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# **The French Armenian Diaspora and Turkey**

## **The Possibility of Dialogue?**

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# Franco-Turkish Briefings

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Dorothee Schmid, head of Ifri’s Turkish Studies Program

## Foreword

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For several decades, French persons of Armenian origin have played a special role in Franco-Turkish relations. History explains this. Armenians originally came to France fleeing the massacres at the end of the Ottoman Empire, and for nearly a century they have integrated perfectly into the French social and political landscape, while keeping the memory of past traumas intact. Recognition of the 1915 genocide has been an explicit claim by the Armenian Diaspora scattered across the four corners of the world. In 2001, such recognition was voted by the French Parliament, and has thus become a subject of discord between France and Turkey.

No dialogue can take place between the two States on this matter. Turkey has great difficulty in opening up the darker sides of its past, and accuses France of judging issues that are none of its concern. France, of its part, is quick to position itself as the defender of universal values, which it sometimes forgets concerning itself, while French Armenians always come forward at inopportune moments to recall the genealogy of their pain. This issue was for long taboo for the Turks, while nourishing violent militancy among Armenians - including the ASALA terrorist attacks in the 1980s. It continues to pollute Franco-Turkish political arrangements today. Both States are unable to lessen tensions on this subject, as they are caught between moral debate and *realpolitik*.

It may be asked whether civil societies are not better suited to clearing the ground of the common memory. The request for pardon put to Armenians by four Turkish intellectuals in 2008 struck a cord in France. It proved that the demands of the Armenian community are beginning to be heard in certain, private Turkish circles. The beginnings of a dialogue between individuals and societies have allowed the asymmetry surrounding this issue to be reduced and to bring the debate to an intimate level, which is probably an indispensable detour before the matter can be treated at diplomatic levels.

But it is precisely the diplomatic rapprochement between Turkey and Armenian, which also began in 2008, that is introducing new parameters into the debate. These parameters are intervening in the impossible mix of morality and *realpolitik*. If the Republic of Armenia accepts to negotiate protocols with Turkey, it may be asked what will happen to the Diaspora's quest, which will be wrong-footed by the State it is specifically seeking to protect. It seems that a new balance of power, which is more explicit and yet more subtle, is emerging between the protagonists of the Turkey-Armenia-Diaspora triangle.

While this rapprochement is getting bogged down, the demand of recognition by the Diaspora is far from losing legitimacy. Instead, it is getting more complex, and moving beyond the insurmountable question of the genocide. It is henceforth being stimulated by a real curiosity for everything happening in Turkey. This has led to worries, given social and political developments, which are held to be unpredictable. But this curiosity reflects an undeniable desire for rediscovery, tinted with nostalgia.

The two following articles seek to help explain how Turkey's image was constructed within the Armenian Diaspora in France, and how it has evolved. Two Armenian intellectuals go back over the origins of the present impasse, and explain why it is hard for them to talk with Turks and even more so with Turkey. But the tone of these articles suggests there is a desire to overcome fear and to envisage a change in relations, a change which is probably seen as inevitable. Inevitable, as time is running out for the descendants of the survivors of 1915, if they want to be heard before this drama finally recedes into History. Inevitable too, because the underlying situation in the Caucasus is changing, and this instability makes dialogue hard to start. Inevitable lastly, because civil societies have taken up the matter on both sides, and a Turkish-Armenian dialogue may break out of the private sphere and become a major democratic issue.

Dorothee Schmid, head of Ifri's Turkish Studies Program

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# A Historical Perspective: The French Armenian Diaspora and Turkey

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*Michel Marian*<sup>1</sup>

## ***Introduction***

For several decades, the French-Armenian community were, with their demands, an obstacle to the development of the Franco-Turkish relations. It has led to the cooling of diplomatic relations, and even crises. Aside such moments of tension, the community has introduced a certain, permanent distance between the two countries, which has no equivalent elsewhere in Europe, nor even the United States.

The underlying situation should not, however, obscure historical variations and differences in traditions which shed light on present developments. This paper thus begins by recalling the historical background to the relationship between the Armenian Diaspora and Turkey, before examining the specificities of the French situation, and gauging potential changes, as well as points of divergence that have emerged within the community.

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Marian was born in Paris, into an Armenian family. He obtained the French *agrégation* in philosophy and is a Lecturer at SciencesPo Paris. He published numerous articles on Armenian issues in the *Esprit* journal and in the *Nouvelles d'Arménie* magazine.

## ***The History of Anti-Turkish Sentiment***

The “Great Diaspora” is a consequence of the 1915 genocide, as well as the reconquest of Anatolia by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s Turkish Nationalist Movement and the Sovietization of Russian Armenia, which had been independent for two years.<sup>2</sup> It developed in the United States, the Middle East, in Europe (above all in France, Belgium, Switzerland, Western Rumania, Bulgaria and Eastern Greece), as well as in the southern cone of Latin America.

