

## TURKEY IN THE PERIOD OF NEO-OTTOMANISM OF ERDOĞAN: THE ADVENTUROUS FOREIGN POLICY AND THE INSOLENT DENIAL ASIM

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A number of conceptual approaches make up the basis of this article. The most important of those is the following: the foreign policy of Turkey obtained a “new quality” during the rule of the “Justice and Development Party” (JDP), since 2002, which could be characterized as adventurism. It stems from the baseless extreme imaginations of the JDP leader, the prime minister of the country, and, subsequently, the president R. T. Erdoğan about the foreign political potentialities of Turkey, which implied, and that was his intention, insurance for the dominant role of Turkey in the surrounding region, particularly in the Near East. In fact, Turkey has neither the necessary potential nor authority to reach this goal. In reality, the active involvement of Turkey in the Syrian crisis and the large scale support of anti-governmental forces there (including such an extremist and genocidal organization as the *Islamic state*) are conditioned by an objective very far from that reality<sup>1</sup>. This “Erdoğanist” or adventurist tendency of Turkey’s regional policy is being expressed from time to time in the Transcaucasus policy, too, which constitutes a menace particularly for Armenia<sup>2</sup>.

This new tendency of Turkey’s foreign policy owes much to Ahmed Davutoğlu with its final shaping and “theoretical” basing. He is the author of a geopolitical theory on the basis of which is the perception of the Ottoman Empire (which a long time ago passed into oblivion), as the main precondition of present day Turkey’s “great-power policy”<sup>3</sup>. In other words, the author builds his geopolitical analysis based on a non-existing phenomenon. This conceptual approach differs essentially from the geopolitical imaginations of the pre-erdoğanist republican Turkey, that is, the Kemalist period<sup>4</sup>.

Occupying high positions in the governments of “JDP” from 2003, Davutoğlu got a chance to have an immediate influence on the foreign policy of Turkey.

At the same time, he was endeavoring to give a practical character to the results of his theoretical searches in the geopolitical sphere. From this point of view, in 2004 he

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<sup>1</sup> We have considered this matter in our publications: see, for instance Рубен Сафрастян, Турецкая авантюра в Сирии: время расплаты близко, - The Analyticon, Сентябрь, 2015, <http://theanalyticon.com/?p=6803&lang=ru>.

<sup>2</sup> See Сафрастян Р., Геостратегия и Южный Кавказ, - Материалы международного стратегического форума “Динамика региональной безопасности на Южном Кавказе (29-30 ноября, 2012 г.): Рабочие тетради, приложение к военно-научному журналу “Айкакан банак” Института национальных стратегических исследований им. Д. Канаяна МО РА, специальный выпуск, Ереван, 2013, стр. 135-144.

<sup>3</sup> Davutoğlu promoted this concept before the “JDP” came to power (see Davutoğlu A., *Stratejik derinlik: Türkiye'nin uluslararası konumu*. Istanbul: Küre Yayinlari, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> See Սաֆրաստյան Ռ., Թուրքիայում աշխարհաքաղաքական մտքի ծագումնաբանության հարցի շուրջ. Սուաթ Իլհանի «Վտանգի տեսությունը», Հայկական բանակ ուսումնական հանդեսի Աշխատանքային տետրեր հավելված, 2012 թ., հմ. 3, էջ 110-115:

proclaimed the thesis that Turkey has to aspire to become “the central power”<sup>5</sup>. Thus, a transition was being made from the Ottoman Empire that existed in the past to modern Turkey, which should take the role of a centre making decisions for the nations and governing them which in former times were under the Ottoman rule. In other words, a “theoretical” grounding was provided for the dominant position of Turkey in an extensive region, which included the Balkan Peninsula, Transcaucasus and the Near East. Afterwards, Davutođlu recognized publicly that the foreign policy of Turkey is henceforth based on the ideology of Neo-Ottomanism. During one of the meetings of the “JDP” administrative board in 2009 he declared: “We are called new Ottomanists. Yes, we are new Ottomanists”<sup>6</sup>.

In addition, Davutođlu also formulated the five new principles of the renewed Turkish diplomacy, of which the most important was, probably, the notorious principle of “zero problem with neighbors”<sup>7</sup>. It was aimed at disguising the aim of Turkish diplomacy in the Erdoğan period to compel the neighboring countries to accept unconditionally the dictations of Turkey in the questions of foreign policy.

