trace the ups and downs of discrimination against Armenians over the past decades,<sup>14</sup> but also to discuss to what extent the Erdogan government made progress for the Christian minorities and why in spite of this, an actual breakthrough has not been successful.

## 2. Foreign policy

“Turkey has lodged an official protest against a statement made by Pope Francis about the displacement of Armenians during World War I. The Turkish Embassy to the Holy See confirmed on Monday in Rome that the Ambassador for the Holy See had been summoned. During a meeting with the Armenian Catholic patriarch

<sup>10</sup> Karen Krüger. “Völkermord an den Armeniern,” FAZ, April 10, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> For an introduction see Wilhelm Baum. *Die Türkei und ihre christlichen Minderheiten*. Kitab: Klagenfurt, 2005 und Tessa Hofmann (ed.). *Verfolgung, Vertreibung und Vernichtung der Christen im Osmanischen Reich. 1912 – 1922*. Münster, 2004.

<sup>12</sup> The best (and most recent) highly nuanced presentation is Schwarz, pp. 30- 126; also comp. Martin Bitschnau (ed.). *Armenien: Tabu und Trauma*. Band. 1: *Die Fakten im Überblick*. Apyrenum Press: Wien, 2010 and the collection of documents by Jörg Berlin. *Völkermord oder Umsiedlung? Das Schicksal der Armenier im Osmanischen Reich. Darstellung und Dokumente*. PapyRossa-Verl.: Köln, 2006; Wolfgang Gust (ed.): *Der Völkermord an den Armeniern 1915/16: Dokumente aus dem Politischen Archiv des Deutschen Auswärtigen Amts*. zu Klampen: Sprünge, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Representative is: Seyhan Bayraktar. “Politik und Erinnerung: Der Diskurs über den Armeniermord zwischen Nationalismus und Europäisierung.” Transcript: Bielefeld, 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately there is no similarly thorough presentation for the present such as that by Tessa Hofmann. *Armenians in Turkey Today*. Report for The Forum of Armenian Associations in Europe. October 2002. [www.armenian.ch/gsa/Docs/faae02.pdf](http://www.armenian.ch/gsa/Docs/faae02.pdf).

Nerses Bedros XIX. Tarmouni in the Vatikan, Francis had labeled the atrocities committed against Armenians as the 'first genocide of the 20th century.' The Turkish Foreign Ministry issued a statement over the weekend condemning the papal statement. In a statement made public on the internet, the papal statement was condemned as 'absolutely unacceptable.' It is expected that the Pope contribute to world peace and not that he foment hostilities about historical events.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, it was in 1990 that George Bush, Sr., became the only President of the United States up to that time to speak of the events of 1915 as 'terrible massacres,'<sup>16</sup> but the immediate protest of Turkey stopped all further developments. In 2000, Turkey successfully saw the breakdown of what was a sure initiative by the US Congress against the genocide committed against Armenians by threatening to let the US rights of use of the military base in the Turkish city of Incirlik lapse. Bill Clinton backed down, as Congress had also done in 1984, 1987, and 1990. In 2001, Turkey could not prevent the French National Assembly from declaring with statutory force that the displacement of Armenians was genocide. (In 2012, the National Assembly decided that denying this genocide was punishable. The Constitutional Council then rescinded this as unconstitutional due to the limitation it placed on the freedom of expression.) Turkey temporarily broke diplomatic relations with France every time and introduced economic sanctions.

Even the German Federal Parliament was silent for several decades, making consideration for the fact that it was dealing with a NATO ally. On the 90th anniversary, in an Armenian Resolution dated June 16, 2005, it only decided to place pressure on Turkey via a compromise across party lines. It refrained from using the term 'genocide' but rather spoke of "displacement and massacres committed against Armenians in 1915" and of offenses committed against the Armenian people."<sup>17</sup> In the same year, under pressure from Turkey, Brandenburg refrained from including treatment of the genocide of Armenians in its history curriculum. After an intense discussion in the media, this was reversed in 2006. All other German Federal States fail to treat the topic at all.

