
« European Turkey » In The Caucasus.

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Few people know that Henrik H. Kroner, Secretary General of the European Movement International, was in Yerevan, the capital of the South Caucasian republic of Armenia, in May 2006. He visited the Tsitsernakaberd Memorial Complex in Yerevan and laid a wreath to the victims of the Armenian genocide in Ottoman Turkey in 1915.

The European Movement was created to "contribute to the establishment of a united, federal Europe founded on the respect for basic human rights, peace principles, democratic principles of liberty and solidarity and citizens' participation."

Henrik Kroner wrote in the book of honorary guests of the Memorial that such crimes as the Armenian genocide must not be allowed to happen again. He wrote that the European Union's values were in favor of future unification.

He said in the museum that the EU was resolved to prevent a repetition of such tragedies, and that Turkey would not be admitted to the Union unless it assumed responsibility for its past crimes.

The process has barely begun and will last years, he said, and Ankara will eventually have to do as requested.

Kroner's visit to Yerevan almost coincided with a serious discussion on criminal liability for the denial of responsibility for the genocide against Armenians, held in the National Assembly of France.

Deeply offended, Turkey recalled its ambassador "for consultations," while the advocates of criminal liability for the denial of responsibility for the genocide and the supporters of the "democratic" principle of discussing this delicate issue rallied in the streets of Paris.

In short, the issue of the Armenian genocide remains a European headache. However, the issue of admitting Turkey to the EU is usually considered from two aspects: Turkey's ability to accept European values, and the EU's ability to absorb new members and spread European values to them.

Experts are analyzing not so much the essence of integration as the timeframe and speed with which Turkey could acquire "European registration."

But the European future of Turkey is not limited to the political struggle of Brussels bureaucrats, or discussions of where Europe ends and Asia begins. The "Europeanization" of Turkey is an acute problem of Caucasian geopolitics, which has a direct bearing on the issue of genocide.

Firstly, the Europeanization of Turkey is related to the painful aspect of the "big Caucasian game", or relations between Turkey and the "Armenian world", which is not limited to Armenia. Other important parts of this "world" are the self-proclaimed republic of Nagorno-Karabakh and the Armenian diaspora, which seriously influences public opinion in Armenia and many other countries, notably the United

States, France and Russia.

These parts of the "Armenian world" are divided over the future of Armenian-Turkish relations. During the rule of Levon Ter-Petrosyan, the first president of Armenia (1991-1998), the Yerevan authorities and the diaspora quarreled more than once over the recognition of the 1915 Armenian genocide. Ter-Petrosyan was not ready to soften his attitude to the tragedy in the name of better relations with his country's western neighbor.

Although Armenia's second president, Robert Kocharyan, is pursuing a harsher policy towards Turkey, Yerevan has withdrawn its territorial claims against it.

But not all parts of the "Armenian world" are prepared to regard the issue of genocide without territorial claims, restitution, or compensation for the property lost during the 1915 tragedy.

Tigran Martirosyan, a prominent Armenian political analyst, said: "The current demands of the Armenian people [part of the "Armenian world"] regarding Western Armenia [modern Turkey] are based on the international requirement on clearing up the consequences of genocide. This norm proceeds from the statutes of international [military] tribunals, UN General Assembly resolutions, and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide [adopted on December 9, 1948 and enforced on January 12, 1951]."

Secondly, Turkey's accession to the EU should outline the post-conflict settlement in the Caucasus and the region's development as a whole. The decision will also bear on Russia's presence in the South Caucasus.

Apparently, the main problem in relations between Turkey and Armenia (and the "Armenian world") is the recognition of the Armenian genocide in 1915. Many people regard Turkey's interpretation of the 1915 tragedy as a genocide (not a civil war, massacre, or deportation of Armenians, as modern Turkish historians prefer to write about it) as proof of Turkey's "Europeanization". But Turkish historians and political experts on the Armenian problem have other arguments.

Professor Halil Berktaý said: "This is a very serious issue, and it represents a mistake on the part of Turkey, which seems unable to make a decision on its political and legal attitude to the Ottoman Empire. Turkey has not fully accepted the fact that it freed itself from Ottoman rule and created a modern republic in its place. This is a very serious contradiction. The republic is not responsible for those events."

"The Turkish Republic can say that it was established in 1923, whereas the Armenian tragedy took place in 1915," the professor said.

"The army and state institutions of the Turkish Republic are not responsible for those events. The Turkish Republic is a new state.

>>From a legal point of view, it is not the successor to the Ottoman government or the reformist Young Turks of the Ittihad ve Terakki (Unity and Progress) party."

Other Turkish researchers of Armenian-Turkish relations call for cleansing the 1915 problem of political complications and "leaving the issue to historians." But many Turkish academics, officials and politicians regard statements like the one made by Professor Berktaý as excessively liberal.

Taner Akcam, the first Turkish historian to describe the 1915 tragedy as a genocide, is currently a professor at a U.S. university.