The concept of Neo-Ottomanism as a new and basic one of the foreign policy of Turkey, adventurous in its essence, took a final formulation step by step by the efforts of A. Davutođlu. The actions of Turkey, based upon the concept of Neo-Ottomanism, have become apparent in the sphere of foreign policy since 2006. At first, it was expressed through the desire of Turkey to act as an intermediary in various regional confrontations<sup>8</sup>. Later on, as we pointed out, the “great-power” and adventurous intentions prevailed in Turkey’s foreign policy, feeding upon the ideas of Neo-Ottomanism.

The new foreign policy of Turkey began gradually to put its stamp on the denialist policy conducted during decades against the Armenian Genocide. It was subjected to some transformations, maintaining, anyhow, its denialist and falsifying essence. The main intention of these transformations (and the Neo-Ottomanist foreign policy) was the “great-power” adventure. That is why the Turkish denialism has tried to act on the one hand in a more “gentle” and “soft” manner outwardly in the period of Erdoğan and JDP’s governing; on the other hand, it undertook impudent steps to overcome Turkish falsifiers of the Kemalist period.

At the beginning, Erdoğan and his teammates were merely continuing the policy of their predecessors toward denying the fact of the Armenian Genocide. In particular, the notorious “Coordinating council of the struggle against the groundless affirmations concerning Genocide”, which had been founded by the directive of the Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit still in 2001, was actively operating. Its chairman officially was the Deputy

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<sup>5</sup> Prof. Dr. Ahmet Davutođlu, Türkiye merkez ülke olmalı, - Radikal, 26.02.2004.

<sup>6</sup> See Cumhuriyet hükümetinin yeni osmanlıcilik hedefi, -Stratejik arařtırmalar enstitüsü, İstanbul, Haziran 2010, s. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Prof. Dr. Ahmet Davutođlu, Türkiye merkez ülke olmalı, -Radikal, 26.02.2004.

<sup>8</sup> See Սաֆրաստյան Ռ., Արկածախնդրության ակունքները. Թուրքիան և իրադրության սրումը Մերձավոր Արևելքում 2006 թ. ամռանը, Միջազգային հարաբերություններ. Հայկական աշխարհ, 2013, թիվ 6, էջ 10-12:

Prime Minister<sup>9</sup>; various high-ranking persons of the government agencies were involved in the board of this organization - the Deputy Commander of the General Headquarters, the First Deputy Ministers of Justice, Foreign and Internal Affairs, the Heads of Departments of both National Security and Public Relations of the General Secretariat of the National Security Council, the First Deputy of Head of the National Intelligence Service, the Head of the General Department of the State Archives, the Chairman of the Turkish Historical Association and the representative of the Propagandist Foundation, operating under the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister's Office<sup>10</sup>.

The "Coordinating council..." and the working groups it created operated actively during the governing period of the "JDP". This activity proceeded mainly behind closed doors because of which it is impossible to clarify fully what kind of legal problems were in the center of their discussions<sup>11</sup>. In November 2006 the foreign minister and the Deputy Prime Minister A. Gül, who was officially at the head of "Coordinating council...", made statements, which proved that a "scrupulous" work had been carried out to explore possibilities to move the question of "groundless affirmations concerning Armenian Genocide" to international instances<sup>12</sup>. Speaking in the parliament, he mentioned that retired diplomats as well as Turkish and trustworthy foreign legists were involved in those operations<sup>13</sup>. It was also noted that the adoption of this "new approach" by Turkey had been "assessed positively" by a number of other countries<sup>14</sup>.

The statement by A. Gul was accepted with satisfaction by some political powers and figures. The main opposition party of the country, the Republican People's Party, pointed out that it was the real author of that idea<sup>15</sup>. The retired diplomat Gündüz Aktan<sup>16</sup>, who was regarded in Turkey as the "spiritual father" of "the international-legal" direction of the struggle against the recognition of Armenian Genocide, characterized the statement of Gül as "extremely brave<sup>17</sup>". The retired ambassador and the deputy of parliament from the Republican People's Party, Şükrü Elekdağ was among the supporters of the statement by the Foreign Minister. For a long time occupying the post

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<sup>9</sup> The leader of the ultra-chauvinist and pan-Turkish "The Nationalist Movement Party", D. Bahçeli, was occupying the post of the Deputy Prime Minister in the coalition government of B. Ecevit. Bahçeli was the first chairman of the notorious "Coordinating council..."

