



TURKISH INDUSTRIALISTS' AND BUSINESSMEN'S ASSOCIATION

March 25, 2009

**HE President Barack H. Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500**

Dear President Obama,

A new resolution was introduced to the US House of Representatives (H. Res. 252) on March 17, 2009 calling the President of the United States to recognize the tragic events of the WWI era as genocide.

It is unfortunate to see a renewed campaign by those who are turning a blind eye to not only the objective historical facts but also to the significant progress made by Turkey and Armenia, the true parties to this issue, in resolving their differences on many fronts. The high level talks taking place between the two countries are leading to a rapprochement between Turkey and Armenia as well as contributing to the long sought after stability in the Caspian region, which is a strategic priority for the United States. Moreover, the US and Turkey are determined to move forward for a more intensified cooperation on several key issues under the vision of the new American leadership. In an era when a strong US-Turkey alliance is needed more than ever to address the challenges of the world's most troubled regions, such as the Middle East and the Caucasus, straining bilateral relations through such initiatives will have negative consequences beyond Turkey-US relations.

The enclosed report provides an analysis of the factual and legal deficiencies of U.S. H. Res. 106, which was brought to the agenda of the House of Representatives in 2007, upon which the current resolution (H Res. 252) is entirely drafted. We hope you will find it useful in promoting a more reasonable and less politicized way of debating the Armenian issue in the US. Attached please find also a copy of the statement made by TUSIAD's Board of Directors on this report as well as the broader Armenian issue.

At TUSIAD, we believe that such "narrow" agenda items should be left behind in order to move on with our more important common objectives aimed at bringing peace and prosperity to the peoples of this troubled region.

Sincerely yours,

Arzuhan Doğan Yalçındağ
President of the Board

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Reflections on the Politics of History

The Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association, TUSIAD, wishes to initiate a new platform for discussing the fate of the Armenian citizens of the Ottoman Empire during World War I. The controversy over this issue and the overly politicized nature of the debate poison Turkey's relations with its closest allies and broaden the appeal of anti-Western sentiments among the Turkish public.

Most organizations of the Armenian Diaspora, academics as well as some political operatives insist on calling the tragic events of that period "genocide". Their further insistence on engaging in a serious debate over the historical record only *after* admission by Turkey that genocide had been committed makes it impossible to have an open discussion.

The closing of the mind on the debate over the most serious of accusations that can be thrown at a people as a whole then allows the politicization of the matter. The world public opinion has already been shaped by this one-sided argument. Political expediency, perhaps more so than a desire to set the historical record straight, leads Parliaments in democratic countries to self-righteously single the Turkish people out for this heinous crime. Disregard for the facts, refusal to recognize counterfactual arguments, ignoring the context facilitate the perpetuation of the received opinion.

Open or disguised censorship are applied to those who are knowledgeable or brave enough to challenge the militant version of the events. In some cases scholars, libeled as 'denialists', have been threatened with violence or have been physically attacked. Careers have been endangered because of the actions taken by fanatics who are more interested in scoring political points than seeking the truth.

There has never been a legal opinion that defined the tragic events of 1915 as "genocide". Those who claim that genocide had indeed been committed never took the matter to court. In Turkey, the historical record concerning the relocation of Armenian population and the violence that accompanied them; the revolt and the disappearance of Armenian communities are being discussed more openly than ever today.

Such a welcome development is being hampered by attempts to legislate history that most Turks see as ill intentioned, unfair and hostile to their national identity. Whereas the Turkish government has been gradually opening its archives to the use of researchers, many of the pertinent and relevant sources such as the Armenian Dashnak Party archives remain inaccessible.

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Under these circumstances neither the efforts to get to the bottom of the historical truth nor the efforts to get the relations between Turkey and Armenia will lead anywhere. Instead yet more generations will have been brought up with hate and enmity and two neighboring countries will not benefit from one another's resources.

At TUSIAD we believe that a more reasonable and politically less polluted way must be found for getting to the bottom of this matter. To begin with we feel the pain and suffering of all those who had become victims of war, violence, famine and epidemics during these turbulent times, Ottoman Armenians in particular. Turks and Armenians have lived together for almost a thousand years and shared a common history, culture, social habits and a land they all loved.

The Armenian community produced many important Ottoman statesmen who served their country well. At the time of the relocation order there were Armenian soldiers fighting in the Ottoman army, defending the realm in Gallipoli. We must recognize the terrible loss of life and the end of many communities' coexistence for the tragedy that it is and mourn our losses. But in doing so we must avoid a one-sided reading of history and the vilification of a people in essentialist terms.

Therefore, TUSIAD will undertake to create a variety of platforms whereby this issue can be discussed calmly, objectively and in a multifaceted way that will avoid a blame game. This report is a modest contribution to the larger debate and our first step in engaging with this issue.

We are not historians or jurists. We are simply concerned about seeking the truth on the Armenian issue. Equally we are interested in fighting a libel that has been accepted as historical truth by too many for far too long.

TUSIAD Board of Directors

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