



NIAS-Europe Studies Brief

European Integration: Why Recognition of the Armenian Genocide Matters for the EU

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Introduction

Going against established scholarship on the issue and international pressure demanding it to face up to its past, Türkiye maintains that the estimated death of 800,000 to 1.5 million Armenians that occurred in the Ottoman Empire during 1915- 1923 does not constitute a genocide.* It denies that there was state intention behind the massacres, lowers the number of casualties, accuses Armenians of committing genocide against Turks, and argues the excesses as a tragedy resulting from the chaos of war.¹ Türkiye expends massive amounts of resources and energy in pushing forward the denialist agenda that one scholar characterized it as “an industry of denial.”² and another termed it as “an industry of denialism.”³

Sadly, Türkiye continues to deny the Armenian genocide at great cost to itself and its image. Barring a majority of Turkish historians and a handful of scholars from outside Türkiye, most serious scholars and historians now agree that what happened to the Armenians in 1915 deserves the label of genocide. The United States, Russia, France, Germany, Switzerland, Canada, and Brazil are some of the countries that have officially passed resolutions recognizing and formally condemning the Armenian genocide, and denying it constitutes a crime in France,⁴ Belgium, Switzerland, Greece, Cyprus, and Slovakia.⁵ Numerous international organizations, state and provincial governments, and municipalities have passed similar resolutions in Europe, North and South America, and Australia. Though these resolutions are non-binding and lack a sense of “real” threat or consequence for Türkiye, it is evident that the issue negatively impacts Türkiye’s international image.

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¹ “The Armenian Allegation of Genocide: The Issue and the Facts / Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs,” accessed February 13, 2023, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-armenian-allegation-of-genocide-the-issue-and-the-facts.en.mfa>.

² Vahakn N. Dadrian, “The Signal Facts Surrounding the Armenian Genocide and the Turkish Denial Syndrome,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 5, no. 2 (June 1, 2003): 269–79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520305671>.³ Taner Akçam, *Dialogue Across an International Divide: Essays Towards a Turkish-Armenian Dialogue*. (Cambridge, MA and Toronto: The Zoryan Institute, 2001), 10.

⁴ Thomas Crampton, “French Pass Bill That Punishes Denial of Armenian Genocide”, *The New York Times* (13 October 2006), <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/13/world/europe/french-pass-bill-that-punishes-denial-of-armenian-genocide.html>

⁵ Shirli Sitbon, “Why French Jews Changed Their View of the Armenian Genocide”, *Haaretz* (6 February 2022), <https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/europe/2022-02-06/ty-article/.premium/why-french-jews-finally-changed-their-view-of-the-armenian-genocide/0000017f-e8dd-dea7-adff-f9ffd6d90000>

In addition, Turkish denial makes little practical sense; the costs of denial seem to outweigh its benefits. One potential benefit of denying the genocide could be to avoid any Armenian claims on Turkish territory or demand for monetary reparation, but these are not the grounds on which Türkiye denies the genocide. Turkish sovereignty is guaranteed by the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), and the real possibility of returning parts of “historic Armenian” territory to Armenia is so remote to be practically inconsequential. Further, former Armenian President Robert Kocharian has publicly assured that “Armenia will not present any legal claim after Turkey admits having committed genocide”⁶ and further reiterated it in his interview with

Turkish journalist Mehmed Ali Birand on CNN Turk:

MAB: You say there will be no territorial claims or demands for compensation if Turkey admits genocide. Is it your position that Turkey should open archives and offer an apology?

RK: Yes—it is. It is our only goal. It is a matter of morality and—most importantly—it is a matter of honor.⁷

Thus, the risk of paying reparations or potential territorial loss cannot be the reason for Türkiye not recognizing the Armenian genocide. On the other hand, Türkiye continuing to deny the genocide could prove costly. Its potential reconciliation with the Republic of Armenia depends on the acknowledgement of responsibility for the genocide. Recalling ambassadors, as Türkiye continues to do in protest of resolutions passed in third countries recognizing the Armenian genocide, harms the diplomatic goodwill existing between Türkiye and these countries.

