

YEREVAN STATE UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTE FOR ARMENIAN STUDIES

**ARMENOLOGICAL ISSUES**  
**JOURNAL**  
**VOLUME 2, ISSUE 1 (29)**

YEREVAN  
YSU PRESS

2025



[ YEREVAN STATE  
UNIVERSITY ]  
PUBLISHING HOUSE

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E-mail: [n.silaev@inno.mgimo.ru](mailto:n.silaev@inno.mgimo.ru)

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## About us

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For general inquiries and instructions for authors, please contact the JAI Deputy editors: Dr. Ashot Hayruni ([ashot.hayruni@ysu.am](mailto:ashot.hayruni@ysu.am)) or Dr. Mushegh Ghahriyan ([musheghghahriyan@ysu.am](mailto:musheghghahriyan@ysu.am))

For questions relating to book reviews, please contact the JAI Editor in Chief: Dr. Vahram S. Petrosyan ([v.petrosyan@ysu.am](mailto:v.petrosyan@ysu.am)).

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## ARMIN T. WEGNER, SCHÖPFER DES BEGRIFFS «VOLKSMORD» FÜR DIE VERNICHTUNG DER ARMENIER IM OSMANISCHEN REICH

Manushak Markosyan

Otto Luchterhandt\*

*University of Hamburg*

### Abstract (deutsch)

Der Aufsatz beleuchtet eine nahezu unbekannte Seite des deutschen Schriftstellers Armin T. Wegner (1886-1978), nämlich sein Jurastudium in Breslau und Berlin, seine Promotion im Strafrecht und seine juristische Qualifizierung des Völkermords an den Armeniern im Osmanischen Reich. Als Sanitätsoffizier während des Weltkrieges in der Türkei und als Augenzeuge hat Wegner die Vernichtung der Armenier mit dem von ihm geprägten Begriff „Volksmord“ und damit bereits 1916 das auf den Begriff gebracht, was Raphael Lemkin 1944 mit Blick auf die Vernichtung sowohl der Armenier im Ersten Weltkrieg als auch der europäischen Juden durch das Nazi-Regime im Zweiten Weltkrieg mit dem Begriff „genocide“ bezeichnet hat. Der von Lemkin definierte Begriff ist in das Völkerrecht eingegangen und seit 1948 weltweit verbindlich geworden.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Armin T. Wegners Jurastudium; Promotion im Strafrecht; Osmanisches Reich; Massenverbrechen an den Armeniern; Wegners Begriff „Volksmord“ (1916); Raphael Lemkins Begriff „genocide“ (1944); Völkerstrafrecht.

### Abstract (english)

This essay sheds light on an almost unknown aspect of the work of the German writer Armin T. Wegner (1886-1978), namely his legal training in Breslau and Berlin, his doctorate in criminal law and his legal qualification of the genocide of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. As a medical officer during the World War in Turkey and an eyewitness, Wegner described the extermination of the Armenians with the term “Volksmord”, which he coined in 1916, whereas Raphael Lemkin coined in 1944 for the extermination of the

\* Manushak Markosyan ist unabhängige Forscherin. Otto Luchterhandt, geb. 1943; Studium der Rechtswissenschaften, Slawistik und Osteuropäischen Geschichte; Promotion (1974) und Habilitation (1986) an der Universität zu Köln; 1991-2008 Professor für Öffentliches Recht und Osteuropäisches Recht, Universität Hamburg; seit 1970 mehr als 300 Veröffentlichungen zum Verfassungsrecht, Verwaltungsrecht und Völkerrecht in Osteuropa, Russland und dem Südkaukasus mit Schwerpunkt auf Menschenrechten, ethnischen und nationalen Minderheiten, Selbstbestimmung und Sezession.



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Received 11.01.2025

Revised 20.02.2025

Accepted 29.02.2025

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Armenians in the First World War and of the European Jews by the Nazi regime in the Second World War the term “genocide”. The term defined by Lemkin became part of public international law and has been binding worldwide since 1948.

**Keywords:** Armin T. Wegner's law studies; doctorate in criminal law; Ottoman Empire; mass crimes against the Armenians; Wegner's term “Volksmord” (1916); Raphael Lemkin's term “genocide” (1944); international criminal law.

### **Armin T. Wegner als Jurist – eine nahezu unbekannte Seite des Schriftstellers im Überblick**

Armin T. Wegner stand im Osmanischen Reich während des Ersten Weltkrieges 1915/1916 als Sanitätsoffizier in türkischen Diensten und wurde zum Augenzeugen der Deportation, Todesmärsche und Vernichtung des armenischen Volkes. Das, was er sah, musste ihn als einen hochsensiblen Menschen zutiefst schockieren. Denn Wegner war schon früh, nämlich im Alter von 20 Jahren, als Dichter und Schriftsteller öffentlich hervorgetreten. Im Berliner Egon Fleischel Verlag hatte er 1909 unter dem Titel “Zwischen zwei Städten” erstmals Gedichte veröffentlicht. 1910 waren von ihm “Gedichte in Prosa” und 1912 eine Rhapsodie mit dem Titel “Höre mich reden, Anna-Maria” erschienen, ein romantisches Liebesgedicht in “Zwölf Gesängen”. Tatsächlich befand sich Armin T. Wegner zu jener Zeit aber nicht in einem Literaturstudium, sondern in einem Studium der Rechtswissenschaften und der Volkswirtschaft. Er hatte es 1908 an der traditionsreichen Leopoldina-Universität in Breslau, der Hauptstadt Niederschlesiens, aufgenommen, die seit 1945 zur Republik Polen gehört und heute Wrocław heißt.

Wegners Entscheidung, Jura zu studieren, ist überraschend, denn die Eigenart dieses Studiums, dessen Inhalte, die Fixierung auf die vom Staat gesetzten Rechtsvorschriften und die für die Rechtswissenschaft typische rationale Denkungsweise standen in einem starken Kontrast zu seinen dichterischen und literarischen Interessen, die zu derselben Zeit, wie eingangs aufgezeigt, eine herausragende Rolle in seinem Leben spielten.

Es besteht kaum ein Zweifel, dass Wegners Entscheidung für das Studium der Rechts- und Staatswissenschaften entscheidend von seinen Eltern beeinflusst worden ist. Gegen Wegners Neigung und Wunsch, sich eine freie berufliche Existenz als Dichter und Schriftsteller aufzubauen, war mit Sicherheit sein Vater eingestellt.

Als höherer Beamter in leitender Stellung bei der Reichsbahn tätig und von der Regierung wegen seiner beruflichen Verdienste mit dem Ehrentitel eines „Geheimen Regierungsrates“ ausgestattet, gehörte Gustav Wegner damals zur Oberschicht des Bürgertums. In diesem Teil der Gesellschaft hielt man ein Leben als Dichter und Schriftsteller für „unbücherlich“ und für einen von Armut gefährdeten „brotlosen Beruf“. Stattdessen trat man entschieden für die Wahl eines

traditionellen „bürgerlichen Berufs“ ein, der die Existenz sicherte, die Gründung einer Familie ermöglichte und gesellschaftlich angesehen war.

Auch die Mutter Armin T. Wegners wird ihm das Jura-Studium am Wohnort Breslau empfohlen haben, aber aus anderen Gründen als der Vater. Marie Wegner geborene Witt (1860-1920) stammte aus einer reichen Hamburger Kaufmannsfamilie. Sie war in der freieren gesellschaftlichen Atmosphäre der traditionell liberalen, republikanisch verfassten Hansestadt Hamburg aufgewachsen. In politischer und gesellschaftlicher Hinsicht war sie stark engagiert und gegenüber der monarchischen Regierungsform im Deutschen Kaiserreich kritisch eingestellt. Auch und gerade wegen ihrer politischen Interessen und gesellschaftlichen Aktivitäten wird Marie Wegner das Jura-Studium für die beste Berufsperspektive ihres Sohnes gehalten haben.

Man darf vermuten, dass ihre Meinung für Armin T. Wegner ein noch größeres Gewicht als die Meinung seines Vaters hatte. Dafür spricht jedenfalls die Kurzbiographie, mit der Armin T. Wegner 1913/1914 seine Dissertation abgeschlossen hat<sup>1</sup>. Darin hat er seine Mutter als „Frauenrechtlerin Marie Wegner-Breslau“ hervorgehoben. Im damaligen gesellschaftlichen und politischen Leben Deutschlands konnte der Leser diese Bemerkung als vorsichtige Andeutung eines politischen Bekenntnisses Armin T. Wegners verstehen. Der Leser hätte die Bemerkung durchaus richtig verstanden, denn Armin T. Wegner hat in dem Nachruf auf seine 1920 verstorbene Mutter offen bekannt, dass sie zu denjenigen Menschen gehört habe, die seine ethischen und politischen Grundsätze und Überzeugungen am stärksten geprägt hätten<sup>2</sup>.

Ebenso wie sein dichterischer Blick auf Welt und Wirklichkeit sollte auch die juristische Ausbildung in Armin T. Wegners Wahrnehmung des schrecklichen Schicksals der Armenier im Osmanischen Reich ihren Niederschlag finden. Wegners seelische Last wuchs damals noch dadurch, dass er aufgrund der strengen osmanischen und deutschen Militärzensur zum Schweigen über jene monströsen

<sup>1</sup> Der Lebenslauf lautet: „Am 16. Oktober 1886 wurde ich als Sohn des jetzigen Geheimen Regierungs- und Baurats Gustav Wegner und meiner Mutter, der Frauenrechtlerin Marie Wegner-Breslau zu Elberfeld geboren. Sieben Schulen im Osten und Westen Deutschlands besuchte ich in sprunghafter Reihenfolge und verließ mit dem Einjährig-Freiwilligen-Zeugnis das Gymnasium, um Landwirt zu werden. Später auf die Schule zurückgekehrt, bestand ich Ostern 1908 das Abiturium an dem Realgymnasium zu Striegau.“

Ich studierte die Rechte und Staatswissenschaften in Breslau, in Zürich und in Berlin, wo ich unter Franz v. Liszt eine Zeitlang Mitglied des kriminalistischen Seminars war, und ging viel auf Reisen in Dänemark, den Niederlanden, der Schweiz, Frankreich, Italien und Algier. In den Jahren 1909 bis 1911 veröffentlichte ich drei Bücher, die im Verlage von Egon Fleischel & Co., Berlin, erschienen. Ende Mai 1913 bestand ich an der Universität Breslau die mündliche Doktorprüfung, mit der ich meine juristischen Studien abschloß, um mich für die Zukunft ganz einer schriftstellerischen Tätigkeit zu widmen.“ Siehe Armin T Wegner.: *Der Streik im Strafrecht*, Melle (bei Hannover) 1913, S. 139.

<sup>2</sup> Wernicke-Rothmayer, Johanna: Armin T. Wegner. Gesellschaftserfahrung und literarisches Werk, Frankfurt a.M. 1982, S. 16; Nickisch, Reinhard: Armin T. Wegner. Ein Dichter gegen die Macht. Grundlinien einer Biographie des Expressionisten und Weltreporters Armin T. Wegner (1886-1978), Wuppertal 1982, S. 11.

und offensichtlich verbrecherischen Ereignisse gezwungen war. Der Zwang musste ihn noch zusätzlich bedrücken, weil er als ein Jurist, der auf Strafrecht spezialisiert war, naturgemäß ein ausgeprägtes Verständnis für kriminelles Verhalten und vorsätzlich begangene Straftaten besaß, und das umso mehr, als er auch Doktor der Strafrechtswissenschaften war. Wenige Monate vor Kriegsbeginn hatte er nämlich eine Dissertation zum Thema „Der Streik im Strafrecht“ verteidigt. So erklärt es sich, dass Armin T. Wegner in einer seiner frühesten Schriften (1916) das im Osmanischen Reich am armenischen Volk begangene Verbrechen als „Volksmord“ bezeichnet hat. Er prägte damit einen Begriff, der exakt das verbrecherische Geschehen bezeichnet, dessen Augenzeuge Wegner damals in Anatolien und Syrien wurde. Diese bedeutende, aber bis heute nahezu unbekannte Tatsache aus der Biographie Armin T. Wegners rechtfertigt es, einen näheren Blick auf seine Ausbildung zum Juristen zu werfen.

### **Armin T. Wegners Jura-Studium in Breslau und Berlin**

Das 1908 begonnene Jurastudium beendete Wegner in Breslau mit der im Mai 1913 verteidigten Dissertation „Der Streik im Strafrecht“. Sein Doktorvater war Prof. Dr. Xaver Severin Gretener (1852-1933)<sup>3</sup>. Gretener stammte aus dem Aargau, einem Kanton im deutschen Teil der Schweiz. Zwar hatte er an deutschen Universitäten, darunter auch in Heidelberg, Jura studiert, machte aber seine Karriere als Hochschullehrer im Fach „Strafrecht“ an der Universität Bern, der Hauptstadt der Schweiz. Auch außerhalb der Universität rechtspolitisch stark engagiert, war Gretener in der Schweiz einer der herausragenden Vertreter seines Faches.

Im Jahre 1900 wechselte er an die Universität Breslau auf einen Lehrstuhl mit einer ungewöhnlichen rechtswissenschaftlichen Breite, nämlich für Strafrecht, Strafprozessrecht, Rechtsphilosophie und Völkerrecht. Obwohl Gretener persönlich die Grundwerte der schweizerischen Verfassung, nämlich Republikanismus, Freiheitlichkeit und Demokratie, repräsentierte und deswegen in politischer Hinsicht wohl eher am Rande der Breslauer Universität stand, wählte die Fakultät ihn für eine Amtszeit zum Dekan.

Die ausgeprägte liberale und demokratische Einstellung und das in thematischer Hinsicht breite wissenschaftliche Profil Greteners dürften den politisch stark von seiner Mutter beeinflussten Armin T. Wegner besonders angesprochen haben, und es ist zu vermuten, dass er auf Empfehlung Greteners für ein Semester zum Studium nach Zürich, also in die Schweiz, gegangen ist.

Auch der Umstand, dass Wegner in der Schlussphase seines Jurastudiums an die Universität Berlin wechselte und bei Prof. Franz von Liszt studierte<sup>4</sup>, dürfte dem Einfluss seines Breslauer Lehrers zuzuschreiben sein.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.chamapedia.ch/wiki/Gretener\\_Xaver\\_Severin\\_\(1852%20%80%931933\)](https://www.chamapedia.ch/wiki/Gretener_Xaver_Severin_(1852%20%80%931933)).

<sup>4</sup> [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franz\\_von\\_Liszt](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franz_von_Liszt).

Franz von Liszt<sup>5</sup> war einer der berühmtesten Strafrechtler und Völkerrechtler seiner Zeit mit starkem Einfluss weit über die Grenzen Deutschlands hinaus. Entgegen der damals in der Theorie des Strafrechts und in der Kriminologie - nicht nur in Deutschland - dominanten Lehre, dass Zweck der Strafe die Vergeltung für das begangene Verbrechen sei, vertrat Franz von Liszt mit starkem Engagement und intellektueller Brillanz eine andere, damals in der Strafrechtswissenschaft noch völlig in der Minderheit befindliche Meinung. Ausgehend von einer ausgeprägt humanistischen Strafrechtstheorie lehrte v. Liszt, dass der Zweck der Strafe an erster Stelle die Resozialisierung des Täters sein müsse. Der Vollzug der Strafe müsse in den Anstalten so organisiert und ausgerichtet werden, dass der Straftäter auf den Weg der Besserung geführt werde und die Chance bekomme, nach Abbüßung seiner Strafe zu seinem eigenen Vorteil, aber letztlich auch im Interesse des Staates ein normales, unbescholtene Leben in der Gesellschaft zu führen.

Die beiden wichtigsten akademischen Lehrer Armin T. Wegners hatten noch eine weitere, bedeutende Gemeinsamkeit: Franz von Liszt war Anhänger eines progressiven politischen Liberalismus im deutschen Kaiserreich. In dieser Hinsicht überragte er seinen Breslauer Kollegen Xaver Gretener freilich bei weitem. Denn im Jahre 1900 wurde Franz von Liszt in Berlin Mitglied und Abgeordneter der Freisinnigen Volkspartei<sup>6</sup>. Sie bildete den linken Flügel des politischen Liberalismus in Deutschland und stand in Opposition zur kaiserlichen Regierung. Im Jahre 1912, als Wegner bei ihm studierte, wurde Franz von Liszt für die Partei in Berlin in den Reichstag gewählt.

Im Ergebnis stand Armin T. Wegner seit Beginn seines Jura-Studiums in Breslau unter einem sehr starken und ziemlich homogenen humanistischen und liberalen politischen Einfluss seiner Mutter sowie seiner akademischen Lehrer Xaver Gretener und Franz von Liszt.

### **Armin T. Wegners Dissertation „Der Streik im Strafrecht“**

Das Thema der Dissertation, das Professor Gretener Armin T. Wegner zur Aufgabe gemacht hat, und die Betreuung seines Doktoranden lassen vermuten, dass Gretener nicht nur ein liberaler Geist, sondern auch in Fragen der Sozialpolitik ein fortschrittlich denkender kritischer Wissenschaftler war. Denn das Thema der Dissertation war damals in Deutschland nicht nur zwischen den politischen Parteien heftig umstritten, sondern wurde auch in der Rechtswissenschaft und insbesondere unter den Spezialisten für Strafrecht kontrovers diskutiert. Es gehörte deswegen ein gewisser Mut dazu, als junger und völlig unbekannter Jurist, welcher

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<sup>5</sup> Der in Wien geborene Franz von Liszt war ein bedeutend jüngerer Vetter des gleichnamigen und gleichfalls in Österreich geborenen weltberühmten Pianisten und Komponisten Franz von Liszt (1811-1886).

<sup>6</sup> [Freisinnige Volkspartei – Wikipedia](#). Die Freisinnige Volkspartei hatte Schwesterparteien auch in der Schweiz und in Österreich. Nach der Fusion mit weiteren linksliberalen Parteien (1910) setzte sie ihre Arbeit unter dem Namen „Fortschrittliche Volkspartei“ fort. Siehe dazu: [Fortschrittliche Volkspartei – Wikipedia](#).

Armin T. Wegner war, ein so umstrittenes Thema zu behandeln. Die Art und Weise der Behandlung des Themas zeigt in beeindruckender Weise, dass Armin T. Wegner trotz seines noch jugendlichen Alters das dafür nötige Selbstbewusstsein besaß.

Einer der Hauptstreitpunkte, den das Thema „Der Streik im Strafrecht“ in juristischer Hinsicht aufwarf, war die Frage, ob das gesetzliche Verbot, andere Arbeitnehmer im Betrieb durch Ausübung irgendeines physischen oder psychischen Druckes, also zum Beispiel durch Agitation und Propaganda, zur Niederlegung der Arbeit und damit zur Verletzung ihres Arbeitsvertrages zu veranlassen, mit der sogenannten Koalitionsfreiheit das heißt, mit dem Grundrecht vereinbar war, sich mit anderen Arbeitnehmern zu Gewerkschaften zusammenzuschließen und gemeinsam durch Streik für höhere Löhne und bessere Arbeitsbedingungen zu kämpfen.

Das Grundrecht der Koalitionsfreiheit war im Prinzip schon damals vom deutschen Verfassungs- und Staatsrecht anerkannt. Das umstrittene Verbot war in § 153 der Gewerbeordnung von 1869 verankert, die im ganzen Deutschen Reich galt. Armin T. Wegner setzte sich kritisch sowohl mit der arbeitnehmerfeindlichen Rechtsprechung des deutschen Reichsgerichts zu § 153, als auch mit den Meinungen derjenigen Strafrechtslehrer auseinander, die die verbotsfreundliche Rechtsprechung des Reichsgerichts unterstützten. Scharfsinnig deckte er die Schwächen in den Urteilen des Reichsgerichts und in den Positionen der Strafrechtswissenschaft auf und trat mit klaren und überzeugenden Argumenten für die Abschaffung des strafrechtlichen Verbots, also für die Aufhebung des § 153, ein. In diesem Sinne nahm Wegner zugunsten einer damals im Reichstag diskutierten Reform der Gewerbeordnung und des Strafrechts Stellung. Kurzum: Wegner erweist sich in seiner Dissertation als ein selbständiger, unabhängiger Denker. Ihre Bewertung mit der Note „summa cum laude“ (lateinisch: „Mit höchstem Lob“), d. h. „mit Auszeichnung“, beruht offensichtlich auch darauf!

Wegner griff bei seiner Untersuchung des Streikproblems thematisch weit aus; denn er beschränkte sich nicht auf eine trockene Darstellung der nur in Deutschland geltenden Rechtsvorschriften, sondern zog zum Vergleich auch die Regelungen des Streikproblems in anderen bedeutenden Industriestaaten heran, namentlich in den USA, in England, Frankreich und in der Schweiz. Wegner ging aber noch weiter, denn über die Analyse der Rechtsvorschriften hinaus warf er auch kritische Blicke auf die hinter ihnen stehenden sozialen Interessen und politischen Ideen der damals in Deutschland herrschenden Wirtschafts- und Sozialpolitik.

Über seine eigene politische Position in jenen Konflikten ließ Armin T. Wegner den Leser seiner Dissertation nicht im Unklaren: Er ergriff entschieden Partei für die im kapitalistischen Wirtschaftssystem sozial schwächere Seite, also für die Arbeitnehmer gegenüber den Unternehmern und Eigentümern der Betriebe und Fabriken. Wegner argumentierte dabei nicht von marxistischen, sozialistischen Positionen aus, wie sie damals im Reichstag von der Sozialdemokratischen Partei

vertreten wurden, sondern aufgrund seiner persönlichen humanistischen Überzeugungen und Auffassungen von sozialer Gerechtigkeit in der modernen Industriegesellschaft. Dabei zeugt die Dissertation eindrucksvoll von der intellektuellen Selbständigkeit und Unbestechlichkeit sowie von der der juristischen Urteilskraft Armin T. Wegners. Er erweist sich damit als ein würdiger Schüler seiner beiden bedeutenden akademischen Lehrer!

Es waren diese charakterlichen Eigenschaften, die es nicht als Zufall erscheinen lassen, dass Armin T. Wegner die Vernichtung des armenischen Volkes im Osmanischen Reich als Zeitzeuge und Augenzeuge später nicht nur aufs Schärfste verurteilt, sondern das monströse Verbrechen auch als Erster auf einen präzisen juristischen Begriff gebracht hat.

### **Armin T. Wegners Prägung des Begriffes „Volksmord“**

Armin T. Wegner hat die Massaker, Vertreibungen und Todesmärsche, kurz, die Vernichtung des armenischen Volkes in Anatolien und Syrien schon 1916 auf den Begriff des „Volksmords“ gebracht. Veröffentlicht hat er das aber erst 1920, also nach dem Ende des Ersten Weltkrieges, in dem Buch „Im Hause der Glückseligkeit. Aufzeichnungen aus der Türkei“<sup>7</sup>. Die darin publizierten Skizzen wurden aber, wie Wegner ausdrücklich vermerkt hat, schon „1915/16 auf türkischer Erde geschrieben“, also in der Zeit, als sich Armin T. Wegner als Sanitätsoffizier in der Türkei befand. Die Skizzen oder Miniaturen standen also zeitlich in nächster Nähe zu den Vorgängen des „Volksmords“.

In den Skizzen liefert Wegner sympathische Porträts der türkischen Landbevölkerung, ihrer bäuerlichen Einfachheit, Schlichtheit und Gutmütigkeit. Dazu stehen die Hoheitsträger des Osmanischen Staates, Beamte und Soldaten, in einem scharfen negativen Kontrast, und als deren Opfer erscheinen die Armenier. Wegner weist auf den „Auszug des armenischen Volkes in die Wüste“ hin<sup>8</sup> und verbindet das aktuelle Geschehen im Weltkrieg mit der Erinnerung an „den **Volksmord** Abdul Hamids“, dem im Jahre 1909 in Kilikien 20.000 Armenier zum Opfer gefallen waren<sup>9</sup>. Er erhebt Anklage gegen „die junge Türkei“ unter „Enver, dem Revolutionär“, also gegen die kurz zuvor an die Macht gelangten Jungtürken.

Wegner verwendet das Wort „Volksmord“, wie der Text zeigt, eher beiläufig, gleichsam literarisch, ohne die geringste Andeutung einer rechtswissenschaftlichen Vertiefung, was man bei seiner Ausbildung zum Strafrechtler eigentlich hätte erwarten können. Gleichwohl ist es erstaunlich und daher besonders hervorzuheben, dass Armin T. Wegner die berüchtigten Massaker an den Armeniern in Kilikien als „Volksmord“ bezeichnet und mit dem aktuellen Geschehen im Weltkrieg in Verbindung bringt, deren Zeuge er wurde.

<sup>7</sup> „Im Hause der Glückseligkeit. Aufzeichnungen aus der Türkei“, Sibyllen-Verlag, Dresden 1920, 212 Seiten.

<sup>8</sup> A. a. O. S. 163.

<sup>9</sup> A. a. O. S. 164.

Kraft seiner sensiblen Wahrnehmung jener Vernichtungsaktionen kam Armin T. Wegner – im Ansatz – zu derselben sprachlichen Bezeichnung, die der polnisch-jüdische Jurist Raphael Lemkin im Jahre 1944 für den Mord an den europäischen Juden geprägt hat – genocide – und der seither ein zentraler Begriff des Völkerrechts, des Völkerstrafrechts und der internationalen Politik geworden ist<sup>10</sup>!

Ebenso wie das Wort „Volksmord“ steht der Begriff und Straftatbestand des „Genozids“ im Singular. Dessen deutsche Übersetzung mit einem Plural – „Völkermord“ – stimmt seltsamerweise mit Lemkins Begriff „genocide“ nicht überein. Anders dagegen der von Armin T. Wegner geprägte Begriff „Volksmord“! Er trifft das verbrecherische Geschehen exakt, denn es geht bei dem Verbrechen immer um ein einzelnes, ein bestimmtes Volk oder um eine bestimmte „ethnische“, „nationale“ oder „religiöse Gruppe“.

Auch wenn er es nicht rechtswissenschaftlich begründet und näher dargelegt hat, ist es doch offenkundig, dass Armin T. Wegner zu der Bildung des Wortes „Volksmord“, das in der deutschen Sprache bis dahin nicht existiert hat, durch seine Kompetenz als promovierter Strafrechtler gebracht worden ist. Die in dieser Wort- und Begriffsbildung liegende Leistung Wegners ist sowohl der Philologie als auch der Rechtswissenschaft bislang verborgen geblieben. Ursächlich dafür war Wegner selbst, denn er hat den von ihm geprägten Begriff in seinen folgenden Publikationen nicht mehr verwendet. Das mag überraschen. Aber Armin T. Wegner verstand sich, wie er selbst betonte, als Dichter und Schriftsteller, der er immer werden wollte und auch geworden ist, und nicht als wissenschaftlich geschulter Jurist<sup>11</sup>! Da auch kein anderer deutscher Autor und Kenner des Osmanischen Reiches<sup>12</sup> die Vernichtung der Armenier in Anatolien und Syrien während des Ersten Weltkrieges auf den einfachen und sich eigentlich aufdrängenden Begriff des „Volksmordes“ gebracht hat, hat das Wort bis zum heutigen Tage keinen Eingang in den allgemeinen deutschen Sprachgebrauch gefunden<sup>13</sup>. Darin spiegelt sich die bittere politische Tatsache wider, dass im Verlauf der 1920er Jahre und erst recht in den 1930er Jahren unter dem Nazi-Regime die Vernichtung des armenischen Volkes im Osmanischen Reich in der Publizistik Deutschlands in der Regel gerechtfertigt wurde, sofern man darüber überhaupt noch geschrieben hat.

Es ist sehr zu bedauern, dass Armin T. Wegner nach dem Ende des Weltkrieges und in der Weimarer Republik den von ihm geprägten und eingängigen Begriff des „Volksmords“ nicht mit seiner doppelten Autorität als Augenzeuge der Verbrechen und als promovierter Kenner des Strafrechts offensiv im deutschsprachigen Raum

<sup>10</sup> Axis Rule in Occupied Europe, Washington D.C. 1944.

<sup>11</sup> Siehe dazu seinen kurzen Lebenslauf am Ende, oben unter Anm. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Es liegt nahe, an Johannes Lepsius zu denken, aber Lepsius ist schon bald nach dem Ende des Weltkrieges nicht mehr publizistisch hervorgetreten und 1926 verstorben.

<sup>13</sup> Das gilt bis in die Gegenwart. Siehe statt vieler Autoren, die über den Völkermord an den Armeniern geschrieben und schreiben, nur Gottschlich, Jürgen: Beihilfe zum Völkermord. Deutschlands Rolle bei der Vernichtung der Armenier, 2. Auflage Berlin 2015.