Within a context of survival and then economic development, the political life of these communities was dominated for four decades by the opposition between communists and anti-Communists. This was sometimes violent. The latter were led by the Armenia Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun Party, shortened to “Dashnak”), which had previously been allied to the Young Turks, before they turned against it. Then it became a force supporting the ephemeral government of an independent Armenia, prior to being expelled by the Bolsheviks. Paradoxically, Communist Armenia was supported by the bourgeoisie and parties on the Right. For patriotic reasons, they were concerned about helping Armenia’s last national territory, which was moreover the seat of the Patriarchate. At the time, Turkey was hardly a preoccupation. It was pushed off the agenda by a desire to turn the page on the horrors of the massacres and expulsions, and given the power of the Turkish reconquest that had occurred against a background of ethnic cleansing.<sup>3</sup> Soviet Armenia was a much more real issue, to be supported in the eyes of some, even by the policies of repatriation implemented after 1945. For others, it was to be overthrown.

The East-West détente of the 1960s was a favorable context for unity to emerge durably against Turkey. On April 25<sup>th</sup> 1965, at the 50<sup>th</sup> commemoration of the first deportation order, the streets of Yerevan were filled with demonstrators calling for “justice” and for “our lands”. From then onwards, the Armenian Communist Party was authorized to encourage historical research and use propaganda that would previously have been qualified as nationalist. A convergent revival also occurred within the Diaspora. On the basis of a re-found sociological assurance and in unison with renewed attention paid to the Holocaust, Armenian organizations began the struggle to obtain “international recognition of the Armenian genocide”.

A new form of lobbying emerged, which was different to the regular actions taken within the corridors of international organizations and limited to re-establishing the Treaty of Sèvres.<sup>4</sup> Instead, it

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<sup>2</sup> Armenian survivors who returned to Anatolia and Cilicia were driven out again as of 1917, following advances by troops of the Entente alliance.

<sup>3</sup> The Kemalists did indeed lead a very brutal war against Armenians and Greeks, which was followed by expulsions barring all right of return.

<sup>4</sup> The Treaty of Sèvres was signed August 10, 1920, between the Allies and the Ottoman Empire. It provides for the creation of an independent Armenia (Art. 88) in

addressed the European Community as well as the United Nations, drawing on a set of actions which ran from local initiatives (such as building memorials) to national ones (like obtaining public support from politicians in host-countries). Such new actions mobilized Armenian communities outside the traditional militant circles, by politicizing Armenian identity at a time when their sociological and cultural existence was shaken by integration. The modern demand that the events of 1915 be qualified as genocide overtook the older claim of the re-establishment of the Treaty of Sèvres, which had become unrealistic in the face of Turkey's new internal and international solidity. The recognition of genocide was backed up by ever-increasing documentary evidence. Renewed publications and the publications of new, historical material qualified the persecutions of 1915 as genocide, according to the criteria set out by the Nuremberg tribunal.

Three factors explain the first success of this campaign during the 1980s. First, the identity rallying Armenians to a moral cause which condensed accounts handed down in families, but which had previously been devoid of political impact. The mobilization in favor of an objective, expressed in terrorist attacks between 1975 and 1983, stretched beyond this period, and transformed Armenian communities into an electoral force. Next, its consonance with the general evolution of values and an increasing public duty to bear witness to the past spurred the interest of researchers outside Armenian circles, bringing the subject into the history books.<sup>5</sup> Lastly, Turkey's rigid reaction shifted from seeking to smother the problem at the beginning of the 1970s to active counter-propaganda at the end of that decade, backed up by its western allies when new Armenian claims were emerging. This attitude isolated Turkey during the 1980s, reflecting also its military regime.

The early 1990s marked a pause in these efforts. Armenians' energy was being absorbed by the start of the Republic of Armenia's

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six departments of eastern Anatolia, a French mandate of Cilicia and the possibility of legal action against the perpetrators of crimes committed by the Young Turk government (Art. 142). The Treaty was accepted by Sultan Mehmet VI, but was never ratified. It was denounced by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who obtained its revision by the Treaty of Lausanne (July 1923).