Most significantly, Türkiye’s accession to the European Union is significantly impacted by its refusal to recognise the genocide. The importance of the issue in the context of EU integration cannot be overstated, as evidenced by the resolutions passed by many European states and entities within the European Union that continue to recognize the genocide “in a spirit of European solidarity and justice.”⁸ Although the recognition of the genocide is not mandatory for Türkiye for its potential membership in the EU, only a few would dismiss it as a non-issue. What drives European states and institutions to recognize the Armenian genocide, and what prevents Türkiye from acknowledging it at the cost of its accession to the EU and international goodwill? This paper suggests that the answer might be found in the conflicting ideas of what Europe means for both sides. On the one hand, the post-Holocaust refashioning of the “European” identity seems to resonate with the need to recognise a genocide that is sometimes understood to be “the first genocide of the twentieth century.”⁹ In this context, Türkiye can conform to “European values” only when it atones for its violent past in the manner of post-war Germany. On the other hand, the Turkish denial of the genocide and exasperation in the event of its recognition by other European entities stems from its narrative of victimhood vis-à-vis Europe, based on its traumatic memories of the loss of the Ottoman Empire for which it holds the European powers responsible. It is argued that Türkiye perceives the current demands to recognize the Armenian genocide as a kind of Western ploy to humiliate the country and intervene in its domestic affairs, akin to the role

⁶ “Kocharian Discusses Territorial Claims in Interview with Turkish TV – Asbarez.Com,” accessed February 8, 2023, <https://asbarez.com/kocharian-discusses-territorial-claims-in-interview-with-turkish-tv/>.

⁷ “Kocharian Discusses”, Abbarez.Com.

⁸ European Parliament resolution of 15 April 2015 on the centenary of the Armenian Genocide (2015/2590(RSP)), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2015-0094_EN.html

⁹ Vahakn N. Dadrian, “The Historical and Legal Interconnections between the Armenian Genocide and the Jewish Holocaust: From Impunity to Retributive Justice,” *Yale Journal of International Law* 23 (1998): 503.

European powers played in exacerbating the so-called “Armenian Question” in 1915. This paper examines both these perspectives to explore what “Europe” means for each side.

“European Values” and the Armenian Genocide

Of the 33 states that have formally recognized the Armenian genocide, 18 are located in Europe.¹⁰ In addition to parliamentary resolutions passed by countries such as Germany, France, Greece, Italy, and the Netherlands, the European Parliament has referred to the genocide at least eight times in 1987, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2005, 2015, and 2022.

Denying the genocide, in effect, constitutes a crime in France,¹¹ Belgium, Switzerland, Greece, Cyprus, and Slovakia.¹² Why are actors and institutions in the EU so committed to recognizing an atrocity that took place over a century ago? Is the issue of genocide recognition tied to the self-definitions of Europe and the stated centrality of human rights in what is understood as “European identity”? This holds even greater significance in the context of Türkiye’s accession to the EU.

Scholars of European integration have often elaborated on the uniqueness of European power. Europe has been regarded as a “normative power”^{13 14 15 16} or a “civilian power”¹⁷ imbued with what some term as “international identity.”^{18 19} Support for human rights, it is argued, acts as a *constitutive norm* for the European Union and has been used as a conditionality for EU membership. Menon et al. even claim that the EU is a “pioneer in long-term inter-state peacebuilding... one of the most formidable machines for managing differences peacefully ever invented.”²⁰ One of the most commonly held notions is that the European identity is founded on the negation of Europe’s own past, most crucially the Second World War and the Holocaust. According to Ole Waever, “Europe’s Other is Europe’s own past.”²¹ It is also a self-conscious “return to Enlightenment values”²² as evidenced in key documents such as the Declaration on European Identity (1973) and the

¹⁰ Countries that Recognize the Armenian Genocide (as on 27 November 2022), https://www.armenian-genocide.org/recognition_countries.html

¹¹ Thomas Crampton, “French Pass Bill That Punishes Denial of Armenian Genocide”, *The New York Times* (13 October 2006), <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/13/world/europe/french-pass-bill-that-punishes-denial-of-armenian-genocide.html>

¹² Shirli Sitbon, “Why French Jews Changed Their View of the Armenian Genocide”, *Haaretz* (6 February 2022), <https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/europe/2022-02-06/ty-article/.premium/why-french-jews-finally-changed-their-view-of-the-armenian-genocide/0000017f-e8dd-dea7-adff-f9ffd6d90000>

¹³ R. Whitman, *Normative Power Europe: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives* (Springer, 2011).

