

# The Issue of the Armenian Genocide in France-Turkey Relations

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## Հայոց ցեղասպանության հիմնախնդիրը Ֆրանսիա-Թուրքիա փոխհարաբերություններում Թուրքիայի Մարիամ Մ.

*Միջազգային հարաբերությունների և դիվանագիտության ամբիոնի ասպիրանտ, Միջազգային հարաբերությունների ֆակուլտետ, Երևանի պետական համալսարան (Երևան, ՀՀ)*

**Ամփոփագիր.** Ֆրանսիա-Թուրքիա փոխհարաբերությունների անցյալի և ներկայիս ընթացքի վրա իր մեծ ազդեցությունն ունի հայկական գործոնը, հայ-ֆրանսիական բարեկամական հարաբերությունները, որոնք, փաստորեն հակակշռում են ֆրանս-թուրքական հարաբերությունների բովանդակային ողջ պարունակությանը, և հաճախ, աշխարհաքաղաքական փոփոխությունների և զարգացումների համատեքստում պահպանում են իրենց կայունությունը, ինչը, ըստ էության, բավականին բարդ է ֆրանս-թուրքական հարաբերությունների պարագայում. քաղաքական ոլորտում առաջացած հակասությունները դոմինոյի էֆեկտով ազդում են նաև երկկողմ հարաբերությունների մյուս ոլորտների վրա: Հայոց ցեղասպանության հիմնախնդիրը ամենատարբեր մակարդակներով և նախաձեռնություններով ներկայացվել էր ֆրանսիական իրականության բոլոր ոլորտներում, որոնց շնորհիվ Ֆրանսիայի Հանրապետությունը արդեն երկու տասնամյակ է, ինչ պաշտոնապես ճանաչել է Հայոց ցեղասպանությունը՝ հակառակ թուրքական հուժկու հակազդեցությանը, որը իր ողջ ծավալող աշխատում էր և այսօր էլ աշխատում է հայանպաստ նախաձեռնությունների իրագործման դեմ՝ փորձելով արգելակել Հայոց ցեղասպանության ցայսօր ծավալվող միջազգային ճանաչման գործընթացը:

**Հանգուցաբառեր և բառակապակցություններ՝** Ֆրանսիա-Թուրքիա հարաբերություններ, Հայոց ցեղասպանություն, միջազգային ճանաչում, լոբբիստական կազմակերպություններ, օրինագծեր, ժխտողականություն

## Проблема Геноцида армян во взаимоотношениях Франции и Турции

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**Аннотация.** Большое влияние на прошлый и нынешний ход взаимоотношений Франция-Турция оказывает армянский фактор, армяно-французские дружественные отношения, которые, фактически, которые, по сути, уравновешивают все содержание франко-турецких отношений, и зачастую сохраняют свою стабильность в контексте геополитических изменений и явлений, что на самом деле довольно сложно в случае франко-турецких отношений: возникшие в политической сфере противоречия эффектом домино влияют и на другие сферы двусторонних отношений. Проблема Геноцида армян был представлен на различных уровнях и инициативах во всех сферах французской действительности, благодаря которым Французская Республика уже два десятилетия официально признала Геноцид армян, вопреки мощному турецкому противодействию, которая на протяжении всей своей деятельности много работала и работает против реализации проармянских инициатив, пытаясь остановить разворачивающийся сегодня процесс международного признания Геноцида армян.

**Ключевые слова и словосочетания:** Отношения Франция-Турция, Геноцид армян, международное признание, лоббистские организации, законопроекты, отрицание

The Armenian factor in France-Turkey relations has always had its influence on the political relations and dialogue between the two countries, leading to sharp conflicts and crises, which, in addition to the political sphere, directly

affected other spheres of bilateral relations and directions of cooperation, continuous changes registering in them. The Encyclopedia of Genocides and Crimes Against Humanity calls the denial of the Armenian Genocide "the most blatant example of

the state denying its own past." The main mission of a number of Turks, as well as Western scholars funded by the Turkish state, has become the creation of a "parallel" history that has little to do with reality and denies the Armenian Genocide. The issue of international recognition of the Armenian Genocide has been on the political agenda since 1990, which was enshrined in the Declaration "On the Independence of Armenia" adopted on August 23 of the same year (Article 11) [19], and since 1998 it has become one of the priorities of Armenia's foreign policy, doubling and promoting the joint efforts of Armenia and the Diaspora aimed at the international recognition and condemnation of that historical reality [4, p. 379]. And so, over the years, along with the Turkish denial, the interest in the Armenian Genocide grew, which was accompanied by the recognition of this historical reality by a number of countries. The Republic of France was no exception. Next to the influential Armenian community in France, which is closely integrated into the French reality and leads an active intra-community life, there is the no less influential Turkish community [47], which tried and still tries to hinder the initiatives of not only the Armenian community by various means and methods [5, p. 9], aimed at the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, but also the efforts of many state and public figures of the Republic of France to achieve the process of recognition and condemnation of the Armenian Genocide by the state [32, p. 619]. In 1965, on the eve of the 50th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, the issue of recognition of the Armenian Genocide was first raised by the communists in France, demanding immediate recognition of the Armenian Genocide and give compensation to the Armenians [7].