It is noteworthy that dealing with Turkey with respect to this segment of national history is playing a critical role in the EU accession process. Acknowledgment of the genocidal character of the displacement of Armenians has become an informal criterion for accession.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.kath.net/news/41621>; [http://de.radiovaticana.va/news/2013/06/10/türkei\\_protestiert\\_gegen\\_armenier-äußerung\\_des\\_papstes/te-700154](http://de.radiovaticana.va/news/2013/06/10/türkei_protestiert_gegen_armenier-äußerung_des_papstes/te-700154) (July 5, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Bayraktar, p. 135. There seem to only be a few families in Anatolia, who have not raised Armenian children.

<sup>17</sup> Details in Bayraktar, pp. 230-232.

<sup>18</sup> Bayraktar, p.15.

The European Parliament already decided in 1987 that the displacement of Armenians was genocide in the sense of the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide adopted in 1948. At that time it also tied consent to this declaration with Turkey's possible European Community accession. The European Union (EU) Parliament confirmed this demand in 2002 and 2005.<sup>19</sup> Only a few EU members, such as France and the Netherlands, have replicated this decision through their national parliaments. The denial that genocide was conducted on Armenians was prohibited in Switzerland but only punishable within the framework of general anti-racist legislation.

[I personally hold this demand on Turkey to be unjust. This is due to the fact that other EU members are not measured by how they deal with their own history. However, how religious freedom, freedom of expression, and freedom of the press are dealt with now should be accession criteria!]

On November 10, 2008, in the Turkish Embassy to the EU in Brussels upon the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the death of the Turkish state founder, the Turkish Defense Minister Vecdi Gönül labeled the "exchange of populations" between Turkey and Greece an important building block for the emergence of modern Turkey and reckoned that Turkey would not be the nation state that it is today if so many Greeks and Armenians were to still live there.<sup>20</sup> Such statements feed the link made between 1915 and the present.

### **3. Foreign policy and the Armenian diaspora**

The enormous activities of Armenian organizations around the world are not to be underestimated. Since the Middle Ages, Armenians have continuously emigrated in large numbers from their home regions into the entire world. Discrimination in the 19th century accelerated the process. Large groups of survivors of the events prior to the founding of the Republic of Turkey found refuge in Russia, France, and the USA. In recent decades there has also been an uninterrupted emigration of young Armenians from Turkey. Additionally, what was once the Soviet Republic of Armenia has existed as an autonomous nation since 1991. Around the globe it has promoted processing the events of 1915/1916 and has kept them in remembrance.

Apart from the 3.1 million Armenians in Armenia, and without wanting to get into an academic debate and committing to a number as an exact estimate, there appear to be over 1.2 million Armenians in Russia, 800,000 in the USA, 300,000 in France and in Georgia, 130,000 in Nagorno Karabakh, 100,000 in the Ukraine, and

<sup>19</sup> Sources in Bayraktar, p. 72.

<sup>20</sup> "Türkei: Minister lobt Vertreibung von Griechen und Armeniern," Die Presse, November 11, 2008, [http://diepresse.com/home/politik/aussenpolitik/429389/Tuerkei\\_Minister-lobt-Vertreibung-von-Griechen-und-Armeniern](http://diepresse.com/home/politik/aussenpolitik/429389/Tuerkei_Minister-lobt-Vertreibung-von-Griechen-und-Armeniern).

70,000 in Iran, Lebanon, and Argentina, respectively, and 50,000 in Syria, Canada, Greece, Bulgaria, and Uzbekistan, respectively. In Germany it is estimated that the number of inhabitants with Armenian roots is 30,000-50,000.<sup>21</sup>

From 1975-1983, Armenian extremists executed attacks on Turkish facilities and diplomats around the world, killing 79 people. Unfortunately, these reprehensible events were what first set discussion and research in motion, but since that time academic disputes and peaceful commemorative events have stood in the foreground.

#### 4. Domestic policy

What is the significance of Armenian policy for Turkish domestic policy? If one compares the Armenian question with the Kurdish question, it is much less significant. That certainly has to do with the fact that the group involved is smaller, at least based on the number of Armenians who publicly disclose their background. There is also at this point no potential for violence among the victims within the country as there is with Kurds. An Armenian friend wrote me the following: "One can actually not expect that such a small population group is so important. But the topic of '1915' and many practices, which remain up to the present day, show that the topic in domestic policy occupies a rather important position."

