

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ARMENIA

KURDS OF TURKEY AND THE ARMENIAN  
GENOCIDE: A MATTER OF HISTORICAL JUSTICE?

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## **List of Abbreviations**

- AKP-** Justice and Development Party
- ARF-** Armenian Revolutionary Federation
- BDP-** Peace and Democracy Party
- CHP-** Republican People's Party
- DEHAP-** Democratic People's Party
- DEP-** Democracy Party
- DTP-** Democratic Society Party
- EU-** European Union
- HADEP-** People's Democracy Party
- HDP-** People's Democratic Party
- HEP-** People's Labor Party
- KADEK-** Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress
- KongraGel-** Kurdistan People's Congress
- KPE-** Kurdish Parliament in Exile
- MHP-** Nationalist Movement Party
- MFA of Turkey-** Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey
- PKK-** Kurdistan Workers' Party
- TBMM-** Turkish Grand National Assembly
- TDP-** Social Democratic Party

## **Introduction**

The issue of the Armenian Genocide is one of the debatable themes within Turkish political and social circles. Turkish society and also various ethnic minorities of Turkey have very diverse interpretations concerning the Armenian Genocide. Some part of Turkish political circles and intellectuals support the official stance of the Turkish government which denies the Genocide of Armenians and conducts any possible actions to support it.

However, other social and political circles of Turkey have quite an opposite stance regarding the issue of the Armenian Genocide and publicly recognize and condemn the Genocide of Armenians. The followers of this new trend are the political representatives of the Kurdish society who began to express some views and ideas on the issue of the Armenian Genocide that were differed from the Turkish official position since 2007. Those Kurdish politicians are elected particularly from the south-eastern parts of Turkey and are well informed about the mass massacres of Armenians in 1915. Some of them even admit their grandfathers' role in the annihilation of the Armenian nation in 1915. As a result those Kurdish politicians became the major advocates of raising the issue of the Armenian Genocide in the Turkish Parliament.

The aim of this Master's essay is to examine Kurdish politicians' stance in Turkey concerning the recognition of the Armenian Genocide and try to analyze the major reasons of why these politicians publicly speak about and recognize the Armenian Genocide. First of all, the study reviews the main literature on the concepts of non-state actors, stateless nations with the aim of trying to underline the major characteristics of these actors and what role they can have in state affairs. Then, the study tries to apply those concepts to Kurds as one of the ethnic groups without their own independent state who can have an impact on Turkey's social and political life.

The first Chapter of the study briefly overviews the history of the Kurdish people, the relations of Kurds and Armenians during the late Ottoman Empire and also briefly introduces the emergence of Kurdish left-wing political parties of Turkey in order to have a clear understanding about the current problem.

The second Chapter tries to analyze briefly the efforts of both Armenia and Turkey to establish diplomatic relations and to see what was the Kurdish perspective concerning that particular issue. Then the paper concentrates on the analysis of the official statements of Kurdish politicians of Turkey who raised the issue of the Armenian Genocide in the Turkish Parliament, thus trying to approve the hypothesis and to answer the research questions which are as follows:

**HP1:** *The growing trends of the statements by Kurdish politicians of Turkey on the issue of the Armenian Genocide derive from their own political aims.*

**HP0:** *The growing trends of the statements by Kurdish politicians of Turkey on the issue of the Armenian Genocide do not derive from their own political aims.*

**RQ1:** *How to explain Kurdish politicians' recent initiative of raising the issue of the recognition of the Armenian Genocide in the Turkish Grand National Assembly?*

**RQ2:** *What was Kurdish politician's stance regarding the establishment of diplomatic relations between Turkey and Armenia?*

## **Research Methodology**

Within the framework of this study qualitative method is used for addressing the research questions and testing the hypothesis. Three research instruments have been used:

- Primary data: Semi-structured interviews
- Secondary data: Document analysis
- Content Analysis

Six interviews have been conducted with scholars working in the field of Turkish and Kurdish studies in Armenia (*See Appendix*). The interviews have been conducted in-person and lasted on average thirty minutes. The period of conducting interviews covered April-May 2015. The interviews were aimed to find out the main reasons for Kurdish politicians' stance concerning the recognition of the Armenian Genocide. The results of interviews helped to get a deeper understanding about the issue, helped also to answer the research questions and to prove the hypothesis.

Document analysis included laws, international conventions and official letters of the presidents. Content analysis of various books, international reports and also the official statements have been conducted in order to analyze the issue, to find about the main reasons of why Kurdish politicians raise the issue of the Armenian Genocide, what are the main implications standing behind this development in Turkey's politics.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The current study has several limitations. Firstly, there is no research conducted on this particular topic which created many difficulties. Some of the literature covers only the late Ottoman period and examines the relationship of Kurds and Armenians, their struggle for autonomy and

equal rights. However, since 2000's the literature is lacking about the relations between Kurds of Turkey and Armenians, about the current topic. The main sources are interpreted in Turkish media. Thus, the main body of the research is based on the interpretation and analysis of the official statements of Kurdish politicians from the Turkish and Kurdish websites.

Secondly, no Kurdish politicians were contacted. Though the research tried to understand the issue more deeply with the means of directly sending e-mail with a questionnaire comprised of five questions to those Kurdish politicians' personal e-mails, however, no reply has been received which in its turn created another hardship for conducting this research.

Another problem was connected with the lack of time. Since the research examines the major reasons of Kurdish politicians' stance on the issue of the Armenian Genocide, as a result of time limitations no chances were available to go to Turkey to meet those Kurdish politicians and also to conduct a survey among Kurdish societies in order to see what their perceptions on that particular problem are, whether they support or oppose the position of their politicians regarding the recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

## Literature Review

### *Non-State Actors*

The main actors of world politics are considered nation-states, however, other actors also exist known as non-state actors. After the end of the World War II the number of non-state actors including international organizations and private actors increased, however, little attention has been paid on them. The rapid growth of these non-state actors led to some theorists of international relations argue that the role of states as unitary actors in world affairs has been on decline giving more influential status to the increase of non-state actors (Büthe 2004; Ataman 2003).

The role of non-state actors is prominent in foreign policies of nation-states. The activities of non-state actors are widespread in more than one state. Among the theorists of international relations one of the proponents of neorealist thinking Waltz (1990) assumes that states are the primary actors in the world politics. However, nowadays it has become evident that nation-states can no longer solve major issues on their own (Ataman 2003). Neoliberals also accept the state-centric view of neorealists, however, they also highlight that non-state actors are important components of the world politics. Nation-states have to give significant attention to non-state actors in order to keep their interests. Meanwhile, this does not mean that states have lost their influence in the international politics. Rather, there is a structural inter-connectedness between states and non-state actors (Kliesch 2009).

During the 1990s the role of non-state actors became prominent in international relations thus contributing to the creation of new scholarly literature giving attention on the influence of these actors in the world politics. The debates of the conceptual framework of non-state actors still exist in international relations literature (Büthe 2004). There is no commonly accepted definition of non-state actors. According to some authors non-state actors are perceived “as any organized group with

a basic structure of command operating outside state control that uses force to achieve its political or allegedly political objectives” (DCAF & Geneva Call 2015, p. 7). Among those actors rebel groups or governments of entities that are not recognized as states are important ones. However, according to Büthe non-state actors comprise various international organizations, multinational corporations, non-governmental organizations, commercial lobbying groups and also international criminal and terrorist groups (2004, p. 245). These actors function collectively, communicate with different non-state actors or governments, express their main goals, operate for profit thus having both negative and positive impact on state affairs. Kironde (2007) in his article also identifies various types of non-state actors such as trade unions, private businesses, citizens’ groups, church and religious organizations, associations comprised of national and ethnic minorities, organizations with anti-discriminatory objectives and others.

Other authors conducting their research identified some other types of non-state actors such as media organizations, interest organizations, voluntary associations, however they particularly concentrated on the role of political parties and some other types of civil society organizations. They put the emphasis on political parties as one of the major types of non-state actors who can have a significant impact in the country’s democratic consolidation. The major difference between political parties and other types of civil society organizations is that their role in the political system is much more significant despite the fact that political parties, in essence, are private, voluntary organizations being separated from the state. Political parties as a result of their functioning in the political system produce goods for public such as they nominate candidates with the pursuit of having representations in the national parliaments in order to conduct and implement policies (Svasand and Tostensen 2009).

Non-state actors are quite different from each other in spite of some similarities. Some of them may have clear political objectives, some may exercise control over a specific territory with a

clear administrative structures, while others can have weak command structures and influence over their members. Some of them conduct their operations in rural areas, while others operate in urban areas. Some of them put their main attention on attacking military targets, while others as a means of their strategy attack civilians (DCAF & Geneva Call 2015). Gradually, non-state actors are becoming more and more autonomous and they also initiate new rules and norms. They function more efficiently than any other state and try to change and modify security considerations in a more radical way (La Porte 2012). In other words, they gain some sort of political authority which pushes them to advocate issues such as freedom of expression and the provision of human, cultural and political rights. Wiseman (2004) within this context identifies a new concept called “polylateralism” which characterizes the relations between states and non-state actors and argues that with the growing trends of non-state actors there is a need to transform the traditional bilateral and multilateral relations between states to a new model.

In the literature of international relations other types of non-state actors also exist which are commonly known as armed non-state actors. These actors establish complex security networks in order to fight against the enemy and ensure their own survival. Such groups are also called armed opposition groups, rebel groups and insurgents (DCAF & Geneva Call 2015).

Three crucial features are important to understand and differentiate armed non-state actors: territory, identity/resources and the relationship to wider society. Territorial control is considered to be one of the main successes of the armed non-state actors. On an upper level of territorial control are de facto authorities and partially recognized states. As these actors can function openly, they sometimes create administrative structures like that of many states such as government, parliament, armed forces. Control over territory can be enough for armed non-state actors to ensure their survival and to disturb a state or another enemy. However, many armed non-state actors do not aim to change regime or the whole power structures of a state, rather they use strategies to refute control

to the enemy by creating instability and insecurity. For instance, armed non-state actors that do not have control over territory are the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the Colombian National Liberations Army and etc. (DCAF & Geneva Call 2015).