<sup>5</sup> Historians of the Great War were for long little interested in this fringe theater of operations. But from the 1990s onwards, they began to recognize the importance and significance of events in Asia Minor. The works of Jay Winter and Annette Becker illustrate this: see A. Becker, J. Winter, « Le génocide arménien et les réactions de l'opinion internationale », in J. Horne (Dir.), *Vers la guerre totale, le tournant de 1914-1915*, Paris, Tallandier, 2010; A. Becker, « Voir, ne pas voir un génocide : l'exemple des Arméniens », in C. Delporte, L. Gerveau et D. Marechal (Dir.) *Quelle est la place des images en histoire ?*, Paris, Nouveau monde, 2008; A. Becker, « Suppressed memory of atrocity and extermination and the end of the two World Wars », in D. L. Bergen, *Lessons and Legacies VII: From Generation to Generation*, Northwestern University Press, 2009. History books in French high schools have subsequently reintroduced the subject of the Armenian massacres, qualifying them as genocide. The massacres had been dealt with by Malet-Issac between the Wars, but had subsequently disappeared.

independence, the Karabakh War against Azerbaijan<sup>6</sup>. Armenia's first president, Levon Ter-Petrossian, tried to keep Turkey away from this conflict. Yet tensions rose in 1992, with the Armenian victory in the war against Azerbaijan over the region of Karabakh<sup>7</sup>. The rupture was triggered by the massacre of Azeri civilians in the village of Khojalu, leading to the closure of the border with Turkey. However, the strategic cause was less clear: it needs to be asked whether for Turkey, the "red line" the Armenians crossed concerned the control of Karabakh itself or if it was that they also occupied six departments which were fully Azerbaijani?

After the eviction of Levon Ter-Petrossian, his successor Robert Kotcharian encouraged the Diaspora to resume the struggle for recognition of the genocide. The late 1990s and the 2000s saw successes in this, with France passing a law to recognize the genocide in 2001 and with the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations voting similarly in 2010. The movement thus continues, nourished by the usual factors: an identity struggle by Armenian communities, as well as the increasing divergence between the official Turkish position and the state of opinions and values about the matter. Yet during the same period, Turkish society and politics have shifted, leading to certain worries among the Diaspora. Before examining this in greater detail, it is useful to complete the preceding picture by highlighting the key features of the political situation in France, which explain its particular response to Armenian claims.

## ***A Particularly Effective Diaspora in France***

In the 1970s, the French government under Presidents Georges Pompidou and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing showed no signs of accommodating the first Armenian mobilizations: support was given to Turkey's refusal to reopen the past, notably within the UN Human Rights Commission in 1973; the first Armenian street demonstrations were put down brutally on 24 April,<sup>8</sup> perhaps to compensate for French support for Greece which Giscard d'Estaing had shown as soon as the latter returned to democracy in 1974. All this changed

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<sup>6</sup> 95% of Karabakh's population was Armenian when Stalin attached it to Azerbaijan in 1921.

<sup>7</sup> In November 1992, during the winter cease-fire of the Karabakh war, an Armenian delegation visited Turkey to set up diplomatic relations between the two countries. As a precondition, Turkey demanded recognition of the Treaty of Kars, signed in October 1921 with Soviet Russia and the Transcaucasian republics, which fixed the eastern borders of Turkey and put an end to Armenian territorial claims. The Armenian government refused to meet this demand. Turkey finally closed its border to Armenia in April 1993, following the military operation conducted by the Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh against the Kelbajar region in Azerbaijan.

<sup>8</sup> This was the date the Church selected in 1919 in Istanbul to remember the victims. As of the 1960s, it was adopted by all tendencies in all communities in public meetings, and in the street demonstrations of the 1970s, especially in France.

with the election of François Mitterrand and the Socialist Party (PS) to power. A significant share of the new President's close advisors and ministers were elected in cities with large Armenian communities: Charles Hernu in Villeurbanne (who actually died on the tribune of a pro-Armenian public meeting), Jean Poperen from Meyzieu and Louis Mermaz from Vienne (also a suburb of Lyon), Joseph Franceschi from Alfortville and above all Gaston Defferre, Minister of the Interior from Marseille. From then on, the Armenians benefited from their geographic concentration and the strong ties forged over decades with between the Dashnak Party and the Socialists. The links between the French Communist Party (PCF) and Armenian communists have also been very strong, as illustrated by Missak Manouchian, an emblematic figure of France's wartime Resistance, and reinforced the political convergence of the 1980s. The official French position thus had three dimensions: a policing and political struggle against the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA),<sup>9</sup> the main terrorist group; the recognition of the genocide and "right to remember" by François Mitterrand in Vienna, at the Armenian Christmas 1984; and the assertion that present-day Turkey was not responsible for these events. Ankara did not seize this opportunity. Thereafter, the hazards of political events increased the risks of offending the Armenians and tensions with Turkey. The passing of a Declarative Law in 2001, supported by all parliamentary groups during the "cohabitation" or power-sharing by the Right and the Left at the time, settled the issue of French recognition.