The creation of a number of lobbying groups was of exceptional importance in the life of French Armenians, whose main and most important task, as we know, was to contribute to the international recognition and condemnation of the Armenian Genocide [22, p. 113-114]. In 1995, on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, French-Armenian political, public, and cultural organizations gathered around the newly created April 24 Committee, with the prospect of commemorating the anniversary of the Genocide and achieving recognition by the French authorities [6, p. 34]. In the initial stage of the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by France, an important event was the statement of the President of the Republic of France, Francois Mitterrand, on January 7, 1984, in which he also addressed the issue of the Armenian Genocide, noting that it left an indelible mark on the fate of the Armenian people, therefore, the genocide must always be remembered [29]. It

should be noted that back in 1981, Francois Mitterrand made a statement and appeal to the Armenian community on the eve of the next presidential elections of the French Republic [53], thus activating the political campaign aimed at recognizing and condemning the Armenian Genocide in the French reality. In 1985-1986, the French Foreign Ministers Roland Dumas and Jean Bernard-Raymond issued statements in which it was specifically stated that France has no right to forget the Armenian Genocide, because the French-Armenian community is also one of the victims of that historical reality [64, p. 141]. The issue of the recognition of the Armenian Genocide was raised again in 1988 and again before the presidential elections, which caused the call of the French communists to the National Assembly and the international community to mark April 24 as a day of remembrance for the victims of the Genocide [11]. Later, in February 1997, French National Assembly member Patrick Labon took a similar initiative, presenting a draft law to the National Assembly proposing to declare April 24 as a commemoration day for this crime against humanity [58]. On May 19, 1998, a draft law was presented to the French National Assembly with the name "Public recognition of the Armenian Genocide of 1915", which after heated discussions was unanimously adopted only a few days later, on May 29. In fact, with this bill, France publicly recognizes the fact of the Armenian Genocide, which was accepted with great enthusiasm by Armenia, and critically by the Turkish authorities, who made many statements and blamed the French deputies for their actions, noting that their actions are primarily aimed against Franco-Turkish friendly relations and their future [48]. The adoption of the draft law by the National Assembly was met with a wave of protest by the Turkish authorities, and they tried to do everything possible to prevent the adoption of the bill by the Senate. And so, as a result of the initiatives of the Turkish side, the bill was not included in the Senate's agenda on March 10, 1999 [56, p. 140], and a few days later, on March 17, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hubert Vedrin, referring to the future fate of the bill, noted that it "will not be of any use", to the interests of peace between Armenians and Turks both in the South Caucasus and in French diplomacy" [56, p. 140]. In 1999, more than 300 French-Armenians participated in the Lyon-Paris protest march, which started from Lyon on April 24 and reached Paris on May 12. The participants of the march demanded the French Senate to recognize the Armenian Genocide following the example of the National Assembly [15]. In terms of addressing the issue of the Armenian Genocide, the meeting held on October

10, 1999 on the topic of "Impunity for crimes against humanity" at the UNESCO central office was important [14], during which, despite the Turkish opposition, the issue of the Armenian Genocide was also discussed and decisions were made: condemnation of the genocide, international recognition and also discussed the need to condemn denial by establishing legal prohibitions against it [16]. One year later, on November 8, 2000, the French Senate discussed and adopted another draft of the law on the Armenian Genocide [17], which entered into force after signing by President Jacques Chirac in January 2001 [12]. Through Foreign Minister Ismail Cem, Turkey immediately criticized the vote of the French. "We condemn the adoption of this draft law, which will definitely have negative consequences on Turkish-French relations," he said. "That recognition will only contribute to the strengthening of Armenian terrorism, regarding which Turkey has not changed its position" [13]. Moreover, according to Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit, Turkey was going to take retaliatory measures against France, which could have serious consequences especially on the military industry [49]. The countermeasure of the Turkish side was the recall of its ambassador to France, Sonmez Koksall, and the cancellation of several bilateral agreements on armaments [38]. Regarding all this, the spokesperson of the Turkish Foreign Ministry, Nekati Utkan, assured that. "It is impossible to blame the Turkish side and present the events during the World War as genocide", adding that this reality will damage relations with France and lead to "dangerous consequences", from the application of embargoes on French products to their general boycott [69]. On May 29, 2001, the next step of the Turkish side was the establishment of the "Coordinating Council for the Fight Against Unfounded Genocide Allegations" (Asılsız Soykırım İddialarıyla Mücadele Koordinasyon Kurulu [57]), whose first president was the Minister of State and Deputy Prime Minister of Turkey Devlet Bahçeli, and the coordinator was the first secretary general of the National Security Council [18, p. 25]. The main goal of the council's activity is to inform the Turkish public, starting from school years, about the "unfoundedness" of the Armenian Genocide claims and to form a negative consciousness, as well as to neutralize the efforts to recognize the Armenian Genocide, which are regularly brought to the agenda abroad [18, p. 25].