Another feature of armed non-state actors is their reliance on identity and resources in order to consolidate and mobilize their members. For instance, territory can be considered as one type of resource for armed non-state actors who can fight for it which in its turn will give access to other resources. Daily material resources of armed non-state actors are “weapons, money, uniforms, means of transportation/communication and other types of equipment” (DCAF & Geneva Call 2015, p. 10). One of the most important “resources” that armed non-state actors can provide is security mainly the protection from government and armed forces. However, armed non-state actors also reproduce collective and individual identities. Among non-material resources “group loyalty, a sense of pertinence, status within and outside the group, skills and knowledge” are important (DCAF & Geneva Call 2015, p. 11). It is usually accepted that individuals will choose to take part in the rebellion based on the type and quantity of resources available at the creation of armed non-state actors. Resources such as common beliefs, values and norms would contribute to the recruitment of high commitment persons, while other resources such as taxation, criminal activity will lead to the combination of low commitment individuals. This in its turn would create “activist” versus “opportunistic” non-state actors. The PKK can be a vivid example of activist non-state actors, while the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone is an opportunistic one (DCAF & Geneva Call 2015, p. 11).

The last feature of understanding the behavior of armed non-state actors is their interaction with wider society and the degree of their marginalization. It has been widely accepted that in the case of sharing common enemy, of protecting their security group members become more united

and stronger being excluded from the wider society. This type of behavior is persistent mainly among terrorist and criminal groups (DCAF & Geneva Call 2015).

### *Stateless Nations and Ethnic Groups*

In the literature of international relations “stateless nations”, “nations without states”, or “ethnic groups without states” are commonly used. According to some estimations nearly 3000 to 5000 nations live in the world, however, only less than 200 nations are considered to be nation-states. Among those stateless nations that are active players in international affairs are the Palestinians, the Basques and Catalonians in Spain, the Kurds in the Middle East and so forth. For example, among these ethnic groups Kurds have a significant role in the politics of the Middle East (Ataman 2003). As long as the Kurdish question is still concerned, it can be stated that Kurds play a crucial role in the politics of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria where Kurdish population lives.

Most nations are usually comprised of different ethnicities meaning that no single group is totally prevailing. An ethnic community is sometimes described “as a group of people united by inherited culture, racial features, religion, or national sentiments” (Karimova and Deverell 2001, p. 13). It is important to mention that state authorities often face challenges brought by mobilized ethnic groups. Richmond in his article (1987) analyzes the main aspects of politically mobilized ethnic groups and states that those groups can pursue various objectives. Those objectives can comprise the right to several privileges such as the provision of the human rights, the use of their own languages in educational settings, the right to profess their religion, the compensation of their property and the use of their votes in several marginal constituencies. Nevertheless, states can conduct risky policies in order to assimilate ethnic minorities into the majority by some coercive actions such as prohibiting the use of minority languages or by some positive measures such as giving the members of ethnic minorities an opportunity to leave their native community and unite

with the national mainstream. For instance, Turkish ruling apparatus from the very past have always used discriminatory policies against its ethnic minorities especially the Kurds. Such policies included the mandatory use of Turkish in daily life and the prohibition of non-Turkic languages including the Kurdish.

People sometimes identify themselves with ethno-national groups. Some of them give their loyalty not to the ruling elite but rather to their ethno-national group that shares common culture, language and bonds of kinship. The result of this loyalty to ethno-national group national liberation movements are becoming significant in world affairs. The majority of Kurds in Turkey have a strong consciousness of considering themselves as a unique ethnic group separated from the Turks and other religious and ethnic minorities living within the territory of Turkey. Various states consist of different ethnicities and most of them involve at least one “potentially threatening” minority. Within this context Kurds are the largest ethnic minority in the republican Turkey and they have constantly faced with Turkish republican nation-building policies. Like other ethnic groups, the Kurds also have a significant influence in international affairs and world politics. Various states seek the Kurdish groups’ involvement in their regional policies (Ataman 2003).

Summing up the main conceptual frameworks discussed in this section, it can be stated that Kurdish people can be considered as one of the key actors or players in Turkey’s social and political affairs. As a separate ethnic group with their own cultural and religious identities Kurds have always struggled to establish their own independent state through various measures. The role of the PKK needs a significant attention within this context. However, till now, Kurds have not established their own state and are the largest ethnic minority within Turkey which shows that ethnicity still is not denied in Turkey. Nevertheless, Kurds are key actors and have a powerful say in Turkey’s politics.

## **Chapter 1: Historical Overview**

### ***1.1. Who are the Kurds?***

Being one of the largest ethnic groups without their own independent state Kurds constitute almost 30 million throughout the Middle East. Kurds are Indo-European particularly Sunni-Muslim people who inhabited the region today being separated between southeastern Turkey, northern parts of Syria, Iraq and eastern Iran (Gunter 1991). Large part of Kurds speak Kurmanji in Turkey, however, Alevi and Sunni Kurds that inhabit in the northwest of Diyarbakir also speak Zaza. Kurds constitute majority in the following provinces of Turkey: Mardin, Siirt, Hakkari, Diyarbakir, Bitlis, Mus, Van and Ağrı. A large proportion of Kurdish population of Turkey lives in other provinces of Urfa, Adiyaman, Malatya, Elazig, Tunceli, Erzincan, Bingol and Kars (Fox 2014, p. 2). Some of them also live in Istanbul. Being considered as an ethnic group with a search of historical and cultural origins in the period of consolidation Kurds started to profess the so-called “pre-Islamic” religion which was particularly originated from the Yezidi religion that was identical with the mediaeval Sufi order (Asatrian 2009, p. 6). Kurds in southeast of Turkey live mainly in smaller towns and villages and are engaged in agricultural works for their survival, however, some of them are yet semi-nomadic. A feudal economic structure is persistent among those Kurds (Fox 2014).

In general, the exact number of Kurds cannot be estimated. According to Garnik Asatrian (2009) statistical information about Kurds is lacking as no census has been conducted by any states that Kurds inhabit or by any NGOs dealing with Kurds. This problem is also connected with some states’ stance which do not consider Kurds as a separate ethnic group (Smith 2013). Another issue that relates to the difficulty of calculating the exact number of Kurds is that they often become refugees and asylum seekers in various states as a result of repressions and persecutions. However, according to some estimations, the number of Kurds varies from 15 million to 30 million, the large

part of whom inhabits in the countries of Western Europe. Nearly 8-12 million Kurds live in Turkey comprising about 20% of the Turkish population, 7 million inhabits in Iran (10% of its population), and 4-5 million in Iraq making up 23% of the Iraqi people. Some of them live in Syria as well.

The concept of Kurdistan was used and is still being used referring to a geographical area where the Kurdish ethnos has lived. In history the name Kurdistan is identified particularly with geographic and ethnic concepts such as Iranian Kurdistan, Turkish Kurdistan or Iraqi Kurdistan as no political entity has ever been in existence with those names in history (Kaya 2012; Baibourtian 2013). Although Kurds thus far have not created their own independent state, they continued to keep their national identity over a long period of time.

### ***1.2. Kurdish Nationalism, Kurdish-Armenian Relations and the Armenian Massacres in the late Ottoman Empire***

The history of Kurds in Turkey traces back as far as 2000 B.C. The name Kurd they received from the victorious Arabs during the 7<sup>th</sup> century when Kurds converted to Islam. Under the rule of the Ottoman Empire Kurds have always faced discriminatory policies. By the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century the declining power of the Ottoman Empire brought the necessity of conducting administrative and military reforms. The so-called “Tanzimat” reforms were aimed to reestablish the power and the influence of the Empire. The reforms brought the emergence of Kurdish revolts throughout the Empire since Kurds before the reforms had somehow autonomous status. They were boycotting against the rise of state control, the loss of their authority and also against the growing recognition of non-Muslim communities in the Empire. Kurds’ major goal was to preserve their authority and increase territorial control. Among non-Muslim communities Armenians have also given some privileges. This brought the fear among Kurdish tribal leaders who worried about the probable Armenian control in the so-called Kurdistan (Kaya 2012).

Nevertheless, the “Tanzimat” reforms could not provide the necessary tools for the country’s development. Realizing the growing power of non-Muslim communities Young Ottomans started to give more rights and privileges to Muslim population. The main ideology of Young Ottomans became “Ottomanism” with the aim to solve the national question in the Empire. According to this ideology, all nations living in the Empire regardless of their nationality and religion should be considered as an integral part of the Ottomans because they were thought to be as one nation. The Turks had the greatest role in every aspects of life, Turkish was the main state language and the Shariat was its legislation (Baibourtian 2013, p. 101). As a result the Ottoman government managed to provoke religious hatred and anger between Christian and Muslim communities, in this case between Kurds and Armenians. In order to start a war with Western Armenians the sultan’s government wanted Kurds’ participation in the war. As a result the government took steps to gain Kurdish support such as giving bribes to their tribal leaders. However, not all Kurds were involved in the war against Armenians. Some of them even attacked Ottoman military bodies and leaders (Baibourtian 2013).

The hostilities towards Armenians by the Ottoman government became stronger with the establishment of the so-called Hamidiye regiments by Sultan Abdulhamid II in 1891. The creation of these military groups was aimed to organize the Sunni population against the Christian minorities. Many prominent Kurdish tribal leaders communicated with various Turkish political and military leaders. Some of them even joined Hamidiye regiments thus increasing the level of hostilities against the Christian communities. These brigads contributed to the rise of Kurdish nationalism as some Kurdish tribal leaders gained strong power and influence (Kaya 2012; Baibourtian 2013).

Immediately after the beginning of the World War I the Young Turks decided to use Kurdish military power in order to achieve their main goals. In order to include the large proportion of Kurdish population in the war, Young Turks gave lavish promises to the Kurds such as to satisfy

their national aspirations and give them autonomy, equal rights and privileges after the victorious end of the war. The Young Turk propaganda machine worked well because they were able to inspire Kurds that they should fight against the internal and external enemies of the Empire. And Armenians were the first ones from the list of internal enemies (Baibourtian 2013). Kurds during the whole period of war remained loyal to the Young Turks because of their political and social backwardness, religious and tribal prejudices, lack of clear motives of national objectives for their future. The Young Turks were able to conduct their plan of the Armenian Genocide particularly using Kurds as one of the main tools. Kurds have played a significant role in suppressing the Armenians' fighting for their survival in Sasun, Mush, Vaspurakan, Shatak, Urfa and Musa Dagh. The behavior of Kurds involved in the Hamidiye Brigads clearly showed that for them their personal benefits have been of utmost importance: they easily begun to be involved in those regiments since they thought that this would help them to increase their influence, they would be given more rights and privileges.

However, on the other side, some Kurdish tribal groups were refused to take part in the mass massacres of Armenians. They even gave shelters to Armenians. The vivid example of this was the protection of twenty thousand Armenians by the Kurds in the territory of Dersim. Also a vast number of Armenians from South Kurdistan were saved from the mass massacres. As a result various Kurdish tribal leaders were pursued by the Young Turks for their support to Armenians.