The solemnity of the law was due to the peculiarity of the Fifth Republic's constitution which excludes motions or parliamentary declarations. It came on top of other, disparate factors, all of which put France in the forefront of the recognition of the Armenian genocide. These included support by the Right for pro-Armenian positions (first expressed in 1989 by France's mayors, led by Jacques Chirac who was then Mayor of Paris), and the defense of Armenian prisoners under the Soviet regime. They were also expressed in Yerevan, in 2006, by Mr Chirac (as President), when he called upon Turkey to face up to its past, in an explicit exchange for his support for Turkey's membership of the European Union. The second factor centered on the traditional French posture of recalling human rights, which is irritating to some, but essential to others. The third point stems from the fact that unlike in the United States, defenders of Israel in France have not been enrolled to support Turkey's arguments. This is maybe because the Jewish and Armenian causes have been linked since the founding of the Human Rights League (*Ligue des droits de l'Homme*), which simultaneously defended Captain Dreyfus and the Armenians massacred by Sultan Abdülhamid 2<sup>nd</sup>. Lastly, France holds a key position in Europe. A

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<sup>9</sup> The Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia, often abbreviated as ASALA. The movement came to an end in 1988, after the execution of its leader, Hagop Hagopian, in Athens, by French agents.

foretaste of this was provided in 1987 with the passage of a resolution in the European Parliament, where French Socialist representatives played a major role in including recognition of the genocide as a condition of Turkey's membership of the EEC, at the time.

## ***Countering the Turkish State***

At the start of the 1970s, the emergence of a new Armenian claim which was historical and moral, pushed demands for territorial reparations into the background. Turkey could have been flexible at that time, by striving to exchange historical recognition for the abandonment of Armenian irredentism. Yet its leaders did nothing, as they underestimated the new Armenian cause and overestimated the capacity of the Soviet Union to exploit any possible recognition of guilt within the context of the Cold War. The role of the army in defining the official Turkish position and the passive support of a population cut-off from its history by the Kemalist rupture did provide a basis for identity in this calculation. Armenian terrorist attacks on Turkish diplomats from 1973 to 1983 crystallized opposition within those parts of the State apparatus which could have responded to rising international concern for Armenian demands. Even when leaders emerged from outside the Kemalist mold, such as Turgut Özal,<sup>10</sup> their positioning was not far removed from traditional views, and because they were fleeting, they were inaudible to Armenians. Or, in the case of Özal, because they were contradicted by the violence of his stated position on the war in Karabakh. Neither the end of terrorism (after 25 years it was still evoked out of context by the Turkish President Abdullah Gül in an interview with *Le Monde* concerning the Gaza flotilla affair),<sup>11</sup> nor the dissolution of the Soviet Union (replaced by the denunciation of the Armenian occupation in Azerbaijan) have dented this flexibility.

Under these conditions, Turkey's political representation which replaced the century-old hostility among the Armenian was simplified, consisting now of a homogenous, abstract and timeless Turkey. It is homogenous due to the intransigence of the Turkish state on the Armenian question and the broader image which Turkey has projected since the founding of the Republic. It is timeless due to the official position of denial, minimization or even the reversal of responsibilities over the fate inflicted upon the Armenians, drawing on the discourse of the Young Turks themselves. For its part, the

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<sup>10</sup> Turgut Özal was the founder of the Anavatan Partisi (ANAP or Motherland Party). He stands apart in Turkey's political landscape of the 1980s. Of Kurdish origin and being close to political Islam in the 1970s, Özal moved away from ideological principles of Kemalism, standing out as a representative of Thatcher-style liberalism in Turkey.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Abdullah Gül, "Privilégier 'l'option diplomatique' avec l'Iran", *Le Monde*, 11 June 2010.

Armenian cause has been reviving the history of Ottoman massacres prior to the genocide (e.g. under Abdülhamid in 1895, and at the beginning of the Young Turk revolution in 1909), as well as moving on to examine later Turkish history, such as Kâzım Karabekir's war against an independent Armenia.<sup>12</sup> It is not therefore only one period or one regime which is being denounced, but a murderous continuity. While this is not exactly attributed to an ethnic group (except when the massacres by Azerbaijanis in 1988-89 reactivated this obsession), the Turkish State and Turkish nationalism since their origins at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century are held responsible. Finally it is abstract because Armenian leadership is today exercised by generations born outside Turkey, because the Iron Curtain masked the geographical proximity and lastly because the Armenian case is not being pleaded before Turkey, but in some way before a virtual international tribunal, an imaginary remake of the 1919 peace conferences that would be missioned with sentencing Turkey.

By refusing any openness, Turkey has denied itself the role of acting as a "subject" in the eyes of Armenians, becoming instead a "bad object". Even 25 years after the end of the military regime, Turkey is widely denounced as "fascist" and "murderous" in demonstrations on the 24<sup>th</sup> April. It is qualified as a "revisionist state" that is prolonging the genocide by denial and which needs to be prevented from being harmful, by sanctioning its public pronouncements. The radical nature of this condemnation has also long been reflected in the physical fear of Armenians, who would not dream of visiting Turkey.