¹⁴ Ian Manners, “Normative Power Europe Reconsidered: Beyond the Crossroads,” *Journal of European Public Policy*, August 19, 2006, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760500451600>.

¹⁵ Ian Manners, “Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?,” *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 40, no. 2 (2002): 235–58, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5965.00353>.

¹⁶ Ian Manners and Richard Whitman, “The “difference Engine”: Constructing and Representing the International Identity of the European Union,” *Journal of European Public Policy* 10, no. 3 (January 1, 2003): 380–404, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350176032000085360>.

¹⁷ Francois Duchêne, “Europe’s role in world peace”, in Richard Mayne, *Europe Tomorrow: Sixteen Europeans Look Ahead.*, First Thus edition (Fontana, 1972), p. 32- 47.

¹⁸ Karen E. Smith, *European Union Foreign Policy in a Changing World* (John Wiley & Sons, 2013).

¹⁹ R. Whitman, *From Civilian Power to Superpower?: The International Identity of the European Union* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1998).

²⁰ Anand Menon et al., “In Defence of Europe: A Response to Kagan,” *Journal of European Affairs*, Vol. 2, no. 3 (2004): 11.

²¹ Ole Waever, “European Security Identities,” *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 34, no. 1 (1996): 122

²² Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, (Knopf Publishers, 2003)

Copenhagen Criteria (1993).²³ For instance, the Declaration on European Identity clearly lists representative government, the rule of law, and respect for human rights as “fundamental elements of the European Identity.”²⁴ Similarly, the Copenhagen Criteria has underlined the protection of minority rights as part of its political criteria for membership in the EU.²⁵ Likewise, the Treaty on European Union (2009) has established the European identity firmly on the concept of universal human rights drawing from “the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, from which have developed the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law.”²⁶ From a European perspective, membership to the EU is inevitably predicated on applicant states’ adherence to European values, evidenced by the repeated genocide recognition resolutions passed by European entities, with the European Parliament taking the most proactive role on the matter.

Although Cyprus was the first European state to recognize the Armenian genocide in April 1982, the European Parliament mentioned the genocide for the first time in 1987. Over time, other countries joined. For instance, Greece recognized the genocide in 1996,²⁷ followed by Belgium²⁸ and France²⁹ in 1998, and Sweden³⁰ and Italy³¹ in 2000. On 24 April 1998, the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Resolution recorded the genocide as “the first genocide of the 20th century” and noted that the “date of 24 April 1915 marked the beginning of the implementation of the plan to exterminate Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire.”³²

In November 2000, another significant resolution was passed by the European Parliament. This was followed by the French law³³ on the genocide and Pope John Paul II’s prayer visit³⁴ to the Genocide Memorial in Armenia. Similarly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council

²³ Anne Jenichen, “The Politics of Normative Power Europe: Norm Entrepreneurs and Contestation in the Making of EU External Human Rights Policy,” *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 60, no. 5 (2022): 1299–1315, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13157>.

²⁴ “Declaration on European Identity (Copenhagen, 14 December 1973)”, http://www.cvce.eu/obj/declaration_on_european_identity_copenhagen_14_december_1973-en-02798dc9-9c69-4b7d-b2c9-f03a8db7da32.html

²⁵ “EUR-Lex - Accession_criteria_copenhague - EN - EUR-Lex,” accessed February 13, 2023, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/accession-criteria-copenhagen-criteria.html>.