Armenians, generally, viewed Kurds as the main machines for implementing the commandments of the Young Turks not as a unique political group who was responsible for its actions. However, the examination of Kurdish behavior during the Armenian massacres clearly showed that Kurds had as much responsibility as Turks. Undoubtedly, without the support and the involvement of the Kurdish forces in the mass massacres, the Turkish ruling elite could not resolve the Armenian Question by force (Baibourtian 2013).

Within this context Sahakyan in his book entitled “The Perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide” (2015) highlights some points of May 24, 1915 “Declaration” adopted by France, Russia and Great Britain which was directed to the Ottoman government. This “Declaration” was an international legal document where France, Great Britain and Russia emphasize the role of the perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide in 1915. According to this “Declaration” the Armenian massacres were perpetrated by the Kurdish and Turkish people and they have conducted their major goal under the authority and permission of the Ottoman ruling elite. In the “Declaration” it was also stated that the major responsibility of conducting Armenian massacres should be put on Turkey and particularly on all the members of the Ottoman government that have been involved in the implementation of this crime, including also the Kurdish masses who also had their role in the mass massacres of the Armenian people (cited in Sahakyan 2015).

Thus, it can be argued that the Ottoman government has managed to involve a large number of Kurdish masses in the perpetration of the Armenian Genocide. Whether Kurdish people were forced or they conducted the massacres of Armenians on their own will, one thing is clear that they take as much responsibility as the Turkish government for implementing the Genocide of Armenians and they ought to bear all the consequences for the huge sufferings and numerous losses of the Armenian nation. Later, we will see that Kurdish people understood that they have been used by the Ottoman authorities in order to contribute to achieve the country’s main objectives and they started to struggle for their own survival within the territory of Turkey. They even tried to get assistance from the Armenian people, however, it was just a way for them to acquire as much collaborators as possible to achieve their major goal: the creation of independent Kurdistan.

### ***1.3. Kurdish Insurgencies in the Republican Turkey***

With the end of the World War I and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire some political changes took place in the region prompting disintegration among Kurdish communities. The signing of the Sevres Treaty in 1920 envisaged temporary authority for such areas of Turkey that Kurds constituted majority (Barkey and Fuller 1998; Durham 2003). Despite the promises of independence, in 1923 under the Treaty of Lausanne the Republic of Turkey was recognized without giving any reference to the situation of Kurds. Under the authority of the Turkish Republic Kurds faced the highest degree of state-governed suppression (Fox 2014; Wood 2010). These discriminatory policies of the Turkish government has led to the upsurge of Kurdish nationalism who being the victims of the Ottoman's fraudulent policy started to fight for their rights with the means of revolts from the 1920's until the end of the 1930's.

Starting from 1925 the official position of the government of Turkey relating to different ethnic minorities was to Turkify them and to annihilate those who will oppose the Turks. This statement was also referred to Kurds who had to consider themselves as Turks if they reject their own national identity. The use of Kurdish language was banned in schools, in daily publications and in dealings with the government. The names of Kurdish villages and towns were also changed and Kurds had to change their children's names into Turkish ones (Fox 2014). This Turkification policy brought the dissatisfaction of Kurdish people who, de facto, became the only largest unrecognized minority with the possibility to becoming a danger for the Turkish state (Barkey and Fuller 1998; Baibourtian 2013).

The first Kurdish rebellion against the Turkish state took place in 1925 ruled by Kurdish religious figure Sheikh Said of Piran. The main goal of the rebels was to establish an independent and united Kurdistan through the military means. Other objectives were to reestablish the caliphate

that had been destroyed by the Kemalists, to demolish the secular regime of the country and to preclude Turkey's modernization and Europeanization. However, the rebels were not well-organized enough for threatening the Turkish state as Sheikh Said and its followers managed to occupy only one-third of Kurdish Anatolia. The government of Turkey responded to the rebellion with the means of demolishing Kurdish villages and forcing Kurds to migrate to other parts of the country. It is interesting to state that Armenians, Assyrians and Circassians of Western Armenia have been participated in this Kurdish rebellion. After the defeat of this revolt the relations between Turks and Kurds became very tense. These circumstances stipulated the Kurdish population to act more strongly against the Turkish government since they would experience the same fate as happened to Armenians. Believing in the fake promises of the Ottoman government and becoming the victims of the government's sly policies, Kurds began to find some possible ways to collaborate with other ethnic minorities in Turkey. This behavior of Kurds in its turn was aimed to acquire as more partners as possible in order to fight against the powerful Turkish state.

The second revolt of the Kurds took place in the environs of Ararat (Mount Ararat) which was organized by Hoybun (Independence) led by Ihsan Nuri. This was military and political organization created in Syria in 1927 by Kurdish protestors who migrated to Syria after the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923. The main goal of Hoybun was to establish Turkish Kurdistan meaning to create a Kurdish state in the territory of Turkey. On October 28, 1927 Hoybun declared the independence of Kurdistan based on the treaty of Sevres and started a war with Turkey. Hoybun could not unite the Kurdish masses as the Kurdish tribal leaders were mainly interested in protecting their interests and also Kurds in Turkey were separated. However, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation became the main collaborator of Hoybun during the Mount Ararat revolt (Kaya 2012; Baibourtian 2013; Sayiyan 2014).

Starting from 1926 Armenians and Kurds put joint efforts in order to fight against the common threat. Consequently, in one of the regulations of Hoybun it was stated: “accepting as an indisputable precondition, friendship and collaboration with the Armenian people, as a nation sharing the same fate against a common enemy and reciprocal recognition of the independence and territorial integrity of Western Armenia and Kurdistan” (cited in Baibourtian 2013, p. 332). Hoybun created a fourth-point declaration the fourth of which indicated: “The convention publicly declares that Armenia and Kurdistan, where these two peoples have lived for centuries, refuse to be subjected to any foreign power, and they strive for independence. These two lands belong only to the Armenian and Kurdish peoples” (cited in Baibourtian 2013, p. 332). Thus, it was obvious that Kurds’ initiative towards rapprochement with the representatives of the ARF was aimed only to gain their support to continue their struggle for independence and the creation of united Kurdistan. Armenians were viewed by Kurds as partners since it was difficult for the members of Hoybun to unite all the Kurdish masses. Here we witness that Kurds did not make any reference to the Genocide issue. As they tried to create their own independent state in such territories that they lived for a long time including also the territories of historical Armenia, it was not on their interests to admit the crime in which their ancestors had played a significant role.

As a result Kurds have benefited from the financial, moral assistance and also the preparatory works of Hoybun’s military structure provided by the ARF which played a significant role for Kurds in their struggle towards independence. For instance under the recommendation of the ARF Hoybun refused from the ideology of liberating the four parts of Kurdistan and of creating united Kurdistan. Two reasons can be understood from this policy. First of all, all human, material and financial resources should be spent only for the establishment of the independence of Kurdistan. Secondly, in the remaining three parts of Kurdistan the dominant countries and nations would not only refuse from their hostile attitudes towards the Kurdish rebellions, but also would assist them

within various means in order to worsen the situation of the Turks. The future events showed that this strategy worked well: both Iran, France and also Great Britain secretly supported the actions of Hoybun (Sayiyan 2014). However one fact was clear: the power of Turkish military was strong enough to suppress the revolt. Despite some achievements, the rebels were gradually losing their forces and in 1931 after five years of struggle the rebellion came to its close. The Mount Ararat revolt was one of the prominent insurgencies in the history of Kurdish national liberation movement. Although this rebellion did not encompass all of Kurdistan and included large masses of people, it was vital for its clear political perception and persistence (Baibourtian 2013; Kaya 2012).

The last Kurdish revolt took place in 1937 in Dersim. It was conducted by religious leader Sayyid Reza and due to this reason the revolt was usually described as religious. The rebellions started their actions in the mountains of Dersim with the same aspiration to create united Kurdistan. However, this time the rebellions did not receive outside support and the revolt was easily suppressed by the Turkish government in 1938 (Kaya 2012). These three rebellions “established the Kurds in Turkish minds as the originators of the primary challenge to their independent existence” (Robins 1993, p. 660).

Kurds and Kurdish behavior in the late Ottoman Empire cannot be characterized on a similar basis. Some of Kurdish tribes have been easily influenced by the lavish promises of the Ottoman ruling elite and become one of the major collaborators of the Young Turks in their war towards the Christian communities. However, aforementioned events showed that not all Kurds participated in the massacres and killings of the Christian, especially the Armenian community.

Until the mid-1940s the Kurdish insurgencies in Turkey were diminished and only some small groups conducted their meetings in regional countries. During the World War II Turkey continued its immense pressure on minorities including the Kurds. After the severe suppression of

the Dersim revolt, Kurdish rebels remained stagnant during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s (Kaya 2012). In 1965 the Democratic Party of Turkish Kurdistan was created which had a nationalist rather than revolutionary approach on its political agenda. Such kind of left-wing Kurdish political parties put the path for the emergence of various Kurdish revolutionary groups and eventually Kurdish legal left-wing political parties in Turkey (Barkey and Fuller 1998).

#### ***1.4. Kurdish Left-Wing Political Parties in Turkey***

It is vital to stress that Kurds being as one of the neglected groups of Turkey managed to achieve some level of success in terms of entering into the political system of Turkey particularly since 1990s. This development helped them to raise their concerns within Turkish political circles which shows that Kurdish people from their social and political backwardness reached such levels that they even can have a say in Turkish politics and also contribute to the solutions of numerous issues relating to various neglected groups of Turkey. As a result in the early 1970s Turkey witnessed the rise of left-wing political parties among Kurdish intelligentsia and youth. Various Kurdish political parties and organizations were created that put on their agenda the issues related to the promotion of democratic values, social security and equal rights (Manukyan 2011).

In 1974 a group of Kurdish students from the faculty of political science of Ankara University established “Democratic Youth Union” which was a left-wing party putting on its basis the ideology of Marxism-Leninism. After four years of propagating their main ideology which was to protect the basic rights of Kurdish people the Union rounded its first meeting in 1978 November 27 where it was renamed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). The president of it became Abdullah Ocalan (Barkey and Fuller 1998; Manukyan 2011). From the very beginning, the PKK had three divisions: the party itself, the National Liberation Front of Kurdistan and the People’s Liberation Army of Kurdistan (Barkey and Fuller 1998).