Mitteleuropas publizistisch vertreten und verbreitet hat. Die Vernichtung des armenischen Volkes in der Türkei hätte als das erstmals im 20. Jahrhundert an der Menschheit begangene schrecklichste Massenverbrechen unter dem so treffenden Begriff des „Volksmords“ wahrscheinlich breite Aufmerksamkeit, auch über die Grenzen Europas hinaus, gefunden. Möglicherweise wäre unter der Ägide des 1919 gegründeten Völkerbundes der „Volksmord“ an den Armeniern auf internationalen Strafrechtskonferenzen gebührend diskutiert und schon damals scharf verurteilt worden<sup>14</sup>.

Dazu ist es nicht gekommen. Es blieb, wie bemerkt, dem engagierten polnisch-jüdischen „Pionier“ und Vorkämpfer des Völkerstrafrechts, Raphael Lemkin, vorbehalten, das gegenüber den Armeniern noch monströsere Massenverbrechen des Nazi-Regimes an den europäischen Juden in den vom Deutschen Reich besetzten Gebieten Europas auf den von ihm geprägten Begriff des „genocide“ zu bringen und der internationalen Ächtung dieses Massenverbrechens zum Durchbruch zu verhelfen. „Genocide“ umschloss auch den „Volksmord“ an den Armeniern. Von ihm hatte Raphael Lemkin als Beobachter des Mordprozesses an Talaat Pascha 1921 vor dem Landgericht in Berlin Moabit hinreichend Kenntnis<sup>15</sup>. Jener Prozess hat auf ihn einen tiefen, ja einen so starken Eindruck gemacht, dass er sich entschloss, Jura zu studieren. Davon zeugt die folgende Notiz zu seiner Biographie<sup>16</sup>: „Lemkin war auf den Gerichtsprozess gegen Tehlirian, der in Berlin wegen Mordes angeklagt war, durch eine kurze Zeitungsnotiz aufmerksam geworden. Durch einen seiner Professoren erfuhr er, dass es Armeniern in Deutschland nicht möglich war, Talaat vor Gericht zu bringen. Das Konzept staatlicher Souveränität machte es nicht möglich, einen Mann wegen seiner Verantwortung für einen Völkermord in einem anderen Land zu verurteilen. Für

<sup>14</sup> Zur Entwicklung des Völkerstrafrechts nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg siehe: Schabas, William A. Genozid im Völkerrecht, Hamburg 2003, S. 32 ff.; englische Ausgabe: Genocide in International Law, Cambridge 2000, p. 29 ff.

<sup>15</sup> Wegner, Armin T. (Hrsg.): Der Prozess Talaat Pascha. Stenographischer Bericht über die Verhandlung gegen den des Mordes an Talaat Pascha angeklagten armenischen Studenten Salomon Teilirian vor dem Schwurgericht des Landgerichts zu Berlin“, Berlin 1921; neu herausgegeben im Auftrage der „Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker“ (Göttingen) von Tessa Hofmann unter dem Titel „Der Völkermord an den Armeniern vor Gericht. Der Prozeß Talaat Pascha“, Göttingen 1980.

<sup>16</sup> [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raphael\\_Lemkin](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raphael_Lemkin). Noch ausführlicher ist der Eintrag in der englischen Ausgabe von wikipedia: „After reading about the 1921 [assassination of Talat Pasha](#), the main perpetrator of the Armenian genocide, in Berlin by [Soghomon Tehlirian](#), Lemkin asked Professor [Juliusz Makarewicz](#) [pl] why Talat Pasha could not have been tried for his crimes in a German court. Makarewicz, a national-conservative who believed that Jews and Ukrainians should be expelled from Poland if they refused to assimilate, answered that the doctrine of [state sovereignty](#) gave governments the right to conduct internal affairs as they saw fit: 'Consider the case of a farmer who owns a flock of chickens. He kills them, and this is his business. If you interfere, you are trespassing.' Lemkin replied, 'But the Armenians are not chickens.' His eventual conclusion was that 'Sovereignty, I argued, cannot be conceived as the right to kill millions of innocent people.' Lemkin then moved on to [Heidelberg University in Germany](#) to study philosophy, returning to Lwów to study law in 1926.“

Lemkin war dies der Anlass, sein Studienfach zu wechseln und Recht zu studieren.“

Erst nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg und nach dem „Volksmord“ an den Juden war die Zeit augenscheinlich dafür reif, „Volksmord“ förmlich zu verurteilen und international zu ächten. Raphael Lemkin konnte darauf entscheidenden Einfluss nehmen: Am 9. Dezember 1948 verabschiedete die Generalversammlung der 1945 gegründeten Weltorganisation der Vereinten Nationen die „Konvention zur Verhütung und Bestrafung des Genozid-Verbrechens“<sup>17</sup>. Die Konvention war keine unverbindliche moralisch-politische Deklaration, sondern ein völkerrechtlich verbindlicher Vertrag und als solcher in juristischer Hinsicht ein (erster) Durchbruch zur Ächtung von „Volksmord“.

Dabei blieb es nicht. Nach dem Zusammenbruch der Sowjetunion und des kommunistischen Bundesstaates Jugoslawien erfuhr das Völkerstrafrecht durch das Ende des Ost-West-Konfliktes einen starken und nun entscheidenden (zweiten) Entwicklungsschub: Am 17. Juli 1998 wurde in Rom das Statut des schon in der Genozid-Konvention von 1948 vorgesehenen Internationalen Strafgerichtshofes verabschiedet. Es ist am 1. Juli 2002 in Kraft getreten. Das Gericht hat seinen Sitz in Den Haag, der Hauptstadt der Niederlande. Art. 6 des Statuts erklärt „Genozid“ zum schwersten Verbrechen des Völkerstrafrechts<sup>18</sup>!

## Schluss

Armin T. Wegner (1886-1978) hat sich nicht nur durch seine wertvollen Augenzeugenberichte und Dokumentierungen des Völkermords an den Armeniern hervorgetan, sondern er hat den Völkermord auch aus juristischer Hinsicht vielfach betrachtet.

Als Sanitätsoffizier während des Weltkrieges im Osmanischen Reich und als Augenzeuge hat Wegner die Vernichtung der Armenier mit dem von ihm geprägten Begriff „Volksmord“ und damit bereits 1916 das auf den Begriff gebracht, was Raphael Lemkin 1944 mit Blick auf die Vernichtung sowohl der Armenier im Ersten Weltkrieg als auch der europäischen Juden durch das Nazi-Regime im Zweiten Weltkrieg mit dem Begriff „genocide“ bezeichnet hat. Der von Lemkin definierte Begriff ist in das Völkerrecht eingegangen und seit 1948 weltweit verbindlich geworden.

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<sup>17</sup> Quelle: United Nations Treaties Series (UNTS) Band 78, S. 277.

<sup>18</sup> [International Criminal Court - Wikipedia](#)

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### **Conflict of Interests**

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

### **Ethical Standards**

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

## THE INVISIBLES: HIDDEN CHRISTIAN NATION(S) IN 20TH-CENTURY TÜRKİYE

Tessa Hofmann\*  
*Independent Scholar*

People endured horrors,  
and then they couldn't talk about them.  
The real stories of the world  
were bedded in silence.  
The mortar was silence  
and the walls were sometimes impregnable.  
(Sebastian Barry: Old God's Time, 2023)

### Abstract

This article discusses the fate of survivors of the Young Turk and Kemalist genocide against the indigenous Christians of the Ottoman Empire (1912-1922). Although the phenomenon of Ottoman Christians converting to Sunni or Shiite Islam or Alevism has existed in the Ottoman Empire since the 17th century, the genocide in particular significantly accelerated Islamization and thus also the phenomenon of crypto-Christianity in various regions of present-day Republic of Türkiye that were previously predominantly Christian. However, Islamization did not protect Armenian and Greek genocide survivors from further discrimination. In addition to a comparative consideration of the affected regions – Sasun, Pontos, Hamshen, Cappadocia and Dersim – the analysis focuses on the Dersim region, whose Armenian inhabitants were affected by genocide no fewer than twice: in 1915/16 and in 1938. At the same time, I examine the effects of Kurdish tribalism and the associated granting of protection at the price of serfdom. My empirical basis is the interviews conducted by Avedis Hadjian and Kazım Gündoğan in the 2010s with people of Armenian descent – defined as descendants of at least one Armenian grandparent or great-grandparent. These interviews confirm the fact, also known in other post-genocidal contexts, that the experience of genocide silences the survivors for at least two generations and socially marginalizes those affected. It was only in the generation of grandchildren that the crypto-Christians and Alevized Armenians were able to overcome their invisibility and confront the public with the demand for equal treatment and acceptance. What price did the crypto-Christians pay for

\* Prof. h. c. (YSU) Dr. Phil. Tessa Hofmann, Independent scholar of Armenian and genocide studies; author; chairwoman of the human rights NGO Working Group Recognition – Against Genocide, for International Understanding (Berlin); Editor of the site „Virtual Genocide Memorial“ (<https://virtual-genocidememorial.de/>).



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Received 20.01.2025  
Revised 11.03.2025  
Accepted 25.03.2025

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remaining in their homeland? Despite the often-praised good relations between Armenians and Dersim Alevis, the price seems to have been particularly high in this region, because the forced adaptation to regional Alevism led not only to a change of faith, but also to linguistic assimilation into the Turkish and Iranian languages of the region (Kurdish, Kırımcık or Zazaki). If we consider language and religion to be essential components of collective and individual identity, then the preservation of an Armenian consciousness in this region is all the more remarkable. In other regions examined here, especially in Pontos and Hamshen, the Islamized Greeks and Armenians at least retained their language.

**Keywords:** *Ottoman Empire; Republic of Türkiye; religion; Islamization; Crypto-Christians; Armenian language; Greek language; linguistic assimilation; Armenians; Greek-Orthodox Christians; Regions; Dersim; Sasun; Pontos; Hamshen (Hemşin); Pontos; Cappadocia; genocide; social marginalization.*

### Hidden Nation(s)

What happens to people who physically survive the ultimate crime – genocide – but only at the cost of complete self-denial, humiliation and socio-cultural assimilation? Under Ottoman and Turkish rule, forced Islamization occurred already before the 20th century, often to avoid tax disadvantages or the loss of privileges. In some regions, the converts managed to develop a crypto-existence, avoiding exogamy and partially preserving linguistic or religious traditions.

Crypto-Christians, referred to as Cryphi, klosti, Stavriotes and Kromledes in Greek, have existed in the Pontos region since 1650. The Islamization of the Pontic Greek population began in the Ofis region, followed by Surmena [Sürmene], Argyroupolis [Gümüşhane], Ionia and other regions.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to the Islamized Armenians, however, the Pontos Greek Muslims or crypto-Christians managed to preserve their linguistic identity, the Pontos Greek dialect Pontiaka, which is said to be most closely related to classical ancient Greek. In Surmena, the district capital consists of 19 villages, five of which are now inhabited exclusively by Greek speakers. In the district of Galiena (ancient Guliena), which consists of 18 villages and settlements, half of the district's population are Islamized locals, while the other half were resettled from the villages of Kullish and Archangelos in the district of Surmena in the third decade of the 20th century. The Turkish language has only recently begun to displace the Pontic dialect, which is no longer spoken by young people, at least those under 20 years of age. The region of Tsaíkara (Kato-Chorion) is purely Greek-speaking and was the last to be Islamized (at the end of the 19th century), with a sufficiently developed religious sense of crypto-Christians. The district of Of (the ancient

<sup>1</sup> Malkidis, Theofanis. *The Cryptochristians of Pontos*.

<https://pontosworld.com/index.php/history/articles/242-the-crypto-christians-of-Pontos?showall=1>

region of Ofis) consists of 49 villages, which were all Greek, but today only Evenköy is a Greek-speaking village. There, the Muslim festival of Ramadan is celebrated, and the Lenten Triodion (from the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee to the Friday before Palm Sunday). The majority of the inhabitants are Muslim (...). The inhabitants, mainly small farmers and cattle breeders, have rebuilt their communities in Constantinople and other cities.

Estimates of the number of crypto-Christians in Turkey vary considerably, depending on the political intentions of the estimators, who either emphasize or downplay the importance or danger of crypto-Christians. The assassinated by Turkish nationalist Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink estimated that there were one million Turkish citizens with at least one Armenian grandparent or great-grandparent.<sup>2</sup> According to the Armenian author and journalist Hadjian, hundreds of thousands of survivors were forcibly Islamized after 1915, with far-reaching consequences: „(...) the Islamicization of Armenians was the vehicle *par excellence* to de-Armenize them: they became non-Armenian non-Christians, for even after three generations Turkish or Kurdish neighbors still know them as *dönmes* (converts).“<sup>3</sup> The Greek historian Konstantinos Fotiadis mentioned in 2020: "Even 100 years after the Pontian genocide, there are still many Turks who are still crypto-Christians. There are many who recognize their Greek origin, but while their grandparents changed their minds due to the circumstances, they transmitted the Greek conscience to them. They are the descendants of the Greek-speaking Muslims, whom the Ecumenical Patriarchate had recognized in number to 180,000, who could not come to Greece because of the Treaty of Lausanne. (...) There were 43,000 crypto-Christians then. At that time, the population of Turkey was about 12 million. (...) If we take into account that the population of Turkey today is about 82 million, by a rough estimate we could say that there are about 2 million in Turkey today with Greek or Christian conscience, some of them crypto-Christians and some others obvious.“<sup>4</sup> The late Austrian orientalist and Orthodox theologian Heinz Gstrein, on the other hand, mentioned in 2020: "The number of crypto-Christians in Turkey today is estimated at just under 100,000,"<sup>5</sup> whereby he only referred to Greek Orthodox crypto-Christians.

Armenian and Turkish nationalists, on the other hand, speculate that there are 300,000 and 500,000 crypto-Christians of Armenian and Turkish origin, respectively. In Germany, we became aware of the existence of crypto-Christians

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<sup>2</sup> Peroomian, Rubina. *And Those Who Continued Living in Turkey after 1915: The Metamorphosis of the Post-Genocide Armenian Identity as Reflected in Artistic Literature*. Yerevan, 2008, p. 211

<sup>3</sup> Hadjian, Avedis. *Secret Nation: The Hidden Armenians of Turkey*. London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2018, p. 21, 123

<sup>4</sup> Zacharis, Lambros: "Professor Fotiadis: There's up to 2 million crypto-Greeks in Turkey and many visit Panagia Soumela in Pontos". *Greek City Times*, November 18, 2020, <https://greekcitytimes.com/2020/11/18/2-million-greeks-soumela-pontos/>

<sup>5</sup> Gstrein, Heinz. „Türkische Geheimchristen im Visier“. May 29, 2020, <https://hephaestuswien.com/turkey-kirche-und-islam/>

in Turkey in the 1970s and 1980s, when Konstantinos Fotiadis, who later became an Ottomanologist at the Western Macedonia University in Kozani, studied empirical cultural studies in Tübingen. During fieldwork among the working class in Baden-Württemberg, he initially came across Turkish Greeks who had been expelled from the islands of Imbros (...) and Tenedos and who had slipped into the ‘Turkish’ guest worker contingents of the Federal Republic. Above all, however, he discovered numerous Turkish men and women from the Black Sea region who spoke the ‘Pontic’ dialect of Greek among themselves, were organized in the local Turkish cultural, i. e. mosque association, but practiced Christian customs at home. Their decision to emigrate to Germany was not only dictated by the search for better earning opportunities and living conditions, but also by the desire for more religious freedom.”<sup>6</sup> The *Septembriana*, the anti-Greek pogrom in Istanbul on 6-7 September 1955, was the final impetus for many Turkish citizens of Greek or Armenian descent to emigrate.

Konstantinos Fotiadis was one of the first scholars to research the Islamization of Asia Minor and the crypto-Christians of Pontos for his dissertation, which he defended in Tübingen in 1985. Armenian authors such as Avedis Hadjian have also studied the fate of people of Armenian descent in Turkey over the last two decades. A. Hadjian, a descendant of genocide survivors from Zeytun, was born in Aleppo and grew up in Buenos Aires; he currently lives as a journalist in New York and Venice. His extensive and often perilous expeditions to the historical Armenian settlement area in western Armenia, to Cilicia and the Pontos coast were undertaken to meet the descendants of Armenian survivors who had remained in the country. From numerous interviews with people who can trace their ancestry back to at least one Armenian grandparent, anonymized for security reasons, a unique, differentiated and touching inventory of their living conditions during the years 2011 to 2014 emerged. A. Hadjian perceived this period as relatively tolerant.

In Sasun, to which Hadjian devotes the first and longest chapter, people of Armenian descent still remember exactly which of their Kurdish and Arab neighbors committed which crimes in 1915, and which tribes ‘only’ robbed and plundered. “We know each other,” is how an Armenian-born Sasun resident summarizes the situation. The greed of their Muslim neighbors played and still plays a central role in the persecution of even Islamized Armenians. Blood feuds among Kurdish tribes over the plundering of Armenian deportees lasted until the 1980s.<sup>7</sup> Until the 1990s, there was a widespread belief throughout Anatolia that Muslim majorities (including Sunni Zazas)<sup>8</sup> had a right to all the property of the Armenians – silver, women, lives – as spoils of war.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Gstrein, op. cit.

<sup>7</sup> Hadjian, op. cit., p. 65

<sup>8</sup> Hadjian, op. cit., p. 123

<sup>9</sup> Hadjian, op. cit., p. 129

It is tempting to compare these earlier findings with the results of Kazım Gündoğan. The film director, who comes from Dersim, belongs to the Kurdish Alevi community and conducted 72 interviews with people of Armenian descent from Dersim and twelve interviews with Dersim Alevis in the 2010s. His collection has already been published in three editions in Turkey since 2022.<sup>10</sup> There is clearly a great deal of interest there, presumably particularly in the Alevi community. Unlike the interviewees of A. Hadjian, who remained anonymous, most of K. Gündogan's interviewees gave their full names.

### A regional overview

The circumstances under which Christians in the Ottoman Empire were forced to convert to Islam varied considerably from region to region. While the Islamized Greek Orthodox Christians in the Pontos region retained their Greek language, the opposite was true in the neighboring region of Cappadocia to the south. Grigorios Faruk Güney, who is a German resident of Cappadocian Greek origin, analyzed the situation as follows: "The history of the Cappadocian Greeks can be divided into three different paths. The first group preserved their language, culture, and faith despite all oppression but was expelled to Greece during the population exchange [of 1923].

The second group, the Karamanlides, also known as 'Karamanlılar', lost their Greek language and instead spoke Turkish, but they preserved their culture, faith, and the Greek alphabet. The Karamanlides accepted the language decree of Karamanoğlu Mehmet Bey, making them a unique group among the Cappadocian Greeks. This decree from 1277 led to a change in their language and marked the beginning of an assimilation process in Anatolia that spanned centuries. This group, too, was expelled to Greece.

The last group, to which my family [the Galatades] belongs, experienced deep assimilation. These people mostly lost their language but continued to live their culture in secret while becoming Islamized. According to my research, my village was assimilated between the 16th and 18th centuries when Turks were deliberately resettled there, while this process had already taken deep root in Anatolian society. Therefore, they were exempted from the population exchange and remained in their homeland of Cappadocia, as they were considered fully 'Turkified'.

Their identity survived, albeit under difficult conditions. The Scottish historian and cartographer John Pinkerton reported as early as 1817: "...the cruel persecutions of their Mahomedan masters have been the cause of their present degraded state of ignorance, even in regard to their native tongue; for that there was a time when their Turkish masters strictly prohibited the Greeks in Asia Minor even from speaking the Greek language among themselves, and that they cut out the tongues of some, and punished others with death, who dared to disobey this

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<sup>10</sup> Gündoğan, Kazım. *Aleviles(tiril)mış Ermeniler* [Alevized Armenians]. İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2022.

their barbarous command. It is an indisputable fact, that the language of their oppressors has long since almost universally prevailed, and that in a great part of Anatolia even the public worship of the Greeks is now performed in the Turkish tongue...’

This deep connection to my roots enabled me to explore my family’s history and rediscover my identity. My grandfather, who passed away in 2022, was the last in our family to speak Cappadocian Greek. I carry this awareness with great gratitude, and after two years of intense catechumenate, I was baptized Greek Orthodox in the same year, in line with the heritage of my ancestors. Many Greeks of Anatolian descent share life paths similar to those of my family. Their identities were suppressed or even lost due to systematic assimilation. While some have today accepted the identity imposed by the Turkish state, others live with the awareness of their true identity. This conflict has also left deep marks on my family and highlights the long-lasting effects of the systematic assimilation policies that began with the language decree in the Seljuk Empire, continued with oppression, exile, and massacres in the Ottoman Empire, and are still carried on today by the Turkish state.”<sup>11</sup>

The case of the Hamshen Armenians is yet another example of ethnicity beyond the traditional religious component. This isolated Armenian community in a non-Armenian – Laz and Greek – environment goes back to the late 8<sup>th</sup> century when a part of the Armenian nobility rebelled against the harsh treatment by the Arab invaders and subsequently had to emigrate, including the Amatowni leader prince Šabowh Amatowni (Shabuh Amatuni), his son Hamam and 12,000 followers. They were given the town of Tambur in the mountains south of Rhizaion (Rize in Turkish), where they founded a new principality in the Byzantium-controlled mountains of Pontos. Tambur was then burnt by Hamam’s brother-in-law, the Georgian prince Vašdean, and the new city that was reconstructed at the same place was called Hamamashen (‘Built by Hamam’) after Hamam Amatowni.

Ottoman records show that Hamshen Armenians remained overwhelmingly Christian until the late 1620s. Islamization seems to have taken place gradually, mainly as a result of the need for equality with Laz Muslim neighbours, the desire to avoid the oppressive taxation of non-Muslims, increasing Ottoman intolerance of non-Muslims in a period of weakness for the Ottoman Empire, and anarchy caused by local semi-autonomous Muslim rulers, or ‘valley lords’ (*dere-beys*). Islam took root in the coastal areas first, and then advanced to the highlands. Emigration of Armenians also took place during this period of pressure, from the 1630s to the 1850s, though fugitives who fled to other parts of the Pontos were still often forced to convert to Islam.

Conversion in Hamshen led to divided families, in which typically house-bound mothers persevered with Christianity, while men with their more frequent external

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<sup>11</sup> Güney, Grigorios Faruk. “My Story”. <https://virtual-genocide-memorial.de/region/the-black-sea-marmara-and-aegean-littorals-eastern-thrace-and-central-anatolia/konya-vilayet-province/?searchedfor=Karamanlides>

contacts became Muslim. In addition, there emerged a segment of crypto-Christians called *gesges* (in Armenian ‘kes-kes’ - half-half). These Hamshen Armenians privately kept practicing various Christian and pre-Christian customs, in particular the custom of popular pre-Christian feast days such as *Vardavar*<sup>12</sup>, even sometimes including their attendance of church services. In difference to Pontos Greek crypto-Christians<sup>13</sup>, who still have a visible presence in the region and beyond, the Hamshen crypto-Christians had disappeared by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for two reasons: During the liberal Ottoman *Tanzimat* (reform) period (1839-1876) with its proclamation of religious equality some Muslim Hamshenlis felt encouraged to revert. Reversion to Christianity, however, caused intensified Muslim mission and led to the opening of Turkish schools in the area and increased linguistic Turkification.

Relations between Muslim *Hemşinliler* and Christian Armenians in the region were sometimes uneven. In Khodorchur, the neighbouring area in the south, Muslims of Hamshen were hired by the Catholic Armenians as guides for travellers, guards, and seasonal workers. Despite these generally friendly relations, some Hamshen Muslims who engaged in banditry also periodically attacked the Khodorchur Catholic Armenians. During the genocide of 1915, some *Hemşinliler* and other Muslims of Armenian descent used the opportunity to rob their Christian Armenian neighbours and take over their properties. The last Christian Armenian village in Hamshen, Eghiovit (Elevit), was destroyed, with its population deported and killed. After the First World War, Khodorchur was partially repopulated by *Hemşinliler*. In Hopa and more particularly in Karadere Valley and regions closer to Trabzon, Islamised Armenians helped Christians instead of robbing them.

In public, many *Hemşinliler* reject an Armenian origin, and some even insist they were descended from Turks from Central Asia who allegedly founded the ‘Gregorian’ (Armenian-Apostolic) denomination of Christianity. They resent Lazis and others who call them Armenians. This may be a result of the experience of persecution and destruction during and after WW1, when some Muslim *Hemşinliler* were mistaken for Armenians because of their Armenian language and killed.

Unlike Armenian converts in other regions, there were no recorded instances of reversion to Christianity among the Islamized Armenians and Greeks of Hamshen or Pontos during the Russian occupation of the area from 1916 to 1918. But abroad Christian Hamshenlis can be found, in particular in the Krasnodar region of the Russian Federation and in Abkhazia, where nearly all Hamshen Armenians adhere

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<sup>12</sup> Originally celebrated in veneration of the Southern Armenian goddess Astgik [“Little Star”], her feast day *Vardavar* (‘rose glow’) transformed through Christianization into the celebration of the Transfiguration of Christ. Astgik shares several features with the Greek goddesses of love and hunting, Aphrodite and Artemis.

<sup>13</sup> Fotiadis, Konstantinos. *Die Islamisierung Kleinasiens und die Kryptochristen des Pontos* [The Islamization of Asia Minor and the crypto-Christians of Pontos; in German]. Tübingen 1985 [Doctoral thesis].

to the Armenian Apostolic Church. Their presence in Abkhazia goes back to Tsarist nationalities and religious policies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when after the successful oppression of Northern Caucasian resistance to Russian conquest during 1864-1878, the Russian Empire tried to alter the ethnic and religious composition of the population by increasing the Christian share. While most Muslim Abkhazians and other Northern Caucasian ethnic groups were expelled and fled their destroyed villages during the *muhajiroba*<sup>14</sup>, seeking refuge in the neighbouring Ottoman Empire as the self-proclaimed protector of Russian Muslims, Russia transferred Ottoman Christians – Pontos Greeks and Hamshen Armenians – from the southern Black Sea region to Abkhazia, with the result that the Abkhazian titular nation found itself in a minority position already one hundred years after the Russian conquest of Abkhazia 1810-1829.

The case of the Christian Hamshenlis of Abkhazia is indicative for the competition of self-identifiers in the Hamshenlis' identity: Hamshen can be used as a synonym for all Muslims from a certain region, even without the notion of Armenianness, or as a synonym for Islamized Armenians from this particular area, or as a synonym for all ethnic Armenians from Hamshen, not regarding their religious affiliation. There is also the option of identifying the Hamshenlis as an ethnos in its own right, as the website *Hamshenian Forum* suggests.<sup>15</sup>

The current Armenian interest in the Hamshen ethnos or sub-ethnos seems to be caused by the specifics of this ethno-religious group. In its understanding as a regional Armenian identity of the Black Sea Region the Hamshen case not only questions any limitation of Armenianness to the religious constituent of identity, but has the 'modern' capacity to bridge the traditional gulf between Muslim and Christian identities.

### The Case of Dersim

The situation of the Armenians in Dersim differs from that in all the aforementioned regions – Sasun, Pontos, Cappadocia, Hamshen – in the extent to which the Armenians there were deprived of their individual and collective identity. This conclusion seems to contradict the fact that Dersim was considered a place of refuge for persecuted Armenians for centuries and especially in 1915. However, this conclusion is understandable when one considers the effects of the repeated genocide and continued violence that Armenians in this region

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<sup>14</sup> From Ottoman Turkish 'muhajir' (a religious refugee) and the Georgian suffix -oba for abstract nouns. The massive flight of Muslim Caucasians was caused by Russian war crimes that some authors qualify as genocide. The subsequent difficulties of Northern Caucasian refugees to survive as an ethnic group in the Ottoman Empire increased the refugees' anti-Christian position. In future anti-Christian persecutions and massacres, Ottoman authorities took these anti-Christian sentiments into their calculations, making the belligerent Northern Caucasians – generally known as 'Circassians' – their all too willing executioners.

<sup>15</sup> Compare the website Hamshenian Forum (in English, Russian, Turkish, Armenian and Hamshen Armenian): <http://www.hamshen.org/forum/>.

experienced in 1915/16, as well as in 1938 and during their nine-year deportation until 1947.

The name Dersim first appeared as the official name of an Ottoman administrative unit in 1847. Dersim – called Desim until 1867 – is geographically divided into an eastern and a western part, or a flat and a mountainous part (Lower and Upper Dersim, the latter approx. 8,000-10,000 square kilometers). East Dersim consisted of the Ottoman districts (*kazas*) of Hozat, Çemişgezek, Pertek, Ovacık and Kemah, while West Dersim consisted of the *kazas* of Medzkert (Mazgirt), Kiğı, Çarsancak (formerly Peri, now Akpazar), Kızılkilise (Nazımiye) and Kuziçan (Pülümür). Since 1847 or 1848, Dersim formed the *sancak* of Dersim or Hozat, with the administrative center of the same name. In 1867, the districts of Çarsancak, Ovacık, Mazgirt and Kuziçan were annexed to the *sancak* of Erzincan in the province of Erzurum. The remaining districts formed an independent province (*vilayet*) for almost ten years, from 1879 to 1888, before being downgraded to the status of a *sancak* together with the nine *kazas* of Çarsancak, Mazgirt, Kızılkilise, Kuziçan, Ovacık, Hozat, Pertek, Çemişgezek and Pah (pronounced Pakh) and placed under the province of Mamuret-ül-Aziz (Kharberd, Harput; now Elazığ). In the following years, the number of *kazas* was reduced to six.