²⁶ CONSOLIDATED VERSION OF THE TREATY ON EUROPEAN UNION, Official Journal of the European Union, (26 October 2012), [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bf140bf-a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e6da6.0023.02/DOC_1&format=PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bf140bf-a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e6da6.0023.02/DOC_1&format=PDF)

²⁷ “Greece (Hellenic Republic) Parliament Resolution”, Hellenic Parliament Resolution 2397/1996 (25 April 1996), <http://www.genocide-museum.am/eng/Greece.php>

²⁸ Belgische Senaat, Zitting 1997-1998, “Voorstel van resolutie betreffende de genocide in 1915 van de in Turkije levende Armeniërs” (17 March 1998), <https://www.senate.be/www/webdriver?MItabObj=pdf&MIcolObj=pdf&MINamObj=pdfid&MItypeObj=application/pdf&MIvalObj=16778005>

²⁹ “PROPOSITION DE LOI ADOPTÉE PAR L’ASSEMBLÉE NATIONALE EN PREMIÈRE LECTURE, relative à la reconnaissance du génocide arménien de 1915”, *TEXTE ADOPTÉ no 140, ASSEMBLÉE NATIONALE (29 May 1998), SESSION ORDINAIRE DE 1997-1998*, <https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/11/ta/ta0140.asp>

³⁰ Sweden parliament Report 929 March 2000), http://www.genocide-museum.am/eng/Sweden_Parliament_Report.php

³¹ “TESTO AGGIORNATO AL 27 NOVEMBRE 2000”, Allegato A Seduta n. 813 del 17/11/2000 (27 November 2000), http://leg13.camera.it/_dati/leg13/lavori/stenografici/sed813/amo02.htm

³² Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Resolution, “Commemoration of the Armenian genocide of 1915” (24 April 1998), Written Declaration No. 275, Doc. 8091, https://www.armeniangenocide.org/Affirmation.153/current_category.7/affirmation_detail.html

³³ “Loi n° 2001-70 du 29 janvier 2001 relative à la reconnaissance du génocide arménien de 1915” (29 January 2001), <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000000403928>

³⁴ “Prayer of John Paul II”, Memorial of Tzitzernagaberd Yerevan (26 September 2001), https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2001/september/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20010926_prayer-yerevan.html

of Europe adopted another resolution on 24 April 2001 condemning the genocide.³⁵ The European Parliament mentioned the genocide again in 2002 on “EU relations with South Caucasus”, where it reiterated the recognition of the genocide in the 1987 resolution and called on Türkiye to facilitate conditions for reconciliation.³⁶ This was followed by separate resolutions in 2005, following the initiation of membership talks with Turkey, and in 2015, to mark the 100th year anniversary of the beginning of the genocide.

The timing of many of these resolutions is noteworthy. For instance, the first resolution passed by the European Parliament in June 1987 on the subject could be argued as a response to Türkiye’s application to join the European Community on 14 April 1987. The resolution gave particular importance to human rights, emphasizing the importance of minority rights and implying that without the protection of minority rights, Türkiye had little hope of meeting the Copenhagen criteria. It said, “The refusal by the present Turkish Government to acknowledge the genocide . . . [Is an] insurmountable obstacle to consideration of the possibility of Turkey's accession to the Community.”³⁷

Another important resolution that was passed by the European Parliament came in the context of Türkiye’s progress toward accession in 2000. Clause C of the resolution categorically stated: “whereas accession negotiations cannot begin until Turkey complies with the Copenhagen criteria.” Further, items 9 and 10 highlighted that the Parliament “recalls the importance it attaches to recognition of the basic rights of the cultural, linguistic and religious groups in Turkey, who make up the country's multifaceted population” and “calls therefore, on the Turkish Government and the Turkish Grand National Assembly to give fresh support to the Armenian minority, as an important part of Turkish society, in particular by public recognition of the genocide which that minority suffered before the establishment of the modern state of Turkey”, respectively. These statements are particularly revealing the importance the EU placed on the Armenian issue while dealing with the Turkish membership.³⁸ Similarly, the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Resolution passed on 24 April 2001 to commemorate the Armenian Genocide ended with an appeal “to all the members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to take the necessary steps for the recognition of the genocide.”³⁹

The European Council began its membership talks with Türkiye along with accession negotiations on 03 October 2005. However, just prior to the beginning of the talks, the European Parliament resolution on the commencement of negotiations with Türkiye on 28 September 2005 underlined the importance of the matter to the EU and Türkiye’s accession to the union. It stated: “The European Parliament has called on Turkey to recognise the Armenian genocide; considers this recognition to be a prerequisite for accession to the European Union.” Clause L of the resolution stated, “only by demonstrating readiness to embrace EU values through determined implementation and continued reform will Turkey be