The matter actually has less to do with the current Armenian question, i.e. the question of dealing with Armenians nowadays. Indeed, Armenians are discriminated against everywhere in Turkey and are de facto second class citizens. For instance, they do not have equal access to state positions or higher education. However, it does not require any special activities, and it is seldom that the central government becomes active in this regard. As far as domestic policy is concerned, however, the historical question regarding how the pogroms in World War I are dealt with plays a significant role.

This question initially appears to play a significant foreign policy role, and the Armenian question above all becomes tangible for the public when the Turkish government acts against other governments. However, it is also internally that one sees Turkey battling researchers and others who want to designate the events of 1915/1916 as genocide or call for more precise research, even if the pressure has dropped over against earlier times. It is for that reason that a grandson of Cemal Pascha was able to publish a book in Turkey entitled 1915 Genocide.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> A detailed table with documentation for numerous estimates can be found at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenian\\_diaspora](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenian_diaspora).

<sup>22</sup> Hasan Cemal. 1915: Ermeni Soykırımı (Der Völkermord an den Armeniern). Verlag Everest Yayınları: Istanbul, 2012; vgl. <http://www.dradio.de/dlf/sendungen/andruck/1920047/>.

But does not the demeanor of foreign policy occur primarily for domestic policy reasons? There is some indication of this, for there is actually no country making modern Turkey responsible for the genocide which took place then, especially since it happened before the founding of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 and for many people counts as part of the vicissitudes of World War I. Turkey is only criticized for being an impediment to coming to terms with it, limiting freedom of opinion and freedom of the press, and by not wanting to view mass murders as genocide or at least as crimes. Rather, Turkey views the events as self-defense against a group which had allied itself with an enemy in the war. That Turkey allows continual foreign policy contention about its own history must actually above all have domestic policy reasons. *In Turkey a prominent domestic political question is the honor of Turks and of Turkey and, in the opinion of the government and the great majority of the population, shame and disgrace have to be averted.*

Indeed, § 301 of the Turkish Penal Code, which made “denigration of Turkishness” punishable, was changed to a “denigration of the Turkish State” under pressure from the EU after the murder of Hrant Dink. Since that time, an indictment according to § 301 additionally requires an approval from the Minister of Justice (which naturally contradicts the separation of powers). In practice, however, nothing has changed, i.e. there have continued to be journalists, human rights activists, and researchers who have voiced their opposition to the official line held by the government in the Armenian question and who have been confronted with this paragraph.

An additional domestic policy reason has yet to be mentioned. After having said for decades that there was no genocide and also having seen Erdogan's government continue this policy, it would be devastating if the government suddenly changed its thinking, given the fact that this would occur in a shame oriented culture.<sup>23</sup>

Turkey also sees the unexpressed danger that coming to terms with the displacement of Armenians could bring forth additional ‘skeletons in the closet.’ This is due to the fact that the policy of ethnic cleansing towards Assyrians and Armenians, the oppression of Kurds in the 1910s to the 1930s, and the resettlement policy with Greece in the 1920s have all only been scantily researched. And finally, this is all the more the case since much less source material on these topics is available outside of Turkey than regarding the Armenians and the extant sources in Turkey are not accessible.

The events are naturally closely interrelated with the domestic policy question regarding the situation of religious and ethnic minorities in Turkey, above all with

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Sighard Neckel. Status und Scham. Frankfurt: Campus, 1991; Thomas Schirmmacher, Klaus W. Müller (eds.). Scham- und Schuldorientierung in der Diskussion. VKW: Bonn & VTR: Nürnberg, 2006; Thomas Schirmmacher. Culture of Shame / Culture of Guilt. VKW: Bonn, 2013.

the similarly superimposed fate of other Christian minorities. One needs to realize that it would be an easy matter for Prime Minister Erdogan to implement the many measures and pledges which have been made to minorities and the EU. They would cause neither extensive costs nor demand changes in legislation.