In the 8th and 7th centuries BC, the later Dersim belonged to the Kingdom of Urartu, whose center of power was located at Lake Van. In ancient times and in the early Middle Ages, Dersim became part of the province of Dzopk (Ծոփ; Greek Sophene, Latin Sophena) of the ancient Armenian kingdom (Medz Hayk or Great Armenia) and the Roman Empire (Armenia Maior – Greater Armenia).

Sophene was detached from Greater Armenia by Rome several times. In 66 BC, Pompey handed over Sophene to Tigran the Younger after he had defeated his father Tigran the Great, and then transferred it to Ariobarzanes I of Cappadocia. Around 54, the Romans installed Sohaemus of Emesa as king of Sophene. After that, Sophene fell under Armenian control again, but in 298 it came under Roman control for good. Sophene became a province of the Roman Empire with the capital Amida (present-day Diyarbakır) and in 530 it was incorporated into the Eastern Roman province of Armenia IV (‘the Fourth Armenia’).

The toponym Çemişgezek (Armenian: Չմշկածաղ - Čmškacag) indicates the close connection of Dzopk/Sophene with the Byzantine Empire. It is derived from the name of the Byzantine general and emperor of Armenian descent, Hovhannes Chmshkik (c. 925-976; reigned 969-976; Հովհաննես Չմշկիկ; Grk: Ἰωάννης ὁ Τζιμισκῆς – Ioannis I Tsimiskes), who was born there. The site was previously known as Hierapolis or Hieropolis ('holy city').

Until the 15th century, the area around Çemişgezek was densely populated and well maintained. After the Ottoman conquest in 1474, however, which involved the mass imprisonment of the inhabitants, the site was transformed into an insignificant village for centuries.

Under Ottoman rule, non-Muslims became legally disadvantaged subjects. “In the Ottoman Empire as an Islamic state, non-Muslims were tolerated, but at the price of a subordinate status that excluded them from, among other things, ruling duties and military service. Thus, the minority status of the Armenians was accompanied by both a greater vulnerability and defenselessness, as well as a more pronounced social dynamism and spirit of optimism in the era of modernizing reforms, which was often observed among underprivileged minorities.”<sup>16</sup>

### A region of ethnic and religious diversity: Turks, Kurds, Armenians

Dersim has been a multi-ethnic and multi-religious region for centuries. From the 14th century onwards, Kurds began immigrating from the Iranian highlands, and their numbers increased under Ottoman rule. According to the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople, 16,657 Armenians lived in the *sancak* of Dersim before the First World War, “alongside two groups that together formed the majority – to the south and southeast, the Seyd Hasan tribe, supposed to have come from Persian Khorasan, and in the rest of the *sancak*, in the most inaccessible regions, the ‘Dersimlis’. Albeit partially Turkified, both groups, especially the Dersimlis, had elaborated a very particular religious syncretism under various influences (...).”<sup>17</sup>

Since the 16th century, the Alevi population of Dersim became known as Kizilbashes (Turkish: *Kızılbaş* – ‘redhead’). The Turkish loan translation of the Iranian term ‘Surh-i Ser’ refers to the red headgear worn by the male followers of the Iranian Safavid dynasty since the time of Shah (Sheikh) Haydar Safavi. The Kizilbashes of Dersim do not practice Islamic prayer (Namaz), do not visit mosques, do not make the pilgrimage to Mecca and do not fast in the month of Ramadan.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the majority of the inhabitants of Dersim spoke two Iranian languages: Zazaki or Dîmlîki (also Kîrmanc(k)i) and Kurmanci (pronounced: Kurmanji), which is also referred to as Northern Kurdish. Dîmlîki/Zazaki/Kîrmanci belongs to the Northwest Iranian language group. Zazaki is most closely related to the extinct Parthian language. UNESCO’s World Atlas of Languages (WAL) lists Zazaki and Western Armenian as ‘potentially vulnerable’ languages in present-day Türkiye<sup>18</sup>, whereas Greek is listed as ‘safe’ and ‘official minority languages’, as is Western Armenian despite its vulnerability.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Hartmann, Elke. „Armenisches Leben im Osmanischen Reich vor 1915: Zwischen Hoffnung und Gefährdung“. <https://www.bpb.de/themen/zeit-kulturgeschichte/genozid-an-den-armeniern/218100/armenisches-leben-im-osmanischen-reich-vor-1915/>

<sup>17</sup> Kévorkian, Raymond. *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History*. London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011, op. cit., p. 421

<sup>18</sup> UNESCO WAL: “Zaza in Türkiye”. <https://en.wal.unesco.org/countries/turkiye/languages/zaza>

<sup>19</sup> UNESCO WAL: „Western Armenian in Türkiye“.

<https://en.wal.unesco.org/countries/turkiye/languages/western-armenian>

At the beginning of the 20th century, Europeans and Ottomans, as well as many of those affected, almost always referred to the non-Turkish and non-Armenian population of Dersim as Kurds, usually without distinguishing between Sunni and Alevi Kurds. Today, many Alevi speakers of Kırmançki reject the assignment to the Kurds, similarly to how in Iranian studies Kırmançki was recognized as an independent language and not just as a Kurdish dialect.

As an orally transmitted religion, Alevism, in contrast to the ‘book religions’ (Judaism, Christianity), had no defined position in the Ottoman legal system. It was not assigned to Islam, nor to the tolerated ‘book religions’. Today, many Alevi speakers of Zazaki or Kırmanç consider themselves to be a separate ethnic group. The question of whether Alevism is part of Islam remains open. About half a million Alevites live in Germany, 95 percent of whom come from Turkey. In December 2022, the Alevites were also granted the status of a public corporation in the state of Berlin, thus being accorded the same legal status as the other faiths (Protestant, Jewish, Catholic).

In the north of Dersim, the Dimılı belong to the Alevi or Kızılbaş religious community, while in the southern half they follow Sunni Islam, as do the Kurds and Turks. Their faith is officially referred to as *Raa Haq* in Kırmançki, as the *path to truth (the path of God)*. The Alevi Dimılı refuse to be classified as Muslims. They emphasize the autonomy of their orally transmitted syncretic beliefs, which include elements of nature religion, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism and even shamanism. The nature-religious components of Dersim Alevism include the worship of sacred natural sites (“jaires”, in Turkish “ziyaret”) such as the Munzur River or a mountain near the village of Qil in Nazımıye, which symbolizes Duzgin Baba (Zazaki: Duzgin Baba or dial. Duzgın Bawa, also Kemerê Duzgını “the rock of Duzgin”, Kurdish: Duzgin Baba). People believe that Duzgin Baba disappeared at the summit of this mountain, known in Zazaki as Kemerê Duzgını (the Rock of Duzgin), Bimbarek (sacred) or Kemerê Bimbareki (sacred rock). According to local legends, Baba Duzgin is the son of Sayyid Kures/Kureş, an ancestor of the Kureşan<sup>20</sup> community, and his real name is not Duzgin but Haydar or Shah Haydar (Zazaki: Sa Heyder). These sacred natural sites connect the *Raa Haq* with pre-Christian beliefs of the Armenians.

According to numerous Armenian sources, the central ancient shrines of the pre-Christian Armenian religion, which were dedicated to the gods Aramazd, Anahit and Mihr/Mher, were located in the north of Dersim. Christianity probably took over the most important places of worship, as in the case of the Armenian Surb Karapet Church (Church of St. John the Baptist; 10th century -1930s) in Halvor, which was blown up in the 1930s and was a place of pilgrimage for both Armenian Christians and Alevi.

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<sup>20</sup> Also Koreyşan/Horeysan/Horasan, i. e. Khorasan in Persia as the origin of the Dersim Alevi.



The ruins of Halvori Vank (Trk: Venk)



Religious practices also form a common cultural heritage between the Alevis and Armenians of Dersim, such as the Kalandar or Kalanda New Year (from Latin *calendae* or the first day of the month), which is widespread from Greece to Georgia. The first day of the lunar calendar-based Kalandar corresponds to 14 January according to the Gregorian calendar. The New Year is also celebrated on the night of the 13th to the 14th of January. In the Black Sea region, especially in the provinces of Trabzon and Gümüşhane, this night has a special significance. Traditionally, children go out on this night and visit the houses of those who reward them for their singing with gifts. In Armenian folklore, the New Year was adopted under the name Kağant and was taken over by the Dersim Kurds and some Zaza tribes under the term ‘gağan(t)’ (gaxan) and celebrated with similar entertainment and ceremonies. It is believed that the person who enters the house

on the first day of the Kalandar month brings good luck.<sup>21</sup> Members of the *Raa Haq* faith – Alevi Kurds as well as Alevized Armenians in Dersim – celebrate the three-day *Gaxan* in different ways in different regions between December 10 and January 12 of the following year, with a three-day fast. In the faith of *Raa Haq*, the Islamic saint Xızır (Hızır; Arab. al-Khidr – “the Green”), as the embodiment of good and of cyclically renewing nature, fulfills the same task as the Armenian Pap(uk) Kağand during the *Gaxan* festival. Papuk Kağand is a figure who preserves and transmits national values and the traditional ritual system to future generations. He is accompanied by the twelve *Khılvıllıks* (խվլվիլք – “cunning”) and *Arales*. Although Papuk Kağand, who visited children with his sleigh, did not give them any presents, he did give them seven pieces of advice for the New Year: mutual respect, peace, honesty, wisdom, hard work, modesty and contentment. Papuk Kağand is related to the historical church leader Catholicos Sahak Partev (c. 350 – c. 438), who, according to tradition, appeared with a shepherd's or bishop's staff and a sheepskin cloak.

The ethnographer Hranoush Kharatyan assumes a mutual religious influence between Armenians and Alevis in Dersim: “The slow, ongoing process of Armenian Alevization had resulted in Armenians and Alevis from Dersim sharing a very similar way of life. Alevized Armenians continued to practice many pre-Christian and even Christian rites, with Dersim 'Alevism' synthesizing many Christian and purely Armenian elements. Traditional Alevi oral histories tell the story of the origins of the Alevis and Armenians of Dersim, as well as their socio-religious past. Thus, most of the heroes in the 'massalanır' stories of the Alevis of Dersim are borrowed from the local 'Armenian keshish' [Trk: keşis; 'Monk'] and the foreign 'baba', while the places of worship, whether the churches of St. George ('Hazrèt illssa', 'Kheder élia') and Saint -Serge ('Hazrèt Kheder'), or the former places of worship of Anahit and 'Ana [Mother] Fatima', the heir to Anahit's functions, and even Mesrop Mashtots ('Masrour') etc., play diverse roles in the historical past of the Dersim people.”<sup>22</sup>

Like Kurdish and Kırmancı/Zazaki, Armenian belongs to the large Indo-European language family, or rather to its subgroup of *satem* languages. According to Armenian tradition, King Trdat III (the Great) declared Christianity the state religion in 301, making the Armenian Apostolic Church one of the oldest churches. Over the centuries of foreign rule, the church has become a central source of Armenian identity and a unifying force, especially in the Armenian diaspora, which now extends across the globe.

<sup>21</sup> Kalendar, <https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalandar>

<sup>22</sup> Kharatyan, Hranoush. „La recherche identitaire au Dersim Partie 2 : les Arméniens alévisés du Dersim.“ *Repair: Plateforme Arméno-Turque*, June 25, 2014; translated from French into English by T. Hofmann

## Tribal society

In areas such as Dersim that eluded the control of the central state authority, regional specifics play a significant role. In Dersim, these included, above all, tribal structures. Alevism is likewise not based on an egalitarian system, but on a caste system of rank-and-file believers and their spiritual leaders (pirs, rehbers). Probably under the influence of the Kurdish tribal system, Armenian society in Dersim also saw the formation of clans and tribes, which was otherwise unusual for Armenians. In his travelogue 'Dersim', published in Tiflis in 1900<sup>23</sup>, the Armenian author Andranik Yeritsian reported on the Armenian tribe of the Mirakian, who lived in harmony with the Alevis of central or mountainous Dersim. A. Yeritsian gives the number of Mirakian tribesmen as 8,000. They spoke a special dialect and are considered descendants of the Mamikonian noble family, famous in Armenian history. Together with the Kizilbash, they were traditionally considered the guardians of the Halvor sanctuary. The Mirakian tribe had three thousand men under arms when they took part in the Dersimis' battles against the Ottoman army.<sup>24</sup> When Reşid Pasha advanced with a force of 40,000 in 1834, the Mirakians played a prominent role in defending Dersim.

But not all the inhabitants of Dersim were tribesmen (aşiret), neither among the Christian Armenians nor among the Muslim or Alevi Kurds and Zazas. "Many farmers, by no means only Armenians, but also the Kurdish villagers, lived as subordinates (*maraba*) of their landlords in a personal relationship of dependency that in many aspects came close to serfdom, but at the same time also placed them under the protection of their *beys* (tribal leaders or urban notables). The *beys'* position of power was based on the institution of tax farming. In some cases, they controlled not only individual villages, but entire regions."<sup>25</sup>

The ambivalent character of the Dersim tribal system is clearly expressed in the interviews conducted by K. Gündoğan with Alevized descendants of Armenian genocide survivors. The Dersim Armenians and those who fled to Dersim in 1915 submitted to the local landlords (Aghas, Turkish Ağa) at the expense of their social, economic and cultural bondage or dependence: Alevization or Islamization with simultaneous linguistic assimilation and services or taxes for their protectors, who, among other things, married them at their own discretion.

The protection granted to those threatened with death was, as their descendants very clearly recognized, not out of affection but out of self-interest, because Armenians were prized craftsmen and farmers, not only in Dersim. Aida (Ayten) Güneş, born in 1960, for example, states in her interview: about her grandfather: "Of course the agha (landowner or landlord) did not release him, but married him off and had him and his wife work for him as slaves... They took Armenian

<sup>23</sup> French edition: Antranik: *Dersim: carnets de voyage chez les Kizilbaches et les Mirakian 1888 & 1895*. Paris: Société bibliophilique Ani, 2017; Turkish editions were published in 2018 and 2022 under the title *Dersim Seyhatnamesi*.

<sup>24</sup> Kévorkian, op. cit., p. 421

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

children under their 'protection', protected them, adopted them, but at the same time they used them as serfs; that too is a fact... Indeed, they often adopted the children of wealthy families at that time, because 'the more children of wealthy families you take in, the more prosperous you will be in the future'.<sup>26</sup>

Musa Teyhani (born 1954) mentions in his interview that sexual assault of Armenian women was part of this serfdom system: "First they expelled the Armenians and enslaved the rest (i. e. us)... They kept us as *marabas*, as slaves who took care of their horses, stables and work... Not because they liked us, but because they needed laborers... It is bitter to say this, but when the aghas wanted, they took the family and the wives of the *marabas*, used them, then returned them or left them... So, the Armenians had nothing...«

Şengül Gündoğdu Devletli explained: "My late father used to say sadly, 'We have become serfs on our own land.' Because this land once belonged to the Armenians. They took the land that belonged to them. They bought the fields of the Armenians, that is, the land of their ancestors. There were many land struggles. In these matters, the state was on the side of the Alevis. It was not in a position to support an Armenian..."

Countervailing tendencies only emerged with the pro-communist and revolutionary movements of the 1970s, when young people in Dersim in particular recognized and condemned the tribal system as backward and repressive. The 1980 coup d'état ended this development through the political persecution of the revolutionaries.

### A safe haven in Dersim?

Until the 1870s, Dersim was a semi-autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire, consisting of a flat area and a forested, almost 2,000-metre-high mountain range. While the plains were increasingly brought under the control of the Ottoman state in the 19th century, the Dersimis were able to defend their independence into the 20th century in their almost inaccessible mountain stronghold.

From non-Armenian historical sources, we know that from the 17th century Armenians from Bingöl, Sebastia (Sivas), Yerznka (Erzincan), and Kharberd (Harput) fled Turkish pressure and sought refuge in Dersim, where some converted to Alevism. Dersim children in turn attended Armenian schools.

Statements about the relations between the Dersim Alevis and the Armenians, especially with regard to the behavior of the Alevis during the genocide of 1915, are contradictory. In general, their relations are considered friendly, since the majority of the Dersimis neither joined the *Hamidiye* cavalry murder squads or

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<sup>26</sup> This refers to the fact that when an Armenian woman was 'adopted' or married, her Muslim stepparents or husband became the legal owners of the inheritance or possessions of the child or wife. It did not matter whether the person in question had consented to the adoption or marriage. - Gündoğan, Kazım: Alevileş(tiril)miş Ermeniler: Dersimli Ermeniler-2; "Biz İsa'ya Tabiyiz, Ali'ye Mecburuz". İstanbul: Arıntı, 2022, p. 52f.

their successors, the *Azadi* militias, nor did they take part in the Kemalist war of independence against the last indigenous Christians. During World War I, between 10,000<sup>27</sup> and 40,000<sup>28</sup> Armenian deportees from Erzincan and other places probably owed their lives to the intervention of Alevi Dersimis, even though their help, especially at the beginning of the deportation, was mostly self-serving; many Dersimis allowed themselves to be generously paid for their escape assistance, especially since the presence of so many refugees in Dersim triggered a famine.<sup>29</sup>

Henry R. Riggs, an American missionary working in Harput, wrote about the flourishing escape business in Dersim in his memoirs, which were written close to the events:

“After the first secret and tentative attempts had been made, both the Kurds and the Armenians took courage and the business grew rapidly. With the intermittent vigilance of the gendarmes, traffic increased and expenses decreased. Those who had paid such high sums at first later regretted not waiting for the price to drop to five dollars per person over time – and later some were taken for free when the Kurds were convinced that they were indeed destitute. After the occupation of Erzingian by the Russians, the Armenians of Erzingian made a kind of agreement with the Kurds, according to which all refugees from that city would be transported free of charge, with the result that practically all of them left Harpoot and returned to their hometown. (....)

Throughout the period I am writing about, from the summer of 1915 to the spring of 1917, the Dersim Kurds were actively and faithfully helping to transport the Armenians to Russia.<sup>30</sup>

The predominantly positive role played by the tribes in Dersim before and during the First World War sometimes obscures the fact that in Dersim, too, Armenians suffered at the hands of the arbitrary semi-autonomous regional tribal leaders, without the Ottoman state intervening to protect its Christian subjects. In the *Kaza* Çarsancak (today's Akpazar, formerly Peri between Harput and Tunceli), for example, local ‘Kurdish groups’ frequently confiscated Armenian property. Some of the Alevi tribes, who were considered ‘Kurds’ of Dersim, did not take part in the massacres of Armenians.<sup>31</sup> But the statements are contradictory: “However, it is not superfluous to add that many cases were recorded at the time when a number of Kurdish and Zaza tribes from Dersim were collaborating with the

<sup>27</sup> Kévorkian, op. cit., 421; 15:000 according to Gerçek, Burçin: “Celal Bey ve diğerleri, interview with Raymond Kévorkian”, *Radikal Newspaper*, 26.02. 2006; quoted from: ibid., “Report on Turks who reached out to Armenians in 1915”, p. 60, footnote 232: 20,000 according to Marchand, Laure; Perrier, Guillaume. *Turkey and the Armenian Ghost*. Montreal & Kingston; London; Ithaca: McGill-Queen’s University, 2015, p. 64.

<sup>28</sup> Virabian, Ashken. “Armenian Identity Zazas (Part Two)”. *Westerarmeniatv*, 20 March 2023, [https://westernarmeniatv.com/en/society\\_en/armenian-identity-zazas-part-two/](https://westernarmeniatv.com/en/society_en/armenian-identity-zazas-part-two/)

<sup>29</sup> Gerçek, op. cit., p. 60

<sup>30</sup> Riggs, Henry H. *Days of Tragedy in Armenia: Personal Experiences in Harpoot, 1915-1917*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: Gomidas Institute, 1996, pp. 113, 116.

<sup>31</sup> Yerevanian, G.A.: *History of Armenian Charsandjak*. Peirut [Beirut], 1956, p. 65.

Ottoman authorities and participating in the massacre of Armenians and the looting of their property. Testimony of treachery by the Zaza tribes of Dersim has also been preserved.”<sup>32</sup>

In the summer of 1918, a contemporary observer, the Protestant pastor and military chaplain Siegfried Graf von Lüttichau, also emphasized the ambivalent character of Dersim as a place of refuge and rescue: “It is interesting that in the area of the Dersim Kurds not only the Armenians were spared, who were already living there in a kind of serfdom, but that it was precisely this Kurdish tribe that led large groups of Armenians safely through its territory and over the Russian border, certainly not out of love for the Christians, but out of hatred for the Turks. Unfortunately, this willingness to help has now come to an end, as the Dersim no longer have the Russians covering their rear and, due to the diplomatic and extremely clever actions of the last commander on the Caucasus front, Izzet Pasha, they are once again obedient to the Turkish government. Their own sense of insecurity and fear of the notorious punitive expeditions that had been carried out against them in the past led them to hand over all Armenians who were still hiding from them, on the orders of the Ottoman government. This, of course, immediately led to executions. About 500 women and children from the Dersim region are in Mezré. The people of Dersim are not the only ones who have remained loyal to the persecuted. In the wild mountains between Malatia and Urfa, for example, a Kurdish brigand named Bozo ruled for a long time. Whenever he had the opportunity, he stripped Turkish officers and soldiers of their clothes and in this way supported Armenian families.”<sup>33</sup>

## Genocide in Dersim

It is difficult to make a consistent statement about the course of the genocide carried out by the C.U.P. regime in Dersim, as it appears to have been carried out under diverse power circumstances and, above all, in dependence on the local tribal leaders. As R. Kévorkian suggested, there is an obvious discrepancy in terms of numbers and facts between the *de facto* deportation in Dersim and the reports submitted to Constantinople. Instead, the following is a list of the special features of the four *kazas* mainly inhabited by Armenians:

### ***Kaza Çarsancak***

The *kaza* Çarsancak had the largest Armenian population in Dersim. According to the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople, 7,940 Armenians lived in 43 villages in the *kaza* on the eve of the First World War, where they maintained 51 churches, 15 monasteries and 23 schools for 1,114 children.<sup>34</sup> The majority of the population

<sup>32</sup> Virabian, op. cit.

<sup>33</sup> „Deutsche Gesandtschaft Konstantinopel an Auswärtiges Amt,“ *Armenocide.net*, October 18, 1918, [http://www.armenocide.net/armenocide/armgende.nsf/\\$\\$AllDocs/1918-10-18-DE-001](http://www.armenocide.net/armenocide/armgende.nsf/$$AllDocs/1918-10-18-DE-001)

<sup>34</sup> Kévorkian, op. cit., p. 276.

worked in agriculture. They grew wheat, barley, rye, lentils, peas, beans, flax, etc. In *kaza* Çarsancak, there are deposits of salt, borax and oil.

“In 1914, 1,763 Armenians lived in Peri [Berri], the administrative center of the Çarsancak *Kaza*, and about 6,200 in 42 villages in the *Kaza*. The *Kaymakam*, Ali Rıza, was in office from March 2 to July 15, 1915. He was therefore present when the first massacres took place in Pertag/Pertak [Փեղովլ - Berdak], near the ferry dock that connected Harput with Dersim across the Euphrates. In this *kaza*, the official number of deportees, 6,537, seems as unlikely as the census figures cited above when one considers the number of conscripts in the *amele taburis* [forced labor battalions] and the number of people who were able to retreat to the mountainous areas of Dersim.<sup>35</sup>

### ***Kaza Çemişgezek***

According to the statistics of the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople, 4,494 Armenians lived in 22 villages of the *kaza* on the eve of the First World War, maintaining 19 churches, two monasteries and 17 schools for 729 children.<sup>36</sup> At the beginning of the 20th century, there were two Armenian schools in the district capital Çemişgezek, Mamikonian and Partjan, which taught around 200 students.

On 1 May 1915, raids began in Çemişgezek for weapons in the Armenian schools, the shops of the bazaar and the homes of officials; a day later, about a hundred people were arrested. The torture they were subjected to was said to be more cruel than anywhere else – some men were nailed to the wall – and lasted until 20 June, when the *Kaymakam*, the district chief, announced that the prisoners would be transferred to Mezere, the twin capital of the province, to be tried there.

On 1 July 1915, the town crier of Çemişgezek read out the deportation order. The following day, one thousand Armenians were forced to leave; beforehand, some children and young women had been abducted from Turkish families. The convoy took four days to reach Arapgir, and three days later it continued on to Harput. Although this route normally takes only a day and a half, it took three weeks this time because the deportees were forced to take huge, arbitrary detours. From Mezere, the convoy continued to Diyarbekir via Hanlı Han, where the male deportees aged 10 to 15 and 40 to 70 were taken out of the convoy and housed in a caravanserai. When the rest of the convoy reached Ergani [Argana] Maden, they saw hundreds of corpses rotting on the banks of the Euphrates. Six weeks later they reached Siverek, where the deportees from Çemişgezek were robbed and some of them massacred. In Urfa, the convoy was divided into two parts to continue to Suruc and Rakka respectively. After passing through the transit camps of Mumbuc and Bab, only 150 women from Çemişgezek reached the transit camp in Aleppo.

In the *kaza* of Çemişgezek, the village of Garmrig [Karmrik] was particularly affected by the search for weapons that took place there on 19 June 1915. On 4

<sup>35</sup> Kévorkian, op. cit., p. 422.

<sup>36</sup> Kévorkian, op. cit., p. 276.

July 1915, 200 men from Garmrig and the surrounding villages were arrested and executed in the following days by gendarmes and units of the special organization; at the same time, all boys under the age of ten were separated from their families. On 5 July, the women of Garmrig were summoned to the church to register their property before being deported to Urfa. On 10 July 1915, the first convoy of women left the villages of Çemişgezek *kaza* and reached the banks of the Euphrates that same evening, where their guards showed them the blood-stained clothes of their murdered husbands. The convoys from Çemişgezek united in Arapgir. "Some villagers from the *kaza*, especially from the northern villages, managed to escape to the Kurdish areas, where they survived as best they could until spring 1916. They moved on to Erzincan when the Russian army took control of the region."<sup>37</sup>

### ***Kaza Hozat***

In the 1880s, Hozat had 150 houses, 30 of which were inhabited by Armenians and the rest by Kurds and Turks. In 1915, there were already 864 houses with 8,640 Armenian inhabitants and 324 houses with 1,944 Kurdish inhabitants.<sup>38</sup> The data of the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople differs greatly from this, almost by a factor of 25: according to this, only 2,299 Armenians lived in 16 villages of *Kaza* Hozat on the eve of the World War, 350 of them in the administrative center Hozat (an "ugly village" according to R. Kévorkian) with a total population of "almost 1,000"<sup>39</sup>. They maintained 18 churches (two of them, Surb Prkich / Holy Redeemer and Surb Gevorg / Saint George in the city of Hozat), eleven monasteries and five schools for 150 children.<sup>40</sup> In the administrative center of the *kaza* Hozat, the town of Hozat, there was a college with 70-80 students.

Some of the Armenian population were native, the rest came from Kharberd (Harput), Arapgir, Akn (Eğin) and Çemişgezeg. Of the 1,835 Armenians of the *kaza* Medzkert (Mazgirt), the majority of 1,200 lived in Hozat. The Armenians of Hozat were involved in trade, crafts, agriculture and horticulture. The main occupation of the Kurds was cattle breeding. Wool, carpets and fruit – especially walnuts – from Hozat were also known outside the town's limits. In the 1880s, there were 50 shops and kiosks, several dozen workshops and a market in Hozat.

According to an official report, 1,088 Armenians were deported from the Hozat *kaza*.<sup>41</sup> However, R. Kévorkian doubts the official figures for the deportations from the *kaza*: "In view of the district's geographical location, this seems unlikely. It is

<sup>37</sup> Kévorkian, op. cit., p. 423.

<sup>38</sup> ԽՈՂԱԹ (Khozat'). - Արեւմտահայաստանի եւ Արեւմտահայութեան Հարցերու Ուսումնասիրութեան Կեղըն. 2011/03/11. <https://www.arevmdahaiastan.net/am/?p=9092>

<sup>39</sup> Kévorkian, op. cit., p. 422.

<sup>40</sup> Kévorkian, op. cit., p. 276.