³⁵ “Recognition of the Armenian genocide”, Doc. 9056, Written declaration o. 320 (24 April 2001), https://www.armenian-genocide.org/Affirmation.218/current_category.7/affirmation_detail.html

³⁶ “European Parliament Resolution on EU relations with South Caucasus” (28 February 2002), <http://www.parliament.am/library/cexaspanutyun/19.pdf>

³⁷ European Parliament resolution on a political solution to the Armenian question (18 June 1987), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2014_2019/documents/dsca/dv/dsca_2016012021_10/dsca_2016012021_10en.pdf

³⁸ European Parliament Resolution on the first annual “1999 Regular Report from the Commission on Turkey's progress towards accession (COM(1999) 513 - C5-0036/2000 - 2000/2014(COS))”, 15 November 2000

³⁹ Recognition of the Armenian genocide, Doc. 9056 2nd edition, Written Declaration No. 320 (24 April 2001), https://www.armenian-genocide.org/Affirmation.218/current_category.7/affirmation_detail.html

able to ensure the irreversibility of the process of reform and to gather the necessary support amongst the body of EU public opinion,” and Item 5 called “on Turkey to recognise the Armenian genocide; considers this recognition to be a prerequisite for accession to the European Union.”⁴⁰ The European Commission’s spokesperson for EU enlargement at the time, Krisztina Nagy, said “We call on Turkey to work on reconciliation and face its historic past...recognition of the genocide [does] not fall under the Copenhagen criteria...The accession process should be seen as an opportunity for Turkey to confront its past.”⁴¹

To emphasize the importance of the recognition, the Commission Reports on Turkish progress towards accession to the EU and an assessment of its conformity with “European values” have almost always contained references to the genocide in recent years, such as the European Parliament “having regard to its resolution...of 15 April 2015 on the centenary of the Armenian genocide”⁴² “encourages Turkey, once again, to recognize the Armenian Genocide...”⁴³ As the European Parliament sees it, Turkish recognition of the Armenian Genocide is a test for its conformity with “European values,” and failure to do will be perceived as evidence of its ‘lack of Europeanness.’”

2015 was an important year for the global recognition of the Armenian genocide. Several states and agencies within the EU, and the Pope openly acknowledged the genocide to mark the hundredth year since the beginning of the genocide. The European Parliament took the opportunity to pass its landmark resolution on the topic and on 15 April 2015, it organized a plenary session on the commemoration of the genocide and emphasised that its action of the genocide was done “in a spirit of European solidarity and justice.”⁴⁴ It called on “all the Member States legally to acknowledge it, and encourages the Member States and the EU institutions to contribute further to its recognition.”

The European People’s Party’s (EPP) resolution on “The Armenian Genocide and European Values” on 03 March 2015 was significant because as the largest political party in Europe, they called upon Türkiye to follow “the finest example of integrity and leadership proffered by the Federal Republic of post-war Germany” and take conscious steps to come to terms with its past. To realise its “European identity,” the resolution urged Türkiye:

- to recognize and condemn the Armenian Genocide committed by the Ottoman Empire, and to face its own history and memory through commemorating the victims of that heinous crime against humanity;
- to provide a vision and implementing plan of action worthy of a truly European Turkey, including a comprehensive resolution of issues relating to the freedom of expression and reference to the Genocide in state, society and educational institutions, as well as the repair of religious and other

⁴⁰ Opening of negotiations with Turkey, “European Parliament resolution on the opening of negotiations with Turkey” (28 September 2005), P6_TA (2005)0350, <https://www.armenian-genocide.org/uploads/Affirmation/901.pdf>

⁴¹ “Why Armenia continues to haunt Turkey”, *Politico* (26 April 2006), <https://www.politico.eu/article/why-armenia-continues-to-haunt-turkey/>

⁴² MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION on the 2016 Commission Report on Turkey (26 June 2017), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2017-0234_EN.html; European Parliament resolution of 13 March 2019 on the 2018 Commission Report on Turkey (2018/2150(INI)), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2019-0200_EN.html

⁴³ European Parliament resolution of 7 June 2022 on the 2021 Commission Report on Turkey (2021/2250(INI)), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0222_EN.html