Starting from the 1984 the PKK began to strengthen its army. The main goal of the party was to create an independent and united Kurdistan based on Marxist-Leninist ideologies (Kilic 1998; Manukyan 2011). Besides independence, the PKK also sought to reform political and social structures of the Kurdish people (Barkey and Fuller 1998). Starting from the 1980s the PKK engaged in attacks and bombings against the Turkish military and police and the major western cities of Turkey. Throughout these military actions, many villages were demolished by the Turkish forces and the PKK and large number of people had to migrate to other parts of Turkey and other countries (Kaya 2012).

During the 1990s the PKK's major purpose was to weaken the power of the Turkish state and have a great dominance throughout the region. First of all, the PKK adopted classic revolutionary strategies combined with violence and terrorism which was mainly directed firstly at potential rivals (Barkey and Fuller 1998). In order to achieve their goals the representatives of the PKK were trying to use illegal means such as bombing and demolishing train stations, warehouses, state buildings. In the southeastern part of the region the PKK tried to create a vacuum with the means of not allowing the state entry to their towns and villages and also restricting the access of Turkish organizations to the region. In order not to be merged culturally with Turkey, the PKK forces bombed schools and killed teachers (Kilic 1998; Marcus 2007). These developments in the south-east of Turkey clearly showed that Kurdish problem was not just a minor issue and the governments of Turkey should take seriously into consideration the growing number of members of the PKK and the level of violence that occurred in the region.

However, some tactical changes took place within the structure of the PKK. The change was connected with the establishment of the Kurdish Parliament in Exile (KPE) which was considered as the chief representative for the Kurds in Turkey. Although it considered itself as a separate

organization from the PKK, however, one of the divisions of the PKK, the National Liberation Front of Kurdistan is an important feature among the KPE lines (Marcus 2007).

Realizing the power of the Turkish state and also understanding that military activities reached no significant results the PKK gradually started to find some ways for the negotiations with the government of Turkey. In late 1995 the PKK started to put its focus on the role of external actors in order to reinforce its political influence for the dialogues with Turkey. These actions of the PKK were connected with its ultimate political aim at this period which was “to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the Turkish state as an interlocutor” (Barkey and Fuller 1998, p. 27).

The capture of Ocalan in February 1999 in Nairobi, Kenya became a turning point in the history of the PKK. This event marked the new path for the solution of the Kurdish question in Turkey (Watts 1999; Gunter 2000). In June 1999 Ocalan was sentenced to death, however, it was converted to long-term life imprisonment after the abolishment of death penalty by the government of Turkey. Nevertheless, after a short period of time, Abdullah Ocalan came with strange declarations stating that he loves Turkey and the Turkish nation. He claimed that the main solution for the Kurdish question could be seen in the unification with the democratic and secular republic of Turkey (Ocalan 2011). Here again, the Kurdish behavior also shows that their national and political interests are of utmost importance for them. The violence and terrorism connected with the PKK stopped in some time after the capture of Ocalan and Kurdish question of Turkey did not find any solutions. In the end of 1999 the PKK forces withdrew from the territory of Turkey and in 2000 it was considered as political movement putting aside its arms (Smith 2013). Almost all of the foreign sponsors of the PKK cut their support in the late 1990s. After the capture of Ocalan the PKK announced a five-year unilateral ceasefire and conducted some steps in order to alter its image. They called on the Turkish government to allow it participate in the country’s political processes, to give more cultural and social rights for the Kurdish people and also to discharge imprisoned PKK

representatives including its leader Ocalan. However, the PKK's demands were not satisfied which resulted in the end of the ceasefire in 2004 (Smith 2013).

After 2004 again attacks and other violent activities have been conducted by the PKK, however, the Kurdish Question is still not resolved. The PKK understood that with military means success is still far to reach. Thus, it changed its ideology and tried to find ways of possible solutions through peaceful means. Within this context several Kurdish left-wing political parties emerged in the 1990's which are all thought to be as the political wings of the PKK and its main ideology. The emergence of those Kurdish parties was significant development within Turkey. Some politicians of Turkey came with a decision to give Kurds a chance to participate legally in Turkey's political affairs. For instance, Turgüt Ozal was one of such Turkish political leaders who publicly accepted the so-called Kurdish reality. With those parties it is stated that Kurdish awareness at the party level began to be realized in Turkey's politics. While the PKK was trying to achieve its main goals with the means of terrorist attacks, killings and bombings, those Kurdish left-wing political parties took quite a moderate position trying to reach their goals through the means of propagating the provision of human rights, freedom of expression and other democratic values. However, as the later developments showed all of them had the same ideological components like the PKK. They all wanted that Kurdish people should have equal rights and privileges like the citizens of Turkey. Overall, six Kurdish left-wing political parties were emerged starting from the 1990s till now (*see Table 1*).

The first Kurdish political left-wing party was People's Labor Party (HEP, Halkın Emek Partisi). It was the initiator among the Kurdish left-wing political parties that participated in Turkish elections. It was run by Fehmi Isiklar. The entry of HEP into the politics of Turkey was a turning point since it finalized the electoral contract with the center-left wing Social Democratic Party (TDP) during the 1991 elections within the Turkish Parliament. The party won 22 seats in the

elections which was a huge development within Turkish political affairs. With the means of various meetings the leaders of this party aimed to promote political and cultural rights of the Kurds which met the concern of many elected officials who thought that this party was spokesperson for the PKK.

**Table 1**

<b>Kurdish Political Left-Wing Parties in Turkey</b>		
<b>Party</b>	<b>Date Opened</b>	<b>Date Closed</b>
HEP (People's Labor Party)	June 7, 1990	July 14, 1993
DEP (Democracy Party)	June 21, 1991	June 16, 1994
HADEP (People's Democracy Party)	May 11, 1994	March 13, 2003
DEHAP (Democratic People's Party)	October 24, 1997	November 19, 2005
DTP (Democratic Society Party)	November 9, 2005	December 11, 2009
BDP (Peace and Democracy Party)	May 2, 2008	April 22, 2014, dissolved to join HDP (Peoples' Democratic Party)

Despite the pressure by the Turkish state apparatus, the HEP had a huge role in Turkish political life over years and reached some level of success. It is the only party in the history of Turkey that kept its representation in the Turkish Parliament while at the same time endorsing formal recognition of a Kurdish nation (Güney 2002). However, in 1993 the party was closed by the Constitutional Court who blamed the party having close ties with the PKK.

The followers of the party in its place created the Democratic Labor Party (DEP, Demokrasi Partisi). This party faced an increased division among its leaders in the issue of how much assistance should have been given to the PKK. A radical wing of the party was quite supportive of the PKK activities trying to justify the violent activities of the PKK as a fight towards the establishment of independent Kurdistan. In 1994 the DEP was also closed by the Constitutional Court and the members of pro-Kurdish party lost their seats in the Turkish Parliament. As a result six members of DEP were arrested and sentenced to 15 imprisonments. The Constitutional Court justified its actions on the grounds that the members of the party conducted provoking statements against the Turkish state (Hevian 2013). Here again, it was obvious that the major goal of this party was again the creation of independent Kurdistan which shows that Kurdish political parties emerging legally within Turkey's politics just wanted to reach the solution of their concerns.

With the closure of every Kurdish political party a substitute one emerged. As a result DEP was succeeded by People's Democratic Party (HADEP, Halkin Demokrasi Partisi) founded in 1994. HADEP began to play a significant role in Turkey's political affairs. Its' participation in 1995 and 1999 national elections was a huge development which indicated that Kurds' efforts to make their voices heard in Turkey's political life were justified (Watts 1999). In 1999 local elections HADEP won 37 municipalities among the Kurdish region, however, it did not manage to gain the ten percent national threshold for having seats in the Turkish Parliament. HADEP has also tried to underline certain policies concerning the Kurdish issue in Turkey. Like the PKK demands, HADEP has also raised the issue of citizenship for the Kurdish people. According to them, national unity should not be based on cultural affinity and blood connections. Rather, the national unity should be constructed relying on "the voluntary loyalty of citizens to the state" (Güney 2002, p. 129). This means that Kurdish identity should not be considered as irreconcilable with the predominant identity of Turkish citizenship. Another issue that was also raised by the party was to eliminate the restrictions on non-

Turkish names for people and towns, on the use of Kurdish language in schools and also on political actions conducted by the Kurdish people. However, like its predecessors, on March 13, 2003 the party was also closed by the Constitutional Court of Turkey and 46 members of it were excluded from the participation in political activities (Hevian 2013).

Another prominent Kurdish political party that emerged after HADEP was Democratic People's Party (DEHAP, Demokrasi Halkin Partisi). The party received seven percent of the total votes in 2002 elections which comprised over three million, however, it also could not manage to have seats in the Turkish Parliament. Later the party members joined another Kurdish left-wing party the Democratic Society Party (DTP, Demokrasi Toplum Partisi) ruled by Ahmet Türk and Aysel Tuğluk. The party did not take part in the elections of 2007, although its candidates began to run independently. In its first efforts the party won 22 seats in the Turkish Parliament. However, again, an accusation was made by the government of Turkey against the party considering it as a political representative of the PKK. As a result the Constitutional Court prohibited the functioning of the party which came to its close in 2009 and its leaders were banned to form any other political party in Turkey for five years (Hevian 2013).

The last Kurdish legal left-wing political party that entered into Turkish political system was Peace and Democracy Party (BDP, Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi) established in 2008 before the DTP stopped its functioning. Numerous Kurdish MPs joined the BDP. The candidates of BDP ran independently securing 36 seats in the Turkish Grand National Assembly. The main ideology of the party was the provision of human rights, freedom of expression and the protection of minority rights. The co-chairs of the party are Selahettin Demirtaş and Gülten Kışanak. The party also puts an emphasis on the protection of LGBT rights, the Turkey's accession towards the European Union and also urges the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by the Turkish Republic. The party holds offices in various cities such as in Brussels, Rome, Paris, and Washington (Hevian 2013).

In 2014 after the local elections BDP and another left-wing Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP, Halkların Demokrasi Partisi) ran for the elections as separate parties. However, after the local elections BDP dissolved and joined to HDP. The ideological base of the party remained the same with a progressive, left-wing oriented tradition. The co-chair of the party Selahettin Demirtaş run for the elections receiving nearly 9.8 % of the votes during the first presidential elections in Turkey in 2014. This was a turning point within the history of the Kurdish political parties of Turkey. Currently it is the main Kurdish legal political party in Turkey having 27 MPs in Turkish Grand National Assembly who act as independents.