After the founder of the council, Devlet Bahçeli, it was headed by members of the Justice and Development Party, Erkan Mumju, Abdullah Gul and Cemil Cicek. The subject of the Armenian Genocide was also widely discussed by the French scientific, cultural and public circles. Studies were

conducted on the Armenian Genocide, articles were published in the press [1] (more than 700 large and small articles on the Armenian Genocide were published in the famous French daily Le Monde between 1987-2006 [21, p. 30]), collections of documents and archival materials were compiled, which in turn contributed the strengthening of the pro-Armenian positions of the French authorities and their implementation of new initiatives regarding the Armenian Genocide. It should be noted that the French authorities, taking into account the importance of bilateral relations, could not ignore the role of the large French-Armenian community as an influential electorate, so it is no coincidence that before important domestic political events, especially before the elections, the French authorities addressed the French-Armenians with speeches and appeals. community, expressing willingness to support and contribute to the process of resolving the Armenian issue and restoring historical justice. In 2001, another law on the Armenian Genocide was adopted in France, according to which "France publicly recognizes the Armenian Genocide of 1915. This law should act as the law of the state" [9, p. 29].

In the 2000s, a great Armenian Genocide denial campaign was launched, which received continuous state sponsorship from Turkey. It is no coincidence that in 2006 the Turkish government declared the struggle against the international recognition of the Armenian Genocide as one of the most important directions of the country's foreign policy [42]. From the beginning of the 2000s, the Turkish lobbying organizations operating in France intensified their activities, which were also largely connected with the establishment of the Bosphorus Institute by the Union of Turkish Manufacturers in Paris in 2009. It is this institute that is considered the cornerstone of the Turkish lobby in France and the coordinating center of its activities, the ideological leader that still manages and controls the activities of lobby organizations [28]. It should be noted that as early as 2005, 400 Turkish associations were operating in France, 250 of which were of a religious nature. Today, the number of such unions reaches around 450 [44, p. 424]. The Union of European Turkish Democrats, the Agency of Turks Abroad, the Islamic Union of Turkey, and other lobby organizations, which enjoy a high reputation in the Turkish reality, continued their active anti-Armenian activities, including meetings and discussions with parliamentarians to secret consultations [63]. On October 12, 2006, the French National Assembly passed a bill making denial of the 1915 Armenian Genocide a criminal offense. The document states that denying the mass slaughter of Armenians is punishable by one year in prison and a fine of

45,000 euros (\$56,400). Meanwhile, Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan, who represented Turkey in negotiations with the EU in 2006, stated that the French law violates one of the fundamental principles of the EU - freedom of opinion, noting that history should be left to the study of historians [36]. "What happened today in France, we think, is not in line with the main values of the European Union," Ali Babacan said in his speech, also emphasizing that the Turkish government will not encourage the boycott of French products at the same time [34]. From the beginning, it should be noted that there were certain contradictory and essentially uncertain facts in the content of the bill, which in turn caused its blocking by the French Senate [69]. Nicolas Sarkozy, who won the 2007 presidential elections of the French Republic, promised representatives of the French-Armenian community before the presidential elections to support the 2006 French bill on the Armenian Genocide [23], but took a pro-Armenian position only in the last period of his presidency. Of course, all this could not have an impact on the moods and expectations of the French-Armenian community, and it is no coincidence that the most influential figure of the French-Armenian community, the world-famous chansonnier Charles Aznavour, publicly warned Nicolas Sarkozy on behalf of the French-Armenians that he will lose the support of 500,000 French-Armenians in the presidential elections to be held in 2012 [31]. After all this, on May 4, 2011, the bill criminalizing the denial of the Armenian Genocide was once again discussed in the French Senate, but like the previous bill, it was withdrawn from the vote due to substantive issues [59]. As early as June 28, 2011, when President Sarkozy's visit to Yerevan was being prepared, Jean-Francois Coppin, General Secretary of the Union for Support of Democracy Party, signed a partnership agreement with the Bosphorus Institute, according to which the two sides "consider it necessary for France and Turkey to jointly reflect on bilateral and mutual challenges" and around the problems related to the benefits", particularly in terms of public issues [45], as a result of which, in the message published by the Bosphorus Institute on February 1, 2012, the president of the institute, Bahadir Kalegasi, declares about the institute's work with senators: "In recent weeks, the institute has done extensive work of exchanges, consultation and information to cover the debate", and after the adoption of the bill, the president of the institute added: "I am very happy that two complaints have been submitted to the Constitutional Council... I welcome this double complaint, which proves the French parliamentarians' respect for their constitution, their desire to maintain French-Turkish