⁴⁴ European Parliament resolution on a European commemoration of the centenary of the Armenian Genocide (2015/2590(RSP)), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-8-2015-0343_EN.html

cultural sites and their return to the Armenian and other relevant communities;

- to launch the long-awaited celebration of the Armenian national legacy based on a total Turkish-Armenian normalization anchored in the assumption of history, the pacific resolution of all outstanding matters, and a complete Europeanization of their relationship.⁴⁵

The resolution passed by the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly⁴⁶ on 17 March 2015 in Yerevan stated: “whereas the absence of unequivocal and timely condemnation of the Armenian genocide contributed to a large extent to the failure to prevent future crimes against humanity...Invites Turkey to come to terms with its past.”⁴⁷

All these resolutions establish beyond doubt that the EU places a great deal of importance on the recognition of the genocide. Therefore, it can be argued that the acknowledgement of the Armenian genocide has emerged as a litmus test for Türkiye to demonstrate its commitment to “European values” and “European identity.”

Turkish Response to the Recognition of the Armenian Genocide

Despite the recognition of the Armenian genocide globally, Türkiye continues to deny the events ever took place. At every instance when the European Parliament raised the issue, Türkiye has denied and accused the European Parliament of being biased or politically motivated. Turkish official statements have repeatedly rejected the European Parliament's resolution on the issue, calling them meaningless, based on one-sided Armenian narratives, or politically motivated. What could possibly explain Türkiye's motive behind its consistent denial of the genocide at the cost of its integration into the EU? Is it perhaps that Türkiye sees itself as a victim/ oppressed state- a *mazlum millet*- that has been historically wronged by Western powers? Hakam Yilmaz calls it the “Tanzimat Syndrome” and the “Sèvres Syndrome.”⁴⁸ In short, Türkiye holds the West (primarily, Britain, France, and Russia) responsible for encouraging nationalist independence movements by ethnic minorities that led to the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire through the Tanzimat Reforms (1839-1876), and foreign occupation and the Treaty of Sèvres that proposed a complete dismemberment of Türkiye.

It is important to understand that Türkiye's relationship with Europe has been fraught with complications since the Ottoman period.⁴⁹ ⁵⁰ Although it went through large-scale westernization of almost every aspect of its society under its first President, Kemal Atatürk, a deep suspicion of the “West” took root among its nationalist elite from the early days of the

⁴⁵ EPP, “The Armenian Genocide and European Values”, Resolution Adopted by the EPP Political Assembly, March 3, 2015, <http://www.epp.eu/files/uploads/2015/11/The-Armenian-Genocide.pdf>

⁴⁶ The Euronest Parliamentary Assembly was established in 2011 as an interparliamentary forum including the European Parliament and the national parliaments of Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Armenia.

⁴⁷ “RESOLUTION (1) on the centennial of the Armenian genocide” (2015/C 315/05), Official Journal of the European Union (17 March 2015), [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22015P0923\(05\)&from=HR](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22015P0923(05)&from=HR)

⁴⁸ Yilmaz, Hakam (2006), “Two Pillars of Nationalist Euro-scepticism in Turkey: The *Tanzimat* and Sevres Syndromes”, p. 29- 40

⁴⁹ Wulf Reiners and Ebru Turhan, *EU-Turkey Relations: Theories, Institutions, and Policies* (Springer Nature, 2021).

⁵⁰ Meltem Müftüleri-Bac, *Turkey's Relations with a Changing Europe* (Manchester University Press, 1997).

republic.⁵¹ Thus, while aspiring to become a part of the “European Community,” the Turkish nationalist elite also view the state as a victim of western machinations. Türkiye’s aspiration to be a part of the European bloc can be traced back to 1949 when it became a member of the Council of Europe. Thereafter, Türkiye joined NATO in 1952, applied for “associate membership” in the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1959, signed the “Ankara Agreement” with the EEC in 1963, and established the Customs Union in 1995. Türkiye became an official candidate for full membership in 2005, with the obligation to meet membership conditions but the progress was painfully slow. Between 2005 and 2016, less than half of the 35 chapters necessary to complete the accession process had been opened. In light of its human rights violations and departure from the rule of law, talks with the EU were stalled in 2016. Türkiye has since been charged with violating the Copenhagen Criteria, with the European Parliament passing a resolution to formally suspend the accession negotiations in 2019.