Thus, the emergence of Kurdish left-wing political parties was a significant development within Turkey's social and political life. Acting as independent parties from the PKK, they tried to show some moderate stance towards the solution of the Kurdish Question. However, as the experience showed, they all had the same ideology as the PKK such as the creation of independent Kurdistan, the provision of cultural and political rights to the Kurdish people. The major difference between the PKK and those political parties was based on the ground that they wanted to achieve their chief objectives through peaceful means rather than through violent activities. Taking into account that military activities cannot be the solution for their concern, those parties tried to gain as much support as possible from various ethnic and religious minorities in Turkey. This would give them more chance and benefits to raise their voices and also to show in international arena that being one of the neglected groups of Turkey they can still act like an organized entity with its clear objectives and can also solve the issues and concerns of other ethnic minorities in Turkey.

## **Chapter 2: Kurds of Turkey and the Issue of the Armenian Genocide in Turkish Politics (1991-2015)**

### ***2.1. A Brief Overview of the Efforts of Armenia and Turkey to Establish Diplomatic Relations (1991-2009)***

It is widely known that till now Armenia and Turkey have not established diplomatic relations as a result of several controversies between the two countries. Although some efforts have been conducted by the two sides towards the establishment of diplomatic relations since 1991 when Armenia gained its independence, however, lack of mutual trust between the two parties slowed down the normalization process.

Turkey has always put several preconditions towards the normalization process which are as follows: the refusal of all territorial claims by Armenia, the end of the campaign by Armenia to impose Turkey the recognition of the Armenian Genocide and also the decline of Armenia's assistance to Nagorno-Karabakh. Those controversies in their turn led to the final closure of the borders between Turkey and Armenia in 1993 (Görgülü, 2008). Within the framework of this study, it is important to pay a particular attention to the issue of the Armenian Genocide.

It is commonly known that the Republican Turkey does not recognize the Armenian Genocide perpetrated by the Ottoman authorities in 1915 and implements any possible measures to falsify the historical truth. The official stance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey concerning the Genocide of Armenians is an evidence that falsification of history is a norm within the governmental structures of Turkey. In the official website of the MFA of Turkey the events of 1915 are interpreted as “a tragic period where all the people of the Empire including Turks, Armenians and others” had faced many losses and sufferings. They view the Armenian demands of the recognition of the Genocide as propaganda in order to reduce Turkey's role in international

affairs and create anti-Turkish rhetoric (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey 2015).

The non-use of the term “genocide” is one of the Turkish official interpretations concerning the Armenian Question. However, the Armenian side continuously claims that between 1915-1923 mass killings of 1.5 million Armenians in the late Ottoman Empire constitute genocide, whereas, the Turkish side calls them “unplanned massacres with murders on both sides” (Ralchev 2010, p. 5–6).

According to the Article 2 of the United Nations convention genocide is defined as “any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; [and] forcibly transferring children of the group to another group” (United Nations General Assembly 1948, p. 1). Nonetheless, the government of Turkey continues its denial policy regarding the Armenian Genocide and states that those killings were not aimed intentionally to destroy and demolish the entire nation. Rather Turkish ruling apparatus has adopted such a stance that Armenians tried to destroy the empire during the war and killed thousands of Turks, while the Ottomans wanted to transfer Armenians from a vulnerable border with Russia (Cooper and Akçam 2005).

However, since 2005 some developments have been realized by the Turkish side which was connected mainly with the AKP’s rise to power. From this perspective the letter of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to the president of the RA Robert Kocharian on 10 April, 2005 needs a particular attention. In the letter Erdoğan stated that Turks and Armenians not only share a common history, but also the two nations have lived together for a long period of time. He emphasized that Turkey and Armenia

have diverge interpretations concerning the “events” that took place during “their common history”. In order to resolve the uncertainties and misinterpretations Erdoğan in the letter came with an offer to create a joint group of historians both from Turkey and Armenia to review the historical facts as a means to establish normal and peaceful relations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey 2005). One crucial thing that needs a particular attention was the fact that the letter was sent two weeks before the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. The government of Armenia in response to Erdoğan’s letter underlined that Armenia is ready for the establishment of normal relations without any preconditions. Here although Turkish government with such measures tried to show the international world that Turkey changed its authoritarian coverage and shows some signs of democracy, however, the letter clearly showed that the falsification of the history is still a tactic of the Turkish government in order to achieve their major goals.

Another major development between two countries was achieved in 2009 when Armenian-Turkish Protocols were signed with the joint initiative of the Foreign Ministers of Armenia, Turkey and Switzerland (Phillips 2012). The Protocols aimed to establish diplomatic relations, to open the closed borders and also to create a joint commission to discuss the historical issues between Turkey and Armenia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia 2009). However, again, the Protocols could not turn into reality since the Turkish side did not refuse from its preconditions.

The signing of the Armenian-Turkish Protocols was a significant cornerstone within the relations between Turkey and Armenia. However, both in Turkey and in Armenia the reactions among various representatives of political elites were quite strong. Various interpretations in the Armenian media exist where the signing of the Protocols was viewed as a means for Turkey to escape the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, whereas, in the Turkish media the interpretations were also quite negative. On the domestic level, the opposition parties from both sides were the ones who strongly opposed the signing of the Protocols. The main opposition parties in Turkey the

Republican People's Party (CHP) and Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) viewed the signing of the Protocols as the loss of Turkish national interests. However, later we will see that the members of Kurdish opposition party of Turkey HDP had quite positive attitude towards the signing of the Protocols, however, they also emphasized the need of resolving the Armenian Question.

Although starting from 1991 till 2009 several steps have been conducted by both Turkey and Armenia towards the normalization of bilateral relations, however, till now Armenia and Turkey have not established official relations yet. Controversies still exist between the two sides on several issues, the most important of which was the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by the Republic of Turkey and also the issue of unresolved conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. Within this context it is important to investigate the Kurdish perspective on the Turkish-Armenian relations and also the issue of the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, what were Kurdish politicians' and their parties' major stance regarding these issues.

## ***2.2. Kurdish Perspective on the Turkish-Armenian Relations and the Armenian Genocide (1991-2006)***

During the 1990's Turkey was still facing the uprisings of Kurdish nationalism and the challenges of national identity by Kurdish people. Those uprisings were particularly connected with the activities of the PKK which tried to achieve its major goals through bombings, attacks and killings of Turkish military. Bearing the consequences of discriminatory policies of the late Ottoman Empire Kurds still faced the same challenges under the Republican Turkey which has inherited the authoritarian coverage of its predecessors' military and bureaucracy (Cooper and Akçam 2005). Speaking about the existence of Kurdish ethnicity, class struggle and especially the Armenian Genocide were the major taboo themes in Turkey's social and political affairs.

Turkey's Kurds sharing the common threat with Armenians began to realize that collaboration and cooperation will be beneficial for both of them to reach the solution of their concerns. Concerning the relations between Turkey and Armenia Kurds took a stance of supporting the establishment of bilateral relations, however, the issue of the Armenian Genocide was also not put ahead by Kurdish politicians. The issue of the Armenian Genocide started to be discussed first of all by the PKK leaders since 1997. However, these announcements in their turn had their political implications. In 1998 the tactics of the PKK were changed and Abdullah Ocalan was trying to solve the Kurdish Question with a peaceful means. They wanted to acquire as much collaborators as possible and also they wanted to show that Kurdish people without an independent state can have a significant impact on Turkey's politics (Interview with Artak Shakarian 2015).

From this perspective the statement of one of the Kurdish prominent political leader, the president of the Kongra-Gel (People's Congress of Kurdistan), and also the de jure political leader of the Kurdistan Worker's Party Zubeyir Aydar needs a particular attention. His statement was quite strong in a sense that he strictly raised the issue of the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by the Turkish state. Within this context on the 82<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the Armenian Genocide the Kurdish Parliament in Exile passed a resolution recognizing the Armenian Genocide. Aydar highlighted that the invasion and occupation of Kurdistan has not only had an impact on the life of the Kurdish people, but also the Assyrian-Syrians and the Armenian population. He stated that the consequences of the colonialist policies led to the anger and hatred between those people and created clashes and forced deportations. Aydar underlined that the 1915 is considered the bloodiest period of imposed colonialist policies (Asbarez.com 1997).

Aydar's statement was very remarkable since he strongly criticized the colonialist policies of the Turkish state. However, in his speech he spoke about not only the Armenian Genocide of 1915 conducted by the Ottoman authorities, rather, he included also the mass killings and annihilation of

the Assyrian-Syrian people on April 24, 1915. He put an emphasis on the fact that the government of Turkey still continues its discriminatory policies against diverse ethnic groups. “The Turkish State regime, from history to our days, has worked against the peoples, as if a guilty party, and with her committed genocides has changed the demographics of Anatolia causing the demise of many cultures-civilizations” he said (Asbarez.com 1997).

Aydar reading that resolution again spoke about the historical justice which is as follows:

“Today is the 82<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the genocide committed against the Assyrian-Syrian and Armenian peoples. Sharing the agony caused by this process, I find the Ottoman State and their collaborators the Hamidiye Alaylari, formed by some Kurdish tribes responsible for this crime before history and I condemn them with abhorrence” (Asbarez.com 1997).

Zubeyir Aydar became one of the initiators among Kurdish political figures who in his statement publicly spoke about the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by the Turkish Republic since 1990s. Aydar for the first time stated that their ancestors Kurds have also played a significant role in the mass massacres of the Armenian people. The crucial thing was that in 1998 speaking about the Armenian Genocide in Turkey was a very risky step and political and also social circles of Turkey tried to avoid speaking about the Genocide since this taboo was still persistent. However, the statement of Aydar showed that Kurdish society gradually began to show its readiness to raise the issue of the Armenian Genocide. These developments were coincided with the period where the relations between Turkey and Armenia were frozen and only tiny achievements were noticed between the two states towards the normalization process.

Another important development was the congratulatory letter of the PKK leader Ocalan to newly elected president of Armenia Robert Kocharian on April 10, 1998. In the letter Ocalan welcomed the resolution of the Belgium Senate on March 26, 1998 which was calling on the government of Turkey to recognize the Armenian Genocide perpetrated by the Ottoman authorities

in the late 1915-1919. The PKK leader also highlighted the need of reconciliations of Turks, Armenians, Kurds and Greeks on a deep discussion and analysis of the main causes of the 1915 events. He emphasized that this reconciliation will gradually lead to a compromise and consensus of ethnic groups and the peaceful settlement of territorial disputes with the means of negotiations. According to him, with these peaceful means only Turkish-Armenian and Greek relations will become possible. “We urge the new governments of Armenia and Turkey to seize the historic opportunity” he mentioned (Asbarez.com 1998). Also Ocalan put an emphasis on the future cooperation between the Kurds and Armenians. He highlighted: “Our movement will continue to support all efforts to set in train a genuine dialogue between all contending parties with the self-evident proviso that the Kurdish claim to self-determination and freedom will not be prejudiced-as it was in Lausanne” (Asbarez.com 1998).

