

**A TEST OF MATURITY: THE GENOCIDE FACTOR
IN ARMENIA'S FOREIGN POLICY**

Introduction

Among the issues on the Armenian foreign policy agenda, perhaps the problem of the recognition of the fact of the Genocide and its condemnation is in many respects the most significant one. It also has a serious domestic political and all-national meaning (in terms of functioning of the whole Diaspora-Homeland system), as well as an important foreign political resonance.

**The Genocide Factor as an Item on the Agenda of Armenian Foreign
Policy**

The Genocide affirmation issue is the only vector of Armenia's foreign policy, which reaches far beyond the regional context and enters modern global politics. The fact that in the past several decades this issue has been widely debated in political and public circles of many countries, including world powers, as well as sudden interest towards that issue by the European Union, go to show our point.

In the past decade, global political processes have been aiming noticeably at strengthening their moral component, as manifested by the growing attention to issues, falling under the category of protection of human rights. In this context, Armenia's policy of promoting the universal recognition of the Genocide and its condemnation as a crime of sweeping and massive violation of the fundamental right to live of the whole nation, takes the central stage of significance.

Another distinctive feature of the Genocide affirmation is that the intensity level of its foreign political manifestation can basically be only set by Armenia's authorities. Here again a fact confirming our idiom is quite evident: perhaps the only adjustment the new Armenian leadership made to the foreign policy agenda upon coming to power in 1998 was the official acknowledgment of the Genocide factor as a priority issue.

This is where the principle difference between the Genocide issue and the resolution of the Karabakh conflict being discussed within the OSCE Minsk Group where initiative belongs to

Co-Chairs, becomes most evident. At the same time, the Karabakh problem is viewed in the context of regional realities by both the parties concerned and the observers alike. Recently, another attribute setting these two issues apart has emerged. On the Karabakh issue, Armenia has more often than not found herself rebutting various accusations by the Azerbaijani side, while on the Genocide recognition front Armenia has adopted a pro-active policy and has put forward claims on her own.

An important characteristic of the recognition issue as a foreign policy factor is the striking contradiction between its core content and its perception by some of our neighbors, chiefly Turkey and Azerbaijan. In effect, this issue is one of the foreign policy problems that are charged with a high degree of moral humanity. Armenia, as a state established by the nation victimized by genocide right after its unacknowledged and unpunished occurrence, now includes on its foreign policy agenda the question this gravest crime under the international law be affirmed and condemned by the genocide perpetrator's successor-state, as well as and by the international community.

The above-mentioned states, and primarily of course, Turkey, however, are trying, firstly, to downgrade the problem to a level of bilateral relations, and secondly, to falsify the very essence of that policy by portraying it as conspiracy built on hatred, confrontation, even hostility. At the same time, Turkey has actively been taking steps, increasingly reminiscent of a full-scale diplomatic offensive, aimed at inflicting her point of view on the international community.

The above-mentioned features of the Genocide factor point to the uniqueness of its nature, thus justifying the vitality of its multilevel study.

The Genocide Factor in Foreign Policy of Armenia: a Diachronistic Analysis

After passing through several stages, the issue of recognition and condemnation of the Genocide, as a key all-Armenian issue, initially concerning mainly the Diaspora and subsequently being embraced (of course, within the limits set by the authorities) by Soviet Armenia as well; and a public and political discourse of the past four decades, has been crystallized into a factor of the foreign policy of the Republic of Armenia,. Let us discuss them all in brief.

In the period, immediately preceding the declaration of independence, two approaches were outlined. The Armenian National Movement (ANM), that headed the national democratic liberation movement in Armenia, had in their platform the point calling for struggle for the

recognition and condemnation of the Genocide. However, at the same time, it made an attempt at revising postulates traditional of Armenian public and political school of thought, by introducing the idea of the genocide issue not standing in the way of normalizing the Armenian-Turkish relations. The majority of the remaining political forces centered around Armenian Revolutionary Federation Party (the Dashnaksutyun) advocated the “traditional” approach, which hinged the establishment of normal relations with Turkey upon her affirmation of the Genocide. Both camps considered that issue in the context of the bilateral Armenian-Turkish relations.

After coming to power in 1990, the ANM had to compromise and agreed to incorporate that issue into the Declaration of Independence (1990), thus booking a spot for it on the Armenian foreign policy agenda. Afterwards, however, the Party tried to ignore the issue by giving it a status secondary to the issue of normalizing relations with Turkey. This policy was then voiced through the concept of Armenia’s readiness to establish normal relations with Turkey without any preconditions.