<sup>41</sup> Kévorkian, op. cit., p. 422.

more likely that about half of the town's Armenians fell victim to the persecutions, while the other half was able to flee to the mountains of Dersim.”<sup>42</sup>

### ***Kaza Mazgirt / Mazgird / Mazkert / Մաշկերտ – Medzkert***

The Armenian place name Medzkert (Western Armenian pronunciation: Medzgerd) means 'great fortress' and probably refers to an Urartian fortress. It was destroyed in 837 by the Byzantine emperor Theophilos during his battle for Mesopotamia, along with other fortresses.

According to the statistics of the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople, 1,835 Armenians lived in nine villages of the *Kaza* Mazgirt before the First World War and maintained 14 churches, 22 monasteries and two schools for 155 children<sup>43</sup>; however, the majority of the Armenians of Mazgirt - 1,200 - lived in the *kaza* of Hozat, the rest in eight Armenian-Alevi villages: Laswan, Dilan-Oğçe, Tamusdağ, Danaburan, Şorda, Khosengyur/Khushdun, Pakh (Trk. Pah) and Çukur. In the vicinity of these villages were the ruins of 15 medieval monasteries.

According to the official statistics, the entire Armenian population was deported, a total of 1,423 people. R. Kévorkian also suspects a strong discrepancy here between reality and the deportation 'successes' feigned by the local officials: "Above all, the number seems to prove the zeal of those responsible for the deportation in this area; they were undoubtedly more concerned with proving to Istanbul how well they were doing their job than with taking an accurate census."<sup>44</sup>



Kayışoğlu Cliff: site of two massacres (1915, 1938) near the village of Ergen  
 (Author: Annika Törne, 26/05/2012. Source:  
<https://journals.openedition.org/ejts/5099#tocto1n1>)

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Kévorkian, op. cit., 276.

<sup>44</sup> Kévorkian, op. cit., 422.

## Deportations of Kurds in 1916 and 1938

Similar to the rule of the despotic Sultan Abdülhamit II (ruled 1876-1909), who was overthrown by them, the Young Turks treated the Kurds according to their usefulness for the regime's anti-Christian policy, their affiliation to the tribal regiments (formerly *Hamidiye*) and their affiliation to heterodox Muslim sects.

As early as July 1915, rumors were spreading in Dersim that the Ottoman government would annihilate the Kurds immediately after their anti-Armenian campaign. Home Minister «Talaat immediately ordered counter-propaganda to be disseminated. When the Dersimites were indeed deported a year later, they sang lamentations, praying to God for survival and accusing the Germans of deporting them. 869 Talaat immediately ordered counter-propaganda to be disseminated. When the Dersimites were indeed deported a year later, they sang lamentations, praying to God for survival and accusing the Germans of deporting them.»<sup>45</sup>

The historian Hilmar Kaiser summarized the first phase of the deportation of the Kurds as follows: “Some Kurdish tribes and peasants willingly joined the Ottoman troops in slaughtering the Armenians. Others, such as the Kurds in Dersim, resisted and organized the escape of the Armenians to the Russian lines. In response, the Ottoman army ordered the deportation of the Dersim Kurds to the western provinces. However, the deportation of the Dersim Kurds was not an isolated incident. Soon, entire tribal associations such as the Hayderanli were deported to the central plateau of Asia Minor. The reason for this deportation was not the fear of the advancing Russian army. The reason was the Ottoman government's goal of assimilating these Kurdish Muslims into the Turkish population. (...) The Kurds had to stop calling themselves Kurds. The authorities also tried to overcome religious differences, such as the fact that many Kurds belonged to a particular form of Shiism. Local authorities had to provide precise information about the available Armenian property and the ability of certain districts to ‘accommodate’ Kurds. Thus, the Ottoman Ministry of the Interior used the administrative units that had been set up to organize the extermination of the Armenians to assimilate the Kurds. Although the Kurds were not generally massacred, a large proportion of those deported died of malnutrition and disease, as they often had to pass through the same places where the Armenians had recently been exterminated.”<sup>46</sup>

From spring 1916, around 300,000 Kurds were deported from the provinces of Erzurum and Bitlis, initially to the Urfa area (northern Mesopotamia) and westwards to Ayntap and Maraş; in a second phase, the Kurdish deportees were driven to the plateau of the Konya highlands. The German-Swiss missionary Jacob Künzler (1871-1949), an eyewitness of the first phase of the deportations, came to

<sup>45</sup> Üngör, U. U. *Young Turk social engineering : mass violence and the nation state in eastern Turkey, 1913-1950*. 2009. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam], p. 223.

<sup>46</sup> Kaiser, Hilmar. “The Ottoman Government and the End of the Ottoman Social Formation, 1915-1917.” 2001. - <http://www.hist.net/kieser/aghet/Essays/EssayKaiser.html>

the following conclusion in his memoirs *Im Land des Blutes und der Tränen* (In the Land of Blood and Tears, 1921):

“It was the intention of the Young Turks to no longer allow these Kurdish elements to return to their ancestral homeland. They were to gradually be absorbed into Turkishness in Inner Anatolia.

The treatment of these Kurds on their deportation train was very different from that of the Armenians. They were not harmed on the way, no one was allowed to harass them. But the most terrible thing was that the deportation took place in the middle of winter. When a column of Kurds arrived in a Turkish village in the evening, the inhabitants, fearing them, quickly locked their front doors. So, the poor people had to spend the winter night outside in the rain and snow.”<sup>47</sup>

The aim of the Kurdish population’s dispersal was their assimilation in the interest of the general Turkification program. To this end, tribal leaders and spiritual leaders were separated from their followers by order of the Turkish Ministry of the Interior and settled in small numbers in purely Turkish villages. At the same time, the urban sprawl was also aimed at heterodox faiths, i. e. against Alevis and/or Kizilbashes, and also against the non-Muslim Yazidis.

In 1938, a second deportation of the Dersim population took place, this time in the Republic of Türkiye, which also included the remaining inhabitants of Armenian descent, regardless of whether they had already converted to Alevism or Islam.

K. Gündoğan’s interviews show that the approach depended again on local power relations. The methods were similar to those already used by the C.U.P. regime during the First World War: elicide, i. e. the arrest and destruction of the intellectual and spiritual leadership, followed by massacres and deportations. In some places, the population was rounded up and machine-gunned, while in others the Turkish army “contented itself” with photographing the terrified people and then deporting them. The Turkish central government’s primary goal was to smash the tribal system, which was considered pre-modern or backward, and to assert its control over a previously inaccessible and unruly region. The descendants of Armenians who had survived the genocide of 1915 were also victims of this policy. In the deportation area of Western Anatolia, the forcibly resettled people from Dersim were distributed among the villages in order to advance their Turkification and Islamization. Armenians who had not yet been Islamized were urged to have their first and last names Islamized or Turkified, to attend Koran classes and to convert to Islam. The method of demographic sprawl was also adopted from the Young Turks, as was the transportation of deportees in black cattle cars, which became the epitome of the ‘Tertele’, the ‘end of the world’, as the 1938 genocide is paraphrased in the Zazaki language.

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<sup>47</sup> Künzler, Jacob. *Im Lande des Blutes und der Tränen*. Potsdam: Tempel-Verlag, 1921, p. 79.

## The Price to Pay for the Homeland

The experience of a double genocide – in 1915 and 1938 – and justified fears of further persecution silenced the survivors and their descendants for at least two generations. In Turkey, they were referred to as the ‘remnants of the sword’. Or as ‘uncircumcised’ (sünnetsizler), as pagans or non-Muslims (gâvurlar) and most often as *filla*, the Kurdish mutilation of the Arabic word *fallah* (farmer, fellah), which became a term of abuse in the Armenian context and always implies social inferiority, since, like the word *maraba*, it refers to serfdom.

It was only in 1947 that the deported residents of Dersim were allowed to return from their exile or to emigrate. Their property, which had been looted or confiscated in the meantime, was not returned. The price for remaining in their homeland of Dersim was very high: deprivation of civil and human rights, complete self-denial, and cultural and linguistic assimilation were widespread.

The statements of many of K. Gündoğan’s interviewees are nevertheless ambivalent: on the one hand, they praise their good neighborly, amicable relations with the Alevi religious community, but on the other hand, many also report experiences of discrimination, of being called ‘Armenian scum’ or ‘unbelievers’ (gavurlar) even by their Alevi neighbors, and of being disadvantaged during military service or when applying for jobs. During the Second World War, Armenians and Greeks had to perform their military service in road construction units, called Nafia, and were not allowed to carry weapons. The Nafia soldiers were considered ‘foreigners’ and wore brown uniforms that visually distinguished them from the ‘natives’ (Turks, Muslims). Ethnic Turks were spared from this.<sup>48</sup> This discriminatory treatment merely perpetuated the practices introduced by the Young Turks.

Interviewees very often complained that Alevis were not willing to marry off their daughters to fellow believers of Armenian origin. Although the interviewees and their relatives did everything to keep their Armenian descent secret, their environment seemed to be well informed about it. Many children were confronted with the accusation of being ‘gavur’ through their neighborhood and at school.

Nevertheless, a member of the Armenian Mirakian tribe in Dersim proudly declared in 2013: “We are from here, we did not come from somewhere else... During the coup in the 1980s, they persecuted us a lot. The neighboring villagers always complained about us Armenians. (...) Now we are here and no matter what we are, we are from here. Maybe for 2,000, 3,000, 5,000 years, I don’t know... That’s why we don’t leave our homeland... We have paid a high price. And we don’t care about the rest...«

While all of the interviewees consider their Armenian descent to be an unalterable part of their identity, the question remains as to which role their affiliation with the Armenian Apostolic Church plays. Those who perceive Christianity as an integral part of Armenian identity have generally left Dersim,

<sup>48</sup> Gündoğan, op. cit., pp. 195, 241.

where there are no longer any intact places of worship. In Istanbul, it was mainly the Kumkapı district that offered more favorable conditions for the restitution of cultural and religious affiliation or reconversion. However, quite a few interviewees complained bitterly about the lack of understanding on the part of the Istanbul Armenians for the Dersim ‘provincials’, for their dialect and their ignorance of Armenian-Christian customs. For some, Istanbul was therefore only a stopover on their way abroad, to France, Germany or across the Atlantic to the USA and Australia. Such decisions led to more individual liberties, but at the same time accelerated the process of alienation, because by no means all those born later in the worldwide Armenian diaspora still feel they are Dersimis.

Other interviewees defend the view that you can change your religion, but not your ethnicity. They see themselves as Armenian Alevis, following the “path of truth (of God)”. Those who were caught up in the wave of politicization of the 1970s regard themselves as atheists or agnostics, for whom the question of religious affiliation is irrelevant anyway. However, everyone seems to be aware that their attitude and that of their ancestors are not based on independent decisions, but on reactions to avoid extreme violence and humiliation.

Not all people of Armenian descent know the details of their ancestors’ fate, who were often afraid to speak out. Hadjian’s interviews and biographical portraits document a wide range of attempts at adaptation by people of Armenian descent in Turkey to the local or regional majorities: to Turkish, Kurdish, Arab and Zaza Sunnis, to Shiite Kizilbashes in Dersim. This raises the question of the role of religion in individual and collective identity. Many of Hadjian’s interviewees denied that one can be both Muslim and Armenian. The author himself does not seem to rule it out. But a purely ethnically defined identity would be a relative novelty in Armenian history, in which religion and ethnicity merged early on. Six centuries of the Ottoman millet system have further solidified this equation.

As early as 1985, Konstantin Fotiadis came to an equally discouraging conclusion regarding the consequences of an identity separate from the original Greek Orthodox affiliation: “Greeks in Pontos ceased to exist with the demise of ecclesiastical life. Over time, the children of the ‘hidden’ will only have the memory of the Christian ancestry of their fathers. This is the reality in Turkey today. There is no salvation for the last ‘secret’ Christians. They are slowly disappearing into the great melting pot of Islam.”<sup>49</sup>

### **The Re-Emergence of the Crypto-Christians**

History does not know the word “never”. Encouraged by the Kurdish national movement, people of Armenian descent founded self-organizations in Dersim (2010), Muş (2014) and Kayseri in the 2010s. Similar developments can also be observed on the Pontic Greek side. Typically, this revival of collective self-awareness only occurs at the third post-genocidal generation earliest. The Greek-

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<sup>49</sup> Fotiadis, op. cit. p. 378.

speaking author Ömer Şükrü Asan from Erenköy [Çoruk; born 1961], who published the book *Pontos Kültürü* (1996) in Turkish, has made a major contribution to the recovery of the Pontic Greek identity, similar to Mi(h)ran Pirgiç Gültekin's contribution to the Armenian identity of the Armenians from Dersim.

So, what is an Armenian? The only answer that is justifiable from a human rights perspective is: each person determines that for him or herself. However, the most common external attributions are based on knowledge of the Armenian language and the Christian faith, especially the Armenian Apostolic denomination. Both language and faith have been lost on the Armenians of Dersim. Some interviewees reported how they had been amazed as children to see their mother hiding under the covers of her bed in the evenings, muttering something unintelligible, apparently saying a prayer in Armenian.

It was only in the 21st century that people of Armenian descent in Turkey gained the self-confidence to publicly acknowledge their descent and to address the decades-long taboo surrounding the persecution and discrimination of Armenians. Political activities in the socialist or Kurdish movements eventually led to the self-organization of the Dersim Armenians, both at home and abroad, thanks to Miran [Mihran] Pirgiç Gültekin, born in 1960. In a statement in spring 2011, the *Association of Armenians of Dersim* characterized the denial of identity as follows: "On a long journey, during which we had to conceal our origins under adverse circumstances and in our own country, we have now arrived here. The Ottoman regime responded to our demands for cultural and religious rights with repression, massacres and banishment. With our hands tied and subjugated, we had to accept a truly unsatisfactory socio-political order."<sup>50</sup>

The publication of the memoir *Anneannem* (My Maternal Grandmother, 2004) by Fethiye Çetin, a human rights lawyer in Istanbul, also marks an important turning point in the recovery of Armenian identity. Shortly before her death, the grandmother had confided her life story and tale of woe to her granddaughter, including the fact that she is Armenian – a revelation that was distressing and almost unbearable for Çetin at the time, as it leads to the loss of social status. It was only years after the grandmother's death that she dared to publish the book. In an interview during her first visit to Armenia, Fethiye Çetin explained the necessity of such recognition: "When people hide their origins or religious affiliation out of fear, threat or isolation, when they try to prove that they belong to the majority, then such an atmosphere contradicts global values, human rights, democracy and nature. Such an atmosphere cannot be protected from either ethical or legal sense. Above all, hiding and discarding one's own roots under pressure, threat or fear is inhumane."<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Hofmann, Tessa. *One Nation – Three Sub-Ethnic Groups: Armenia and Her Diaspora*. Yerevan: Narek, 2011, p. 86

<sup>51</sup> Melkonyan, Rouben. "'Armenia did not seem to be strange to me...': Interview with Fethiye Çetin." *Noravank Foundation*, May 4, 2009, <http://www.noravank.am/en/?page=theme&thid=1&nid=1793>.

It is to be hoped that since then it has been possible to deal openly with Armenian descent in Turkey, which is an essential prerequisite for healing the centuries-old pain of the Armenian population or those of Armenian descent.

## Conclusion

Genocide is considered the ultimate crime. Raphael Lemkin, the principal author of the United Nations *Genocide Convention*, based his definition empirically on the genocides that took place during the two World Wars of the 20th century: the genocide of Christians in the Ottoman Empire and the extermination of European Jews during the Second World War. As his work *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (1944) indicates, Lemkin under

“(...) a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. The objectives of such a plan would be disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups. Genocide is directed against the national group as an entity, and the actions involved are directed against individuals, not in their individual capacity, but as members of the national group. (...)

Genocide has two phases: one, destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group; the other, the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor. This imposition, in turn, may be made upon the oppressed population which is allowed to remain or upon the territory alone, after removal of the population and the colonization by the oppressor's own nationals.”<sup>52</sup>

Applied to the situation of Islamized or Alevized Christians or crypto-Christians in the Republic of Türkiye, as analyzed in this article, this means that genocide in Lemkin's expanded definition also continued after the First World War. In the first half of the 20th century, it was impossible to live openly and with equal rights as an Armenian or Greek Christian in Türkiye. Even Islamized Armenians felt compelled to conceal their descent for at least two generations and were still exposed to numerous forms of discrimination and insults.

The repeated massacres and deportations in Dersim (1938), which claimed the lives of both Armenians and Alevis, show how justified the fears of the 1915 genocide survivors and their descendants were. At the same time, the serfdom of Armenian farmers and artisans, which was based on the Kurdish tribal system, intensified. The Turkish nation-state's fight against socialist and Kurdish nationalist movements, which numerous young people of Armenian descent in Dersim had joined in the 1970s, led to further repressions.

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<sup>52</sup> Lemkin, Raphael: *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation; Analysis of Government; Proposals for Redress*. Washington, 1944 (New edition: New introduction by Samantha Power. Clark, New Jersey: 2005), p. 79.

It was only in the 2010s that members of the third, post-genocidal generation overcame social exclusion and cultural invisibility by organizing themselves and confidently demanding equal rights. The question remains as to which significance Christianity can and should still have for the individual and collective identity of these “neo-Armenians”.

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### Conflict of Interests

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

### Ethical Standards

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF PARIS-BASED *ZHOGHOVURD* (PEOPLE) DAILY NEWSPAPER IN RESEARCHING THE ARMENIAN DIASPORA'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE FRENCH RESISTANCE (1941-1945)

Arshaluys Teteyan\*  
*Yerevan State University*

### Abstract

The participation of the Armenian Diaspora in the French Resistance has been the subject of various historical studies. Numerous documentaries and feature films have been made on this topic, generally focusing on the famous Armenian fighter Missak Manouchian and his heroic group. Over recent years, the memoirs of Armenian Resistance heroes such as Meline Manouchian, Mihran Mavian, Arsène Tchakarian, and others have been published.

However, the Armenian Diaspora in France, the majority of whose members were survivors of the 1915 Armenian Genocide, wrote many heroic pages in the history of the Resistance. Unfortunately, many of these events, their participants, and the heroes of those victories remain largely unknown to this day. There are numerous unexplored sources, including Armenian newspapers published in France during the war and the post-war period. One such publication is the *Zhoghovurd* newspaper, which was issued in Paris under the editorship of Shahe Tatourian from 1943 to 1948. The pages of this newspaper contain many materials written by the participants and witnesses of the events, which could be of significant importance for studying the involvement of the Armenian Diaspora in the French Resistance.

The valuable content of this periodical could be divided into several groups. The first group includes the memoirs of the Armenian participants of Resistance about various actions and their friends who lost their lives during different operations. Among this it's important to note the names of notorious Armenian fighters M. Mavian, A. Konstandinian, D. Davitian and others. The second group contains several components, including information about the number of Armenians who participated in various actions and operations, their biographies, and posthumous commemorations. Particularly interesting is the third group of information from the pages of the *Zhoghovurd* newspaper. This group includes data on Armenians returning from Nazi death camps, as well as the efforts of the Armenian community to reintegrate and rehabilitate former prisoners.

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\* Arshaluys Teteyan, Ph. D in History, Associate Professor Chair of History of Neighboring Countries of Armenia, YSU a.teteyan@ysu.am



**Keywords:** *French Resistance, Zhoghovurd daily newspaper, Participation of the Armenian People in the French Resistance, Vahridj Vadjaraganian, Arpen Davitian, Karapet Metsikian, Haik Dpirian, Nshan Ter-Martirosian, Armenian diaspora in France, Missak Manouchian.*

## Introduction

The article titled “An Unknown Figure of the Resistance”, from the May 5, 1946, issue of the Paris-based daily newspaper *Zhoghovurd (People)*, begins with the following lines: “When and by whom will the history of Armenian participants in the French Resistance be written?”<sup>1</sup>. This question, from as far back as the 1940s, is still relevant today. Despite the various kinds of publications in past decades about Armenians in the French Resistance, there are still many sources that need to be studied. There are many names of Armenian participants that have been forgotten, and the full extent of Armenian Diaspora involvement remains largely understudied. This does not imply that the role of Armenian Participants is deliberately overlooked or undervalued. The French Republic has consistently acknowledged and expressed profound gratitude for the contributions and sacrifices of foreign nationals in the French Resistance. The evidence of this the Pantheonization of Hero of French Resistance Missak Manouchian in February 2024. In the present context, there is an urgent need to complete the research on Armenian participation in French Resistance and to emphasize the substantial contributions made by the Diaspora, not only in combating Nazism on the front lines but also in supporting efforts in the rear. First, it will illustrate the commitment of individuals to opposing nationalism and hatred—ideologies from which they had previously endured suffering under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. Survivors of the Armenian Genocide of 1915 never hesitated to join the struggle against the new evil doctrine, which undoubtedly took its roots, including the ideologies of the Young Turks. Secondly, in an era marked by the spread of false narratives—particularly those promoted by certain Turkish and Azerbaijani historians—regarding alleged Armenian collaboration with Nazi individuals, it is essential to highlight the prominent role Armenians played in the French Resistance, as well as in resistance movements across other European states. Doing so directly challenges and refutes these unfounded claims.

## Methodology and Sources

Since World War II and continuing to the present day, the theme of Resistance and the narratives of Heroes have been at the forefront of social, political, and scientific discussions in France. Of course, publications dedicated to Armenian Heroes of the French Resistance but mostly of Missak Manouchian have also been published over the years. The works of Didier Daeninckx merit particular attention in this

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<sup>1</sup> Hay antsanoth rezisthan my (An Unknown Figure of the Resistance), *Zhoghovurd* oratherth, (*Zhoghovurd daily newspaper* (*Zhoghovurd*), No. 484, 05.05.1946.

context.<sup>2</sup> Many other authors have dedicated their works to the famous group led by Missak: Robrieux Philippe, Gérard Streiff, Denis Peschanski, Claire Mouradian, Astrig Atamian.<sup>3</sup> Manouchian was the iconic and beloved protagonist of the *bande dessinée*. There are numerous *bande dessinées* published in his honor for all ages.<sup>4</sup>

Of particular importance are the memoirs of the Armenian partisans themselves, published in recent years in France. Among them, for example, are the works of Tchakarian Arsène, Manouchian Mélinée and many others.<sup>5</sup>

Over the past few decades, a limited number of publications have been issued in Armenia, most of which focus on Missak Manouchian and Armenian communist participants of the French Resistance. Among the various publications, the works of Tigran Drampian<sup>6</sup> are particularly noteworthy. A renowned historian Klement Harutyunyan, who has written numerous books dedicated to Armenian participation in WWII and the Great Patriotic War, devoted special chapters in his books to European Resistance, including the role of French-Armenian partisans.<sup>7</sup> While these works provide a partial examination of the role of French Armenians, numerous narratives remain unexplored.

Despite the various kinds of publications in past decades about Armenians in the French Resistance, there are still many sources that need to be studied. There are many articles and various types of publications in Armenian newspapers and journals, most of which have yet to be studied or analyzed. In this context, the newspapers and journals published in France hold significant importance. Such

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<sup>2</sup> Daeninckx Didier, Missak, Paris, Editions Gallimard, 2018, p. 352.

<sup>3</sup> Robrieux Philippe, L'Affaire Manouchian. Vie et mort d'un Héros communiste, Fayard, 1986, 434 p., Streiff Gérard, Missak et Mélinée Manouchian. Un couple en Résistance, Paris, Éditions L'Archipel, 2024, 236 p., Peschanski Denis, Mouradian Claire, Atamian Astrig, Manouchian: Missak et Mélinée Manouchian, deux orphelins du génocide des arméniens engagés dans la Résistance française, Paris, Textuel, 2023, 191 p.

<sup>4</sup> Didier Daeninckx, Laurent Corvaisier, Missak Manouchian, l'enfant de l'Affiche rouge, Rue du monde, 2009, p.60. Didier Daeninckx, Mako, Missak Manouchian: Une vie héroïque, Les Arenes Eds, 2024, 120 p. Jean-Pierre Pécau, Eduardo Ocana, Missak Manouchian mort pour la France, Delcourt, 2024, 72 p.

<sup>5</sup> Tchakarian A., Les francs-tireurs de l'affiche rouge, [Paris, Messidor/Editions sociales](#), 1986, 250 p., Tchakarian A. avec la collaboration de Hélène Kosséian, Les commandos de l'Affiche rouge la vérité historique sur la première section de l'Armée secrète, Monaco, Rocher, 2013, 272 p., Manouchian Mélinée, Manochian, Paris, 1974, [Les Éditeurs français réunis, 204 p.](#)

<sup>6</sup> Drampian T., Manushyan khumby. Patma-vaveragrakan vipak (The Manouchian's Group. Historical documentary story), Yerevan, Armenia, 1990, 134 p.: Aryan gnov (At the cost of blood), Yerevan, Armenia, 1971, 72 p.: Fransahay kumunistnery dimadruthyan tarinerin (1941-1944թթ.), (French- Armenian Communists during the years of Resistance (1941-1944), Yerevan, 1967, 200 p., Драмбян Т., Они сражались за Францию, Ереван, Издательство Ереванского университета, 1981, 196 с.

<sup>7</sup> Harutyunyan K., Hay zhoghovrdi masnakcuthyun Hayrenakan Mets paterazmin (1941-1945 թթ.), (*Participation of the Armenian People in the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945)*, Yerevan, Zangak-97, 2002, 248 p.: Hay zhoghovrdi masnakcuthyun Erkord hamashkharayin paterazmin (1939-1945 թթ.) (*Participation of the Armenian People in the World War II*), Yerevan, Hrazdan, 2001, 135 p.:

importance is held by the Armenian national front's official newspaper *Zhoghovurd* which was published in Paris from 1943 to 1948 by Shahe Taturian. The newspaper was published during and after the war, ensuring that the facts and events did not remain in the shadow of time. Most of the articles were written by participants or individuals closely involved with the events.

It is true that newspaper's editor, along with most of the authors, were members of Communist party and apologist of Soviet Union and there were quite a few ideological and propagandist trends in the pages of the newspaper. But despite this, there is plenty of evidence and facts that cannot be ignored or viewed with bias. They can enrich or complement history of Armenian participants of French Resistance with new facts and content after comparison and clarification with other sources.

Guided by these purposes, we have identified the following research objectives.

- Derive and organize information from the pages of the newspaper about Armenian participants in the French Resistance.
- Classify them according to predefined principles.
- After research and analysis, introduce them into scientific circulation, thereby contributing to and fostering the work of future researchers.

In accordance with predefined principles, we have divided the information from the pages of *Zhoghovurd* into the following groups.

- Memories of Armenian Participants of the French Resistance.
- Biographical information about Armenian Participants and Supporters of the French Resistance.
- Facts and evidence regarding the activities, interventions, and contributions of the Armenian Diaspora in the struggle against the Nazi occupation of France.

### **Memories of Armenian participants of the French Resistance**

During its publication, *Zhoghovurd* daily newspaper published many memories of Armenian participants and supporters of the French Resistance such as Mihran Mavian, Davit Davitian, Alexander Kostandinian and many others. It was in *Zhoghovurd* that first time Mihran Mavian shared his memories entitled "Underworld of Crime".<sup>8</sup> In 1946, *Zhoghovurd* began publishing the memories of another participant of the French Resistance, Davit Davitian. This memoirs with impressive title "Mephistopheles in Buchenwald" tell us about the life and struggle of prisoners in one of the infernal Nazi camps.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Later Mihran Mavian's memories were published as an independent book with the title "Underworld of Crime". See Mavian M., Votchri andrashkharen (Underworld of Crime), Yerevan, 1976, 213 p.: It was subsequently translated into French and published under the title «Par-delà les ténèbres» (Compiègne, Mémorial de l'internement et de la déportation, 2010):

<sup>9</sup> Davitian D., Mefistofiles Pukhnvalti mej (Mephistopheles in Buchenwald), *Zhoghovurd*, No. 224, 01.07.1946 - No. 278, 04.09.1946.