## ***Armenia Exists Once More and Turkey is Changing: Two Slowly-Emerging Realities***

The first breach of this compact view of the world came from Armenia. The first president of the new Republic, Levon Ter-Petrossian, made efforts to renew friendly relations between the two countries and promoted a moderate approach, by trying to find a compromise on Karabakh. This attitude met with some opposition in the Diaspora, but found support too. Such support was also lent and reinforced twenty years later by President Serj Sarkisian, when the Armenian-Turkish protocols were signed. This reflects legitimist concerns over the defense of the Armenian State, whatever its government or status, and which was represented in the Diaspora from the 1930s to the 1970s.

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<sup>12</sup> In September 1920, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk ordered Kâzım Karabekir to attack and push back Armenian forces beyond Turkish borders. The towns of Sankamis (20 September 1920), Kars (30 October) and Gumri (7 November) were all retaken. A peace treaty was signed with Armenia in Gumri.

But there is an essential new dimension to the issue, namely Armenian-Turkish neighborly relations have become an economic and strategic reality. Eastern Turkey has become an interesting trade partner, and the Turkish border the key to accessing the West. This justifies the development of a more complex relationship between Armenia and Turkey, and has led part of the Diaspora to reassess Turkey in terms of its role with Armenia, whose survival and economic development have become a priority. This tendency has thus accepted that the protocols provide for a commission to study the means to deal with historical disputes between the two countries. The idea is to give time to Turkey and to find appropriate channels of resolution, though the commission's objectives are not to retry the genocide. But this tendency within the Diaspora has found it far harder to put up with Turkey's obstinacy in backing Azerbaijan wholly and publicly, and in making the opening of its frontier subject to Armenian concessions on Karabakh, which is contrary to the letter of the protocols.

Developments in Turkey itself have also provoked slow, but henceforth strongly contrasting reactions within the Diaspora.

The first subject of debate concerned the possibilities of dialogue. This was put forward by former diplomats at the end of the 1990s. But for most of the Diaspora, it was immediately clouded by the fact that Turkish governments were clearly using this as a diversion to avoid political motions condemning the genocide. Nevertheless, discussions could have continued in settings with less direct political consequences, such as at the Armenian-Turkish site at the University of Michigan.<sup>13</sup> With the coming to power of the AKP, the emergence of democratic intellectuals critical of Kemalism has once again sparked controversy over the non-use of the word "genocide" by some, as well as their possible exploitation to present a more European face of Turkey.<sup>14</sup> At this juncture, the treachery of the Young Turks, previously neglected by an image of unvarnished savagery, emerged. In fact, the Young Turks first befriended the Armenians to weaken their guard, before destroying them. There is increasing acceptance by Armenians of some Turks' progress in recognizing the past, provided that this process and its expression do not cast aside the genocide. But it is above all the constancy of these intellectuals, in the face of the more aggressive tone by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan towards Armenians, which lends authenticity to their position in the eyes of Armenians. Thus, while skepticism prevails concerning changes in Turkey's official policy, the

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<sup>13</sup> A forum or discussion list (Workshop for Armenian-Turkish Scholarship, or WATS) has been organised for several years by Fatma Göçek and Ronald Suny at the University of Ann Arbor: see for example, [http://www.armenews.com/article.php3?id\\_article=22766](http://www.armenews.com/article.php3?id_article=22766).

<sup>14</sup> I refer here to a book I wrote with Ahmet Insel *Dialogue sur le tabou arménien*, Paris, Liana Levi, 2009, and its reception by the Diaspora in France. This was favorable in *Nouvelles d'Arménie Magazine* and critical in *France-Arménie*.

social diversification of Turkey is being recognized. So is Turkey's political diversity, including the differences between Erdogan and President Abdullah Gül.

The second cause for changing perceptions comes from Turkey's Armenians. Up until the 1990s, they had been viewed by the Diaspora as hostages, and as an "endangered species". This was indeed reflected by migration which began again in the 1950s following inter-communal clashes in Cyprus.<sup>15</sup> The courage of someone like Archbishop Chnork Galoustian during the years of terrorism in the 1980s was recognized. But his work in identifying and "re-Armenianizing" families in Anatolia was largely unknown. Two major figures helped change the simplified views about Turkey's Armenians, showing that they were not necessarily gagged nor bound to disappear. Hrant Dink, a journalist, publicly defended his twofold, Armenian and Turkish identity. This initially caused a stir within the Diaspora, especially when he visited Marseille in 2006. His assassination in 2007 unfortunately confirmed that he was not a hostage, but the first Armenian voice to be heard publicly in Turkey. 100,000 people attended his funeral, proving that he had struck a cord. The Diaspora is looking increasingly attentively at the openings he has created: the demonstrations commemorating the day of his death, the trial of his assassins, as well as the first public gatherings in Istanbul on 24 April 2010 to commemorate the genocide.