In its turn Turkey, which recognized the Republic of Armenia’s independence as early as December 1991, had refused to establish diplomatic relations with her until a number of preconditions has been met. In so doing, in its attitude towards the young state Turkey has chosen a rare *operational code*¹ for modern international relations, where severance of existing diplomatic relations or refusal to recognize a newly-established state are more common practices for similar situations. The choice of that operational code can be attributed to Turkey’s desire to achieve a strategic upper-hand in her relations with Armenia, compelling the latter, which had aspired to normalize her relations with the neighbor, to accept *non-conventional* relations² with Turkey.

The lack of a diplomatic representation and the resulting narrowing of reliable channels of information on the political life of the Turkish state had further weakened the positions of young Armenian diplomacy.

¹ The term was first introduced into international relations studies by Alexander George, who used it to characterize the ways of action by policy makers. See A. George. *The ‘Operational Code’: A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision Making*, International Studies Quarterly – International Studies Quarterly, 1969, 13:2 (June), p. 1900-222. Used here to characterize a paradigm of a foreign policy of a state, the genesis of which may be reduced to one definite action.

² That is, the multi-layer bilateral relations in the conditions of absence of diplomatic relations. This scantily explored aspect of international relations is highlighted in the innovative work: *G. R. Berridge, Talking to Enemy: How States without ‘Diplomatic Relations’ Communicate*. New York, 1994.

In general, Turkey's policy towards Armenia from the very beginning can be described as a policy of *coercion*. That policy is being articulated with particular clarity in Turkey's tendency to impose her own issues on discussion agendas for various non-conventional contacts.

The shaping of that agenda began as early as in 1991 and already by the mid 1990s it has been fully formulated, whereby Turkey tried to compel Armenia to:

- Relinquish its policy of pressing for the affirmation of the Genocide;
- Officially recognize the inviolability of the Armenian-Turkish borders border, as established by the 1921 Kars Treaty;
- Make unilateral concessions to Azerbaijan in the Karabakh settlement.

The Armenian side was interested in developing trade and economic relations with Turkey as well as using its communications. Later on, after Turkey closed its land border with Armenia in 1993, a new item had been added to the agenda: the conditions of opening of the border. From 1991-1997, Turkey exerted a firm diplomatic pressure on Armenia, trying to get concessions across the entire range of the above-mentioned issues. Twice, in 1992 and 1993, Turkey even threatened to use military force, moving troops closer to the Armenian border.

In these conditions, Armenia chose defensive tactics, and attempted to distance itself from the Genocide recognition policy by conceding the leadership on that issue to the Diaspora. Official Yerevan's drive to dissociate from that issue was so resolute that the then Armenia's Foreign Affairs Minister had to resign after making unauthorized remarks on the Genocide in a 1992 statement.

4

After coming to power in 1998, the new leadership of the country amended the foreign policy agenda by placing the abovementioned problem on top of the state's most important issues. Meanwhile, the formula designed by the past leadership, according to which the Genocide recognition issue should not impede the establishment of normal relations between Armenia and Turkey, remained intact. So here we have a unique fusion of the traditional approach with that of the ANM.

Initially, after the indicated above amendments had been made, the issue was largely viewed by Armenia within the framework of Armenian-Turkish relations, and in the context of strengthening ties with the Diaspora. Later on, though, set off primarily by the increased efforts to have the issue placed on the agendas of the US Congress and the French Parliament in 2000, a tendency to view it in a larger context of the expansion of Armenian's relations with the West has emerged.

The Genocide in Armenian Foreign Policy: A Synchronistic Analysis

How does the Genocide factor really come across in the diplomatic activity of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia? We suggest several analysis levels.

1. Bilateral relations

In Armenian-Turkish relations, the problem of the recognition of the Genocide and the whole set of associated issues have not yet been seriously discussed by the two sides. This stems from the policy of a total denial of the very fact of the Genocide, traditionally employed by Turkish authorities until recently, when Turkey has put forward an idea of discussing the issue by historians from both countries, being fully aware that this proposal, which transforms a political problem into a historical debate, would be unacceptable for Armenia. As expected, Armenia immediately rejected that suggestion, in her turn advising the Turkish leadership to expand their familiarity with the available scientific and historical materials.

5

In the situation where no direct contacts with Turkey on this issue exist, in addition to the obvious objective set forth by Armenian leadership the affirmation of the Genocide and its condemnation by Turkey - Genocide factor in the Armenian foreign policy, acquires additional functions of a containment instrument for Turkey's policy of *coercion* against Armenia.

Actually, we have the following picture of diplomatic interactions between the sides. Turkey, which seeks concessions from Armenia on a number of issues, using the latter's unfavorable geographic location to its advantage, is exerting pressure on her, and as it was noted above, puts forward preconditions for establishing diplomatic relations, opening land border, and developing normal trade and economic contacts with Armenia.

In contrast to the Turkish approach, Armenia proposes two fundamental principles underlying the concept of her relations with Turkey: the establishment of normal relations without preconditions, and Turkey's readiness to discuss all disputable issues, including those set forward by Turkey as preconditions.