Among the memories, special importance is given to those written by the participants of Resistance about their friends and comrades of arms. One of the authors who periodically wrote about his comrades was Alexandre Kostandinian. There are many articles written by him, dedicated to Missak Manouchian, Arpen Davitian, Haik Dpirian and many others. Much is known about these famous heroes of the French Resistance, however, there are still some details we can learn from these valuable memories. First and foremost, their humanism, moral qualities, and values. This is clearly shown in Hayk's response to Kostandinian's request, asking him not to join the Resistance because of his family and two children: "Thinking of oneself is considered treachery for a revolutionary".<sup>10</sup>

In 1944, an announcement in the pages of the *Zhoghovurd* invited people to take part in a remembrance ceremony at Ivry Cemetery. Here, among the fallen heroes from the Paris region, Missak Manouchian and Arpen Manoukian, we see the name of Vahridj Vadjaraganian. Tiran Voskerichian also mentions in his book Vahridj Vadjaraganian's name among the Armenian martyrs<sup>11</sup>. A few fragments of his biography can be found in the biographical dictionary of individuals executed during the French Occupation ([Les fusillés, 1940-1944. Dictionnaire biographique des fusillés et exécutés par condamnation et comme otages ou guillotinés en France pendant l'Occupation](#)).<sup>12</sup>

Thanks to memories of Shahe Taturian the editor of *Zhoghovurd* we find a little information about Vahridj. He was born in Partizak in 1908. He survived the 1915 Armenian Genocide, lived in Constantinople and later in the Corfu orphanage. From there, he moved to France. In 1939, he was drafted into the French army. After the Battle of Dunkirk he moved to England. Upon returning to France, he joined the Resistance movement. In several issues of *Zhoghovurd* Taturian shares his memories about meeting him and the time spent with him in the camp Tourelles.<sup>13</sup> In May 1944 Vadjarakanian was transported to Rouillé (Vienne). In 1944, 52 prisoners, 38 of whom were political prisoners, managed to escape from the camp. However, 10 km away from Rouillé, in the Saint-Sauvant (Vienne) forest, they were surrounded by German forces. Vahridj was among the 31 massacred Maquis.<sup>14</sup>

Even without extensive detail, this brief overview is sufficient to demonstrate the *Zhoghovurd* daily newspaper's significance and relevance. Personal narratives and eyewitness accounts published in the pages of the newspaper serve as valuable

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<sup>10</sup> Kostandinian A., Haik Dpirian, (Haik Dpirian), *Zhoghovurd*, No. 77, 06.01.1945). For more details about this famous combatant see *Zhoghovurd*, No. 191, 24.05.1945 p., No. 267, 22.08.1945.

<sup>11</sup> Voskeritchian T., Hay ardzakazeni my yushery (The memoirs of the Armenian fighter of the Resistance), Beirut, 1974.

<sup>12</sup> Grason Daniel, Vadjaraganian Vahridj <https://fusilles-40-44.maitron.fr/vadjaraganian-vahridj/> (24.04.25)

<sup>13</sup> Taturian Sh., Vahritchi masin (About Vahridj), *Zhoghovurd*, No. 37, 19.11.1944, No. 38, 21.11.1945, No. 39, 22.11.1945.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

primary sources, offering direct insight into historical events and individual experiences.

### **Biographical information about Armenian Participants and Supporters of the French Resistance**

There is a lot of biographical information about the Armenian participants of the French Resistance in almost every issue of the newspaper. We all know Manouchian's letter to his wife, Meline. But there was a second one addressed to Meline's sister, Armenuhi. It was here that Manouchian wrote and asked to remember and honor Arpen Davitians memory with him. In the first years after their deaths, they were remembered together, and their portraits were carried side by side at all memorial events. Over time, his name was not entirely forgotten, but it gradually received diminishing recognition. Fortunately, the *Zhoghovurd* daily newspaper preserved much valuable information for us about Manouchian's comrade-in-arms and member of his group, Arpen Davitian.<sup>15</sup>

As we have mentioned, there are many articles dedicated to Haik Dpirian's life trajectory and activities. In several issues of *Zhoghovurd* from March 1946, we read about the national funeral of an Armenian hero. In those days, the municipality of Paneo decided to move and rebury Dpirian's remains and those of his three friends. Thanks to this, we get a sense of the atmosphere and the course of the event. Ervand Hovhannesian's article, published in 24 March in *Zhoghovurd* paid tribute to Dpirian's mother. She stayed in Egypt and for her the grave of her son was his library and his unpublished work «I, my life and my pen». In response to her question about whether her son has a grave in France, Hovhannesian write. «Armenian and French people never forget their heroes. **The proof of this** is the national funeral of Dpirian and his three friends».<sup>16</sup>

In several issues of *Zhoghovurd* from February 1946, we get a sense of the atmosphere surrounding the national funeral of another hero, Nshan Ter-Martirosian. The newspaper provided a detailed account of the ceremonies that took place in Nice and Marseille. We should note that not only the farewell of the Armenian hero, but also his life and struggle are chronicled in the pages of the *Zhoghovurd* newspaper.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Alexander, Arpen Davitian (Arpen Davitian), *Zhoghovurd*, No. 435, 07.03.1946.

<sup>16</sup> Haik Dpiriani thaghomy (The funeral of Hayk Dpirian), *Zhoghovurd*, No. 448, 22.03.1946), Herosin thaghman arthiv, (In relation to the hero's funeral), *Zhoghovurd*, No. 450, 24.03.1946), Haik Dpiriani ev ir ynkerneru pharahegh thaghumy (Haik Dpirian's and his friends grand funeral), *Zhoghovurd*, No. 452, 27.03.1946:

<sup>17</sup> Hamazgayin mets cuyc ev thaghum Nshan Ter-Martirosiani (Nationwide mourning demonstration and funeral of Nshan Ter-Martirosian), *Zhoghovurd*, No. 410, 06.02.1946, Hakahitlerakan payqari heros Nshan Ter-Martirosiani thagoumy (The funeral of a hero of the anti-Hitler struggle), *Zhoghovurd*, No. 412, 08.02.1946, Ardzakazen hramanatar Nshan Ter-Martirosiani atchyunnery Marseyli mej (The remains of the guerrilla commander Nshan Ter-Martirosian in Marseille), *Zhoghovurd*, No. 416, 13.02.1946:

One of the heroes of the French Resistance in Marseille was Karapet Metsikian. Karapet or Karpis was a soldier in the French Army, and after 1940, he joined the Resistance movement. He was the founder of the Armenian resistance group in Vienne and the Committee of Liberation in *Le Péage-de-Roussillon*. He and his friends liberated 11 Soviet prisoners of war from the camp of *Saint-Rambert-d'Albon*. He also sabotaged railway lines in *Saint-Rambert-d'Albon*, blew up eight steam locomotives, and disrupted German supply movements. He was eventually captured by the Nazi Gestapo and tortured to death in Montluc prison. To this day, no one knows what they did to his body, he still has no grave.<sup>18</sup> Despite everything, his elderly parents never gave up hope that he would return one day. They passed away without ever knowing what happened to their son. Karapet's father passed away a few months ago, shortly after his wife's death. There is an article entitled «Unfortunate Family» in the issue of *Zhoghovurd* from January 22, 1946, which tells how the Armenian community of Vienne held a final farewell in honor of the grieving father.<sup>19</sup>

Many issues of *Zhoghovurd* are entirely dedicated to the Armenian participants of the French Resistance. For example, the issue from March 7, 1946, had the following headline: «They fell heroically so that the Motherland might live and liberty might prevail». It provided us with the names and short biographies of Armenian fighters from Marseille and Lyon. Most of them were survivors of the Armenian Genocide, born in various cities and villages of Western Armenia: Levon Antonian (Berdik, Kharberd), Avetis Tulumjian (Kesaria), Nikoghos Avetikian (Havtik, Kesaria), Azat Nikoghosian (Hertif, Qgi), Karapet Terterian (Karin), Karapet Metsikian (Izmir). Among the names of Armenian heroes, there are many young men, 18-19 years old, born in France in 1926-1927: Khachik Marikian, Sargis Miralian, Torgom Ter-Merkerian, Manuk Birian, Vrez Perpatian, Ervand Sar-Keshishian and many others. These young people, sons of Armenian Genocide survivors, never hesitated and undoubtedly joined the fight against the Nazis.<sup>20</sup>

As we have already noted, there is information about Armenian Resistance in almost every issue of *Zhoghovurd*. There are many articles dedicated to the participation of Armenians in the French Resistance, not only in Paris, Lyon, and Marseille, but also in most of the cities and villages of France. Thanks to the newspaper, we learn the names that, over time, would have been forgotten. Here are some examples: In the issue of September 19, 1945, *Zhoghovurd* presented the translation of the letter from the Mayor of Barjoles regarding the Armenians. Here we read the name of Torgom Mnatsakanian, one of the victims of Barjoles.<sup>21</sup> From

<sup>18</sup> Karapet Metsikian (Karapet Metsikian), *Zhoghovurd*, No. 775, 20.04.1947.

<sup>19</sup> Tarabakht yntaniq (Unfortunate Family), *Zhoghovurd*, No. 397, 22.01.1946:

<sup>20</sup> Anonq vor herosabar inkan, vorpeszi hayreniqy apri ev azatutyuny yaghthanake (They fell heroically so that the Motherland might live and liberty might prevail), *Zhoghovurd*, No. 435, 07.03.1946:

<sup>21</sup> Fransaciq Hayoc masin (French people about Armenians), *Zhoghovurd*, No. 291, 19.09.1945.

the pages of the newspaper, we learn the name of Petros Topuzian a medical student from Vienne. He moved to England and joined Charles de Gaulle's army. He perished in 1944.<sup>22</sup> In the issue of March 4, 1946, we read that Vahram's (Valanten Sagiaian) name who was decorated with the Cross for War by the Military Governor of Paris, Koenig.<sup>23</sup> In the article titled "Armenian Members of the Resistance are Honored in Grenoble", from the issue of September 12, 1946, preserved for us the names of 21 names of Armenian participants and contributors of French Resistance.<sup>24</sup>

This heading represents only a portion of the heroic names from the Armenian Diaspora, the number of which, according to various statistical sources, was 50,000 before World War II. The exact number of participants, or those who lost their lives, is difficult to estimate because it is fair to say that the entire Diaspora took part in the struggle against the Nazi occupation in one way or another. However, when such research is conducted in the near future, the data from *Zhoghovurd* will be essential and should be prioritized.

### **Facts and evidence regarding the activities, interventions, and contributions of the Armenian Diaspora in the struggle against the Nazi occupation of France**

The pages of *Zhoghovurd* contain preserved information about various aspects of the Armenian Diaspora's activities during the Nazi occupation of France. Worthy of mention are the activities of Armenian women. It is no coincidence that many women were among those awarded and honored by the French authorities. We should also mention the Union of Armenian Women, which did great work in the fields of reintegration and rehabilitation for former prisoners returning home. What is interesting is that we always see the surname Aznavourian in the list of generous and compassionate artists who participated in charitable events organized by the Union of Armenian Women or *Zhoghovurd*, whose aim was to help the families of victims or freed prisoners.

Of significant importance is the coverage of efforts for the liberation of Soviet prisoners and, later, their involvement in different military operations. It is known that the first partisan unit was organized from Armenian prisoners of war. Thanks to the newspaper, much information about the unit stationed in Nîmes became known. In the issue of November 4, 1944, we read about the presentation of the flag of the partisan detachment and the celebration held on this occasion. It's interesting to read about the theatrical performance based on the play written by one of the partisans, Gurgen Mukhranian, "In the Ring of Fascism"<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Keanqy Vieni mej (Life in Vienne), *Zhoghovurd*, No. 98, 31.01.1945.

<sup>23</sup> Patvoy takhtak. Hay qaj my ky patui (Armenian hero is honored), *Zhoghovurd*, No. 193, 26.05.1945:

<sup>24</sup> Hay Rezistanner ky patuin Krynopli mej (Armenian Participants of Resistance are honoring in Grenoble) *Zhoghovurd*, No. 591, 12.09.1946:

<sup>25</sup> Droschaki handznum hay partizanakan gndin (The transfer of the flag to the regiment), *Zhoghovurd*, 04.11.1944:

## Conclusion

As presented in the introduction, this article aims to examine the *Zhoghovurd* daily newspaper and its significance in researching the role of the Armenian Diaspora in the struggle against the Nazi occupation of France. In accordance with the defined research objectives, this article, structured under three main headings, highlights key information and evidence derived from this newspaper: Memories of Armenian Participants of the French Resistance, Biographical information about Armenian Participants and Supporters of the French Resistance, Facts and evidence regarding the activities, interventions, and contributions of the Armenian Diaspora in the struggle against the Nazi occupation of France. This is the first time the role and significance of *Zhoghovurd* daily newspapers are becoming subjects of research in the context of the French Resistance. It helps us recover names, recognize heroism, and ultimately restore the complete picture of Armenian participation in the French Resistance. As we stated, this is the first such research, and it will create opportunities for further researchers to continue studying not only *Zhoghovurd*, but also other newspapers and journals published by Armenians, which could help restore the true picture of the Armenian Diaspora's role.

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#### **Conflict of Interests**

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

#### **Ethical Standards**

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

## MAINTAINING POWER THROUGH AGGRESSION: THE AZERBAIJANI EXAMPLE

Raffi Kantian\*  
*German-Armenian Society*

### Abstract

The takeover of power by Ilham Aliyev over 20 years ago contains all the elements of a non-democratic system. The power thus assumed is perpetuated by so-called elections, which were and are neither free nor fair. The regime arbitrarily disregards the law and citizens are exposed to state attacks without protection. Critical voices from civil society, freedom of the press and freedom of opinion are systematically suppressed on an ongoing basis. The system is not afraid to persecute critical citizens abroad, too. Criticism by foreign powers has been and continues to be mitigated/suppressed by offering lucrative business opportunities and corrupting foreign, predominantly Western politicians.

An essential feature of this system without checks and balances is the plundering and distribution of the people's wealth among a few groups close to the rulers, while at the same time disadvantaging the majority of the population. This system of self-enrichment of those in power can also be observed in the so-called „liberated regions“. Here, too, critical discourse is undesirable. Critics are arrested and imprisoned on trivial pretexts, sometimes even kidnapped from abroad. Some become victims of assassination attempts. This system is not interested in democratic reforms, as they would massively curtail the power of those in power and put a stop to their self-enrichment. Instead of implementing reforms, the system is constantly fuelling a very aggressive nationalism, hatred of its neighbor Armenia and thus distracting from the obvious demands of civil society. The constant territorial demands (West Azerbaijan, Zangezur Corridor, etc.) directed at Armenia have proven to be particularly effective in keeping its own population at bay and avoiding a regime change.

It is a widespread phenomenon that autocrats do not renounce their rule and the economic and other advantages associated with it. In the case of Azerbaijan, this forms an important pillar in the continued aggression against Armenia.

\* Raffi Kantian is Dr. and the Chairman of the German-Armenian Society and the responsible editor of its quarterly journal ADK, the only print medium in the German-speaking world on Armenia/the Armenians. His areas of interest are the late phase of the Ottoman Empire, the young Republic of Turkey and recent Turkish history. He also deals with the triangle of relations between Turkey, Azerbaijan and Armenia. He publishes articles and book reviews on these topics, gives lectures, organizes conferences and panel discussions (digital and other formats), participates in or moderates them and advises scholars researching these topics.



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Received 15.03.2025

Revised 02.05.2025

Accepted 10.05.2025

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**Keywords:** Aliyev clan; domestic policy in Azerbaijan; self-enrichment of those in power; suppression of critics; holding on to power as the primary goal; foreign policy successes as a means of stabilizing the regime.

### **The Aliyev system**

Ilham Aliyev inherited the rule of Azerbaijan from his father Heydar Aliyev in 2003. None of the parliamentary and presidential elections held since then have been either free or fair. The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights has noted this in its reports.<sup>1</sup>

One of the direct consequences is that the legislature, i.e. the parliament, is unable to exercise the control of the executive that is important for a democratic system. In other words, there are no limits to Ilham Aliyev's arbitrary rule.

### **The business model of the Aliyev clan**

A telegram from the US embassy in Baku dated January 27, 2010, and published by WikiLeaks states, among other things:

"In this opening issue, we profile the family of First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva (born Mehriban Pashayeva), and her uncle, former Azerbaijani Ambassador to the United States and current Deputy Foreign Minister Hafiz Pashayev. Mehriban Aliyeva, besides being the wife of the President, is a Member of Parliament and head of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, a non-transparent organization that bills itself as a vehicle for charitable works. Other members of the Pashayev family hold powerful positions in government and academia, and are associated with powerful business groups outside the energy sector. The Pashayevs are known to operate extensively in Baku's rapidly expanding construction/real estate market, and are well invested in the financial and telecommunications sectors."

"2. (C) Observers in Baku often note that today's Azerbaijan is run in a manner similar to the feudalism found in Europe during the Middle Ages: a handful of well-connected families control certain geographic areas, as well as certain sectors of the economy. By and large, this seems to be the case, with general agreement among leading families to divide the spoils and not disturb one another's areas of business or geographic control. The families also collude, using government mechanisms, to keep out foreign competitors, and entities such as the State Border Services, State Customs and tax authorities create barriers that only the best connected can clear. As a result, an economy already burgeoning with oil and gas revenues produces enormous opportunity and wealth for a small handful of players that form Azerbaijan's elite."

This system continued after 2010. However, the Aliyev family's grip on the state was significantly strengthened. President Ilham Aliyev's wife, Mehriban Aliyeva, was appointed Vice President of Azerbaijan by her husband by decree in

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<sup>1</sup> Elections in Azerbaijan, OSCE, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/azerbaijan/>

February 2017. The office did not exist until then and was introduced in a constitutional referendum in 2016.<sup>2</sup> There is speculation that Heydar Aliyev Jr, son of Ilham Aliyev, will be installed as the new President of Azerbaijan in the future. He took part in a cabinet meeting at the end of September 2024 at which economic issues were discussed.<sup>3</sup>

Investigative journalists, such as The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists and the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, play an important role in documenting the economic machinations of the Aliyev clan. Some of their comprehensive investigations include: “Offshore companies provide link between corporate mogul and Azerbaijan’s president” in 2013<sup>4</sup>, and “How the Family that Runs Azerbaijan Built an Empire of Hidden Wealth” in 2016.<sup>5</sup> The articles in <https://www.occrp.org/en/azerbaijanilaundromat/> of OCCRP are also revealing, showing how political influence was and is bought in Western parliaments.

This model also continues seamlessly in the so-called “liberated territories”. The master plan for the reconstruction of Shushi was drawn up by the British company Chapman Taylor. No tender has been published anywhere. Among the major Azerbaijani players willing to work with British companies is Pasha Construction, which is part of a holding company linked to Azerbaijan’s ruling family (Ilham Aliyev’s wife is a descendant of the Pashayevs).

Nine of the so-called agroparks in the “liberated areas” are owned by the Aliyev family. The owners of a further 38 agroparks are in direct contact with the ruling family.<sup>6</sup> Azerbaijani economist Gubad Ibadoglu commented on the so-called “smart villages” in which the returnees in Karabakh are to live: “Corrupt officials and businessmen will take control of the money allocated to them.”<sup>7</sup> The fact that Aliyev considers the land to be his “private property” can be seen in the following

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<sup>2</sup> Aserbaidschan: “Aliyev ernennt seine Ehefrau zur Vizepräsidentin,” *Der Standard*, February 21, 2017, <https://www.derstandard.at/consent/tcf/story/2000052943445/aliyev-ernennt-seine-ehefrau-zur-vizepräsidentin>

<sup>3</sup> Farhadova, Aytan. “Ilham Aliyev’s Son Attends Cabinet Meeting, Sparking Succession Rumours,” *OC Media*, September 26, 2024, <https://oc-media.org/ilham-aliyevs-son-attends-cabinet-meeting-sparking-succession-rumours/>

<sup>4</sup> Candea, Stefan and Khadija Ismayilova. “Offshore Companies Provide Link Between Corporate Mogul and Azerbaijan’s President,” *International Consortium of Investigative Journalists*, April 3, 2013, <https://www.icij.org/investigations/offshore/offshore-companies-provide-link-between-corporate-mogul-and-azerbaijans-president>

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<sup>6</sup> Isayev, Heydar. “Farmland in Karabakh Being Given to Powerful Azerbaijanis – Report,” *Eurasianet*, June 28, 2022, <https://eurasianet.org/farmland-in-karabakh-being-given-to-powerful-azerbaijanis-report>

<sup>7</sup> Isayev, Heydar. “Azerbaijan Prepares for Karabakh Resettlement in ‘Smart Villages,’” *Eurasianet*, October 20, 2021, <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-prepares-for-karabakh-resettlement-in-smart-villages>

example: He instructed deminers to clear only THOSE parts of the country of mines that were in his interests.<sup>8</sup>

Another example is the private company that Ilham Aliyev founded with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.<sup>9</sup>

### Criticism from the opposition

People and institutions that deal with the machinations of Ilham Aliyev and the clans and the corruption of the system are particularly dangerous for the regime.

For example, investigative journalist Afgan Mukhtarli was abducted from Tbilisi on May 29, 2017, under unexplained circumstances and sentenced to six years in prison in Baku. He had been researching Ilham Aliyev's financial machinations in Georgia in Tbilisi.<sup>10</sup>

This also includes Gubad Ibadoglu, a political activist, academic, critic of the oil and gas industry and prominent human rights and environmental activist, who has been a research fellow at the London School of Economics since 2021.

Two of his scientific articles should be mentioned: Ibadoglu, Gubad (June 21, 2021). "Corruption Risks in the State Budget of Azerbaijan and Their Management"<sup>11</sup>, "The economics of petro-authoritarianism: Post-soviet transitions and democratization".<sup>12</sup>

Gubad Ibadoglu was arrested on 23 July 2023 and charged under Article 204.3.1 of the Criminal Code (if an organized group has committed the manufacture, acquisition or sale of counterfeit currency or securities).

The media portals Kanal 13 and AbzasMedia, which report critically on the systemic corruption in Azerbaijan, are also dangerous for the system and their employees were successively arrested from fall 2023 and confronted with absurd accusations. Among other things, AbzasMedia is said to be part of a US spy ring.<sup>13</sup>

Former Azerbaijani diplomat Emin Şaiq İbrahimov makes a connection between the war over Nagorno-Karabakh and the Aliyev clan's hold on power. In a Twitter post, he writes: "These stories must not end in order to preserve the land as

<sup>8</sup> Rubin, Michael. Did Azerbaijan target Christians for its dictator's personal profit? *Washington Examiner*, November 29, 2023, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/2433934/did-azerbaijan-target-christians-for-its-dictators-personal-profit/>

<sup>9</sup> Natiqqizi, Ulkar. "'Brotherly' Azerbaijan and Turkey Build Lucrative Karabakh Business Ties," *Eurasianet*, October 24, 2022, <https://eurasianet.org/brotherly-azerbaijan-and-turkey-build-lucrative-karabakh-business-ties>

<sup>10</sup> European Court of Human Rights, *Mukhtarli v. Azerbaijan and Georgia*, [https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#%22itemid%22:\[%22001-184176%22\]}](https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#%22itemid%22:[%22001-184176%22]})

<sup>11</sup> Ibadoglu, Gubad. *Corruption Risks in the State Budget of Azerbaijan and Their Management*, June 21, 2021, SSRN, [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3871136](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3871136)

<sup>12</sup> Ibadoglu, Gubad and Rashad Sadigov. "The Economics of Petro-Authoritarianism: Post-Soviet Transitions and Democratization," *Resources Policy* 85 (August 2023), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0301420723004634>

<sup>13</sup> Abzas Media, <https://oc-media.org/tag/abzasmedia/>; Arrests at AbzasMedia: Allegations and Responses, *Meydan TV*, November 22, 2023, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fgVMfR1J\\_pA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fgVMfR1J_pA).

a family object and to plunge the people into misery as eternally disenfranchised subjects. They are busy robbing the people. Only the parasites, the servants of the dictatorship who fill their bellies, can support this senseless policy. But it is in vain.”<sup>14</sup>

Other members of Azerbaijani civil society are campaigning for peace with Armenia. For example, Feminist Peace Collective has raised its voice in “Solidarity with Karabakh/Artsakh against total war, blockade and hegemony”.<sup>15</sup>

On August 21, 2024, Bahruz Samadov was arrested in Baku. He is a PhD student at Charles University in Prague, where he researches political debates in Azerbaijan and authoritarianism, has written frequently for OC Media and other publications and is a regular guest on the Caucasus Digest podcast. Samadov is also an outspoken supporter of peace with Armenia. He is accused of “high treason”.

Opponents of the war are generally referred to as “NoWar”cilar. They are regularly shown on the popular, state-controlled YouTube channel with the hashtag #xainleritani (know the traitors).<sup>16</sup> The creators are certain: they are working for the enemy Armenia and are controlled from a central office, hence the Armenian tricolor in the collage for the imaginary “network of traitors”.

A platform called the Expert Center for Journalists has published an „educational article“ titled “The ‘Liberalism’ of ‘Azerbaijani’ ‘NoWar’ Supporters to Support Terrorists - the Video of Treason”.<sup>17</sup>

Azerbaijani human rights and democracy activist Mahammad Mirzali was attacked and stabbed 16 times with a knife in Nantes, France, on March 16, 2021. According to Mirzali, many other Azerbaijani activists have been attacked in this way by the Aliyev regime. He said this in an interview with civilnet.am.<sup>18</sup> He was then the subject of threats. He spoke about this in another interview with civilnet.am.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Emin Ibrahimov X post, December 24, 2022, <https://x.com/eminibrahimov81/status/1606723909667196928>.

<sup>15</sup> “In Solidarity with Karabakh/Artsakh against Total War, Blockade and Hegemony,” *Feminist Peace Collective*, August 10, 2023, <https://www.feministpeacecollective.com/en/post/in-solidarity-with-karabakh-artsakh-against-total-war-blockade-and-hegemony>

<sup>16</sup> “Müharibəyə yox” şüarı altında fəaliyyət göstərən xəyanətkar şəbəkə [Traitorous Network Operating Under the Slogan “No to War”], YouTube video, August 15, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oh-Ogn8VttY>

<sup>17</sup> “Azərbaycanlı ‘NoWar’çılardan terrorçuları dəstekləmək ‘liberalizmi’,” *MediaEkspert.az*, August 25, 2023, <https://mediaekspert.az/az/yazilar/azerbaycanli-nowarcilarin-terrorculari-desteklemek-liberalizmi>

<sup>18</sup> “Is Aliyev’s Popularity Surging in Azerbaijan? A Talk with Activist Mahammad Mirzali,” *CivilNet*, May 31, 2021, <https://www.civilnet.am/en/news/609891/is-aliyevs-popularity-surging-in-azerbaijan-a-talk-with-activist-mahammad-mirzali/>

<sup>19</sup> “Azerbaijani Activist Recounts Story of Attacks after CivilNet Interview,” *CivilNet*, July 15, 2021, <https://www.civilnet.am/en/news/626224/azerbaijani-activist-recounts-story-of-attacks-after-civilnet-interview/>, <https://www.civilnet.am/en/news/626224/azerbaijani-activist-recounts-story-of-attacks-after-civilnet-interview/>

In the comprehensive report “We Try to Stay Invisible” Human Rights Watch documents Azerbaijan’s increasingly harsh repression of critics and civil society.<sup>20</sup>

### **The inertia of the system or foreign policy successes as a distraction from the demands of civil society**

The Aliyev system is not interested in democratizing the country for two main reasons.

- a) In the event of democratization, it would lose all or part of its power.
- b) As a direct consequence, it would have to give up its economic monopoly.

The system seems to have chosen the aggression against Armenia and the “successes” achieved as a means of distracting itself from the demands of civil society. Moreover, the system hopes to consolidate its position in this way.

### **Building blocks of this policy**

#### 1. Systematic Armenophobia

Azerbaijan’s humiliating defeat in the first war over Nagorno-Karabakh in the 1990s fuelled the hatred of Armenians that had existed before, without which the pogroms in Sumgait and Baku would have been inconceivable. The Khojaly massacre, which was essentially blamed on the Armenians and has not been fully investigated, has led to a potentiation of state-directed and promoted Armenophobia.

There are many channels through which Armenophobia has been and continues to be practiced. The dossier „Armenophobia in Azerbaijan“ summarizes its main manifestations<sup>21</sup>

A key component is the integration of Armenophobia into the education system, including school textbooks.<sup>22</sup>

The incitement of small children to burn the Armenian flag is a particularly vivid example of the “successes” of Armenophobia.<sup>23</sup>

The beheading of Lieutenant Gurgen Margarian by the Azerbaijani officer Ramil Safarov during a NATO training course in Budapest in 2004 is another vivid example of what systematic Armenophobia can lead to.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Human Rights Watch, “We Try to Stay Invisible”: Azerbaijan’s Escalating Crackdown on Critics and Civil Society (New York: Human Rights Watch, October 2024),

<sup>21</sup> <https://stophatespeech.net/en/content.html>.

<sup>22</sup> Armenophobia in the Textbooks Used in Azerbaijan, <https://azerichild.education/en/>.