The “Tanzimat syndrome” embodies the suspicion with which Türkiye views the issue of third-party advocacy of minority rights within the state. The Tanzimat reforms were initiated by the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century in response to demands by non-Muslim minorities for more rights and privileges. The Ottomans resented the frequent European advocacy for their Christian minorities and suspected that the European states were instigating the minorities to rebel against the empire. By initiating some reforms, the Ottomans had hoped that the reforms would prevent the minority-inhabited territories from breaking free. However, the reforms triggered a fresh wave of independence movements from which the Turkish elite deduced two beliefs that continue to shape its policies towards minorities: one, more rights and freedoms do not make minorities more loyal to the state, but rather, they find further opportunities to organize and revolt; and two, the real reason behind European support for human rights and freedom for minorities was to weaken Türkiye.

It is argued that this syndrome, symbolised by the suspicion with which Türkiye views the issue of minority rights and European intervention as being intrinsically connected is partially responsible for the way it responds to the Armenian issue. The Armenians and other minorities continue to be perceived as untrustworthy collaborators of Western powers. Meanwhile, the demands by third parties for recognising the genocide and foreign Parliaments passing resolutions on the genocide are perceived as Western attempts to weaken Türkiye by encouraging rebellion within the state. According to President Erdoğan, “We will never allow those, who do everything they can in order to divide this country and separate this nation” (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, 30 May 2015).⁵²

The Sèvres Syndrome is another marker of Türkiye’s scepticism towards the West. After losing War World I, Türkiye was occupied by Allied forces. According to Türkiye, the peace treaty that the Ottoman Empire signed with the Allies in 1920 compromised Turkish sovereignty and caused widespread public outrage. The Treaty of Sèvres, although never really implemented, dealt a big blow to the Turkish psyche. The treaty had proposed limiting the country to a much smaller territory than its current borders and contained provisions for independent states for the Armenians and the Kurds. The Turkish War of Independence was

⁵¹ Taner Akçam, *From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008).

⁵² “We will not allow those, who want to put out the conquest's fire that has been ablaze in our hearts for 562 years”, Presidency of the Republic of Turkey (30 May 2015), <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/32505/istanbulun-yureginde-562-yildir-yanan-fetih-isigini-sondurmek-isteyenlere-asla-izin-vermeyecegiz>

fought over this treaty, after which the Kemalists succeeded in 1923 to wrest a better deal from the West in the form of the Treaty of Lausanne. Through its wartime experience, the Turkish elite learnt never to completely trust the West. The idea that Western powers desire the dismemberment and downfall of Türkiye became ingrained in the minds of Turkish leaders and society, and suspicion of the West became a part of the Turkish worldview. Post-war Turkish official histories thus portray Türkiye as a victim of the West, the “oppressed nation” (*mazlum millet*) which had to rely on its own abilities to gain independence from hostile foreign intentions against it. The minorities who collaborate with the West are seen as “the enemy within” within this thought framework.

The Sèvres syndrome explains the general Turkish scepticism towards the West and its persistence in denying the Armenian genocide. Türkiye perceives the recognition of the Armenian genocide as part of a Western agenda against it, rather than a genuine humanitarian concern for its minorities. Further, within Türkiye, the Armenians are still viewed as enemies and collaborators, just as they were seen when the Ottoman Empire confronted the West. Demands for recognising the genocide are therefore seen as an affront and an insult to Türkiye.

