Erdogan Blethers

On April 24, Armenia will hold events to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire. Similar events will also be held, as experience suggests, in all the countries and cities where there are at least a small Armenian community. Today the Genocide is recognized by 20 countries of the world, by 43 US states, and a number of European institutions. Some countries adopted a Law on prosecuting for denying the Genocide.

The Genocide recognition process is expanding, despite the opposition of Turkey, which sometimes denies this great tragedy that claimed, to various estimates, lives of 1 to 2 million people, and sometimes promotes additional examination of the circumstances of the massacre of Armenians and other ethnic minorities in the Ottoman Empire. As the anniversary date approaches, Ankara toughens its rhetoric, and takes various steps to smooth the international attention. In particular, this year Turkish authorities are planning to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Gallipoli exactly on April 24. In his interview for the French TV channel France24, Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, ended up accusing Yerevan of having deliberately planned to hold the commemoration on April 24 in order to distract attention of the international community from the historic battle of Çanakkale (Gallipoli).

"This year Turkey celebrates the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Çanakkale and is not going to ask Armenia for permission. This is a historic date, and it has absolutely nothing to do with the events in Armenia. On the contrary, they scheduled the commemoration date in such a way that it coincides with our date," Erdogan said.

The truth, however, is on the surface. Battles of Gallipoli were mostly of positional character and lasted for almost a year. Turkey has never before celebrated the anniversary of the battle on April 24. While in Armenia this day has been a day of mourning from time immemorial.

Another statement made by Recep Tayyip Erdogan to the same TV channel is also surprising: "When the problems between Turkey and Armenia are in issue, it has always been Turkey that moved in positive direction and offered a hand of peace. But Armenia has never accepted the hand of peace."

Let us recall that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey was among the first states to recognize the independence of Armenia. However, during the Nagorno-Karabakh War it broke diplomatic relations with Armenia to demonstrate solidarity with Azerbaijan and closed the Turkish-Armenian border in support of the blockade of Armenia, declared by Azerbaijan. Political relations between Yerevan and Ankara did not practically exist until September 2008, when the Armenian side initiated the so-called "football diplomacy". Suddenly, Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan invited his Turkish colleague Abdullah Gul to Yerevan to visit the match between the national teams of the two countries, which were sorted by lots into the same group of the qualification round for the 2010 World Cup. Gul arrived. Later Sargsyan made a return "football visit" to Bursa.

The "Football Diplomacy" was culminated by signing in Zurich the Protocols on Normalization of Relations by Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Turkey. The document provided for opening diplomatic missions, deblocking the border and transportation. As for painful issues in the history of relations, the parties agreed to form, if required, joint commissions to examine the circumstances. The signed protocols were delivered for ratification in the
Ankara felt strong pressure from its allied Baku which reproached Turkey for betraying their brotherhood. Turkish authorities were also harshly criticized by a major part of their own society that believed that the improvement of relations with Armenia was unacceptable at the expense of changing to the worse the relations with Azerbaijan. Soon, using a formal pretext, the Turkish party accused Armenians of derailing the Zurich agreements and delaying the ratification of the protocols. The fact is that according to the Armenian Constitution any international treaty should be first considered by the Constitutional Court of the Republic, and only after that by the parliament. The explanations of Yerevan did not have any effect on Ankara, and the Armenian parliament members were forced to return like for like – they froze the process of ratification of the Zurich protocols. The international community made several attempts to put the process in motion, but they failed. The culmination (probably a temporary one) already took place this year, and it was not what many hoped for.

Yerevan invited many foreign leaders to the events marking the centennial of the Genocide. Recep Tayyip Erdogan was among those invited. Ankara responded by inviting Serzh Sargsyan to celebration of the 100th anniversary of the battle of Gallipoli. The Armenian side, having fairly taken it for cynicism of the action, bluntly called for a sober assessment of the situation and realistic approach to the historical events of the past. After that, Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan, using his constitutional right, demanded the Parliament to drop the Zurich protocols off the agenda once and for all. That was promptly done, and, according to comments from Ankara, Turkey hardly expected it. The case, however, was not over: the National Assembly of Armenia (the parliament) delivered one more blow, recognizing that Greeks and Assyrians were also subject to Genocide in the Ottoman Empire during the same time as Armenians. In response, Ankara accused Yerevan of non-neighborly actions that could not stimulate detente in the region. After that, Erdogan made the above-mentioned accusations. However, Armenia did not react to them in any way. The Republic is preparing for the centennial of the tragic events, receiving numerous foreign high-ranking officials, including President Vladimir Putin, the leaders of France, Greece, Cyprus, parliamentary and government delegations from other countries, who recognize or have started the process of recognition of the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire, which was, according to a number of historians, the first time in the history of mankind that a state massacred its own citizens because of their ethnicity.

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