The second prominent figure is Fethiye Cetin. By recalling how she discovered the Armenian origins of her grandmother, she has enriched the image of the consequences of the genocide and revealed the shades of identities hidden by the Armenian-Turkish polarization.<sup>16</sup> These identities are being unveiled progressively and are henceforth subject to much research, and even debate over the possibilities of being Armenian and Muslim. They support the view, to the point of exaggeration, that Turkey's Armenian population will expand in the future.

The last factor of change is the interest in traveling to Turkey, shown by ever-greater numbers of the Diaspora. This is an underlying change, taking place outside politics, but which is doubtless full of consequences. Fear is slowly giving way to curiosity, which is active and varied. Diaspora Armenians are seeking to discover places of family origin, to visit Muslim cousins, to take part in the September 19th, 2010 pilgrimage to the Aghtamar Church (which takes on its religious vocation one day each year), and even to take part in

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<sup>15</sup> There were murderous clashes between Greeks and Turks before and after Cyprus' independence, especially in 1955 and 1963. These confrontations had an impact on Turkey, leading to the departure of Turkey's remaining Greeks and concerns among other Christians, including Armenians, who left Anatolia for Istanbul or abroad.

<sup>16</sup> F. Cetin, *Le livre de ma grand-mère*, La Tour d'Aigues, Editions de l'Aube, 2008.

cultural events on Armenian themes, that are encouraged by some towns in eastern Turkey.<sup>17</sup>

These developments remain limited in terms of the representative institutions of the Diaspora, even if the Legitimist tendency has ensured that oppositions to the protocols is not general in France and the United States, if not in the Middle East. The “institutional” Diaspora still favors the strategy of putting international pressure on Turkey, and hence remains polarized about the possible recognition of the genocide by President Barak Obama, as if Turkey has not demonstrated that it does not follow Washington’s orders in matters of national interest. In France, it is still engaged in a struggle to get a second law passed which would criminalize genocide denial. Street protest supporting such a law, which is no longer in tune with the times, are weakening, but the issue is still on the table more out of inertia or lack of an alternative objective which is slow to emerge.

Two new realities are emerging. First, Armenia has acceded not only to independence, but is also developing its own diplomacy. Second, Turkey is increasingly complex, split between its official politics which is still reluctant to admit the realities of the past, and an increasing public arena in which more and more voices are expressing their apologies to Armenians.<sup>18</sup> The Diaspora is starting to take note of these changes, by showing more active solidarity with Turkish Armenians (as shown, for example, by the intervention of Armenian lawyers from France during the trial of the assassins of Djn). Also, part of the Diaspora is letting Yerevan lead the increasingly complex relations with Ankara.

However, it will surely have to redefine its own actions too. For the moment, such change is at a stand still, given that the Sarkozy Presidency has clearly come out against Turkish membership of the EU, a slowing down of the process itself and lastly the “suspension” of the Turkish-Armenian protocols. But in the short term, the announcements of a dialogue made by Ahmet Davutoglu herald the moment when positions will have to be adopted vis-à-vis political events in Turkey. In the medium term, the growing populations of Turkish origin in countries which have historically welcomed the Armenian Diaspora will surely call for new strategies to be adopted, rather than simply preempting politics. The French Diaspora is more “politicized” than the disappears of North and South America, which are more effective in providing economic support to Armenia. It is also freer in its leanings than those of the Middle East, and will have a role

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<sup>17</sup> L. Marchand, “Génocide Arménien : le travail de mémoire des Kurdes”, *Le Figaro*, November 23, 2009.

<sup>18</sup> A petition, launched in December 2008 by four intellectuals, and which asks Armenians to pardon the “great catastrophe” they suffered obtained 30,000 signatures. The issue of public apology is also debated in the Turkish press, notably during the April commemorations or in reaction to brutal declarations by Prime Minister Erdogan. The text of the petition is available at: <http://www.ozurdiliyoruz.com/foreign.aspx>.

to play in these changes. The paradox is that Armenians who are most politicized against Turkey will likely also lead the way in the future, drawing on the underlying, increasing curiosity about the country of their ancestors, whereas depoliticized Armenians may well content themselves to adhering by proxy to the prevailing anti-Turkishness in their host countries. In other words, the transmission of Armenity may well express itself in dialogue with Turkey in the future, while anti-Turkish sentiment could lead to the bidding of farewell to roots.