I asked an Armenian friend in Turkey whether the Kurdish issue or the Armenian question was more important for Turkish domestic politics. His answer: "In my opinion, the Kurdish issue is the biggest question in present day Turkey; over the long term, the Armenian question will cause Turkey more headaches. I hope that there is a quick solution. Every year the 24th of April means a lot of stress for us." (235 Armenian intellectuals were arrested without cause on April 24, 1915, which was the beginning of the pogrom.)

## **5. Domestic policy: The mood among the population**

One should not lose sight of the fact that disdain of Armenians and discrimination against them is deeply rooted in Turkish society. For instance, up to the present day, Armenians who want to open a business change their name so that people will consider buying from them at all.

Thus the largest part of the Turkish population is of the conviction that laws regarding the Armenian question in France or in Switzerland exclusively serve to put Turkey in a bad light in front of the world. Since the topic is not treated in Turkish schools and in Turkish literature, students instead receive consistent and nice foundation myths about Turkey, the country's inhabitants naturally also do not know the background.

Unfortunately, there have not been any current day surveys made among Turks about how they think about Armenians. There are also no current surveys that have been made among Armenians in Turkey about when and where they feel discriminated against. However, whenever I have the opportunity to ask Armenian Turks, they have clearly implied that everyday discrimination by the population is much more direct and worse than the legal disadvantages and activities of the central government. The latter situations actually only arise when there are questions of property relating to churches or the possessions of churches, or when it comes to questions of academic conferences or the activities of other governments.

The appearance in the media, in everyday life, and in political parties is that the overwhelming majority of Turks shares the position taken by the government on the Armenian question and does not want a change.<sup>24</sup> The murder of Hrant Dink in 2007 shocked most Turks – as did other murders of Christian leaders thereafter –

<sup>24</sup> Seyhan Baraktar (op. cit.) has analyzed around 1,000 texts from the period 1973 to 2005 and has documented the continuing discrimination of Armenians. Unfortunately, a similarly basic analysis is not available for the present.



but in all of that no fundamental questioning of the discrimination of Christians can be seen. It just should not happen in the form of open violence or murder.

One should also not forget: In addition to Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP), there is a second great power in Turkey, the representatives of Kemalism in the army and in the largest opposition party, the Republican People's Party (CHP). In the Armenian question (and in dealing with religious minorities at all), both enemy camps are in agreement. Indeed, Kemalists are for the most part even more radical. Christians can generally remember that the situation under the Erdogan administration is better for them than previously under the Kemalists. There is also no notable political entity in Turkey – apart from a number of Kurdish politicians – which would campaign to essentially improve the situation for Christians and religious minorities.

## **6. Improvements under Erdogan**

I asked an Armenian friend from Turkey the following question: “How often does a normal citizen in Turkey come into contact with the view of the Armenian question held by the Erdogan government, e.g. in school, in the media, in everyday life? He answered my question as follows: “Naturally one comes into contact with it. We have become very accustomed to it, to the point that we don't even notice it. A number of improvements in the recent past have, however, led to a situation where we have had an opportunity to catch our breath. To give a simple example: When I was small, we were scared to speak Armenian on the street. We were taught in school that we were Turks. In military service, on the other hand, we were labeled Armenians and were equated with those who have a criminal record. That is no longer the case nowadays.”

The improvements under the Erdogan government are not only noticeable in everyday life. Rather, they are also noticeable institutionally: “Up to the beginning of the AKP government's term of office, there was assimilation and there was a pressure of serious proportions. Nowadays, the situation is better. Today there are even separate departments for Armenians and other minorities in the security forces and in the Foreign Ministry.”

Can one differentiate between what is considered the discrimination of religious minorities and what falls under racist discrimination of ethnic minorities? In the Armenian question, it would be difficult to separate both aspects. However, up until the Erdogan government, the racist share might well have played a larger role. Since Erdogan, Islam has played a larger role in Turkish identity, and with that said, a more noticeable distinguishing feature against Armenians as Christians. My friend writes: “Admittedly, up to the AKP administration, it had precious little to do with Christianity. At its root, it had more to do with racism. Certainly, being Turkish and

associated with Islam as well as being Armenian and associated with Christianity are such closely tied links that it is difficult to precisely isolate what is racism and determine where religious fanaticism begins.”