relations and leave the memory issue alone in Turkey" [20]. During his speech in Armenia, Nicolas Sarkozy urged Turkey to review history and recognize the massacres that took place almost 100 years ago as genocide [40]. The French president also stated in his speech that if Turkey does not do this by the end of 2011, then France will have to ratify the bill criminalizing the denial of the Armenian Genocide. Naturally, the Turkish side could not leave President Sarkozy's statements unanswered, particularly flattery, considering them unreal and describing them as a crazy way to buy the votes of the French-Armenian community [41]. In response to threats from the Turkish side, the bill was ratified on December 22, 2011, and immediately after that, as a sign of protest, Turkey announced that it was recalling its ambassador from Paris for an indefinite period and freezing military-political relations [37]. The Turkish side responded to the incident with protest speeches and gatherings [25]. On January 23, 2012, the French Senate adopted the draft law criminalizing the denial of the Armenian Genocide [33], the entry into force of which was prevented by the decision of the French Constitutional Council. Despite that circumstance, the newly elected French President Francois Hollande repeatedly reaffirmed his intention and willingness to achieve the adoption of the law criminalizing the denial of the Armenian Genocide in France [10, p. 6]. The adoption of the bill by the Senate was met with sharp criticism by the Turkish authorities; canceled all economic, military-political meetings planned with the French side and recalled its ambassador for consultations [76]. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan took the opportunity to hit back at France, accusing it of having a "bloody past," condemning the deaths of 45,000 people in Algeria in 1945, then under French rule, as well as France's role in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda that killed 800,000 people [66]. According to the press release of the Turkish Foreign Ministry, "French-Turkish relations, which have been developing for centuries, were damaged today by the false and irresponsible claims of French politicians who do not see the political consequences of their actions" [53]. As for the volume of bilateral trade and economic relations between Turkey and France in the given period, as of 2011 it reached 16.03 billion dollars, the French surplus was 2.42 billion dollars. At the end of June 2012, 1039 companies with French capital were operating in Turkey. In 2011, French direct investments in Turkey reached 985 million dollars, and in 2010, trade volumes between the two countries amounted to 12 billion euros [54]. It should be noted that the Minister of Foreign Affairs of France, Alain Juppe, responding to the media's

question about French-Turkish relations after the events surrounding the bill criminalizing the denial of the Armenian Genocide, answered that. "Our relations with Turkey are not disturbed, on the contrary. Our economic relations are very strong, and cultural ties are also being strengthened" [5]. However, Turkish threats weakened when a bill criminalizing denial of the Armenian Genocide was rejected by the French Constitutional Council [51]. The extraordinary and plenipotentiary ambassador of Turkey in France at that time, Tahsin Burjuoglu, in his turn stated that if the French Constitutional Council did not cancel the bill passed by the Senate, then Ankara would break the relations with Paris [58]. On April 24, 2014, French President Francois Hollande presided in Paris at the ceremony dedicated to the memory of the 1.5 million victims of the Armenian Genocide, which took place in Yerevan Park in Paris, with the participation of representatives of the French-Armenian community, during which he officially announced that on April 24, 2015, in Yerevan to participate in the official events of the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide [3]. Along with all that, the Turkish authorities strengthened the struggle with various means and methods, about which Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arynch noted. "The 100th anniversary of both the Dardanelles events [71] and the claims of the Armenian Genocide is coming. We are working hard. Work is carried out with the help of conferences, seminars, publications and documentaries. However, we also develop special activities in the field of public diplomacy to influence the public opinion of all countries of the world" [2]. Moreover, a department with special powers called "2015" was created within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, which was supposed to deal with preparations for 2015, and huge financial resources were provided to it to fulfill its duties properly [30]. On April 24, 2015, during the official event of the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, French President Francois Hollande made a speech in Yerevan, speaking about the need for international recognition and condemnation of the Armenian Genocide [8]. Regarding the statement, the Turkish side mentioned that it is only trying to carry out the continuation of former president Nicolas Sarkozy's policy in order to get the support of the French-Armenian community in the future political processes [70, p. 74].