A conflict between the *operational codes* of the two approaches to bilateral relations is apparent. In this situation, the Genocide factor becomes especially important for Armenia, as the only sphere allowing for more independent and flexible policy towards Turkey and counterbalance to the Turkish policy of *coercion* against Armenia. The previous Armenian leadership had demonstrated this approach, which, however, was overall unsuccessful, because it was based on a “defensive” *operational code*.

The incumbent authorities have apparently built on the negative experience of their predecessors, which is why on this issue they have chosen an “offensive” *operation code*. Thus Armenia’s options for resisting and confronting the Turkish *coercion* policy have increased, make it possible to neutralize their negative diplomatic consequences. Armenia’s strong rebuttal to the Turkish proposal to downgrade the issue of the Genocide recognition from the political domain to academia discussions was only be possible because of the “offensive” *operational code*, which just proves our point.

2. “Big policy”

In 1987, the European Parliament passed the resolution on the “Political Solution to the Armenian Issue,” in which the tragic events of 1915-1917 on the territory of the Ottoman Empire, which targeted the Armenian population, are qualified as genocide, as prescribed by the UN Convention on the “Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.” The same Resolution calls upon the European Council to exert pressure on the Turkish Government in order for it to recognize the Genocide. The process of placing of the genocide issue on the agenda of the “big European policy” has clearly begun. Since the 1990s, a similar process has been noticeable in the United States.

Therefore, the leadership of the newly independent Republic of Armenia has from the very beginning had an opportunity to extend the Genocide factor beyond the frameworks of the bilateral Armenian-Turkish relations and apply it to Armenia’s relationship with the West, thus trying to acquire an instrument against the *coercion* policy exercised by Turkey towards Armenia. However, since the then Armenian leadership had chosen the “defensive” operational code in relations with Turkey, they preferred not to do it.

Armenia’s joining the campaign for the international recognition of the genocide in 2000 has given it a new momentum by having it integrated in global processes. Having thus adopted the “active” operational code, our state has at the same time strengthened its position vis-à-vis Turkey.

In 2004, the above process was given new dimensions when the public opinion of the EU countries, as voiced by influential intellectuals, began actively demanding from Turkey, which seeks membership in the EU, to condemn the dark pages of its history, while leaders of the EU countries started raising this issue in bilateral negotiations with the Turks.

On the whole, one can say that the internationalization of the Genocide factor is being accomplished on two levels. In the realm of *Realpolitik*, it is being used by influential political circles in Europe and the United States for their own gain – as an additional vehicle to put pressure on Turkey. At the same time, it has already been adopted by global discourse on the problems of genocide and other crimes against humanity.

Armenia's interaction with European countries and the U.S. on the level of *Realpolitik* strengthens its overall position in the world and, particularly, its relations with Turkey. The active participation in the above discourse enhances Armenia's authority in the world.

3. Geostrategic aspect

The Genocide factor has also been influencing the choice of a Geostrategic direction in which Armenia will develop. It is Russia that has been traditionally perceived by Armenians as one of the most consistent allies on this issue. Russia's recent inclination to establish closer relations with Turkey, as well as general weakening of its positions in the world, seem to dash all hopes that Russia would assist in this matter which had remained some of the Armenian political elite.

In fact, Armenia today can realistically expect support in having the genocide recognized and condemned only from the European Union and the United States, and count on them to keep pressuring Turkey on that issue. This situation is an additional Geostrategic factor contributing to the movement of Armenia toward the West.

Perspectives

Operational code, adopted by the incumbent Armenian authorities in regard of Turkey, assumes that there will be no unilateral concessions on such a key and wide-scale pan-Armenian issue, as the Genocide affirmation. Following its introduction into the agenda of the Armenian policy on Turkey, the room for maneuvering for the Armenian side seems to have shrunk quite considerably.

On the other hand, the establishment of an appropriate interaction modus with the Western politics and global political processes makes Armenia's position in its bilateral relations with

Turkey more sustainable. For that reason it appears that the path towards further integration with the West can uncover additional resources required to successfully counter the *coercion* policy of Turkey. The official recognition and condemnation of the fact of the genocide by Turkey would be the ultimate justification of this operational code. After the affirmation has been achieved, this question could be moved from the political realm to the domain of international law thus preparing ground for raising legal issues of retributions for the crime of genocide against the Armenian people the crime, perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire, the successor of which is the present Turkish Republic.

Instead of the Conclusion: a Test of Maturity

As we stressed, the introduction of the Genocide factor into Armenia's diplomatic agenda, has become her claim for maturity. Following through on this path and achieving success at that would mean that Armenia has passed the maturity test. However, in order to pass this test, it is necessary to have not only the required knowledge, but also the ability to use the skills wisely and to the maximum advantage. Let's hope for the Armenian diplomacy to display these qualities.