Here the statement of Kurdish leader shows that not only the Genocide issue was discussed, rather, the leader highlighted that the reconciliation of other ethnic groups will be an important step for reaching a consensus. The statement of Ocalan was a sign of changing the image of the PKK as a terrorist organization to an organization with more contemporary views concerning the issues of Turkey that needed to be solved without violent means. However, from his last sentence he tried to tie the normalization process between the conflicting parts of Turkey with the Kurdish demands. This fact shows that the recognition of the Armenian Genocide was a tool for a Kurdish politician to use it in order to solve their concerns.

Comparing the two statements of the leaders of the PKK the major difference was that Ocalan’s statement was to some extent general, the emphasis was not particularly on the Armenian Genocide, just he highlighted that the issues of ethnic minorities of Turkey should be resolved peacefully, whereas, Aydar’s statement was quite decisive since he publicly condemned the Genocide of Armenians stating that Kurds also had a great role. However, one major thing was

clear: they both tried to highlight that the involvement of Kurds in the solutions of these problems should be taken into account thus with such measures trying to show that Kurdish people are keen on solving every issue with peaceful rather than violent means. Nevertheless, both leaders in their statements did not make any reference to the way that the Genocide issue should be resolved. They just highlighted that peaceful solution was a necessity without mentioning about the possible ways of resolving the issues between Turkey and Armenia.

After the capture of Ocalan in 1999 some changes have been realized within the structure of the PKK both ideologically and politically. Ocalan started to put much more emphasis on the promotion of democratic values, human rights rather than the creation of independent Kurdistan, on political and cultural rights of Kurdish people within Turkey. The traces of some changes we can notice in the change of the name of the PKK which transformed into the Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress (KADEK) in 2002 the aim of which was to refuse from violent actions, however, without putting their arms down. In 2003 KADEK again changed its name this time Kurdistan People's Kongress (KongraGel) which in its turn condemned terrorism and took a stance of peaceful resolution of the conflict (Bilgin 2012).

Ocalan later in his book "War and Peace in Kurdistan" wrote: "The trial on the Turkish prison island of Imraili marked a political U-turn in the conflict and offered new perspectives for a political solution" (Ocalan 2008, p. 28). Addressing the main challenges that the government of Turkey needs to become a democratic country Ocalan put again the emphasis on the Armenian Question. According to him, the Armenian Question became one of the significant tragedies that the development of capitalist modernity has brought throughout the Middle East. He stated that Armenians together with Kurds shared a great part of their settlement area. Being Christians Armenians often were met with repressions with Muslim Turks thus contributing to the emergence

of nationalistic sentiments within Armenians. The divergences with Turkish nationalism led to the genocide of Armenians by Turkish ruling apparatus.

Here, we witness that Ocalan changed its tactics, tried to portray himself as a critic towards the Turkish government's discriminatory policies with such measures aiming to gain the assistance of the Armenian people. Ocalan in his another book entitled "Democratic Confederalism" highlighted: "The consequences of the genocide can hardly be put into words. The search for the lost country defines their national psyche and is at the heart of the Armenian question" (2011, p. 40). Thus, the ideological change within the structure of the PKK became a turning point in Turkish politics. Kurdish awareness at the political level began to be realized after the capture of Ocalan. From this it can be deduced that Ocalan's tactics were changed to a great extent. The use of the term "genocide" was a major step. However, again, political implications stood behind these developments: speaking about the Armenian Question, the leader also tried to put an emphasis on the Kurdish issue which again underlines that they brought the issue of the Armenian Genocide in Turkey's political agenda just to positively demonstrate their image both within Turkey and in international arena. It was obvious that Ocalan was trying to get as much support as possible for their own political objectives (Interview with Ara Papian 2015).

It is important to stress that since 1997 raising the issue of the Armenian Genocide within Turkey was a very dangerous and risky step. Gradually, such taboos have been removed to some extent which was also connected with the AKP' rise to power in 2002. The former Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan took to some extent "moderate" stance concerning the main challenges of the Turkish state. Kurds were given some cultural and political rights, also some reforms have been conducted concerning education and broadcasting in Kurdish (Ter-Matevosyan 2014). The new government of Turkey was quite supportive of joining the European Union, to implement Copenhagen criteria. The AKP wanted to run the country towards democratic direction with an

emphasis on the promotion of human rights, freedom of expression. The resolving of the Kurdish question was one of the major issues for joining the European Union (Phillips 2012). On the contrary, it is important to state that the recognition of the Armenian Genocide was not a priority requirement for becoming a member of the EU. However, on September 28, 2005 the European Parliament adopted a resolution concerning the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by Turkey as a prerequisite for the EU membership, which was, however, non-binding (European Parliament Resolution 2005).

Among other reforms conducted by the AKP government were the eliminations of restrictions on the Kurdish language and the permission to publish some articles, journals in Kurdish language. Those reforms gradually created a sense of hope within Turkish Kurds and also contributed to Kurds' widespread assistance to the AKP. Here, we witness that when Kurds achieved to some success, they easily began to show their sympathy towards AKP government. However, nationalistic or Kemalist sentiments in Turkey showed their resistance towards the democratic consolidation of AKP's initiative, which became an obstacle for the reforms related to the rights of Kurdish people. In their turn large numbers of Kurdish officials in the Turkish Parliament came with the demands for conducting political and constitutional reforms to give Kurds greater rights and opportunities. For instance, they wanted more autonomy, changes in the reforms regarding the acquirement of citizenship and also an increase in the number of seats in the Turkish Parliament. The evidence of these demands is that Kurds today are more engaged in their cultural and political practices.

In line with these developments the taboo on Genocide still remained which was connected with several factors among the Turkish nation. According to them, genocide allegations are continued tendencies of the Christian West to disparage Turks as barbarous. They believe that Western world ignores them. Thus, they refuse to admit genocide accusations and are against the

widely perceived view that Turkey is equal with Nazi Germany concerning the genocide issue. Furthermore, Armenians under the eyes of Turkish nation resemble the most disturbing event of the history of Turkey: the demolition of the empire and the loss of its territory's great part (Cooper and Akçam 2005). However, gradually, we witness that taboo on Genocide was being removed as a result of Kurdish politicians' readiness and courage to raise this issue in the Turkish Parliament.

### ***2.3. Kurdish Politicians of Turkey and the Armenian Genocide (2007-2015)***

Since 2007 new element emerged in Turkish politics which changed the widely perceived Turkish official stance to a great extent. This new element was connected with the oppositional Kurdish BDP party (Peace and Democracy Party, currently Peoples' Democratic Party) the members of which became actively involved in the discussions of the Armenian Genocide in the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM). Those Kurdish politicians expressed some ideas that were different from the state's official stance. Being elected particularly from the eastern and southeastern parts of Turkey, Kurdish politicians are well informed of the genocide perpetrated by the Ottoman authorities and also their predecessors on the territory of historical Armenia. Turkish Grand National Assembly is the most important place where the issue of the Armenian Genocide is quite often discussed and where different Turkish deputies continue to keep the official stance of their country: the falsification of the history and the denial of the Armenian Genocide. In accordance with this, Parliament also sponsors and spreads the so-called Turkish "academic" literature which denies the Genocide of Armenians.

The current BDP-HDP party in the Turkish Parliament is a progressive, left-wing party. Within this context the "Kurdish-left" is used as a new phenomenon in Turkish politics. Initially Kurdish left-wing parties emerged as actors relying on ethnic and regional basis expressing particularly the interests of the Kurdish society, however, gradually Kurdish leftist movements inspired also non-Kurdish progressive movements such as socialists, feminists and also other ethnic

minorities. The Kurdish left-wing political parties emerged considering themselves as secular parties with no reference to religious values and principles and traditional morality. However, Turkish political circles have always regarded those parties as regional or ethnic movements since their main goal was to protect the rights and wills of the Kurdish society within Turkey. All Kurdish left-wing political parties have based their main ideology on the freedom of expression, the protection of ethnic minorities, equal citizenship, gender equality, labor rights and social justice. However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, all of them have been banned by the Constitutional Court on the grounds that they were aimed to demolish the united Turkish state and its population and also for representing the main ideologies of the PKK being considered as the political wings of the latter.

The current BDP-HDP party still has representatives in the Turkish Parliament and is the main Kurdish political party with its left-wing party orientation. The party has always criticized the government of the AKP. The Kurdish question is the major axis within the political conflict of the AKP and the BDP-HDP. Besides, the two parties had also divergent views on the issues of human rights, freedom of expression, democracy and also identity issues. One of the key weapons that BDP-HDP uses as a criticism towards the AKP is its highly progressive political discourse which is identical with the left-libertarian ideology of European democratic states. The core element of the Kurdish left in this case the BDP-HDP in its contribution to move Turkey towards democratic direction is based on its left-libertarian ideology which includes “gender equality, freedom of expression, decentralization of power, the environment and grassroots democracy” (Celep 2014, p. 173). Kitschelt in his article examines the major characteristics of left-libertarian parties stating that those parties put much more emphasis on “individual autonomy and political participations, with a leftist concern for equality” rather than on “traditional conservative or socialist programs” (1988, p. 195).

From this perspective it is vital to mention that current BDP-HDP party in Turkey with its left-libertarian approach raises a number of issues in Turkey that are of utmost importance both for Kurdish society and other ethnic minorities of Turkey. Among those issues, as mentioned above, the Armenian Genocide is also quite often put forward by the BDP-HDP members and one of the initiators raising the issue of the Armenian Genocide was a Kurdish deputy from Siirt province Osman Ozceliq.

In 2008 he issued an announcement stating that the mass massacres of innocent Armenians were a tragedy and highlighted that during his childhood he always listened about the history of Armenian massacres during the Ottoman Empire. It is vital to mention that during his speech Kurdish deputy used the term “Armenian massacres”. Ozceliq also stated that there is a need to apologize to Armenians. However, after his statement the situation in the Turkish Parliament became very tense as the members of the governing AKP party just assailed to the Kurdish deputy which led to the end of the parliamentary session (Hürriyet.com.tr 2008). Here it was clear that the ruling AKP party and its members were trying still to prohibit the use of the word Armenian massacres which shows that Turkey was not yet ready to openly admit the historical truth, the Armenian Genocide. This fact contradicts to their major ideologies such as the promotion of democratic values. However, Kurdish deputy’s statement was a major development within Turkey’s politics as it was a novelty in the Parliament. The recognition of the Armenian Genocide that is the major problem for the Turkish state is being raised by the political representatives of one of the largest ethnic minorities in Turkey.