## Armenia/Turkey: The Emotional Factor

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Christian Makarian<sup>19</sup>

Like old postcards of mythical Istanbul<sup>20</sup>, the Armenia memory harks back to a lost world, which was shattered and eradicated all at once, and then suddenly covered by a veil. A black veil for mourning, a white veil for the nostalgic recollection of a happy society before the cataclysm. It is this heartbreaking duality, grounded in recurring injustice and past softness, which most Armenian families that immigrated to France in the 1920s hold in remembrance of the events of 1915. It has spanned decades in the narratives of the elderly. The countless testimonies of massacres, which have terrified the survivors' children and children's children, are interlaced with village anecdotes, prolific legends, colorful expressions, rich folklore that all accompany a generous cuisine and gracious songs, the last splendors of a civilization that was surely convivial. This way of life, which had real refinements, was precisely what Armenians shared with the Turks.

For the large majority of Armenians in France, the history of their origins was first and foremost a family history, an inheritance they received in sobs and tears, passed down in an emotional, indelible manner, before being a discipline taught at the Sorbonne. It was through the words of their parents and grand-parents that the

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<sup>20</sup> Y. Ternon, J-CI. Kebabdjian, *Arménie 1900*, Paris, Editions Astrid, 1980; Y. Ternon, J-CI. Kebabdjian, *L'Arménie d'Antan, L'Arménie à travers la carte postale ancienne*, Paris, HC Editions, 2009.

descendants of Armenian immigrants learned about their collective past, far before reading the works of historians like Anahide Ter Minassian, Claire Mouradian or Raymond Kevorkian (among others), who were duly trained and qualified in France's remarkable intellectual tradition. This tragic inheritance, handed-down in families and individual in its blood ties, has come to dominate Armenian identity<sup>21</sup>, to the extent that the only way to escape from it has been to integrate French society zealously. And the success of such integration has been welcomed by all.

The notification "No Return Possible", stamped on the passports of some Armenian subjects by the authorities of the Ottoman Empire, sum the situation up well. The future could be better, but only elsewhere. Everything had to be rebuilt in order to overcome a past which a majority of French persons saw as very specific, distant and foreign, with excessively bitter undertones (especially following the Holocaust). Armenians had to accept a form of general indifference in the absence of any official recognition. These were the only options of survival. Yet, nothing had been fundamentally settled with Turkey. Turkey was a dark shadow that always aroused a subliminal attraction, immediately awakening a deep wound<sup>22</sup>. Paradoxically, when the Armenian genocide was finally, officially recognized by France in 2001, a surge in identity occurred. It arose in parallel to the need for justice, reinforcing the case for indictment.

It is this painful context that today weighs on the perceptions which every citizen of Armenian origin may have of modern Turkey: if it is understood that the latter cannot be directly held responsible for what happened nearly a century ago, then it may be asked why the Turkish authorities are not able to condemn the genocide categorically. Armenians, along with those French intellectuals who support them, simply do not understand<sup>23</sup>. Contrary to what may be expected, time has not healed wounds. Young French citizens of the third or fourth generation of Armenian origin know little of Turkish realities. They are more restive than their elders in learning about the country of Atatürk, and are much more intransigent than their grandparents or great grandparents, due to the transmutation of a post-traumatic context<sup>24</sup>.

Resorting to a pseudo political "rationality" is no longer possible at the point where broken human dignity rightfully asserts itself. The claim that the elimination of a population belongs to the

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<sup>21</sup> See J. Altounian *L'intraduisible, Deuil, mémoire, tradition*, Paris, Dunod, 2005

<sup>22</sup> J. Kéhayan, *Mes papiers d'Arménie*, La Tour d'Aigues, Editions de l'aube, 2006

<sup>23</sup> "This is no about 'telling the history'. History has been told. It has been told and told again. The question is now to prevent its negation", Republican meeting, 17 January 2007, Paris.

<sup>24</sup> M. Hovanesian, « De l'abîme aux constructions d'identité », in D. Donikian et G. Festa (dir.), *De l'abîme aux constructions d'identité*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2009. See also M. Hovanesian, *Le lien communautaire. Trois générations d'Arméniens*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2007.

past is all the more unacceptable given that the magnitude of the crime is still denied in the lands where it took place, and that its verbal (and hence essential) questioning is subject to criminal law. A collective trauma can never be delineated by an official decision. The unilateral amnesia enacted by successive Turkish regimes cannot lead to a peace process. Instead, it becomes the very model of denial which creates frustration. Seen from France, Armenians and Turks remain at odds, through time and space. For Turks, 1915 belongs to the past and is a peripheral issue for a society which partly recognizes its cultural diversity<sup>25</sup>. They have moved directly to the 21<sup>st</sup> century and to being a global economic power. For Armenians, 1915 conditions the future and is increasingly central to it. Both the troubled take-off of the former Soviet Republic of Armenia, and the fragmentation of the Diaspora project the specter of forced dispersal onto the map of the world. They constitute a dislocation which is still to be reduced, but which will not be so.