## 7. The Turkish view

With genocide, the Turkish government and Turkey's official historiography combine something comparable with National Socialism, presupposing a racist-ideological motivation and a group of victims which are in no way themselves involved in warlike disputes. Since Armenians, however, were seen as a religious group who as Christians had allied themselves with Christian enemies, and since Armenians who had converted to Islam in the 19th century had not been persecuted, the idea that one was dealing with genocide as a result of racism has been rejected.

In the process, it has been overlooked that the UN's 1948 definition of genocide presupposes neither a certain ideology nor a certain type of 'people.' Rather, the definition only contains the goal of planning to kill members of a certain group or to deliver them up to possible death.<sup>25</sup> Article 2 reads as follows: "In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (A) Killing members of the group; (B) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (C) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (D) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (E) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."

A) to C) are well documented. Regarding E), Tessa Homann has well documented that in the course of the displacement, 150,000 to 200,000 small children who were Armenian were either given away or taken away and later not returned.<sup>26</sup> These children later married and thus became the parents and grandparents of people who are today Turks. Up to the present day, this has been a delicate domestic political issue.

The charge or observation is often made that Armenians are among the ancestors of leading Turkish politicians. This has occurred in the cases of Turgut Özal, Mesut Yılmaz, Abdullah Gül, Devlet Bahçeli, and Alpaslan Türkeş. It is sup-

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<sup>25</sup> It cannot be discussed here that the UN's 1948 definition is too narrow from today's point of view since, for instance, it leaves out social groups, it goes too far since it does not prescribe that there must be a large number of victims and that, generally, tracking genocide and research into genocide have together made many advancements.

<sup>26</sup> Tessa Hofmann. "Armeniens verborgene Kinder: Die so genannten Krypto-Armenier in der Republik Türkei." Lecture, May 15, 2010. [http://www.aga-online.org/news/attachments/TessaHofmann\\_Vortrag\\_15052011\\_Dersim\\_Armenier.pdf](http://www.aga-online.org/news/attachments/TessaHofmann_Vortrag_15052011_Dersim_Armenier.pdf) und weitere ihrer Veröffentlichungen.

posed that even the founder of the state, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, had Armenian ancestors.<sup>27</sup> However, it is impossible to investigate this situation on the basis of documented material in Turkey.

For example, in 2004 Turkey was shocked by the news on the front page of the February 21, 2004 edition of *Hürriyet* when it reported that the adopted daughter of the founder of the state, Kemal Atatürk, and the first female pilot in Turkey – and with that said almost a national symbol – had been an Armenian child who had survived displacement. The information had been made public prior thereto by the journalist Hrant Dink on the basis of interviews with relatives of the adopted daughter. The Turkish General Staff did not even make any effort to contradict the facts. Rather, the Turkish General Staff labeled it an injury to the national sentiments and values of Turkey to even contemplate this.<sup>28</sup>

Up to the present day, Turkey justifies the policy of displacement of Armenians pursued by the Young Turks – more specifically the *İttihad ve Terakki* (Union and Progress) Party – as an act of self-defense made necessary by the war. Works by renowned Turkish history professors, who view the guilt as lying upon the Armenians themselves, have been translated into German.<sup>29</sup> “At most, what has been admitted is that in connection with their deportation to Mesopotamia, only small numbers of Armenians eventually arrived and survived this ordeal. Several hundred thousand (300,000 or more) Armenians met their death with the suppression of an Armenian uprising. Overall, far more Muslims (Turks, Kurds, and others) were killed by the allied Russians and Armenians than Armenians by Turks and Kurds.”<sup>30</sup> “In the 1980s, a form of sponsored academic life established itself which reinforced the thesis of the deportation of Armenians on account of the war. Since foreign parliaments have begun spending time on the topic, Turkish historians have utilized a new manoeuvre: It is not the Muslim population which massacred Armenians. Rather, it is the other way around. Estimates speak of three million. Whoever is not willing to believe that is intimidated, maligned, and criminally prosecuted. The Nobel Prize winner in Literature Orhan Pamuk has dared to speak of ‘genocide’ and was for that reason charged with ‘denigration of Turkishness.’ Turkish publishers who print books contradicting national historiography are slapped with such high monetary fines that they are driven to bankruptcy.”<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> <http://haypressnews.wordpress.com/2012/08/29/war-ataaturk-armenier/>.