When the Armenian-Turkish protocols were signed, there was a growing trend among Kurdish deputies of Turkey to publicly speak about the Armenian Genocide. On October 21, 2009 another Kurdish prominent political figure Selahettin Demirtaş issued a statement at the Turkish Grand National Assembly concerning the signed protocols between Turkey and Armenia in Zurich.

He stated that a historical issue exists between the relations of Turkey and Armenia dating back over 100 years. He blamed the mass massacres of 1915-16 to Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire claiming that there could not be any justification for what happened during that period. No national security implications can be justified for the obliteration of an entire nation by forcing them to displace and killing them. Turkish government in case of admitting the historical truth, took a stance of denial policy and falsification of historical facts. Kurdish politician also highlighted that in Turkish modern historical books there is no reference to those issues that happened during 1915-1916. The denial of the Armenian Genocide led to the spread of anti-Armenian movements in the country. According to him, their major responsibility is to speak about the historical truth not just to diverge from them and continue to falsify the reality (Bianet.org 2009).

During this meeting in Turkish Grand National Assembly various political figures this time again from the governing AKP party tried to interrupt the speech of Demirtaş, however, the efforts failed. Kurdish politician continued to speak about the Armenian Genocide and stated that the use of the word Armenian has been associated with an insult in the country. Highlighting those realities Demirtaş stated that a rigid political and ideological perception of the Armenian Genocide had been created in Turkey. He emphasized: “It is our duty to state from this rostrum about the reality we know” (Bianet.org 2009).

Demirtaş suggested to create a committee comprised of independent historians from both Turkey and Armenia the aim of which would be to discuss and reveal the historical realities. He highlighted that without conducting such steps there could not be any real chances for achieving peace and resolving the tragedy. “Turkey should lead the way to uncover the historical facts instead of continuing to carry the burden of a tragedy caused by the Committee of Union and Progress. In order to normalize the relations between the two countries, it should be acknowledged that this is the only way for mutual trust” (Bianet.org 2009). This statement of Demirtaş has to some extent

similarities with the letter of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to the president of the RA Robert Kocharian where Erdoğan offered the creation of historical committee. One of the interviews stated that the creation of historical committee has no meaning since everybody knows that Armenians have lived in the territories of Western Armenia where now Kurdish people inhabit. The scholar highlighted that the statement of Demirtaş is just a mean to simply show that they support the peaceful solution of the Armenian Question, however, they are not ready for conducting serious steps yet (Interview with Ara Papian 2015). Demirtaş at the same time admitted the fact that in both societies anger and hatred persists and to reduce this hostilities to a minimum level there is a need of joint efforts of the Armenians in Turkey and also the Diaspora Armenians. Besides, pursuant to him, the government and media in Turkey should also change their tones and language when speaking about the Armenian Genocide. The reduction of this anger will contribute to the normal establishment of relations between Turkey and Armenia. Within this context in one of his speeches Demirtaş emphasized:

“We have always supported our government, the President developing relations with the Armenian government and for the borders to be opened and this continues to be our stance because the suffering of the past should not determine the relations between Turkey and Armenia forever. This is a problem which must definitely be solved today at this stage” (Demirtaş 2014).

He claimed that the issue of Turkish-Armenian normalization relations can be solved with the means of Turkish support to Armenians in overwhelming the trauma and sufferings. “Our party is following a very open and transparent policy regarding this issue and it supports Turkey developing good, right and strong relations with all its neighbors” (Demirtaş 2014). However, as we see, Demirtaş did not make any reference to one of the preconditions of Turkey to establish diplomatic relations with Armenia which was the refusal of territorial claims by Armenian side. He just spoke more generally about the issue without mentioning even one word concerning the territorial issues between the two countries.

Demirtaş was one of the leading political figures representing the interests of Kurdish people in the Turkish Parliament. It is vital to stress that in the period of presidential campaigns he was very active of speaking about the recognition of the Armenian Genocide. In one of his speeches he announced that if he elected as the President of Turkey, he promised to recognize the Armenian Genocide. This fact shows that Kurdish politicians speak about the Armenian Genocide since they need support and assistance also from the Armenian community of Turkey (Interview with Tatevik Manukian 2015). It is just a way for them to get as much support as possible in order to receive more votes for the ten percent national threshold in the elections.

In his article “The Middle East, the Kurdish Peace Process in Turkey, and Radical Democracy” Demirtaş speaks about the historical truths that should not be neglected by the Turkish government. Again the leader highlights the promotion of democratic values in Turkey, however, putting an emphasis on the resolution of the Kurdish problem. He points out that despite some promises of the AKP government towards the peaceful solution of the conflict tiny achievements have been realized. “The discourse of a nation-state ideology has generated a highly polarized society. Denial, extermination, assimilation, marginalization, “other”ization etc.- these are all the state’s ideological tools that have been systematically organized for decades” (Demirtaş 2015b, p. 29). Pursuant to him, in order to solve the major issues of Turkey any actions should be done with transparent measures. “Real political and social transformation is only possible through transparency and a participative approach” (Demirtaş 2015b, p. 30).

On January 19, 2015 Demirtaş again spoke about the recognition of the Armenian Genocide. “We recognize the Armenian Genocide without question. The Kurds and others certainly have played a role in the Armenian Genocide, but the political will to commit this genocide was that of the Young Turks’ party, led by Enver and Talaat Pashas” (Demirtaş 2015a).

The statement of Demirtaş clearly shows that the issue of the Armenian Genocide is a method for Kurds to raise also the Kurdish Question, to find more partners in order to achieve their major goal which is the solution of the Kurdish Question. The last statement of Demirtaş highlighted that they try to put the blame of the Genocide only on the Turkish government. They do not want to negatively demonstrate the overall image of a Kurdish people, thus with these measures to gain more partners. One of the interviewees stated that Demirtaş knows that the possibilities of his and his party's victory in the upcoming elections are low, so with those measures he tries to inspire the Armenian community of Turkey and also other ethnic and religious minorities of Turkey who had quite positive attitude towards Armenians to vote for his party (Interview with Artak Shakarian 2015).

Kurdish politicians of opposition parties continued publicly to speak about the recognition of the Armenian Genocide in the following years. One of those political figures was the deputy from Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party Altan Tan. In October 2011, he issued a statement in a scientific conference held in Mardin where he emphasized: "The Armenian Genocide took place in 1915. I use word genocide as a political figure and I want it to be fixed" (Gudem.bugun.com.tr 2011).

Gradually, we see that Kurdish politicians started to openly use the word "genocide" which was a major development towards eliminating the taboo on the Armenian Genocide in Turkey. Later on an interview to the Armenian newspaper "Agos" in Istanbul, Altan Tan elaborated his statement more deeply claiming that the major responsibility for conducting the Genocide of Armenians in 1915 should be put on the Young Turks, however, he stressed that many Kurds had also participated in the Genocide. He underlined: "One cannot say that all the Kurdish people participated in the Armenian Genocide, but the Kurdish leaders bear responsibility for perpetrating the Genocide"

(Gundem.bugun.com.tr 2011). This statement of Altan Tan was a tactic in order to avoid from bearing the responsibility of what their ancestors commit. It is crucial to mention that Altan Tan was one of the members of the pro-religious Prosperity Party, however, in his speech he also condemned Muslim clergy for their position regarding the Armenian Genocide. Again Kurdish politician undermined the role of the Kurds on the perpetration of the Armenian Genocide, however he aimed not to negatively demonstrate the overall image of Kurdish society which was a mean to avoid the criticism by the international world and also to show that Kurdish people are more prone to admit the Genocide, are more keen on removing the taboos within Turkey's political and social lives. However, as we see, none of the Kurdish politicians in the statements spoke about the compensation issues of the Genocide which demonstrates that those statements are simply words that is not followed by clear and decisive steps.

In accordance with the raise of the issue of the Armenian Genocide, Kurdish political figures began to add some legal implications to the problem. In April 2012 another prominent Kurdish deputy and member of the Peace and Democracy Party Sırrı Süreyya Önder made an announcement stating that he will present a legal act in the Turkish Parliament according to which April 24 should be declared as “the sharing day of national mourning and suffering of the Armenian people” (Radikal.com.tr 2012). Again the deputy, like its main counterparts, used the word “genocide” during his speech and he also took part in the ceremonies that were conducted in Istanbul commemorating the events on April 24, 1915. This was a huge development within Turkey's political and social affairs. It can be stated that since 2011 Kurdish politicians began to raise and condemn the Genocide of Armenians with much more intensity compared to 2008. This fact also shows that the taboo on Genocide was gradually removed as a result of Kurdish politicians' readiness to express their own views and ideas on that particular issue.

At the same time another Kurdish prominent figure from Peace and Democracy Party Hasip Kaplan in a meeting with Armenian journalists in Turkish Grand National Assembly stated that their fraction will represent a legal document referring to all the tragedies that happened in Turkey including the Armenian Genocide. Kaplan admitted that their grandfathers did commit crimes, however, they did so against their will. Concerning the relations between Turkey and Armenia the Kurdish political leader stressed that starting from 2007 they are working in the Turkish Parliament and think that the political relations with Armenia are not so strong enough to establish normal bilateral relations. Kaplan also criticized the government of Erdoğan stating that hatred and hostility towards Kurds and various ethnic minorities is gradually increasing in the country (News.am 2012). However, the most important thing during his interview was that despite admitting the crimes and massacres that happened in 1915 with Armenians, Kaplan highlighted that nowadays it is very risky and dangerous to speak about the Armenian Genocide in the Turkish Parliament (News.am 2012). Here it is obvious that Kaplan was one of the Kurdish political figures who spoke about the Armenian Genocide only in an interview with Armenian journalists and tried to avoid of raising this issue within Turkey's political circles. This fact shows that in Turkey the fear of speaking about the Genocide of Armenians is still persistent. However, not all Kurdish leaders have acted in such a way as was discussed earlier.