Turkish President Erdoğan can be seen playing up to the narrative of Turkish victimhood on multiple occasions by invoking the historical atrocities committed by European powers. This is evident in his statements such as “The latest countries to speak of genocide are Germany, Russia, and France. What happened during the two world wars that had been initiated by Germany in the past century is before our eyes... First, they (Germany, Russia, and France) must, one by one, clean the stains on their own histories”⁵³ or “the countries that are blackmailing us with these Armenian genocide resolutions have the blood of millions of innocents on their hands.”⁵⁴

Confronted with the wave of genocide recognition in 2015, the Turkish Ministry of External Affairs even accused the European Parliament of “religious and cultural fanaticism” and argued that “members of the European Parliament may better encounter their own past and remember especially their roles and responsibilities in the most abhorrent calamities of humanity such as World War I and World War II, well before dealing with the 1915 issue.”⁵⁵ This was in line with its earlier response to the European Parliament’s resolution in 2000, where it accused the former of having a “Turkey complex.”⁵⁶ The state’s official position on the issue has been clearly encapsulated in its 2018 statement:

We do not attribute any value to this unilateral and by no means objective stance of the European Parliament ...the Resolution is deemed meaningless on our end...the reference made once again this year to the unfortunate assessment of 15 April 2015 of the European Parliament are based on one-sided Armenian narratives, reflects the

⁵³ “Erdoğan hits back in genocide row”, Deutsche Welle (25 April 2015), <https://www.dw.com/en/Erdoğan-lashes-out-at-west-and-russia-for-recognizing-armenian-killings-as-genocide/a-18408666>

⁵⁴ “Erdoğan: Armenia ‘genocide’ used to blackmail Turkey”, Al Jazeera (4 June 2016), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/6/4/Erdoğan-armenia-genocide-used-to-blackmail-turkey>

⁵⁵ “Erdoğan says European Parliament’s 1915 vote shows enmity against Turkey”, Hurriyet Daily News (17 April 2015), <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/Erdoğan-says-european-parliaments-1915-vote-shows-enmity-against-turkey-81168>

⁵⁶ “Morillon Report Regarding Turkey’s Progress Towards Accession No:217 - November 15, 2000”, Republic Of Türkiye Ministry Of Foreign Affairs, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/morillon-report-regarding-turkey_s-progress-towards-accession_br_no_217---november-15_-2000.en.mfa

biased and political character of this report.⁵⁷

However, a subtle shift in the state's attitude towards the Armenians became noticeable in Türkiye in 2005. Reassured by the negotiations with the EU, human rights groups, activists, academics, and the liberal intelligentsia in the country began holding conferences and initiating public conversations about what happened to the Ottoman Armenians without uttering the word genocide. President Erdoğan also spoke of Armenian "suffering" during World War I for the first time in 2013, and then in subsequent years without acknowledging the genocide.⁵⁸ In one of the most radical developments, several human rights organizations got together and launched the "100th Year- Stop Denialism" campaign to mark the centennial commemoration of the genocide in 2015 and called for recognition, apology, and reparations for the victims. Many prominent Turks publicly lent support to the enterprise at the time. However, the widening gap between the EU and Türkiye since 2016 has undone most of these changes. The Turkish government's move towards populist authoritarianism and widespread human rights abuses have eventually led to the abandonment of membership talks with the EU. As of early 2023, Türkiye's stance on the genocide remains as hard as it was prior to 2005, characterized by the suppression of alternative opinions domestically and outright denial in the international political landscape.

Conclusion

Will Türkiye recognize the Armenian genocide anytime in the near future? The answer is negative. The Armenian genocide issue is closely tied to the narrative of victimhood in Türkiye. The resolutions passed in foreign parliaments recognizing the genocide have only fuelled this narrative of victimhood further and strengthened Turkish suspicion of the West. Unless there is a fundamental revision in this narrative, acknowledging the genocide seems very unlikely. Any potential recognition of the Armenian genocide by Türkiye will be the outcome of internal changes rather than the pressure exerted by international actors, including the EU. On the other hand, until such time the Turkish elite and the society talk about it, recognise it, and dealt with it honestly, the Armenian genocide will remain a taboo and a curse that will continue to haunt the country.

About the author



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⁵⁷ "No: 52, 13 March 2019, Press Release Regarding the European Parliament's Resolution Regarding 2018 Report on Turkey", Republic Of Türkiye Ministry Of Foreign Affairs, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_52_-avrupa-parlamentosu-2018-turkiye-raporu-hk.en.mfa

⁵⁸ It is important to note that his statements place emphasis on the joint suffering of Armenians and Turks; Armenian groups and genocide scholars have thus argued that his statements do not acknowledge the genocide of Armenians and continue the denial of the genocide through subtler means.