<sup>28</sup> Details in Bayraktar, p. 269.

<sup>29</sup> E.g., Kemal Çiçek. *Die Zwangsumsiedlung der Armenier 1915 bis 1917*. Manzara Verlag: Pfungstadt, 2011; Kemal Çiçek, Ömer Turan, Ramazan Çalık, Yusuf Halaço lu. *Die Armenier: Exil und Umsiedlung*. Manzara Verlag: Pfungstadt, 2012.

<sup>30</sup> Egbert Jahn. “Erinnerung an Völkermord als politische Waffe in der Gegenwart.” *Frankfurter Montagsvorlesungen NF 04*. June 4, 2012, <http://www.fb03.uni-frankfurt.de/46582983/ZSFraMoV04-NET-Voelkermord-14.pdf>, p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Krüger.

## 8. Advice for Turkey

Turkey's behavior is primarily conspicuous because public apologies for the crimes of earlier generations are in vogue. Bill Clinton apologized for slave trading and the United States' failure to act during the genocide in Rwanda, Queen Elizabeth apologized for the oppression of the Maoris in New Zealand, Pope John Paul II apologized for various failings of the Catholic Church, for instance the conquest of South America and the condemnation of Galileo Galilei. The Australian government apologized in 2008 to the Aborigines, the French Government apologized in 2008 for the Dreyfus Affair, and the Canadian government has apologized to Indians whose children were forcibly adopted.<sup>32</sup>

Turkey's behavior is all the more astonishing given that, on the one hand, the Republic of Turkey's founding narrative for 1923 demonstrates a determined break from the Ottoman Empire and, on the other hand, Erdogan's Islamic oriented government has firmly broken away from the Young Turks' Kemalist-secular orientation as well as from previous history and the first decades of the Republic of Turkey.

Turkey's behavior with respect to genocide has brought about its own way of academically dealing with genocide. This is to use 'denial' as the final act of genocide, and in the meantime this is pursued as its own independent field of research. As a result, in the meantime the denial of genocide in Turkey has been almost as well researched as genocide itself.<sup>33</sup> In this sense, Turkey has done genocide research a favor, but that also means the following: A somewhat less noisy behavior on the part of Turkey would have arguably prevented the Turks' genocide of Armenians from being the first case of genocide in modernity discussed in academia ... and from having such a central role in genocide research.

It is important to highlight the following: If the depiction of the displacement of Armenians had not been blocked by Turkey as it has been, it would be much easier to objectively present all aspects, also all aspects which would partly exonerate Turkey. Also, the question of whether there was a planned and coordinated genocide or only widespread death among civilians that has to be accepted in the chaos of war<sup>34</sup> would be able to be better discussed without the 'drama' of domestic and international politics.<sup>35</sup>

Indeed, it is justified to carefully examine the numbers in circulation in a critical academic manner, as is done for instance by Jahn: "The small people group, the

<sup>32</sup> See Christopher Daase. "Entschuldigung und Versöhnung in der internationalen Politik." *Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 63 (2013): 25/26 (June 17): 43-49.

<sup>33</sup> See literature in Bayraktar, pp. 42, 53-54.

<sup>34</sup> There is a good list of the most important representatives of different positions in Boris Barth. *Genozid*. München, 2006, pp. 62-78 and Bayraktar, p. 35-36.

<sup>35</sup> For instance clearly so in Jahn, p. 16.

Armenians, with around 4.5 million people, accounted for more than a seventh of the death toll of World War I. However, one has to differentiate between four groups of fatalities: 1. Soldiers and other armed combatants who died in war between nations or in Armenian insurgencies, 2. Civilians and prisoners of war who were killed near the front line in tight temporal or locational connection to the acts of war (commonplace war crimes), 3. Villagers and those deported who died owing to state disarray, such as many Turks and even Ottoman soldiers, ... 4. Civilians and political detainees who were systematically shot, beaten to death, drowned, and burned by government office holders, or who were delivered into the hands of private murderous groups or delivered up to death by thirst, hunger, and disease ... all on account of official orders. Only in the case of the fourth group it is appropriate to speak of victims of genocide. According to various estimates, their number could be around 650,000, plus or minus 200,000 to 300,000."<sup>36</sup>