<sup>10</sup> See Սաֆրաստյան Ռ., Թուրքիայի պայքարը Հայոց ցեղասպանության միջազգային ճանաչման ու դատապարտման դեմ ներկա փուլում. նոր միտում, Արևմտահայության պահանջատիրության հիմնախնդիրները (գիտահետազոտական միջազգային գիտաժողով), Կիպրոս-Նիկոսիա, 18-19 ապրիլի 2008 թ.: Գիտական զեկուցումների ժողովածու, Երևան, Արևմտահայերի ազգային համագումարի նախապատրաստման միջազգային կազմակերպչական կոմիտե, 2009, էջ 150-155:

<sup>11</sup> Cakirözer U., Emekli büyükelçi, yazar Aktan: Ermenistan yerine Fransa'yi dava edelim. Milliyet, 16.11.2006.

<sup>12</sup> Ermeni iddialarina karşı titiz çalışma. - Hürriyet, 15.11.2006.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Cakirözer U., Ermeni hamlesi. - Milliyet, 15.11.2006.

<sup>15</sup> Cakirözer U., Emekli büyükelçi, yazar Aktan: Ermenistan yerine Fransa'yi dava edelim. Milliyet, 16.11.2006.

<sup>16</sup> Now deceased.

<sup>17</sup> Cakirözer U., Emekli büyükelçi, yazar Aktan: Ermenistan yerine Fransa'yi dava edelim. Milliyet, 16.11.2006.

of Turkish ambassador in Washington, he had gained an immense “experience” in the denying of the Armenian Genocide<sup>18</sup>.

In April 2005 the Prime Minister R. T. Erdoğan wrote a letter to the President of the Republic of Armenia, Robert Kocharyan, offering to organize a joint commission, which had to “ascertain whether or not there was genocide”<sup>19</sup>. Thus the foundation of the “new image” of Turkey’s denialist policy was officially laid, which aims not simply to deny the fact of genocide, but to try to reach the goal of the denial through taking more “subtle” steps and putting the real fact under question.

Later, the tendency of such “subtle” denialist policy took a new form; the affirmation about “sharing the joint pain”, resulted from the losses of both Armenians and Turks during World War I, was pushed forward. This new form of Turkish denialism is not less dangerous than the “traditional” falsification of the historical facts. Moreover, it is even more immoral in its essence as it tries to equate the executioner and the victim.

In 2015 Turkey found itself in a hard situation. On the one hand, the Neo-Ottoman adventurism made the geopolitical situation of the country rather difficult<sup>20</sup>. On the other hand, it came under serious pressure because of numerous significant worldwide events implemented by the Republic of Armenia and Armenian Diaspora on the occasion of the Armenian Genocide Centennial. Under these conditions Erdoğan took a step, which was unprecedented by its insolent character even for the period of Turkish policy of denialism and falsifications lasting for decades; on April 24 he invited the President of the Republic of Armenia, Serzh Sargsyan, among other heads of state, to attend the event of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the victory in the Çanakkale (Gallipoli) battle<sup>21</sup>. Naturally, Serzh Sargsyan rejected Erdoğan’s insolent invitation<sup>22</sup>.

Thus, the expansionist adventurism during Erdoğan and JDP’s governing period, called Neo-Ottomanism, in the foreign policy was coupled with an unprecedented insolence in the sphere of denying the Armenian Genocide.

***Translated from Armenian  
by V. Gharakhanyan***

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<sup>18</sup> Киракосян А., Сафрастян Р., Въпросът за Арменския геноцид в кривото огледало на “турското послание”, Ереван (София), 5.12, 1987 - 12.12, 1987.

<sup>19</sup> Koçaryan’a mektup, - Milliyet, 14.04.2005. Robert Kocharyan: "Your suggestion of discussing the past cannot be effective if it does not include a discussion of the current situation and the future of relations between our countries...The political atmosphere should be prepared for the dialogue. To move mutual relations forward is the duty of the politicians. We cannot leave this responsibility to the historians...We can establish an intergovernmental commission to study every problem between our countries and begin the discussions without any precondition" (Robert Kocharyan Letter to Prime Minister Erdogan, April 26, 2005, <https://goo.gl/Ykb9D1>)

<sup>20</sup> Рубен Сафрастян: Неоосманизм – это роковая ошибка Турции, - EADaily, 04.09.2015.

<sup>21</sup> Ռուբեն Սաֆրաստյան. Թուրքիան ցեղասպանության 100-րդ տարելիցին ընդառաջ փորձում է նորանոր հնարքներ գտնել, - Լրագիր, 17.01.2015.

<sup>22</sup> <https://goo.gl/LS2ckU>