<sup>23</sup> [https://www.reddit.com/r/armenia/comments/n15a9r/how\\_are\\_a\\_group\\_of\\_azeris\\_are\\_throwing\\_a\\_party/?rdt=52467](https://www.reddit.com/r/armenia/comments/n15a9r/how_are_a_group_of_azeris_are_throwing_a_party/?rdt=52467)

<sup>24</sup> European Court of Human Rights, Makuchyan and Minasyan v. Azerbaijan and Hungary, [https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#%22itemid%22:\[%22001-202524%22\]}](https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#%22itemid%22:[%22001-202524%22]}), Deutsch-Armenische Gesellschaft, „Überstellung und Begnadigung des verurteilten Mörders Safarov durch Alijew: Internationale Reaktionen“, 5. September 2012,

<https://www.deutscharmenischegesellschaft.de/2012/09/05/uberstellung-und-begnadigung-der-verurteilten-mordlers-safarov-durch-alijew-internationale-reaktionen/>

In the “Park of Trophies” - erected in Baku after the 44-day war in 2020 - hatred of Armenia and Armenians was also fostered for quite some time through the racist depiction of Armenian soldiers. It was only after strong protests from the West that these elements were removed from the “Park of Trophies”.

## *2. Stages of the extended demands on Armenia*

As long as the settlement of the Karabakh conflict was being sought under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group, it could be assumed that the Baku regime was ultimately concerned with controlling the seven regions under Armenian control. The status of Nagorno-Karabakh was still open at the time. However, it was already clear at the time that Baku did not agree with the Minsk format.

In the fall of 2019, an exhibition in Baku drew attention to the Yerevan Khanate. This khanate has become one of Azerbaijan's main weapons in the historic wars with Armenia, in which the two countries lay claim to the 'true' ownership of territories in the Caucasus. Azerbaijani government rhetoric uses the history of the khanate - which was ruled by Turkic-speaking khans under Persian suzerainty - to delegitimize Armenia's claim to its own territory and defend against analogous Armenian claims to its territory.

The Yerevan Khanate has received and continues to receive a disproportionate amount of attention in Azerbaijan, according to Cavid Aga, an Azerbaijani social media activist and history enthusiast. “You see conferences and symposiums about this [Yerevan Khanate], but you don't see much about other medieval small states that played a more important role at the time. I don't find much about other khanates, other medieval small states, not even the Khanate of Baku,” Aga told Eurasianet. “They are really pushing this.”

President Aliyev caused a stir back in 2018 when he referred to Yerevan and other territories in what is now Armenia as “historical Azerbaijani lands” and said Azerbaijanis should “return” there. Following this call, Azerbaijani government officials began promoting on their Twitter accounts a high-production quality video produced by the Ministry of Youth and Sports defending Yerevan's Azerbaijani origins. “The city ... is clearly one of the cultural centers of Azerbaijan,” says the spokesperson.<sup>25</sup>

After Azerbaijan's victory in the 44-day war in the fall of 2020, other demands were ventilated.

On September 19, 2022, just days after Azerbaijan launched an attack on Armenia, reviving fears of a major invasion, a threatening campaign was launched in Azerbaijan's pro-government media.

Several news websites published an announcement about the establishment of a “Goycha-Zangazur Republic” (GZR) on the territory that is now part of Armenia.

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<sup>25</sup> Clayton, Austin. “Azerbaijan Mounts Exhibition Showcasing Erivan Khanate,” *Eurasianet*, October 17, 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-mounts-exhibition-showcasing-erivan-khanate>

Its borders would correspond to those of today's Armenian provinces of Sevan and Syunik (called Goycha and Zangezur in Azerbaijani, respectively).<sup>26</sup>

However, GZR soon disappeared from the headlines, but the term "West Azerbaijan" became established in Azerbaijani journalism. President Aliyev pushed this term more and more.<sup>27</sup>

As early as 2020, an Azerbaijani academic in Turkey, Gafar Khahmagli, founded the so-called Republic of West Azerbaijan (Irevan), which would have had an even greater territorial reach than GZR. This project (which was also called the Turkish Republic of Irevan) was linked to another group with obvious government connections, the West Azerbaijan Community (WAC), but did not receive the (brief) state support that GZR did.

### Foreign policy successes as a means of stabilizing the regime

Just how dangerous a lack of success by the Azerbaijani military can be for the Aliyev regime was demonstrated in July 2020. The fighting that broke out on July 12 was the deadliest since the "April War" of 2016. It took place on the international border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, where there had been occasional exchanges of fire in recent years, but not since the 1990s had there been such heavy fighting.<sup>28</sup>

At least 11 Azerbaijani soldiers, including Major General Polad Hashimov, were killed in three days of fighting on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border. Unprecedented protests broke out in Baku. Some of the protesters broke into the parliament and caused damage, and the police used tear gas and batons to disperse the demonstrators, who fought back and overturned police cars. Other protesters tried to convince the police to join them.<sup>29</sup>

Azerbaijan's victory in the 44-day war in 2020 and the expulsion of the Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023 had a stabilizing effect on the regime in Baku. Ilham Aliyev's good performance in the presidential elections on February 7, 2024, was often attributed to his "success" in gaining complete control over Nagorno-Karabakh. Even the handover of the four villages in the Tavush region to Azerbaijan in 2024 boosted Aliyev's rating among the majority of the population. In this heated nationalist mood, the continued enrichment of the

<sup>26</sup> "The Rise and Fall of Azerbaijan's 'Goycha-Zangazur Republic,'" *Eurasianet*, September 22, 2022, <https://eurasianet.org/the-rise-and-fall-of-azerbaijans-goycha-zangazur-republic>; Die "Republik Göyçe-Zengezur," *Armenisch-Deutsche Korrespondenz* (ADK) 197, Jg. 2022/Heft 4, <https://www.deutscharmenischegesellschaft.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/ADK197-Die-%E2%80%9ERepublik-Goeyce-Zengezur.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> "Ilham Aliyev Viewed Conditions Created at Administrative Building of Western Azerbaijan Community," *President of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, December 24, 2022, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/58330>

<sup>28</sup> Kucera, Joshua, "Fighting Between Armenia and Azerbaijan Widens," *Eurasianet*, July 14, 2020, <https://eurasianet.org/fighting-between-armenia-and-azerbaijan-widens>,

<sup>29</sup> "Pro-War Azerbaijani Protesters Break into Parliament," *EurasiaNet*, July 15, 2020, <https://eurasianet.org/pro-war-azerbaijani-protesters-break-into-parliament>

Aliyev clan only played a role for a small minority of people in the country. However, this minority was kept in check by radical police-state measures.

### Conclusion: A look into the future

From Baku's point of view, there is enough "conflict material" that can be used to maintain power and distract attention from the continued enrichment of those in power. These include the enclaves within the Republic of Armenia, the problems of limitation and demarcation, the territories of the Republic of Armenia occupied by Azerbaijan since May 2021, Syunik transit road (the so-called "Zangezur Corridor"), Azerbaijan's ultimate demand for a new constitution for the Republic of Armenia. Not to forget "Western Azerbaijan" and Yerevan as an "Azerbaijani" city. It is to be feared that the Aliyev system will try to force concessions from Armenia for its continued existence with these and possibly other conflicts. Consequently, it seems unlikely that a peace treaty worthy of the name can be concluded in the foreseeable future.

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## Conflict of Interests

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

## Ethical Standards

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

## HETEROTOPIAS IN THE FOREST ON THE PERCEPTION OF MEMORIAL DAYS (USING THE EXAMPLE OF BUCHENWALD, BERLIN AND YEREVAN)

Jürgen Gispert\*  
*Leipzig/Yerevan*

### **Abstract**

2025 marked the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the Buchenwald concentration camp near Weimar/Germany and the victory of the Allies over Hitlerite fascism. The interference caused by the current war in Ukraine with regard to the evaluation of commemoration days for their implementation provided an opportunity to resume and expand on an essay published a few years ago comparing the memorials in Buchenwald and on Tsiternakabert in Yerevan. The results of wars not only have potential consequences for the further course of history, but also for the ideational content of monuments referring to them, which, if they are allowed to remain, can change the direction of their interpretative content. This is illustrated by the cursory history of the memorials near Weimar (Buchenwald) and Tsiternakabert and their use in comparison with the Soviet Memorial in Treptower Park/Berlin and Red Square in Moscow. The monuments under discussion and the events that revolve around them are placed in the three-way relationship between past and present (Benjamin) and the respective changes in perspective are observed, taking into account the relationship between the individual and the collective.

**Keywords** – Armenia, Artsakh, Diaspora, pan-Armenian conferences.

### **Intro: The 80th anniversary of the liberation of Buchenwald**

Days of remembrance are days on which groups, individuals, representatives of a state, etc. commemorate their dead or important events. In a publication, the renowned Federal Agency for Civic Education writes on the keyword “political memorial days”: “[They] are among the symbols through which a state presents

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\* Jürgen Gispert is Dr. and a German ethnographer, Armenologist and journalist. His research mainly concerns theory of memory culture, Armenian history, particularly the Armenian Genocide.



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Received 05.04.2025  
Revised 10.05.2025  
Accepted 25.05.2025

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itself to the public.”<sup>1</sup> Examples include June 17, which commemorates the workers’ uprising of 1953 in the GDR and was officially the national day of remembrance of the Federal Republic of Germany from 1954 to 1990 as the “Day of German Unity”. After 1990, October 3 became the all-German “Day of German Unity”.

One of the problems I see here is the distinction between a “normal” day of remembrance and a “political day of remembrance”. Funerals in mafia milieu are a very good example of this. Where does individual pain begin and where does politics end? This is intended to illustrate the simple fact that every day of remembrance has a political character. This non-trivial fact comes to the fore when we look at the most recent events in the state milieu of remembrance. April 11, 1945 is the day of the liberation of the Buchenwald concentration camp inmates, which is commemorated every year on the Sunday around April 11. This year, the commemoration was overshadowed by the war in Ukraine, which raised the question for political leaders as to whether Russian representatives should be excluded from the events. This year is also the 80th anniversary of the liberation from Hitler fascism, which brings the present and the past into conflict. Inevitably, the topic of Ukraine and its official assessment is incorporated into the commemoration of Buchenwald, other events commemorating liberations are NOT considered a memorable event in their own right.

This is what happened in Buchenwald in April. Official representatives of Russia and Belarus were unwelcome, according to the director of the Buchenwald Memorial.<sup>2</sup> The Foreign Office in Berlin issued a “warning” “against Russian representatives at war commemorations” (Auswärtiges Amt warnt, 2025)

In January, a handout to local authorities and memorials warned of potentially “massive propaganda, disinformation and historical revisionist falsification” on the part of Russia. Accordingly, the ministry recommends that no official representatives of Russia or Belarus should be invited - and, in case of doubt, that they should not be admitted. The large community of former concentration camp inmates is becoming smaller and smaller in numbers. But those who remain keep coming forward with descriptions of that time, trying in this way to authentically rescue the past for the present. In ethnological terms, this is seen as a form of oral tradition or literature.

This year, on the day of liberation and its commemoration, the death of a former concentration camp inmate was given a peculiar reinterpretation. The now dead former concentration camp inmate did not die in the usual way, but in a Russian bombing raid in the Ukraine. The two pieces of information, i.e. the news of the

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<sup>1</sup> Schiller, Dietmar. “Politische Gedenktage in Deutschland: Zum Verhältnis von öffentlicher Erinnerung und politischer Kultur.” Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte 25 (1993). <https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/archiv/536541/politische-gedenktage-in-deutschland-zum-verhaeltnis-von-oeffentlicher-erinnerung-und-politischer-kultur/APuZ 25/1993>.

<sup>2</sup> Auswärtiges Amt warnt. Auswärtiges Amt warnt. vor russischen Vertretern bei Kriegsgedenken. 2025, <https://www.rbb24.de/politik/beitrag/2025/04/kriegsgedenken-auswaertiges-amt-kritik-russland-vertreter-handreichung-landkreise-seelower-hoehen.html>

death of the 96-year-old Ukrainian Boris Romantschenko as a concentration camp inmate and the reason for his death, are packaged by the Foreign Office in Berlin, in which he is incorporated into the official political and current commemorative rhetoric. In this way, an individual tragedy is duplicated. The declaration of official representatives as undesirable persons on the grounds that, “against the backdrop of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, there is a warning against the possible appropriation of commemorative events marking the end of the Second World War by Russian or Belarusian representatives”<sup>3</sup> is, strictly speaking, the preventive declaration of a possibility as a fact, which is followed by a punishment in advance that should actually only be imposed afterwards.

The circumstances that led to the war in Ukraine - which can by no means be explained by the term “war of aggression” by Russia alone - are contrasted with those of Hitler's fascism and made to resemble it: Romchenko was first tortured by Nazi henchmen and after 80 years killed by an aerial bomb by Putin, suggesting a certain lack of gaps in the proceedings.

The handout from the Federal Foreign Office is non-binding, not obligatory, but definite. In fact, there were opposing reactions. For example, on the 80th anniversary of the Battle of the Seelow Heights on April 16 in Seelow (Märkisch-Oderland), the Russian ambassador Sergei Netschajew was present despite the Foreign Office's warning, as were representatives of state and local politics and other groups. The Deputy District Administrator welcomed them and together they paid tribute with wreaths and bouquets of flowers. The district administrator commented on the handout with: “That's absurd”. He thus argued in favor of the above-mentioned value of a commemorative event for itself, which includes what the district administrator critically argues against the Foreign Office's measure, “[e]veryone cannot exclude the highest representative of a country from a commemoration of their own countrymen.”<sup>4</sup>

At this point, we want to look at the description from two perspectives and take it further. On the one hand, against the background of the relationship between the individual and the collective, and then from the point of view of the relationships between the present and the past that are discussed here. According to the French memory theorist and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, every individual memory has an inherent group memory that is consciously and unconsciously reproduced. For our purposes, this has the consequence that the dead Ukrainian can be and is assigned to different “Ge-Schichten”<sup>5</sup> based on his origin and life experience. As a Ukrainian living under Selensky, he is also a survivor of Buchenwald and now,

<sup>3</sup> Auswärtiges Amt warnt. Auswärtiges Amt warnt.

<sup>4</sup> The battle on the Seelow Heights on April 16, 1945 is considered the battle with the heaviest losses on German soil (around one million soldiers of the 1st Belorussian Front and around 130,000 German defenders. Around 33,000 Soviet and 12,000 German soldiers were killed. (Auswärtiges Amt warnt, 2025)

<sup>5</sup> 80 Jahre Kriegsende: Landkreis und Stadt erinnern an Schlacht auf den Seelower Höhen. 2025 <https://www.rbb24.de/politik/beitrag/2025/04/80-jahre-kriegsende-gedenken-schlacht-seelower-hoehen.html>.

under wartime conditions, receives the posthumous favour of serving as an argument legitimizing the exclusion of Russian representatives on the basis of his fate. For our purposes, we can translate the German word “Ge-Schichte” into “history” (a term I borrow from the American cognitive anthropologist Stephen Tyler of Rice University in Texas) in order to express the close and manifold interlocking between the individual and the collective in a Halbwachsian sense. This interlocking also includes the construction of a political relationship between the present and the past shown here, which simultaneously extracts the individual relationship for itself and drowns it out collectively.

The events in Buchenwald and around the commemorative event there evoke a recourse to the methodology of the timeline, on which the important events relating to the day of remembrance are to be entered synchronously: April 11, 1945, the 60th anniversary in 2005 and the 80th anniversary in 2025. This year's commemoration undergoes an abrupt change in the content of the relationship between past and present. The Federal Foreign Office is aligning the events of 2025 with 1945 and linking the content of Buchenwald with those in Ukraine. In addition, as a constellation, it overshadows the entire relationship between the commemorative events on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the victory over Hitler-fascism and serves its potential to relativize history.

As a means of comparison - which is not exhaustive here - let us go backwards in time and look at how the construction of Buchenwald took place in 1945 and what happened in 2005. The genocide memorial in Yerevan will serve as an international point of comparison.

I have taken the description of Buchenwald, especially the one from the year 2005 and of Tstsernakabert, from an earlier article I wrote.<sup>6</sup>

### **First differentiations between Buchenwald and Tsitsernakabert**

In the Soviet era, the Armenian genocide was not officially mentioned as part of an independent Armenian history, while in the GDR the genocide of the Jews was emphasized less than the proletarian struggle against imperialism and its heroes. The underlying pattern found its analogy in Yerevan, where the myth of the Armenian rebirth under Soviet rule was propagated. The Buchenwald memorial is the place where a) the atrocities took place and b) a monument was erected to them by the descendants of the perpetrators. The genocide memorial in Yerevan was erected by the descendants of the victims. With regard to the memorial day in Buchenwald in 2005, we can conclude that the instrumentalization of the genocide by the GDR after 1990 in the name of a united Germany was replaced by a ritual and an empty historiography, whereas in Yerevan we cannot speak of a *lieux de mémoire* (place of remembrance), as the French historian Pierre Nora put it. What

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<sup>6</sup> Gispert, Jürgen. “Die Gedenkstätten Buchenwald und Tsitsernakaberd: Ein Vergleich.” Armenisch-Deutsche Korrespondenz 170 (2016/1); Gispert, Jürgen. “The Memorial Places of Buchenwald and Tsitsernakaberd: A Comparison.”

both places have in common is that their respective independent histories have been integrated into Soviet history.

### **April 10, 2005 in Buchenwald**

On April 10, 2005, I visited the Buchenwald concentration camp memorial. It was the 60th anniversary of self-liberation and a major commemoration ceremony. One of the highlights was the speech by the then Federal Chancellor Schröder (SPD) in the German National Theater in Weimar, before heading to the nearby Ettersberg, where the death camp was located. The Chancellor's program was called "State Protocol", a term used in diplomatic relations. It should be noted that former inmates of the concentration camp were part of the audience in the theater. They themselves were the main actors because they were the ones who had to assemble every day on the roll call square of the concentration camp during their imprisonment. I later overheard conversations with former inmates on the square and realized that the state protocol and the chancellor irritated them - his appearance was out of place for them.

One of the reasons is probably the nature of the state protocol, which is therefore also a diplomatic protocol. In terms of conceptual history, diplomacy points to conflict, which is to be resolved through it. It consists of a collection of various regulations "governing the conduct and presentation of state ceremonies" (Protokoll Inland der Bundesregierung)

It ensures that the event runs smoothly. In this way, it could have influenced the perception of the former concentration camp inmates with historical experience at the site itself.

One of the highlights of the smooth running of the event was Schröder's speech. In it, the Chancellor said: "But memory has a way of fading with time, of becoming powerless, of occasionally appearing distant from contemporary life. Because this is the case, places that are entirely dedicated to remembrance and convincingly bring the past into our present are so important. These places admonish us to resolutely resist the temptation to forget or repress."<sup>7</sup>

Schröder emphasizes the "uninhabited place of memory" (Jan and Aleida Assmann), only with regard to which one is able to remember what happened. On April 10, however, we enter a place with former inmates who are still alive. In the context of Schröder's explanation, this means that they are a deceased part of a museum and can only tell us something if we call them. But they can speak for themselves.

This takes us back to the beginnings of the Buchenwald concentration camp as a museum, the construction of which began just a few days after the liberation. The

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<sup>7</sup> Schröder, Gerhard. "Rede von Bundeskanzler Gerhard Schröder auf der Gedenkfeier zum 60. Jahrestag der Befreiung der nationalsozialistischen Lager am 10. April 2005." In Weimar: Bulletin 27-1, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/suche/rede-von-bundeskanzler-gerhard-schroeder-796008>.

term “self-liberation” is controversial. In the last days of its operation, the prisoners took control of the concentration camp. This was organized by the Communist Party, which had secretly stockpiled weapons but was too weak to fight the Nazis alone. However, the protagonists had radio contact with the approaching American troops and so they waited for the right moment to overpower the remaining SS men, most of whom had already fled. During the Cold War, self-liberation was overemphasized, while the role of the American army was swept under the carpet. After liberation, this was part of the myth of Buchenwald, and under communist rule it was part of a common Soviet policy of remembrance.

The Buchenwald concentration camp was operated between 1937 and 1945. A total of around 266,000 people from all European countries were imprisoned there during this period. The death toll is estimated at around 56,000, including 11,800 Jews. From 1945 to 1950, Buchenwald served as a prison camp for the Soviet army. After the liberation of the camp, the fate of the Jews was not acknowledged. The role of the extermination camps was generally underestimated. Buchenwald itself was not initially an extermination camp.

The aforementioned creation of the first museum in Buchenwald took place on April 19, 1945. Members of the Communist Party, who had held important positions in the concentration camp during their imprisonment, took on this task. The opening ceremony consisted of a military tribute to the dead, a ceremonial swearing-in, as was customary for soldiers, and a victory parade. Now something emerged that the French theorist Maurice Halbwachs, who himself died in Buchenwald, would call “material form”. A material form not only reflects the corresponding expectations of the individual, but also shapes them.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, as members of a group, individuals retain an awareness of the material form. The problem is that the group of prisoners was heterogeneous in itself and not all members were taken into account by the communists. The organizers of the ceremony erected a wooden obelisk to give the anonymous dead an identity - they had either been buried, or the wind had blown their ashes away. But the obelisk itself had the function of categorizing the dead, dividing them into nationalities. Thus, the Jews were once again excluded as a separate group. This was manifested by a carving on the back of the obelisk; someone had carved the word “Jews” there. In this way, the obelisk was not designated as the material form to which the Jews could refer as an affected group. By engraving “Jews” on the back of the obelisk, the protagonists not only equalize their exclusion, as they have symbolically regained their own space within the memory community of concentration camp inmates, but they also show the contrast: with the back of the obelisk, they also inhabit the underside, the hidden side of the GDR memory system.

Religiously and mythologically, the obelisk in ancient Egypt is associated with the sun god, it connects heaven and earth, is a symbol for the rays of the sun, stands

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<sup>8</sup> Gispert 2022, Ch. 3.1.5

for rebirth and the cycle of life, connects man with heaven, the gods and the sun - in short, it embodies power and dominion. The subject of the obelisk in memorial construction will still occupy us in connection with the Armenian genocide memorial.

### ***The victim identities of Ernst Thälmann***

An important point of the ceremony was the so-called Oath of Buchenwald, which emphasized the role of anti-fascism. It contained this sentence: “[...] the building of a new world of peace and freedom is our ideal”.<sup>9</sup> The survivors were now less a collective linked by fate, with individual experience and attitudes, but were subject to a political collective, a social program represented by the SED and its practice. The Jews were then subordinate victims. As Jews, they were not the fighters against fascism.

This is attached to the architectural process. Architecture is not created in a space. Architecture first creates the space. However, this does not mean that the space is built. Space is not separate from everything else, but exists alongside and within it. Architecture creates artifacts that also enable the creation of space.<sup>10</sup>

We must add that every being places itself in a space as part of it, positions itself and thereby relates to it. Architecture is a form of thinking: an initial model proposed by the Association of Persecutees of the Nazi Regime attempted to use the entire rest of the camp for a “Museum of Resistance”. It was rejected by the SED. Instead of using the barracks for various nationally-oriented exhibitions, the camp was to be reconstructed solely as a Thälmann memorial. Ernst Thälmann was the leader of the Communist Party who was murdered in the camp in 1944. Therefore, with the exception of the crematorium - in the immediate vicinity of which Thälmann was shot and subsequently burned to death according to one version of his death - the entrance building, the western and eastern towers, all the barracks were demolished. The locations of the latter were marked with stones. The interpretation: “The essence of the Buchenwald concentration camp is not embodied in the barracks or the massive blocks [...]. The essence was the deep comradeship, the mutual help, united [...] by the fight against fascist terror...”<sup>11</sup> The final form of the memorial was to represent the deliberate crushing of fascist cruelty by the leadership of Ernst Thälmann's followers, which included the demolition of the barracks. This is where the character of socialist realism comes into play.

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<sup>9</sup> Buchenwald Schwur. 2005. <https://www.buchenwald.de/geschichte/themen/dossiers/schwur-von-buchenwald>.

<sup>10</sup> Waldenfels, Bernhard. “Architecture Based on the Body.” In *Sensory Thresholds: Studies on the Phenomenology of the Unknown*, 200–215. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999, 202.

<sup>11</sup> Hoffmann, Detlef. *Das Gedächtnis der Dinge: KZ-Relikte und KZ-Denkmäler 1945–1995*. Wissenschaftliche Reihe des Fritz-Bauer-Instituts 4. Frankfurt am Main and New York: Campus, 1997, 119.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the GDR, a second attempt was made to commemorate Buchenwald. The history of the camp was extensively researched. Additional memorial sites were created that not only took into account the Jews, but also the Sinti and Roma and other groups. A striking example of the character of the new memorial site is the place where Thälmann was murdered: It is explicitly designated as the place that was assigned to him in the GDR. The memorial policy with its own ideology, which was practiced here after the unification of the former two German states, is comparable to that of the GDR representatives after the defeat. It acknowledges its character after taking over the memorial by describing the site of Thälmann's execution as having been assigned by the GDR's memorial ideology. In a way, this was a second museumization of Thälmann.<sup>12</sup>

Now we can go back to what the survivors said in 2005. They said that 60 years after the Buchenwald oath, fascists were marching against the protest of democratic demonstrators and being protected by the police. The German government supports the US war in Afghanistan, social and labour rights norms achieved through struggle against oppressive systems are being undermined, leading to desolidarization: "Against this backdrop, the Buchenwald Oath, with its legacy created by the political prisoners of Buchenwald, is as relevant as ever." (**Aus dem Aufruf der Lagergemeinschaft, 2005**) Here, the memory of Buchenwald is not understood as a remembered part IN the present, but as a part OF the present. The difference is that the former inmates do not remember the past, but the present. Chancellor Schröder, on the other hand, speaks of the survivors' obligation not to give injustice, violence, anti-Semitism, racism and xenophobia a chance in Germany. He sees this problem as part of the past, but not of the present: "In order to understand, we are dependent on the memories of the survivors. They are our link to this very past."<sup>13</sup>

On the stage of the theater, the Chancellor speaks of the past, while the survivors from the concentration camp's roll call area echo Schröder's sound in the present. The Chancellor refers to the survivors as people from the past, but they name concrete conditions that can also be found today.

## The Tsitsernakaberd memorial

Now we turn to the question of how the monument on Tsitsernakaberd came to be built.<sup>14</sup> What happened in 1915 was called genocide, but the Armenian nation and

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<sup>12</sup> This double museumization of Thälmann in his ideological value is accompanied by the economic value of the name "Thälmann" itself. If the name Thälmann in this sense stands for the museum value of the memorial, then the character of Armenia as a living museum may come to mind: Let us take into account the naming practice of the people to give their children of such dazzling figures names like just "Telman" in order to make the investment of the museum value of the name of an internationally recognized communist economically useful to their own family.

<sup>13</sup> Schröder, Gerhard. "Rede von Bundeskanzler Gerhard Schröder

<sup>14</sup> Gispert Jürgen, 2022, Ch. 4.

its people were hidden behind the struggle against the Western imperialist powers, just like the Holocaust. During Stalin's time, there was no official discourse on this chapter of Armenian history. This changed during Khrushchev's rule. In short, the decision to erect a memorial to commemorate 1915 had already been made before the events of the 50th anniversary in 1965. On the other hand, Levon Ter-Petrossyan, the first president of the independent Republic of Armenia, claimed that the memorial was the result of the demonstrations of April 24, 1965. In fact, however, the then First Secretary of the Communist Party of Armenia, Yakov (Hakob) Tsarobyan, convinced Moscow of the need for a memorial dedicated to the genocide. Tsarobyan's personal identity plays a role in this.

He was not only a party secretary, but also a descendant of genocide survivors. He was a member of a refugee family who had found their way to the Soviet Republic. As the bearer of a personal and national message, he was able to objectify this in the memorial. The problem was the official ideology that he had to take note of. As in the case of Buchenwald, the anti-fascist character of the memorial had to be emphasized. Now 300,000 Armenians died as soldiers in the Second World War, and quite a few Soviet Armenians held the rank of general. It is not possible to find out here whether they fought and died as anti-fascists or for Stalin's sake. However, one factor should be emphasized: It is often pointed out that before the decisive battle of Stalingrad, Turkish troops stood on the border with neighboring Soviet Armenia and waited to see what would happen. If Stalingrad had been lost, it would have been a sign for Turkey to complete 1915 and 1920.

At least (and probably not only) in the case of the Armenians, it was not just about whether they were anti-fascists or not. In this respect, the intentions in favor of the memorial must be seen not as a struggle of a supposedly peripheral Soviet Armenia against the headquarters in Moscow, but as a relationship between medium and message. We can identify the origin of this in the geopolitical dilemma in which Armenian history plays out again and again. Whether it was Byzantium and the Sassanids, the Ottoman Empire and Persia, later Russia or most recently Turkey and the Soviet Union: the Armenians developed their own culture under the influence of these other forces. This "inter esse" creates a culturally conditioned interest that runs like a paradigm through Armenian history. The resulting relationships are expressed through artifacts. In short, Armenia is not in a position to decide strictly between East and West. We have to take this into account when dealing with the monument, which by definition is the crystallization point of events and informs us about how culture deals with the past. What did this look like in practice?