In spite of this differentiation, he comes to the following conclusion: "Whichever of the numbers is empirically the most sound, the fact of a comprehensive genocide committed against hundreds of thousands of Armenians, largely organized by state authorities in the shadow of the World War and in the face of the impending breakdown of the Ottoman Empire, cannot be seriously doubted."<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, one has to take into account the context of war, the turmoil of World War I, and the confusion of the events along the front lines in the East. One should mention all victims and victim groups, including Muslims, and openly describe why they died. Indeed, one has to see all uprisings and civil wars involving Christian minorities as background which led to an independent nation state of Armenia within the Ottoman Empire. In 1920, militarily a nation state emerged when the Entente left Armenia in the lurch and it fled into the arms of the Russians. Indeed, the Russian Czar labeled the Armenians his allies, and Armenians served in the Russian army.<sup>38</sup> Admittedly, all of this does not explain why Armenians not only in the areas around the front lines but throughout Turkey were displaced. It also does not explain why they were not deported into areas where Armenians could have then accounted for the majority; rather, they were allowed to starve to death. For all that, it would put Turkey in line with other often likewise unscrupulous participants in the war.

Turkey has refused the religious communities of the Armenian Patriarch as well as of the ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, the Catholic Church, and the chief rabbi in Istanbul existence as legal entities. If religious freedom were to be guaranteed in Turkey, many countries in the EU would surely be quickly prepared to allow the 'Armenian question' to be history and not to hold it against modern Turkey. Against

<sup>36</sup> Jahn, p. 12.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>38</sup> This is only a selection. More is found in Schwartz.

the background of Christian and other religious minorities' still not being allowed to exist legally and the state's allowing or initiating the expropriation of a large part of the ancient Mor Gabriel Syrian Orthodox cloister, suspicion is repeatedly nurtured that Turkey has learned nothing about this question over the past one hundred years.

To actually allow Christian minorities in Turkey the rights they have legally long possessed would greatly exonerate Turkey in the historical Armenian question and in many quarters would take Turkey out of the line of fire with respect to this question.

## 9. Appendix: Crypto-Armenians

In Turkey there seem to be many citizens who are actually of Armenian descent but who keep this concealed outside of the family. The result is that they are considered to be 'normal' Turks. I have myself spoken with Turks whose mother or grandmother have admitted on their deathbeds that the family is Armenian. That often unleashes an interest on the part of the younger generation to find out more about their own history as well as Armenian Christianity. How many such 'crypto-Armenians' are there? How many of them know that they are Armenian? The estimates vary considerably. One Armenian friend from Turkey wrote me the following: "There are even those who say that it amounts to a few million. It is said that more than half of the people in Tunceli, 30% of the people in the district of Kahta in the province of Adiyaman are Armenians. However, there is a difference between an assertion and proofs. I suppose that the number is far above one million. We very often encounter statements like the following: 'My grandmother was also an Armenian.'"

In 1980 the then Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, Shnork Kaloustian, formulated four major groups of Armenians living in Turkey. It is a division which in the meantime has become standard practice:<sup>39</sup>

Individuals who have formally maintained their identity as Armenians. Most of these Armenians live in Istanbul.

Islamified Armenians or Turkisized Armenians who have completely assimilated (often generations ago) into mainstream Turkish society.

Kurdized Armenians who were Islamified three or more centuries ago and who mostly live as Kurdish tribes but have not truly been integrated into Kurdish society.

Crypto-Armenians (Turkish: 'Kripto Ermeniler') are Armenians who are primarily in Anatolia; outwardly, they have converted to Islam but have retained their Armenian identity. Quite a number convert back to Christianity and attach themselves to the first group if they move to Istanbul.

<sup>39</sup> Cf Karen Khanlaryan. "The Armenian ethnoreligious elements in the Western Armenia." Noravank Foundation, September 29, 2005. [http://www.noravank.am/eng/issues/detail.php?ELEMENT\\_ID=3724](http://www.noravank.am/eng/issues/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=3724), as well as also subject to all Wikipedia articles: <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kryptoarmenier>, similarly the English version: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crypto-Armenians>.