Gradually, we witnessed the growing trend among Kurdish politicians who spoke about the recognition of the Armenian Genocide in Turkey. Another prominent Kurdish leader was Ahmet Türk who also spoke about the recognition of the Armenian Genocide both by Turkey and by Kurdish people. On February 3, 2013 in an interview Ahmet Türk spoke about the role of Kurds in the Armenian Genocide and apologized to the Armenians on behalf of all Kurdish people. He emphasized that Kurds had a huge role in the torture and mass massacres of Armenians, Yezidis and Assyrians in 1915, and he as a Kurd publicly apologized to the Armenian people.

Ahmet Türk was one of the Kurdish politicians who clearly stated that Kurds had a great role on the Genocide of Armenians. He explained the involvement of Kurds in the massacres of Armenians as being tools for Turkish ruling elite to conduct their crime in 1915. “Our grandfathers and fathers were used in the injustices perpetrated against Armenians, Assyrians and Yezidis. There’s blood on their hands. With the blood of these peoples they bloodied their own hands. Thus, as their children and grandchildren, we apologize” (t24.com.tr 2013). Türk also added: “We, as Kurds, say that we did commit these crimes, but we committed them against our will. The Turkish government instead of denying it, must also apologize... There is a need of fundamental change here” (t24.com.tr 2013). It is important to mention that Ahmet Türk is also a mediator of talks between the government of Turkey and Kurdistan Workers’ Party jailed leader Abdullah Ocalan and during an interview he also raised the issue of Ocalan urging the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to follow suit and recognize the Genocide of Armenians.

Gradually, the issue of the Armenian Genocide became one of the main important political debates and concerns of the Kurdish politicians represented in the Turkish Parliament. The speeches of those Kurdish political figures were aimed both to raise their prestige among some parts of the Turkish people and also with the recognition of the Armenian Genocide they tried to bring the anger and hatred of the governing AKP party towards the Kurdish opposition parties thus strengthening the struggle between the government and the opposition.

The trends of the Kurdish political figures regarding the recognition of the Armenian Genocide continued also in 2014 when another Kurdish political figure this time female Sebahat Tuncel from the pro-Kurdish Democratic People’s Party came with a legal document in Turkish Grand National Assembly in November 2014 where she emphasized the need to achieve public accord and reconciliation in Turkey. Pursuant to her, this objective could be accomplished with the

overcoming of some obstacles that persist in Turkey. There are many tragedies such as the massacres in Dersim, Marash, Sebastia and also the Armenian Genocide. According to this new legal document, the president of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan should apologize for the Armenian Genocide, and immediately the next day should read the legal document. The legal document also had reference to the possibility of the financial and moral compensation issues, however, it was not so clear-cut. Pursuant to Tuncel if the initiative was approved by the Turkish Parliament, the proposal will get a status of a bill which will announce 24 of April as the day of national mourning in Turkey (Milliyet.com.tr 2014).

Throughout 1990's until 2014 the developments of Kurdish and Armenian Questions within Turkey's political and social affairs have been characterized by their ups and downs. Kurdish Question which was primarily connected with the upsurge of the PKK has become one of the major internal threats for the republican Turkey. The prolonged struggle of Kurds for their cultural and political rights led to some positive achievements in terms of promoting broadcasting and education in Kurdish language. However, on the contrary, the Armenian society has not achieved any success concerning the solution of the Armenian Question. Despite some developments achieved within Armenia and Turkey in terms of establishing bilateral relations, Turkish Republic continued to keep its stance putting preconditions in the normalization process and took any measures for the falsification of historical truth.

Thus, Kurdish society of Turkey and their political representatives at large started to realize that the issue of the Armenian Genocide should not be put aside from the Turkish politics. Political maturity of Kurds achieved such levels that they started to speak publicly about the recognition of the Armenian Genocide. Sharing the sufferings, pains, assimilation, deportation and other discriminatory policies throughout the history Kurds realized that they have many similarities with

Armenians. Thus, besides the two Kurdish political leaders of the PKK, starting from 2007 numerous other Kurdish political figures raised the issue of the Armenian Genocide in the Turkish Grand National Assembly. However, they started to raise the issue of the Armenian genocide with much more intensity since 2011 with such measures trying to urge the government of Turkey to recognize the crimes and mass massacres that happened to Armenians in the late Ottoman Empire in 1915.

Nevertheless, despite such positive developments, the statements by Kurdish politicians in their turn had some political implications. All of them just simply admitted the Genocide of Armenians, some of them even highlighted that Kurds have also had their role in the massacres, however they always tried to underline the fact that Kurds have been forced to conduct the Armenian massacres. This was a tactic for them to blame only the Turkish government for bearing the responsibility of resolving the Armenian Question. However, as history showed, Kurds have played as much important role as Turks in the annihilation of the Armenian people in 1915.

Another issue that also needs a particular attention is that none of them stated how the issue of the Genocide should be resolved. According to one of the scholar interviewed, Kurds are the ones who took the advantages of the Armenian Genocide to a great extent. Currently, large part of them live in the territory of historical Armenia, they are the owners of the Armenian's property. Thus, Kurdish politicians in their statements do not make any reference to the compensation issues. Although some of them emphasized that they will present some legal acts concerning the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, however, till now, no such developments have been realized. One of the scholars stated that these statements have no clear and specific grounds. According to him, Genocide is a crime which should be followed by several steps: recognition, condemnation and compensation (Interview with Ara Papian 2015). However, none of them made any reference to the

compensation issues. Recognizing the Armenian Genocide is just a method for them to use in order to raise also the issue of the Kurdish Question, to get as much assistance as possible and also receive as more votes as possible from the Armenian community of Turkey to maintain their seats in the Turkish Grand National Assembly. It is also a tool for them to internationalize the Kurdish Question due to the joint efforts of the Armenian Diaspora and Kurdish lobby.

According to one of the interviewees, Kurdish politicians with such measures also want to inspire the Alevi minority in Turkey the majority of which has quite positive attitude towards the Armenian community of Turkey. Kurdish politicians hope that they will also get the support of the Alevi minority as well (Interview with Ara Papian 2015).

Kurdish politicians raising the issue of the Armenian Genocide also try to underline that they are the main proponents on establishing civil society in Turkey. They want to show international world that living in the country with its persistent authoritarian coverage they can act as a united group which is more prone on establishing democratic values, is more supportive on the provision of more cultural and political rights to other ethnic and religious minorities. However, again, these actions of Kurdish politicians have their own political implications. They want to maintain their seats in the Turkish Parliament and to raise the issues and concerns of the Kurdish society at large.

## **Conclusion**

The study aimed to analyze and to understand the major reasons of Kurdish politician's stance regarding the recognition of the Armenian Genocide. Due to a lack of research conducted on this topic, the study could not give a full picture of Kurdish politicians' position on that particular issue. However, with all the findings and the results of all interviews the study showed that Kurdish politicians recognize the Armenian Genocide just as a mean to accomplish their major objective: to gain more partners for resolving the Kurdish question. For them the recognition of the Armenian Genocide is not a matter of historical justice.

The statements of Kurdish politicians are a major development and achievement within Turkish political and social life since the Genocide was among the taboo themes in Turkey for a long time. Kurdish politicians try to highlight that both Armenians and Kurdish people faced many sufferings and loses under the rule of the Ottoman authorities and sharing a common threat should be a sign for both of them to cooperate in order to reach the solutions of their own concerns. Thus, recognizing the Armenian Genocide they just want to show both international world and particularly the Armenian people both in Turkey and Diaspora that they are the supporters of the Armenian demands concerning the Genocide. However, as all the interviewees underlined, Kurdish statements have no meaningful grounds. Their statements are just simple words which are not followed by any significant steps. Recognition is not the end of the solution of the problem. Large part of Kurdish people currently lives in the territories of historical Armenia and they consider it their homeland. One of the interviewees also stated that those Kurdish people do not admit the fact that these lands have belonged to Armenians, they just say that Armenians have lived in these lands, however, these territories belong only to Kurdish people.

Thus, it can be argued that Kurdish politicians are still not ready to conduct important actions for having a contribution to resolving the Armenian Question. With such statements they just try to demonstrate the overall image of Kurdish people in a positive manner and also to show that they are keen on establishing democratic values in Turkey. And also in every statement we saw that they tried to put the responsibility of solving the Armenian Question on the Turkish state.

Currently, the major goal of the HDP party is to gain as more votes as possible to receive the ten percent national threshold for maintaining seats in the Turkish Parliament and we noticed that the members of this Kurdish party are the major activists raising the issue of the Armenian Genocide, thus, with such measures trying to receive votes from the Armenian community of Turkey. Concerning the establishment of bilateral relations between Turkey and Armenia, Kurdish politicians took a supportive stance, however, again they want to show that Kurdish society is prone to the peaceful resolution of any issues and concerns between these two sides. However, none of them underlined in their statements about the preconditions that Turkey always puts towards the establishment of diplomatic relations with Armenia. And one of the preconditions of Turkey was the refusal of all territorial claims by Armenia. Nonetheless, no Kurdish politician speaking about the possible Turkish-Armenian relations emphasized the need of Turkey to refuse from its preconditions. This also supports the hypothesis that Kurdish politicians in all of their statements do not express any views or ideas that are against their national and political interests.

To summarize, based on the overall findings, the study answered the research questions and also **accepted** the hypothesis which is as follows:

**HP1:** *The growing trends of the statements by Kurdish politicians of Turkey on the issue of the Armenian Genocide derive from their own political aims.*

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## **Appendix**

### **Persons interviewed (April-May 2015)**

- Alexandr Arzumanian (the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia in 1996-1998)
- Ara Papiian (Lawyer, historian and diplomat, the president of "Modus Vivendi" Center for Social Science)
- Artak Shakarian (Turkologist, also the head of the School for Young Leaders)
- Rudik Yaralian (Expert in Iranian Studies at the Yerevan State University)
- Tatevik Manukian (Associate Professor at Institute of Oriental Studies at Armenian National Academy of Sciences)
- Vahram Petrosian (Head of the Department of Armenian-Kurdish relations at Institute for Armenian Studies)

### **Interview Questions**

1. Since 2008 various Kurdish politicians of Turkey raise the issue of the Armenian Genocide in the Turkish Parliament and also urge the government of Turkey to recognize the Genocide of Armenians? According to you, what stands behind these developments?
2. How will you elaborate the Kurdish politicians' such actions concerning the recognition of the Armenian Genocide? Are there any political implications or is it just a matter of historical justice for them?
3. What was the reason that Kurds started to raise the issue of the Armenian Genocide particularly since 2000s rather than in 1990s?
4. According to you, can these statements of Kurdish politicians have any impact between the relations of Turkey and Armenia?