### ***Dimensions of the inversion***

Once it had been agreed that this monument should depict the genocide, there was both an official and a secret competition. The latter took place with the participation of architects Arthur Tarkhanyan and Sashur Kalashyan. The exciting

thing about it was that it entered the competition with Moscow's specifications. The interplay between medium and message is particularly evident in the way in which Moscow was convinced of the need for a genocide memorial. They used the famous quote from Adolf Hitler, who had said a few days before the invasion of Poland: "Who is still talking about the extermination of the Armenians today?" The reference to Hitler's statement in the context of pushing through the construction of the memorial did not only result in Moscow's approval. It should be noted that the statement was later followed by the murder of six million Jews. The effect is that in Soviet ideological terms, the Holocaust disappears behind the anti-imperialist struggle of the Soviet Union, but for the Armenian side it represents the medium through which it transports its own message, the Armenian genocide, and in this way adheres to the memorial, but in turn indirectly superimposes the Holocaust, if not even leaves it behind. Ironically, this can be seen as a response to the ignorance of the Armenian genocide in connection with the adoption of the UN Convention in 1948.

We can support this view by examining the first model for the Tsitsernakabert Memorial, which consisted of three main elements. Initially, the architects planned a cross that would be buried nine meters deep in the ground. Cross stones would form the side walls. Behind it, a bell tower would be built, and in front of it, an equestrian statue of Vardan Mamikonyan would stand. By entering the cross, which was buried deep in the ground, people were to unite themselves spiritually with the murdered and the dead. The monument to Vardan Mamikonyan was rejected on the grounds that it would capture the nation's imagination. As is well known, Vardan Mamikonyan is a historical and mythological figure in Armenian history. He died in 451 at the Battle of Avarayr against the Sassanids. The often-quoted phrase "Unconscious death is death, conscious death is immortality" ("Unconscious death is death, conscious death is immortality") originates from this struggle. The figure of Vardan is an allegory of the Armenian hero and martyr. When we see or think about Vardan, we are also confronted with the relationship between border space and sphere of influence. This makes it clear why this figure was rejected: the role of the centralized Soviet Union was diametrically opposed to Vardan's visual symbolic power. Vardan would not be a good figurehead for Soviet anti-fascism, but rather for the Armenian cosmos. The architects had to comply with the authorities' orders but also wanted to implement their own ideas. So, they transferred them into another medium. The monument today consists of the symbolic tomb or mausoleum, the obelisk, and the large wall next to it and the Genocide Museum Institute, which was opened in 1995. There are also a lot of trees having been planted by prominent visitors.

Vardan's mythological significance is fully compensated or translated: In 1995, at the 80th anniversary, I saw a detachment of soldiers enter the symbolic tomb, spread out around the Eternal Flame, and shout "Glory and Honor!" This represented the idea of a symbolic yet conscious death, thus completing the circle of Vardan's figure and monument. This phenomenon is represented in the initial

design of the memorial by the cross in the ground and the cross-stones on its walls. The planned ritual was intended to visualize the meeting of the dead with the living. This, in turn, is expressed in practice through the existing ritual every April 24th. The ensemble of the memorial, inaugurated in 1967, did not include any cross-stones, but the mausoleum is built like the opening to a tomb, where people gather and meet the dead – added to this is the sun, which provides light and life from above. This creates an ideal connection to the museum opened after independence in 1995. There, in the large exhibition space, on the exterior wall, one could see so-called light crosses, crosses through which light falls into the museum's exhibition hall, thus again expressing the meeting between the dead and the living, as developed in the original model. This symbolism has been removed for the new exhibition.

The place of ritual, especially the mausoleum, creates, in Foucault's words, "contra-placement or counterforts, utopias made reality, where the real places within the culture are simultaneously represented, disputed, and repelled, to an extent places beyond place, although they can actually be reached."<sup>15</sup> It represents a heterotopia; it is another space. Moreover, it is a hybrid of utopias and heterotopias, something excluded from the cultural paradigm, yet actually present. The architecture of the memorial area is thus inherent in the space. The mausoleum part of the monument bears the symbol of "rebirth"; furthermore, the 12 basalt stones symbolize the opening of the grave, the resurrection of the dead. Those who have been murdered are honored with flowers. This process also corresponds to a spiritual union with them. The Armenian term for this is "woki arnel" ("receiving the spirit") or "wokekotshum" ("calling the spirit"). This can be demonstrated by ritual practice. The architectural arrangement of the monument causes people to literally leave the obelisk on the right; instead, they enter the tomb. Inside, we have the aforementioned rebirth, which in this respect counters the rebirth officially symbolized by the obelisk. Armenians prefer to unite with their dead, but it does not mean they live in the past. In this way, through the choreography of the entrance to the Tomb of Eternal Flame, we simultaneously witness a performance about the Soviet ideological politics of memory and its Armenian dissolution.

We have another possibility to compare Buchenwald and Tsitsernakaberd. In the case of Buchenwald, the original monument is followed by a counter-monument. In the Armenian case, the counter-character of the memorial is embedded in the official one. Tsitsernakabert is a people's monument, Buchenwald is not. If we look at the Genocide Memorial, there are gravestones to the left of the entrance to the symbolic grave. People who fell in the battle for Nagorno-Karabakh are buried there. These, as well as the cross-stones in front of the platform, are significant signs of the *milieu de mémoire* character of the memorial; it would be less appropriate to call it *lieux de mémoire*. The latter is preferred by Pierre Nora

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<sup>15</sup> Foucault, Michel. "Other Spaces." In *Aisthesis: Perception Today or Perspectives of Another Aesthetic*, edited by Karlheinz Barck et al., Leipzig, 1992, 38.

and Jan Assmann, his German colleague, while the former is chosen by Maurice Halbwachs to describe the relationships of the individual bearer of a collective memory.

At the state protocol celebrated by Chancellor Schröder on April 10 in Buchenwald in front of the survivors on the roll call square, they are transformed into the living dead, while in the Armenian case the real dead under the gravestones and the crossstones representing the dead and murdered of Sumgait in 1988, Baku in 1990 and the Karabakh War can be described in their entirety as “dead living”. During the state protocol celebrated by Chancellor Schröder on April 10 in Buchenwald before the survivors on the roll call square, the survivors were transformed into the living dead. In the Armenian case, the actual dead beneath the gravestones and the crossstones representing the dead and murdered of Sumgait in 1988, Baku in 1990, and the Karabakh War can collectively be described as “dead living.” In the Armenian case, this is due to their inherent connection to the original memorial. The laying of gravestones and cross-stones was not officially realized but rather carried out in the early years of the Karabakh conflict through spontaneous actions by people from the city who buried the first dead person on the memorial site or brought the first cross-stone.

## Conclusion: On the Musealization of History

### *Time-Spatial Dimensions*

The triply coded relationship between past and present, exemplified above using two separate scenes related to invitations from official Russian representatives, can be summarized in a single event: On May 8th, a commemoration traditionally takes place at the Soviet Memorial in Berlin-Treptow (former GDR East Berlin). Following a lawsuit against this, the Berlin Administrative Court “confirmed the ban on USSR flags at the Soviet Memorial in Treptow Park on May 8th and 9th.”<sup>16</sup> With this confirmation, the interpretation of how the Soviet flags should be classified this year was provided: “In view of the ongoing Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, Soviet flags could, for example, convey a willingness to use violence and be interpreted as an expression of sympathy for the Russian war effort. The resulting impression would impair the dignity of the victims and endanger public peace.”<sup>17</sup>

The past (Pa) is overshadowed and determined by the events of the present (Pr) (1) Pr>Pa), but in turn occupies the interpretive content of the actions in Treptower Park (2) Pa>Pr): From the relationship between 1) and 2) follows the inevitable tendency to identify a threatening, repeating Soviet victory, but now with that of the Russians themselves - and in the middle of Berlin in the here and now!

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<sup>16</sup> Gericht: Keine Sowjet-Flaggen zum 8. Mai. 2025. <https://www.evangelisch.de/inhalte/243047/07-05-2025/gericht-keine-sowjet-flaggen-zum-8-mai>.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

This is a simulacrum (Baudrillard): like is conceived as dislike, sign as countersign, similar as dissimilar. A fictitious future is conceived as an “imagined” past in a present. And a real measure is intended to prevent this: the flag ban on May 8 and 9, a historic date: On May 8, the Germans in West Berlin signed the capitulation document. One day later, on May 9, Stalin had the ceremony repeated in the Soviet area of East Berlin. Polemically, the ban was intended to provide posthumous clarification – “no Russians here!”, which, it must be emphasized again, is factually incorrect, but thereby allows for statements about the current official perception of history. This is relevant because the Soviet soldier, by his very nature, cannot be reduced to Russia. – However, a blanket identity is postulated and sanctioned accordingly. Currently, we can draw a comparison with the events in Armenia on May 9, 2024, when Prime Minister Pashinyan emphasized the Soviet-Armenian contribution to the Red Army and appeared to be balancing it. Here, however, a distinction was still made; in Berlin, however, only Russians are recognized, symbolically represented by the Soviet flag and condemned by it. Of particular importance is that the justification for the ban seems more than questionable: The flag is intended to prevent the remembrance of the dead from being compromised, which suggests a separation between the flag and the fate of the soldier.

The above quote speaks of the “dignity of the victims,” which remains relatively vague. Who is the victim here? Soviet soldiers then, Ukrainian victims today? It's unknown. Time and content blur. However, this has the tendency to decouple World War II, or rather the memorial as its artifact, from its historical basis and reverse it: The meaning of the day of remembrance is projected onto present-day activities and revalued. What's remarkable about the Soviet Memorial in Treptower Park is that it's both a memorial and a military cemetery, yet without actual graves. Completed in May 1949, it honors the 7,000 Soviet soldiers who fell in the Battle of Berlin and are buried here. The dead soldiers lie anonymously beneath a mound – a grassy area that people also cross. On May 8, it was also forbidden to fly Soviet flags here.<sup>18</sup>

By treating Treptow Park as a cemetery, we can draw a connection to Tsitsernakabert in Yerevan, as well as look ahead to May 9th this year in Moscow. A long time ago, the proposal to build a chapel on Tsitsernakabert was discussed, but this was ultimately abandoned. One counterargument was that this would turn the site into a cemetery and dilute the political nature of the commemoration ceremonies there. However, the Karabakh fighters buried there are individuals who symbolically unite family and nation. After the First Karabakh War and the creation of the graves in the memorial area, it became customary for the relatives of the dead to stand at the graves. The crowd flocking to the symbolic grave connects the individual deaths of the Karabakh fighters with the collective fate of

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<sup>18</sup> Tagesschau. 2025. [www.tagesschau.de/inland/regional/berlin/rbb-80-kriegsende-1-900-polizisten-bei-gedenkveranstaltung-in-berlin-im-einsatz-100.html](http://www.tagesschau.de/inland/regional/berlin/rbb-80-kriegsende-1-900-polizisten-bei-gedenkveranstaltung-in-berlin-im-einsatz-100.html).

the Armenian nation. At the Red Square celebrations on May 9 this year, or rather, the dress rehearsal for the parade, one spectator said: “You may know the line from the song: ‘There is no family in Russia that does not remember its heroes.’ And that is exactly the case; in every family there is a relative who is affected.”<sup>19</sup>

This is precisely what applies to the participants in the commemoration on April 24 in Armenia. The value of commemoration is not celebrated here as a formality of protocol. The actors are part of the backdrop, and they also admit themselves into the space, along with their respective positions. This also includes the viewer’s assessment that for “many young people” “Victory Day is just another holiday.” (Aischmann Frank, 2025) Putin declared his solidarity with the units of soldiers from countries friendly to Russia, such as Vietnam, Egypt, and China, on Liberation Day. This may be seen as an imitation of Soviet customs, where the unity of the socialist brother nations was presented in this way. However, today it cannot be reduced to then in order to be measured against it.

Putin declared his solidarity with the Soviet soldiers of World War II – and claimed their legacy for Russia: “Representatives of various nationalities who destroyed National Socialism will forever remain Russian soldiers in history.”<sup>20</sup>

**(Parade Moskau, 2025)** An informant told me, that he was right, considering the proportion of soldiers and Russian losses. Putin’s statement, however, also includes the assertion of a continuity between today’s fascism in Ukraine and the Soviet Union’s fight against it back then. Not an equation, but a continuation. Consequently, Putin expresses solidarity with the Russian troops fighting there. (Parade Moskau, 2025) Thus, the circle closes on the Russian side, while, as we have seen, the German side accuses the Russian side of doing what it fought against 80 years ago. A peculiar convergence of German and Russian interpretations emerges here.

### *The Milieu of the Mémoire*

The fact that the oath taken by the survivors of the Buchenwald concentration camp after its liberation was ideologically “straightened out” shortly thereafter to suit the needs of the new power that took over—the official change in the oath from “ideal” to “goal”—clarifies the importance of the institution for the milieu created by its influence in general, and here of language in particular. Analytically, an institution cannot be separated from the milieu in which it appears, as Marcel Mauss and Paul Fauconnet worked out.<sup>21</sup> The survivors were now less a collective bound by fate with individual experiences and attitudes, but rather they were subject to a collectivization of their ideals into a political goal with conditional

<sup>19</sup> Aischmann, Frank. “Kriegsgedenken und Kriegspropaganda.” Tagesschau, 2025, <https://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/europa/feier-sieg-zweiter-weltkrieg-russland-100.html>

<sup>20</sup> Eydlin, Alexander. “Parade Moskau: Putin beansprucht Sowjetsieg im Zweiten Weltkrieg für Russland.” Die Zeit, May 9, 2025, <https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2025-05/parade-moskau-tag-des-sieges-wladimir-putin>.

<sup>21</sup> Stadler, Manuel. “Soziologie als kollektive Psychologie.”

participation. In terms of memory, the Jews were subordinate victims. As Jews, they were not the fighters against fascism. In the means-end schema, a goal prescribed to a whole is not only contrasted with the ideal, but also replaces it: An ideal can not only encompass a goal, but also exceed it, which potentially poses a danger to the institution and the milieu. The local milieu in which commemoration crystallizes into practice determines the staging by the actors and their respective sphere of action. The substitution of “ideal” for “goal” seems to mark a fundamental change in the process of commemoration and its content, but only reveals what has always been inherent in official commemoration policy.

The survivors were now less a collective bound by fate with individual experiences and attitudes; instead, they were subject to a collectivization of their ideals into a political goal with conditional participation. In terms of memory practice, the Jews were subordinate victims. As Jews, they were not the fighters against fascism. In the means-end schema, a goal prescribed to a collective is not only contrasted with the ideal, but also replaces it: An ideal can not only encompass a goal, but also transcend it, which potentially poses danger to the institution and the milieu.

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The local milieu, in which commemoration solidifies into practice determines the staging by the actors and their respective sphere of action. The substitution of “ideal” with “goal” appears to mark a fundamental change in the process of commemoration and its content, but only makes obvious what has always been inherent in official commemoration policy. Between “Oath 1,” sworn in 1945, and “Oath 2” in 2005, lies a cultural and political development that solidifies Oath 2 into an amplifier and echo of the first oath—the oath becomes a call (from) history. With this second oath, the former inmates also catch up with the events in the GDR in 1945 (Obelisk) and 1958 (Substitution), taking them with them as an implicit commentary on what was happening.

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change in the process of commemoration and its content, but only makes obvious what has always been inherent in official commemoration policy. Between “Oath 1,” made in 1945, and “Oath 2” in 2005, there lies a cultural and political development that solidifies Oath 2 into an amplifier and echo of the first oath—the oath becomes a call (from) history. With this second oath, the former inmates also catch up with the events in the GDR in 1945 (Obelisk) and 1958 (Substitution) and incorporate them as an implicit commentary on what was happening. If we look at the two memorial sites described near Weimar and in Yerevan, the centralized nature of Buchenwald and the decentralized nature of Yerevan are striking, which is symbolically evident in the different positioning of the obelisks. The symbolism of the obelisk in Buchenwald can be narrowed down to the person of Thälmann and the victory of communism. We find an equivalent in Yerevan, the obelisk erected there as a symbol of the rebirth of the Armenians as part of the socialist community of nations. However, this image, with its basic centralist pattern, is reinterpreted in a decentralized way, as can be seen in the development of the building and the staging on the day of remembrance itself: The people leave the obelisk to the right and go down the stairs to their ancestors. We saw the same reinterpretation in Buchenwald, when “Jews” was carved into the back of the obelisk.

This brings us to the relationship between lieux de mémoire and milieu de mémoire. According to Nora, lieux de mémoire is to be understood as a causal consequence of the assumed loss of milieu de mémoire.<sup>22</sup> Collective memory clings to monuments as places of remembrance; one speaks of memory because it no longer exists. This pattern of thought follows an evolutionary approach, in which modernity creates said lieux in order to provide orientation for memory through the resulting places of remembrance. The case of Armenia, however, shows that lieux de mémoire cannot emerge without the milieu that selects it as such: we have lieux de mémoire because the milieu exists for them. The important difference is: in Nora’s concept of lieux de mémoire, milieu de mémoire seems to dissolve. In a figurative sense: the individual memory has been left at the cloakroom of the hall with cross stones because it is (forcibly) collectivized and archived in the form of cross stones.

Milieu de memoire is not opposed to lieux de memoire, but the principle of lieux becomes part of one’s own milieu and is always transformable. When we speak of milieu, we encounter the connection to the institution, which, through its materialization, helps determine the milieu and thus also the conditions under which the actors find themselves in this milieu, how they relate to it, and thereby reproduce the conditions. What are the conditions of the Jews and other inmates in Buchenwald and the later commemoration days, and what of the Armenians in 1965 and later? This could be shown using the instrumentalization of the obelisk in Weimar and Yerevan. Engraving serves here as a method to create counter-history.

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<sup>22</sup> Nora, Pierre. Zwischen Geschichte und Gedächtnis. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2001.

Symbolically, space for interpretation is reclaimed here: the obelisk functions as a message transmitter, just like a cross stone in Armenia, which tells us about its origin and the meaning of its appearance through notches. Likewise, the genesis and impact of the obelisks in Buchenwald and Tsiternakaberd are signs of the existence of other spaces, as demonstrated by Foucault above. In short, the ritual at the Eternal Fire, along with the architecture of the area, contains a hybrid of utopia and heterotopia. In the cultural order, it is actually something excluded, yet nevertheless present.

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### **Conflict of Interests**

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

### **Ethical Standards**

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

## THE DYNAMICS OF FRANCE - TURKEY RELATIONS FROM 1995 TO 2007

Mariam Topakyan\*  
*Yerevan State University*

### Abstract

This paper offers a comprehensive examination of France-Turkey relations during the 1990s, with a particular focus on the critical period from 1995 to 2007. The study identifies this era as a phase of continuous and stable development, which both consolidated the achievements of prior historical phases and laid a solid foundation for subsequent dynamic interactions. The analysis situates bilateral relations within the broader context of Turkey's evolving political and economic relationship with the European Union, emphasizing the significant and influential role played by France. The paper highlights how France acted as a key interlocutor and strategic partner, fostering political dialogue and reinforcing a complex web of legal and institutional frameworks governing mutual obligations and responsibilities. Although the relationship faced notable obstacles and challenges, it demonstrated resilience and a shared commitment to advancing common interests and strategic goals, reflecting an increasing degree of interdependence between the two countries.

To explore these dynamics, the study employs a multidisciplinary methodological framework centered on strategic analysis. This approach is supported by event analysis, which enables the identification and examination of key turning points and critical developments influencing bilateral relations. Additionally, content analysis is utilized to systematically evaluate diplomatic communications, policy documents, official statements, and media coverage, providing insight into the narratives and discourses shaping Franco-Turkish interactions. This combined methodological approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the political, diplomatic, and legal factors that drove the evolution of relations between France and Turkey over the examined period.

**Keywords:** France-Turkey Relations, foreign policy, European Union, security system, perceptions, economic cooperation, cultural and political identity, bilateral strategic dialogue, turkish secularism, European foreign policy.

\* Mariam Topakyan, researcher at the Institute for Armenian Studies, YSU, e-mail: [mariam.topakyan@ysu.am](mailto:mariam.topakyan@ysu.am).



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Received 25.05.2025  
Revised 18.06.2025  
Accepted 22.06.2025

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## Introduction

A new phase in France–Turkey relations began in the second half of the 1990s, prompted by the imperatives of the time and historical necessity. During this period, the two countries engaged in increasingly frequent interactions, primarily as a result of evolving mutual perceptions and their subsequent reinterpretation and redefinition. This process, in turn, led—over time—to a period of dynamic and active cooperation. Although these relations have been continually shaped and modified by both internal and external influences since their inception, they have nonetheless retained their core elements and distinctive characteristics. These enduring features have served as key guarantors of the continuity of bilateral ties and as driving forces behind the further strengthening of the relations.

### **Jacques Chirac's Presidency and the Foundation of France's Foreign Policy**

On May 17, 1995, former Prime Minister Jacques Chirac<sup>1</sup> won the presidential elections in the French Republic, succeeding former President François Mitterrand<sup>2</sup>. His twelve-year presidency laid a solid foundation - through its tangible achievements - for the subsequent successful and effective implementation of both domestic and foreign policy by the French government.

It is important to note that, toward the end of the 20th century, one of the central priorities of France's foreign policy - among other pressing issues - was European integration<sup>3</sup>. France viewed the solution to these challenges in the establishment and deepening of multilateral cooperation among European states. Accordingly, it initiated scientific and technological collaboration with West Germany and supported Spain and Portugal in their accession to the European Union<sup>4</sup>. Within the framework of cooperation with West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl<sup>5</sup>, the French government succeeded in steering the European Union toward the final stage of conceptual preparation and institutional consolidation. This effort laid a stable foundation for the organization's future active operations—an agenda to which France remains firmly committed today.

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<sup>1</sup> Les mandats de Jacques Chirac, <https://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/jacques-chirac/3-les-mandats-de-jacques-chirac/>.

<sup>2</sup> François Mitterrand, <https://www.elysee.fr/en/francois-mitterrand>.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Chirac, une carrière politique exceptionnelle. *Le Monde*, September 26, 2019.

[https://www.lemonde.fr/disparitions/article/2019/09/26/jacques-chirac-est-mort\\_6013138\\_3382.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/disparitions/article/2019/09/26/jacques-chirac-est-mort_6013138_3382.html) (accessed January 16, 2025).

<sup>4</sup> The accession of Portugal and Spain to the European Union. *European Council, Council of the European Union*, December 23, 2015.

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/documents-publications/library-library-blog/posts/the-accession-of-portugal-and-spain-to-the-european-union/>.

<sup>5</sup> The unbreakable link between France and Germany. *Financial Times*, December 17, 2008.  
<https://www.ft.com/content/69327bc4-cbab-11dd-ba02-000077b07658>.

In line with the provisions and principles of the Maastricht Treaty signed by his predecessors<sup>6</sup>, President Jacques Chirac continued to support the establishment of stable security systems in Europe and the expansion of the European Community. In doing so, he contributed to the consolidation and maintenance of European security, especially in light of the growing internal and external threats and challenges it faced daily. Accordingly, appropriate measures had to be taken to effectively counter these risks. (It is worth noting that during Chirac's presidency, France transitioned to a new currency, the euro, which replaced the franc in 1999)<sup>7</sup>.

As a result of Chirac's policies, France succeeded in improving its relations with several countries - including the United Kingdom<sup>8</sup> (although tensions resurfaced following the joint Franco-British-American military operation "Desert Fox"<sup>9</sup>), the People's Republic of China<sup>10</sup>, Japan<sup>11</sup>, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia<sup>12</sup>, the Syrian Arab Republic<sup>13</sup>, the United Arab Emirates<sup>14</sup>, among others - thereby placing its foreign policy on a stable, multi-layered, and comprehensive trajectory extending from Europe to the Middle and Far East.

### **France-Turkey Relations under Presidents Demirel and Özal: Turkey's Strategic Priority: European Integration**

As in the past, the French Republic continued to regard the Republic of Turkey with significant interest. At the time, Turkey was led by President Süleyman Demirel<sup>15</sup>, who had served as Prime Minister on seven occasions from 1965 to 1993 and as President from 1993 to 2000, succeeding former President Turgut Özal.<sup>16</sup> During Özal's presidency, France-Turkey relations had already begun to

<sup>6</sup> Moltke, Konrad. The Maastricht Treaty and the Winnipeg Principles on Trade and Sustainable Development, Manitoba, 1995, p. 18,

<https://www.iisd.org/system/files/publications/maastricht.pdf?q=sites/default/files/publications/maastricht.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> French Franc,

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/in\\_depth/business/2001/euro\\_cash/spent\\_currencies/f\\_franc.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/in_depth/business/2001/euro_cash/spent_currencies/f_franc.stm).

<sup>8</sup> France and Britain: Neighbours, Friends, Allies. *Rusi*, July 14, 2020.

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<sup>9</sup> Operation Desert Fox, [https://archive.defense.gov/specials/desert\\_fox/](https://archive.defense.gov/specials/desert_fox/).

<sup>10</sup> Establishment of Sino-French Diplomatic Relations,

[https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/ziliao\\_665539/3602\\_665543/3604\\_665547/t18003.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/ziliao_665539/3602_665543/3604_665547/t18003.shtml).

<sup>11</sup> France-Japan relations, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/tag/france-japan-relations/> (accessed January 20, 2025).

<sup>12</sup> A history of Saudi-French relations. *Arab News*, July 13, 2020.

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<sup>13</sup> The saga of France and Syria relations. *Gulf News*, May 26, 2006. <https://gulfnews.com/opinion/opeds/the-saga-of-france-and-syria-relations-1.238423>.

<sup>14</sup> Bilateral relations between France and the UAE, <https://ae.ambafrance.org/Bilateral-relations-between-France-and-the-UAE>.

<sup>15</sup> Sari, Eren. Çoban Süli, Istanbul, 2015, p. 8.,

[https://books.google.am/books?id=FN3JDQAAQBAJ&pg=PA8&redir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.am/books?id=FN3JDQAAQBAJ&pg=PA8&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false).

<sup>16</sup> Özal Kurt'üm diyemedi. *Hurriyet*, April 20, 2013. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/ozal-kurtum-diyemedi-23081075>.

intensify. Bilateral official visits resulted in the signing of educational and cultural agreements - complementing the existing legal framework<sup>17</sup> - which were further developed throughout Demirel's term in office. These efforts culminated in the signing of several major bilateral accords, including the Maritime Cooperation Agreement signed in September 1996<sup>18</sup>, which set the groundwork for expanding relations and fostering collaboration in the maritime sector with a view to sustained cooperation and the strengthening of bilateral trade and economic ties, the Environmental Protection Cooperation Agreement, signed in March 1997 and entering into force in September of the same year<sup>19</sup>, and the Agreement on the Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy, concluded in 1999<sup>20</sup>. These agreements laid the foundation for a broad-based partnership and demonstrated both countries' commitment to further enhancing and enriching their multifaceted cooperation—especially in recognition of the mutual benefits involved.

Within the context of Turkish foreign policy, since the early 1980s, integration into various European institutions and organizations had become a key strategic priority, among other national imperatives<sup>21</sup>. At that time, Turkey's potential accession to the European Union had evolved into a critical socio-political, economic, and even existential and ideological issue<sup>22</sup>. However, as will become evident through the factual analysis of this topic, the urgency and intensity of this issue gradually diminished in the ensuing years.

It is no coincidence, therefore, that from the second half of the 1990s onward, the evolution and dynamics of France-Turkey relations were increasingly framed within the broader context of Turkey-EU relations. France's policy stance and political positioning were of paramount importance in this regard. After all, this issue emerged as one of post-Cold War Europe's most contentious questions, directly linked to the security and stability of the European system. In this light, France has consistently held a vital and enduring role as a key regional actor.

During this period, official France-Turkey diplomatic exchanges also intensified. Numerous high-level visits took place between representatives of both

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<sup>17</sup> Traités et accords de la France, <https://basedoc.diplomatie.gouv.fr/exl-php/cadcg.php?>

<sup>18</sup> Accord maritime entre le gouvernement de la République française et le gouvernement de la république de Turquie,

[https://basedoc.diplomatie.gouv.fr/exl-php/util/documents/accede\\_document.php?1616593086576](https://basedoc.diplomatie.gouv.fr/exl-php/util/documents/accede_document.php?1616593086576).

<sup>19</sup> Accord de coopération entre le gouvernement de la République française et le gouvernement de la république de Turquie dans le domaine de l'environnement, [https://basedoc.diplomatie.gouv.fr/exl-php/cadcg.php?](https://basedoc.diplomatie.gouv.fr/exl-php/cadcg.php)

<sup>20</sup> Accord de coopération entre le gouvernement de la République française et le gouvernement de la République turque pour le développement des utilisations pacifiques de l'énergie nucléaire, [https://basedoc.diplomatie.gouv.fr/exl-php/cadcg.php?](https://basedoc.diplomatie.gouv.fr/exl-php/cadcg.php)

<sup>21</sup> Özlem, Terzi. Europeanisation of foreign policy and candidate countries: a comparative study of greek and turkish cases, Politique européenne, 2005 (3), N°17, p. 115, <https://www.cairn.info/journal-politique-europeenne-2005-3-page-113.htm>.