Turkey could make a point of "bidding farewell to its past," using the "liberal" historians' idea that the republic is not a legal successor to the previous regimes to denounce the "Ottoman past" that made the Armenian genocide possible (the absence of legal succession has been a key ideological precept of the Turkish Republic since the rule of its founder, Kemal Ataturk).

Moreover, Ankara could accept the gesture of Yerevan, which has abandoned its territorial claims to Western Armenia, now part of Turkey. It could solve the problem by acknowledging the 1915 Armenian genocide. The point is to separate the territorial problem (and restitution) from the request for accepting responsibility for the Armenian genocide.

One might think that Turkey's admission to the European Union would make the territorial claims of the "Armenian world" history, since the EU is categorically against territorial re-divisions even in the name of "historical justice."

But the situation is not that simple. The Turkey of Kemal Ataturk, which rejects the heritage of the "anti-popular Ottoman regime," is mostly pursuing an old foreign and domestic policy. I am referring to its policy regarding Cyprus, relations with Greece, Bulgaria, Armenia and the former-Yugoslav territory, and its attitude towards ethnic minorities (the Kurd issue).

Throughout the 20th century Turkey cleverly played on contradictions between great powers to strengthen its position in the world. During Kemal Ataturk's revolution, the Turks smartly used contradictions between Soviet Russia and the Entente. During the Cold War, they used the left-wing threat in Greece and Cyprus to solve the Cyprus problem in their favor.

This is why Armenia and the "Armenian world" are concerned about the European future of Turkey, which has fully used NATO resources disregarding the high standards of "European security." We can also assume that Turkey will use EU resources to advance its foreign policy ambitions.

No country has yet been excluded from the EU. Will Turkey, if it engages in unacceptable behavior, become the first outlaw? And if it is, what foreign policy strategy will the authorities in Ankara adopt?

As an EU member, Turkey will use its European "privileges," notably the cover of "European interference," to pursue an active policy in the Caucasus. Acting not so much on behalf of united Europe, as in the pursuit of its self-serving goals, Turkey will use democratic rhetoric to try to minimize Russia's "imperial" influence in the region.

Unlike other members of NATO and the EU, Turkey has its own national interests in the Caucasus. Just as in 1918-1920, Azerbaijan has become Turkey's main partner in the South Caucasus. Turkey recognized Azerbaijan's independence on December 16, 1991, and helped it during the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. In 1993, it closed the border with Armenia but, unlike in 1918-1920, stopped short of a full-scale military intervention. In 1994, Azerbaijani President Geidar Aliyev spoke in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey about strategic relations. In the 1990s, Turkey acted as Azerbaijan's agent in NATO and other international organizations.

Military cooperation is a major part of Azerbaijani-Turkish relations. Since 1996, Turkish military advisers have been working in Azerbaijan, and the Azerbaijani military has been trained in Turkey.

Turkey has been energetically promoting relations with Georgia since the early 1990s, despite such minor political differences as the Abkhazian problem and the repatriation of Meskhetian Turks. In 1998, the Georgian Defense Ministry and the Turkish General Staff signed a memorandum of understanding on military cooperation, which provides for Turkey's assistance in the training of Georgian officers. The two countries are also promoting transportation and communications.

Turkey may turn the Armenian genocide into an element of political bargaining. As a strategic partner of Azerbaijan, Turkey will most likely do this, pledging to accept responsibility for the crime of a genocide if pressure is put on Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh. It may encourage the EU to pressure Armenia into forcing the self-proclaimed Karabakh republic to accept abstract and far-fetched peace plans of international structures.

On the other hand, Turkey may suggest "an exchange of confessions" between Turkey, Azerbaijan and Armenia. On March 26, 1998, Azerbaijani President Geidar Aliyev issued a decree "On the Azerbaijani Genocide." March 31 was declared the Day of the Azerbaijani Genocide. The decree mentioned the "dismembering" of the Azerbaijani nation, the "re-division of historical [Azerbaijani] territory" and the "occupation" of Azerbaijan as a result of the Golestan (1813) and Turkmanchai (1828) peace treaties that ended two Russo-Persian wars.

The Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, Armenia and the Armenian nation have been accused of the Azerbaijani genocide. Turkey may presumably pledge to assume responsibility for the Armenian genocide if Armenia accepts responsibility for the Azerbaijani genocide. If Yerevan rejects the offer (which it will most certainly do), Turkey would redirect the EU wrath from itself to Armenia.

In short, the Europeanization of Turkey, which may be positive to a degree, would also create problems for Armenia and the "Armenian world". Turkey may devise all kinds of unacceptable conditions for admitting responsibility for the 1915 Armenian genocide.

As for Europe, the advocates of integration, acting in accordance with the principle of political correctness and for the noble purpose of bringing an Asian country into the lap of European democracy, may sacrifice the interests of Armenians, just as they sacrificed the interests of Serbs in Croatia and Kosovo, and of Greeks in Cyprus.

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