On October 14, 2016, the French National Assembly unanimously adopted a law (entitled "Equality and Citizenship") that criminalizes crimes against humanity and war crimes, including the denial of the Armenian Genocide, and, according to this law, the denial, disputing or belittling of such

crimes is punished by one year imprisonment and a fine of 45 thousand euros [25]. However, this law, like the previous ones, had a very short life. In January 2017, the French Constitutional Council canceled the law of October 14, 2016. This was the second time that the French Constitutional Council decriminalized denial of the Armenian Genocide [27]. Back in January 2018, President Emmanuel Macron announced that the Armenian Genocide Day should be included in the calendar of memorable days of the French Republic, and the decision regarding this will be made in the coming months, stating in his speech that: "The history of French Armenians is the history of France. And since the Armenian Genocide is part of our memories, the memory of the Armenian Genocide should be respected in our republic as well. Together with you, I will also fight to the best of my ability against any manifestation of denial, which disrespects the memory of the victims and the dignity of the living". One of the important steps taken by French President Emmanuel Macron on February 5, 2019 was the announcement made on February 5, 2019, to declare April 24 as the Armenian Genocide Memorial Day during the annual dinner organized by the Coordinating Council of Armenian Organizations in France, noting that France calls the genocide a crime against humanity since 1915, and against civilization [34], which was followed by threats from the Turkish side, calling the decision of the French leader "scandalous" and using the word genocide in quotation marks [65]. "We condemn and reject the attempt of President Macron, who has many political problems in his country, and tries to save it from destruction for one more day by turning historical events into political material," Turkish President's Spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said in a statement [62]. On April 10, 2019, French President Macron signed the decree on recognizing April 24 as the national day of commemoration of the Armenian Genocide, which states that April 24 should be designated as the day of commemoration of the Armenian Genocide of 1915. According to the decree, events will be held in Paris on that day every year. Similar events can be organized in other cities, in each department, at the initiative of the community leadership. The Prime Minister of France is responsible for the implementation of this decision [34]. Just a few hours after the signing of the decree, official Ankara released a critical statement through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, according to which: "Macron used this promise to win the votes of representatives of the Armenian community during the elections. It is inevitable that the attitude of France, which is far from friendly relations with our country, will have a negative

impact on our relations with it," the statement said [65].

In parallel with all this, with the active efforts of the Turkish authorities and lobbyist organizations, which also tried to prevent the events organized in memory of the innocent victims of the Armenian Genocide on April 24 [62], in which French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe also participated, in December 2019, the French 17th Chamber of Correction examined the lawsuit filed by researchers Olivier Pardo and Maxime Gauin against the law adopted in January 2001, which in fact challenged a number of provisions of the law and their sub-clauses [50], in relation to which the coordinating council of Armenian companies in France criticized and condemned the anti-Armenian steps and actions being carried out [60], however, the process is still ongoing. Thus, the Armenian factor, its individual components, especially the issue of the Armenian Genocide, has a great influence on the current and future course of France-Turkey relations. It should be noted that all the steps and actions of the Turkish side proved the fact that its main goal is to block the process of recognizing the Armenian Genocide in Europe, in this context, in France, until they become a final obstacle to its membership in the European Union, and thus also in the European family. on the way. It is clear that the main and driving force in all of this is France, followed by Germany [43] and Italy [46]. In this sense, the French side, according to the position of the Turkish official circles, had a powerful card in its hand to prevent and restrain the Turkish penetration both in its internal and external environment, which it constantly demonstrated. Thus, Turkey's strategic priority is to destroy the French citadel, first of all by inducing the French parliamentarians or the Constitutional Council to annul the law adopted in 2001. Not every law punishing Genocide denial nullifies Turkey's maneuverability and therefore limits its ability to achieve its goals. It turns out that Turkey has one way to achieve its goal: to penetrate and influence the political life of France, using the whole arsenal of his abilities. However, France's policy regarding the recognition of the Armenian Genocide and its recognition is of the utmost importance in the context of international perceptions of the process of international recognition and condemnation of the Armenian Genocide.

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