<sup>22</sup> Рустэмовна, Алсу. Внутриполитическая борьба в Турции по вопросу о вступлении страны в ЕС (80-е гг. XX - начало XXI вв.), Казань, 2005, с. 26, <http://www.lib.ua-ru.net/diss/cont/196638.html>.

states. Particularly noteworthy were the visit of French politician and prominent diplomat François Dopffer<sup>23</sup> to Turkey in 1995; the visits to France by Turkish State Ministers Gürcan Dağdaş<sup>24</sup> (1996) and Edip Safder Gaydali<sup>25</sup> (1999); and the official visit in 2000 by General Hüseyin Kırıkoğlu, Commander of the Turkish Armed Forces. These visits coincided with the signing of the aforementioned bilateral agreements, through which Franco-Turkish cooperation evolved into an increasingly multifaceted and institutionalized partnership that deepened with each passing year.

### France-Turkey Relations within the Turkey-EU Context

In 2000, President Süleyman Demirel was succeeded by Ahmet Necdet Sezer<sup>26</sup>, who had previously served as President of Turkey's Constitutional Court. Sezer was a staunch advocate of secularism<sup>27</sup> and strongly supported the consolidation of Turkey's secular regime.<sup>28</sup> This position often placed him at odds with the Justice and Development Party (AKP)<sup>29</sup>, which was founded in 2001 and declared itself a center-right conservative party, going on to win the parliamentary elections in 2002.<sup>30</sup> On numerous occasions, Sezer openly stated that secularism in Turkey was under threat and that it was imperative to take all necessary measures to protect it, thereby ensuring the country's development proceeded along a stable trajectory and safeguarding the unimpeded and secure future of its citizens.<sup>31</sup>

During President Sezer's tenure, Turkey's domestic political life was marked by persistent tension. A notable episode was the dispute that erupted between President Sezer and Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit<sup>32</sup> during the National Security

<sup>23</sup> François Dopffer, <https://www.ofpra.gouv.fr/fr/histoire-archives/galeries-d-images/les-directeurs-de-l-ofpra/francois-dopffer>.

<sup>24</sup> Gürcan Dağdaş,

[https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/milletvekillerimiz\\_sd.bilgi?p\\_donem=23&p\\_sicil=5469](https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/milletvekillerimiz_sd.bilgi?p_donem=23&p_sicil=5469).

<sup>25</sup> Edip Safder Gaydali,

[https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/milletvekillerimiz\\_sd.bilgi?p\\_donem=22&p\\_sicil=4509](https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/milletvekillerimiz_sd.bilgi?p_donem=22&p_sicil=4509).

<sup>26</sup> Ahmet Necdet Sezer, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/ahmet-necdet-sezer>.

<sup>27</sup> Turkey's turmoil. *The Economist*, May 01, 2007.

<https://www.economist.com/europe/2007/05/01/turkeys-turmoil>.

<sup>28</sup> Cornell, Svante. The Rise of Diyanet: the Politicization of Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs. *The Turkey ANALYST*, October 09, 2015.

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<sup>29</sup> 'Hangisi doğru., AK Parti mi, AKP mi?'. *Hurriyet*, February 08, 2008.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160611104010/http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/hangisi-dogru-ak-parti-mi-akp-mi-8186392>.

<sup>30</sup> Cagaptay, Soner. The November 2002 Elections and Turkey's New Political Era. *The Washington Institute*, December 01, 2002, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/november-2002-elections-and-turkeys-new-political-era>.

<sup>31</sup> Sezer'den çok karar! Oy vermedi!. *Haber 7*, August 10, 2014. <https://www.haber7.com/ic-politika/haber/1189530-sezerden-sok-karar-oy-vermedi>.

<sup>32</sup> Turkey suffers as leaders fight on. *The Guardian*, February 21, 2001.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/feb/21/3>.

Council meeting on February 21, 2001. The clash was immediately followed by a severe economic crisis, later dubbed “Black Wednesday”.<sup>33</sup> Among the contributing factors to this crisis were the fast-paced and wide-ranging reforms undertaken in the context of EU accession negotiations<sup>34</sup>, as well as complications surrounding Turkey’s dealings with the International Monetary Fund.<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, during this period, Turkey’s integration into and accession to European institutions and organizations remained a top priority on the country’s foreign policy agenda. This commitment was particularly evident in official policy documents issued in 1997<sup>36</sup>, 2000<sup>37</sup>, and later in 2007<sup>38</sup>, which articulated the key principles and features of the Turkey–EU dialogue at the time. These developments triggered a process now commonly referred to as Turkey’s EU accession question - a process that encompassed the emergence and evolution of several new dynamics in both Turkey-EU and France-Turkey relations, within the broader context of a new phase in France-Turkey engagement.

A critical factor shaping the dynamics of France-Turkey relations - especially in the context of the Turkey-EU dialogue - was the issue of mutual perception: how each country perceived, interpreted, and articulated its view of the other. As will be seen, this factor continues to exert significant influence over the trajectory of bilateral relations. Debates around Turkey’s EU membership gradually brought forth a deeper question: What constitutes a European identity?<sup>39</sup> Thus, the characterization of Turkey’s potential membership became closely tied to the perceived degree of its “Europeanness.” At the heart of this debate lies the issue of how Turkey’s Ottoman and Islamic heritage affects its contemporary political and cultural identity. In the French public imagination, the Ottoman Empire is largely associated with notions of an Islamic state and imperial conquest. Historically, Europeans have often criticized the Ottoman Empire for its expansionist ambitions, especially as it targeted the European continent itself, posing a direct threat to European powers. This historical perception has fueled a form of skepticism—often referred to as “Turkish-skepticism” or pessimistic doubt - viewing Turkey’s

<sup>33</sup> Başbakan: Ahmet Necdet Sezer'den çok çektim. *Haber Populer*, April 17, 2014.

<http://www.haberpopuler.com/siyaset/basbakan-ahmet-necdet-sezerden-cok-cektim-h1616.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Turkey’s New European Union Strategy, Determination in the Political Reform Process, Continuity in Socio-Economic Transformation, Effectiveness in Communication,

[https://ab.gov.tr/files/ardb/evt/3\\_ab\\_bakanligi\\_yayinlari/turkeys\\_new\\_eu\\_strategy.pdf](https://ab.gov.tr/files/ardb/evt/3_ab_bakanligi_yayinlari/turkeys_new_eu_strategy.pdf).

<sup>35</sup> IMF stopped Central bank from giving liquidity in 2001, said Ercel. *Referans*, August 16, 2007.

[https://web.archive.org/web/20070929010840/http://www.referansgazetesi.com/haber.aspx?HBR\\_KOD=76143&ForArsiv=1](https://web.archive.org/web/20070929010840/http://www.referansgazetesi.com/haber.aspx?HBR_KOD=76143&ForArsiv=1).

<sup>36</sup> Defence and Security Policy of the Turkish Republic,

[file:///D:/%D0%97%D0%B0%D0%B3%D1%80%D1%83%D0%B7%D0%BA%D0%B8/241248\\_ANEXO\\_POLITICA+DEFENSA+DE+TURQUIA\\_ANG%20\(5\).pdf](file:///D:/%D0%97%D0%B0%D0%B3%D1%80%D1%83%D0%B7%D0%BA%D0%B8/241248_ANEXO_POLITICA+DEFENSA+DE+TURQUIA_ANG%20(5).pdf) (accessed February 2, 2025).

<sup>37</sup> Turkey: Defence White Paper 2000, [https://www.files.ethz.ch/154907/Turkey\\_2000eng.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/154907/Turkey_2000eng.pdf).

<sup>38</sup> Turkey: Defence White Paper 2007,

[https://www.files.ethz.ch/154908/Turkey\\_makale%204.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/154908/Turkey_makale%204.pdf).

<sup>39</sup> Europe and the identity challenge: who are “we”?, <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/0466-europe-and-the-identity-challenge-who-are-we>.

EU accession as a modern version of a centuries-old expansionist strategy, and as a renewed expression of Turkish imperialism.

The institutional framework for relations between the European Union and Turkey was formally established as early as 1963 with the signing of the Ankara Agreement.<sup>40</sup> Following the entry into force of the Customs Union agreement between Turkey and the EU in 1996, a customs union was officially formed between the two parties.<sup>41</sup> In April 1987, Turkey submitted its application for EU membership<sup>42</sup>, but it took nearly twelve years for the country to receive official candidate status. This milestone was only announced in 1999 at the historic Helsinki Summit<sup>43</sup>, where Turkish Foreign Minister Bülent Ecevit delivered a hopeful and forward-looking address, describing the event as a highly significant turning point in the relationship between the two sides.<sup>44</sup> France, under the leadership of President Jacques Chirac, supported and facilitated the adoption of this decision, with Chirac remarking: "Turkey possesses European potential-ancient and historical. Turkey's capabilities justify the establishment of a stable, democratic, and modern state, which since 1923 has opted for secularism."<sup>45</sup> A Turkey integrated into the European Union also aligns with our political, European, and economic interests." However, in the wake of subsequent geopolitical developments and internal French political dynamics, France gradually emerged as one of the most vocal and active opponents of Turkey's EU membership, ushering in a period of renewed tension in bilateral relations.

### Strengthening Military and Economic Ties

It was during this same period, in January 2000, that the two countries signed a Framework Agreement on Military and Defense Cooperation<sup>46</sup>, considered a key

<sup>40</sup> EU-Turkey Association Agreement (the "Ankara Agreement"), <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/delegations/en/d-tr/documents/eu-texts>.

<sup>41</sup> Turkey: Customs Unions and preferential arrangements, [https://ec.europa.eu/taxation\\_customs/business/calculation-customs-duties/rules-origin/customs-unions/turkey-customs-unions-preferential-arrangements\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/business/calculation-customs-duties/rules-origin/customs-unions/turkey-customs-unions-preferential-arrangements_en).

<sup>42</sup> Analysis - EU-Turkey relations: One step forward, two steps back. *Anadolu Ajansi*, March 26, 2021. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis/analysis-eu-turkey-relations-one-step-forward-two-steps-back/2189335>.

<sup>43</sup> Helsinki European Council 10 and 11 December 1999 Presidency Conclusions, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/hel1\\_en.htm](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/hel1_en.htm).

<sup>44</sup> Statement of Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit in Helsinki on Turkey's Candidacy to the EU December 11, 1999, [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/statement-of-prime-minister-bulent-ecevit-in-helsinki-on-turkey\\_s-candidacy-to-the-eu\\_br\\_december-11\\_1999-.en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/statement-of-prime-minister-bulent-ecevit-in-helsinki-on-turkey_s-candidacy-to-the-eu_br_december-11_1999-.en.mfa).

<sup>45</sup> Eylemer, Sedef. Taş, İlkay. Pro-EU and Eurosceptic Circles in Turkey. *Taylor & Francis Online*, December 05, 2007. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13523270701674657>.

<sup>46</sup> Accord-cadre entre le gouvernement de la République française et le gouvernement de la République de Turquie relatif à la coopération militaire et de défense, <https://basedoc.diplomatie.gouv.fr/exl-php/cadcgp.php?>

component of the strategic vision for deepening bilateral relations. This agreement complemented a series of prior accords in the defense sector and aimed to further solidify collaboration in defense industry development, military training, national security, and related trade and economic areas. It should be noted that during this period, following the establishment of the EU-Turkey Customs Union in 1996 and the rapid expansion of bilateral cooperation, trade between France and Turkey more than doubled over the next five years, reaching \$5.8 billion in 2000.<sup>47</sup> As a result, Turkey became France's third-largest trading partner outside the EU, while France ranked as Turkey's third-largest partner overall.<sup>48</sup> Despite the economic disruptions experienced in Turkey at the end of 2000 and the beginning of 2001, the loss in trade momentum was largely offset by 2002, initiating a steady upward trend.<sup>49</sup> By 2003, according to data from the Turkish Treasury, there were 270 enterprises operating in Turkey with French capital investment. These firms held significant market shares in sectors such as automotive, construction (notably electricity generation), cement, insurance, distribution, and pharmaceuticals.<sup>50</sup>

### **Chirac's Second Term and Evolving EU Negotiations**

In 2002, presidential elections were held in France, in which the incumbent, Jacques Chirac, secured a second term by winning 82.1% of the vote in the second round against the far-right candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, during his second term, Chirac experienced notably low approval ratings and came to be regarded as one of the least popular presidents in modern French political history.<sup>52</sup>

On December 12 of that same year, the European Union, during the Copenhagen Summit, decided to begin accession negotiations with Turkey.<sup>53</sup> Subsequently, following the major EU enlargement in 2004-bringing in ten new member states<sup>54</sup> - the European Council declared during the Brussels Summit on

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<sup>47</sup> Turkey Trade Summary 2000,

<https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/TUR/Year/2000/Summarytext>.

<sup>48</sup> Turkey trade balance, exports and imports by country and region 2000,

<https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/TUR/Year/2000/TradeFlow/EXPIMP/Partner/all>.

<sup>49</sup> Turkey's Foreign Trade Policy, <https://ms.hmb.gov.tr/uploads/2018/12/Ticaret-Politikasi-Asya-C3%96negi.pdf>.

<sup>50</sup> Histoire des relations entre la Turquie et la France: Quelques dates et repères symboliques, <https://tr.ambafrance.org/Histoire-des-relations-entre-la>.

<sup>51</sup> Réélection de Jacques Chirac à la présidence de la République française. *Perspective Monde*, May 05, 2002.

<https://perspective.usherbrooke.ca/bilan/servlet/BMEve/375>.

<sup>52</sup> Jacques Chirac, ancien Président de la République de 1995 à 2007, <https://www.franceculture.fr/personne-jacques-chirac.html>.

<sup>53</sup> The Copenhagen Summit: The Lithmus Test for Turkish Candidacy. *Turkish Policy*, September 20, 2002.

<http://turkishpolicy.com/dosyalar/files/TPQ-2002-3-Vural.pdf>.

<sup>54</sup> EU Leaders Brace for Crucial Summit on Constitution. *Voice of America*, October 29, 2009. <https://www.voanews.com/archive/eu-leaders-brace-crucial-summit-constitution-2004-06-16>.

December 17, 2004<sup>55</sup>, that official accession talks with Turkey would commence on October 3, 2005.<sup>56</sup> The screening process of Turkish legislation began shortly thereafter, on October 20, 2005<sup>57</sup>, and concluded on October 18, 2006.<sup>58</sup> Given that December 17, 2004, was designated as the date to finalize the conditions for initiating negotiations with Turkey, the French National Assembly convened on October 14, 2004, to deliberate Turkey's eligibility for EU membership. The debate featured both proponents - such as Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin, Foreign Minister Michel Barnier, Communist Party leader Alain Bocquet, and MP Jean-Marie Le Guen<sup>59</sup> - and opponents, including François Bayrou<sup>60</sup>, president of the Union for French Democracy. The discussions once again highlighted the presence of divergent and often opposing views within French political circles regarding Turkey's accession and the broader policy France should adopt toward the country. Indeed, these developments and the preceding events—such as former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's consistent opposition to Turkey's membership—further crystallized France's position as one of the most outspoken and radical opponents of Turkey's integration into the EU. D'Estaing had expressed concern that Turkey's accession could result in uncontrolled enlargement of the Union, potentially prompting interest in EU membership from countries in the Middle East and North Africa, with Morocco<sup>61</sup> often cited as a likely candidate. President Chirac asserted that Turkey would only possess the potential for EU membership if it met the conditions stipulated in official European documents.<sup>62</sup> He maintained that Turkey could reach the necessary standards only

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<sup>55</sup> EU Enlargement: challenges and opportunities, Keynote speech by Jean-Claude Trichet, President of the ECB held at the conference 'Europe's frontiers: EU enlargement - its implications and consequences', organised by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon. *European Central Bank*, October 27, 2004.

<https://www.ecb.europa.eu/press/key/date/2004/html/sp041027.en.html>.

<sup>56</sup> EU freezes talks on Turkey membership. *Independent*, December 12, 2006.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/eu-freezes-talks-on-turkey-membership-428085.html>.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with European Commission President José Manuel Barroso on BBC, London. *Europa*, October 15,

2006, [https://web.archive.org/web/20070412110934/http://ec.europa.eu/commission\\_barroso/president/pdf/interview\\_20061015\\_en.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20070412110934/http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/president/pdf/interview_20061015_en.pdf).

<sup>58</sup> Commission Staff Working Document, Turkey 2006 Progress Report, Brussels *Delegation of the European Union to Türkiye*, November 08, 2006, p. 4.

[https://www.avrupa.info.tr/sites/default/files/2016-11/Turkey\\_progress\\_report%202006.pdf](https://www.avrupa.info.tr/sites/default/files/2016-11/Turkey_progress_report%202006.pdf).

<sup>59</sup> Assemblée Nationale, Michel Barnier, Alain Bocquet, Jean-Marie Le Guen, [https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/12/cra/2004-2005/016.asp#P32\\_329](https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/12/cra/2004-2005/016.asp#P32_329).

<sup>60</sup> Assemblée Nationale, François Bayrou, [https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/12/cra/2004-2005/016.asp#P32\\_329](https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/12/cra/2004-2005/016.asp#P32_329).

<sup>61</sup> Турция хочет развалить Европу, Предупреждает Валери Жискар д'Эстен. *Коммерсантъ*, 11 ноября, 2002. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/350241>.

<sup>62</sup> Conférence de presse de M. Jacques Chirac, Président de la République, sur la perspective de l'adhésion de la Turquie à l'Union européenne, à Bruxelles le 17 décembre 2004,

over time. In the French public consciousness, EU membership was perceived not merely as a matter of geography but of identity - being European in the cultural and historical sense. As Chirac stated in a 2002 speech: "I know it can be discussed from a geographical point of view, but I do not believe it can be discussed from a historical and civilizational standpoint".<sup>63</sup>

### **The Armenian Genocide and Its Role in France-Turkey and EU-Turkey Relations**

Despite Turkey's participation in various European political, economic, and military organizations, Chirac contended that while Turkey could be viewed as a component of the European system, it was not, in essence, a European country. As of 2003, he emphasized that rather than debating Turkey's European identity, it was more important to acknowledge and value the fact that Turkey had pursued EU membership for over 30 years<sup>64</sup>, striving to maintain a balanced policy - thereby avoiding further escalation in an already complex and tension-laden Franco-Turkish relationship. At the time, the Armenian question, with all its components, played a particularly significant role in shaping these relations. The Armenian factor in France-Turkey relations has always had its influence on the political relations and dialogue between the two countries, leading to sharp conflicts and crises, which, in addition to the political sphere, directly affected other spheres of bilateral relations and directions of cooperation, continuous changes registering in them.<sup>65</sup>

In 2004, French Foreign Minister Michel Barnier stated that Turkey must recognize the systematic and organized massacres of Armenians in 1915 as genocide.<sup>66</sup> While he clarified that France had not set this recognition as a formal precondition for EU accession, he emphasized that the issue would be raised during the negotiation process. Later, European Parliament President Martin Schulz declared that recognition of the Armenian Genocide should indeed become a prerequisite for Turkey's accession to the European Union. It is important to note that the Turkish government has consistently rejected this condition and does not consider it part of the EU's membership criteria.<sup>67</sup> In 2006, the European

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<https://www.elysee.fr/jacques-chirac/2004/12/17/conference-de-presse-de-m-jacques-chirac-president-de-la-republique-sur-la-perspective-de-ladhesion-de-la-turquie-a-lunion-europeenne-a-bruxelles-le-17-decembre-2004>.

<sup>63</sup> Lakhdari, Sadi. *Qu'est-ce qu'une barrière culturelle?*, *Outre-Terre*, Paris, 2004 (2), N° 7, p. 338, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-outre-terre-1-2004-2-page-387.htm>.

<sup>64</sup> Chirac: If Criteria Are Fulfilled, Turkey Can Enter EU. *Hurriyet*, September 23, 2003.

<https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/chirac-if-criteria-are-fulfilled-turkey-can-enter-eu-172911>.

<sup>65</sup> Topakyan, Mariam. The Issue of the Armenian Genocide in France-Turkey Relations, *Region and the World* scientific-analytical journal volume XVI, № 1 (56), 2025, pp. 14-15.

<sup>66</sup> Turkey 'must admit Armenia dead'. *BBC News*, December 13, 2004.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4092933.stm>.

<sup>67</sup> Genocide Recognition Precondition to Turkey's EU Bid, Says Euro-Parliament President. *Asbarez*, September 18, 2012, <http://asbarez.com/105486/>.

Parliament voted against officially including such recognition as a formal benchmark for Turkey's EU accession.<sup>68</sup>

### **Article 301 and Freedom of Expression Concerns**

The development of France-Turkey relations was notably influenced by Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code<sup>69</sup>, which essentially criminalizes the denigration of Turkey, the Turkish nation, or Turkish governmental institutions. This article came into force on July 1, 2005<sup>70</sup>, and was adopted as part of a package of reforms aimed at improving criminal legislation prior to the commencement of Turkey's accession negotiations with the European Union. Since its enactment, Article 301 has been the subject of extensive controversy, primarily due to its restriction of freedom of speech rights.<sup>71</sup> It is therefore not surprising that in September 2006, the European Parliament called for the repeal of laws such as Article 301, deeming them a threat to European standards of free expression.<sup>72</sup>

### **Chirac's Constitutional Amendment on EU Enlargement Referenda: Continued Franco-Turkish Cooperation Despite Challenges**

On March 1, 2005, then-French President Jacques Chirac amended the Constitution of the Fifth Republic<sup>73</sup> to require that any future EU enlargement be ratified by a national referendum. This amendment reflected Chirac's declared intention that France would hold a referendum on Turkey's accession to the European Union when the matter arose, and that any subsequent EU expansions would similarly be subject to popular vote.<sup>74</sup>

It is reasonable to infer that two primary considerations underpinned this presidential decision. Firstly, Chirac may have sought to preserve his political credibility and legacy by acknowledging public concerns on the issue rather than

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<sup>68</sup> European Parliament critical of slowdown in Turkey's reform process. *Europa*, September 27, 2006.

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=IMPRESS&reference=20060922IPR10896&language=EN>.

<sup>69</sup> Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi: Türk Ceza Kanununda Değişiklik Yapılmasına Dair Kanun N° 5759,

<https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/kanunlar/k5759.html>.

<sup>70</sup> Turkey's new penal code touches raw nerves. *Euractiv*, June 02, 2005.

<https://www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement/turkey-new-penal-code-touches-raw-nerves/article-140266>.

<sup>71</sup> Turkey: Nationalism and the Press. *Committee to Protect Journalists*, March 15, 2006.

<https://cpj.org/reports/2006/03/turkey-3-06/>.

<sup>72</sup> New EU warning on Turkey reforms. *BBC News*, September 27, 2006.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5385954.stm>.

<sup>73</sup> Loi constitutionnelle N° 2005-204 du 1mars 2005 modifiant le titre XV de la Constitution (1), <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000000238079/>.

<sup>74</sup> Turkey's EU Prospects and Europe's Domestic Politics. *Wilson Center*, June 15, 2004. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/turkeys-eu-prospects-and-europes-domestic-politics>.

dismissing them.<sup>75</sup> Secondly, the amendment likely aimed to preempt the potential rejection of the European Constitution - a highly politicized topic closely linked to debates about Turkey's EU membership. Notably, the timeline of this change is significant: following the amendment to Article 88-5, Chirac scheduled the referendum for March 4, 2005.<sup>76</sup>

The French referendum on the Constitutional Treaty was subsequently held on May 29, 2005, with a turnout of 69.37%. The European Constitution was rejected by 54.67% of voters, underscoring the polarized nature of French society: one segment favoring European cosmopolitanism, the other prioritizing national sovereignty.<sup>77</sup> This outcome also highlighted that French public concern centered predominantly on socio-economic issues rather than Turkey's accession per se. Moreover, a later constitutional amendment empowered the French Parliament - provided a majority agrees - to block the organization of such referenda.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, bilateral France-Turkey relations and mutually beneficial cooperation continued to develop steadily at the governmental level. A prominent example was the June 2006<sup>79</sup> signing of an agreement on mutual encouragement and protection of investments, which fostered the further deepening and consolidation of trade and economic ties between the two countries.

### **Transition of Power: Nicolas Sarkozy's Presidency Begins**

In May 2007, France held its presidential elections<sup>80</sup>, resulting in Jacques Chirac being succeeded by Nicolas Sarkozy<sup>81</sup>, leader of the Union for a Popular Movement since 2004<sup>82</sup> and, prior to the presidency, minister of the General Council of Hauts-de-Seine and a veteran public official. Sarkozy's presidency is distinguished by its outcomes, including the overall stability and dynamic

<sup>75</sup> The European Convention, [https://web.archive.org/web/20120125041723if\\_/http://europeanconvention.eu.int/Static.asp?lang=E&Content=Composition](https://web.archive.org/web/20120125041723if_/http://europeanconvention.eu.int/Static.asp?lang=E&Content=Composition).

<sup>76</sup> Jacques Chirac et son referendum. *Le Monde*, March 11, 2005. [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2005/03/11/jacques-chirac-et-son-referendum\\_401233\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2005/03/11/jacques-chirac-et-son-referendum_401233_3232.html).

<sup>77</sup> Cole, Alistair. *Governing and Governance in France*, New York, 2008, p. 109, <https://www.haugenbok.no/governing-and-governance-france/cole-alistair/9780521608312>.

<sup>78</sup> Turkey, with eye on EU, says determined to reform. *EUBusiness*, April 15, 2009. <https://web.archive.org/web/20090417223231/http://www.eubusiness.com/news-eu/1239805023.06>.

<sup>79</sup> Accord entre le gouvernement de la République française et le gouvernement de la république de Turquie sur l'encouragement et la protection réciproques des investissements (API) entre la France et la Turquie, <https://basedoc.diplomatie.gouv.fr/exl-php/cadgp.php?>.

<sup>80</sup> Sarkozy nod for presidential run. *BBC News*, January 14, 2007. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6260275.stm>.

<sup>81</sup> Ambition and Honesty on the French Campaign Trail. *Spiegel International*, April 09, 2007. <https://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/sarkozy-closes-in-on-his-goal-ambition-and-honesty-on-the-french-campaign-trail-a-476255.html>.

<sup>82</sup> The New French President's Roots Are Worth Remembering. *New York Times*, March 15, 2007. <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/15/opinion/15tue4.html>.

progression of relations with Turkey during his tenure. August 2007 witnessed Turkey's own presidential elections<sup>83</sup>, culminating in the election of former Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül<sup>84</sup>, representing the Justice and Development Party. His presidency marked the beginning of certain notable shifts in Turkish foreign policy, which were essentially responses to ongoing geopolitical developments.

## Conclusion

From the 1990s onward - and particularly since 1995 - France-Turkey relations have entered a distinct phase characterized by both consolidation and transformation. This period has been marked by the stabilization of earlier diplomatic achievements and the development of more structured, multifaceted, and interdependent forms of cooperation. The bilateral relationship evolved not in isolation, but as part of broader geopolitical and institutional processes, most notably Turkey's protracted and complex engagement with the European Union, in which France has historically played a pivotal role.

Throughout the period under review, the evolution of Franco-Turkish relations has been mediated through an increasingly formalized legal and political framework, underpinned by a growing corpus of bilateral agreements, joint initiatives, and multilateral commitments. These institutional arrangements have enabled both continuity and flexibility, allowing the two states to manage ideological divergences and political tensions - particularly in areas such as human rights, migration, regional security, and identity politics.

Despite recurring crises - some of which have stemmed from sensitive historical issues, such as the Armenian Genocide, or from divergent perspectives on EU enlargement - the bilateral relationship has demonstrated a notable degree of resilience. Strategic imperatives, including defense cooperation, economic interdependence, energy transit, and the pursuit of regional stability in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, have continued to anchor the relationship within a framework of pragmatic engagement.

Ultimately, while France-Turkey relations remain shaped by shifting political narratives and contentious historical legacies, they have nonetheless preserved a forward-looking orientation grounded in institutional mechanisms and shared strategic interests. Despite recurring challenges and periods of tension, this framework has allowed both countries to sustain a constructive dialogue and pursue shared objectives, thereby preserving the potential for deeper cooperation and integration in the future - a subject warranting separate research.

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<sup>83</sup> Gül adaylıktan çekildi. *Hurriyet*, May 06, 2007. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/gul-adayliktan-cekildi-6466839>.

<sup>84</sup> Sayın Gül, bu yemini hiçbir zaman unutmayın. *Radikal*, August 29, 2007. <https://web.archive.org/web/20070930220642/http://www.radikal.com.tr/index.php?tarih=29%2F08%2F2007>.

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The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

### **Ethical Standards**

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

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