Most Turkish intellectuals, including the most universalist among them, have generally not taken full measure of this psychological situation which complicates the Armenian-Turkish question. When stubbornly denying the reality of the genocide committed by the Young Turks' regime of 1915 (whose legacy it also strongly criticizes), the Turkish state is not only acting in cold political calculation, distorting History merely because otherwise it contradicts Turkey's national ideology which is based on the radical simplification of a complex past. It hopes in fact that time will wipe out the crimes that directly preceded the foundation of Atatürk's Republic, that time will dilute the memories of the victims, finish by wearing out their sympathizers, efface all evidence and confine this endless controversy to history. The Turkish government seeks to marginalize Armenian communities spread across the globe, hoping that they will shout themselves hoarse. Yet such speculations only appear possible given the views held, at least by a large share of Turkish public opinion, that the Armenians got what they deserved.<sup>26</sup>

In so doing, however, Turkey does not take into account the essence of the problem. The word "genocide" is a highly political issue for Ankara, which mobilizes all the power and dexterity ascribed to Turkish diplomats. But for all citizens of Armenian descent it is a subject of unparalleled bitterness that has little to do with being a political claim. Politics versus dignity, strategy as opposed to justice: the struggle is both unequal and without solution. It begs the question of why Turkey, with its massive army, spectacular growth and

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<sup>25</sup> A. Durak, *Ebru, Reflets de la diversité culturelle en Turquie*, Arles, Actes Sud, 2009.

<sup>26</sup> The events of 1915 were originally justified by the possible Armenian "threat" to the security of the Ottoman Empire, as Armenians were accused of dealing with the Russian enemy. The idea of Armenian "treason" has been strongly anchored in Turkey's collective memory ever since, suggesting that the massacres and deportations were essentially defense operations.

demographic expansion continues to be so cruelly offensive towards a people of six to seven million souls, only half of which live in Armenia, a population which does not want to return to the blood-drenched land of its ancestors for anything in the world. The Turks have a numerical superiority of between 10 and 20 to one. So what sort of fear lies behind their anger?

To pretend that 1915 (actually the exterminations continued through until the end of 1916) was only a matter of displacing the Christian populations of Anatolia, who were suspected of being rebellious, is to accuse the survivors of lying about the slaughter. It means qualifying the worst atrocities committed as mere fabrications or even gossips, though they were witnessed by an impressive number of Western diplomats and other observers. No descendants of the survivors of 1915 can decently accept this without disavowing their own parents or grandparents. By refusing until today to recognize the reality of this mass extermination, that was planned and systematic, respective Turkish governments continue to wound millions of citizens who have become French, American, Uruguayan or hold other nationalities as a result of the hazards of Diaspora, and who sometimes have little else in common apart from the indignation towards the country who committed the act causing their exile.

The eradication of a people has been followed up by the humiliation of the continued prohibition of its ability to declare itself as the victim of monstrosity. The words which Atom Egoyan put into Charles Aznavour's mouth in his film *Ararat* sum up the pain well: "These people should really hate us for having murdered us and prevented us from saying so". So much so that, year-by-year, it seems increasingly difficult to resolve this dispute through discussion among historians or by a "cold" approach to the events. From this point of view, the official Turkish position follows no logic: summoning historians to set out new bases for the relationship between Ankara and Yerevan while claiming that all this "belongs to the past" is incoherent.

Faced with denial and contempt, the wound has widened to the point that the combination of trauma and identity outweigh all other considerations. That is why Armenian communities living in democratic states (France, the European Union, the United States, Canada, Argentina, Australia, etc.) have firmly opposed the protocols relating to the establishment of bilateral relations between Ankara and Yerevan, signed in 2009 and frozen since. That also explains why the Turkish authorities find it hard to understand that the head-on opposition to Turkey is infinitely greater among members of the Diaspora than among Armenians in Turkey who have to watch their words, or those living in Armenia, a State that has yet to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of its independence.

Turkey's position heralds mounting tensions. It clearly indicates a conscious move to confrontation. Across the globe, Armenian communities are continuing to strengthen structures to put international pressure on Turkey. Once again, Armenians of the third or

fourth generation are leading the struggle, though they are often born to mixed couples and rarely speak Armenian. On both sides, conflict is pushing aside the path to reason. Great frustration is only intensifying with time, turning into outright exasperation.

It may legitimately be asked if Turkey had recognized the organised and systematic nature of the events of 1915 back in the 1970s, 1980s or even 1990s, whether Armenian-Turkish relations would not be very different today, something which would benefit Turkey itself. If Turkey is still not ready to do so, then it is clearly because it considers the present state to be preferable to a peaceful situation. Furthermore, this preference is not only based on a simple assessment of the relative benefits. Instead, it relies on fundamental positions which are “visceral” and bring back to the very definition of Turkey’s identity, in which the Armenians have clearly played a decidedly unenviable role.