Turkey: View from Within
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Among the survivors of Mets Yeghern, there are people whose lives were saved by a Turkish neighbor, friend or stranger. In this book, 15 stories of the descendants of the Turks/Kurds who saved Armenians, 15 stories of Armenians currently living in Turkey, and 10 interviews with the descendants of those saved (Armenians saved by Turks/Kurds) and of Turks/Kurds who saved Armenians are presented.

These are true stories, transcribed exactly as they were related to our team, without any editing of the content. The stories have been narrated by the descendants, relatives, and close friends of the survivors of Mets Yeghern and the descendants of those who saved Armenians. Each narrator shared what witnesses had told them about the events of that time. The stories of the Armenians currently living in Turkey, the presented interviews also include the heroes’ views on the transformations in Turkey and the current situation of Turkish-Armenian relations.

The stories have been collected through the efforts of the “European Integration” Non-Governmental Organization with the support of the U.S. Department of State within the project “Turkey: View from Within.” Our partners in Turkey are the “Armenian Culture and Solidarity Association” (coordinator Aris Nalci), as well as Aline Ozinian-Voskanian.

The aim of the project “Turkey: View from Within” is to have a contribution in the development of the dialogue between the Armenian and Turkish nations, as well as in building mutual trust. This project builds on a 2014 project, conducted by us with the support of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom, and which resulted in the book “100 Years…True stories.” The electronic version can be found here.

The electronic version of the book “Turkey: View from Within” is published in Armenian, Turkish and English and is available for free. It is intended for a wide circle of readers.

“European Integration” NGO expresses deep gratitude to the U.S. Department of State, “Armenian Culture and Solidarity Association” (coordinator Aris Nalci), Aline Ozinian-Voskanian, as well as to the narrators who shared their stories.
The materials, opinions and conclusions presented in the book introduce the views of the participants of the events and the people narrating the stories, and do not reflect the position of the U.S. Government.

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True Stories

- Of the descendants of the Turks/Kurds, who saved Armenians in 1915

- Of Armenians now living in Turkey
In Conservative Cities of Turkey You Cannot Even Say a Word of Your Being an Armenian

Tells Member of the Turkish Parliament from the CHP Party, Selina Dogan, an Armenian Living in Turkey

I was born in Istanbul. I went to an Armenian school, then a French one. I am a lawyer by my first profession and I have done my MA in human rights. Before becoming a member of the Turkish Parliament in 2015 from the Republican People’s Party (CHP) I was working as a lawyer.

Several years ago (about 15 years ago) the Armenian question was a taboo in Turkey. It was a kind of a “silent” issue that no one raised explicitly. Armenians were living as a closed community, they did not demand, they did not raise their problems with courage. The EU process, however, helped to improve the minority rights in Turkey. The international community started to exert more pressure on Turkey for basic human rights and freedoms. This EU process also helped the AKP to enlarge its power, but they were not really very willing to solve the problems, they were just trying to get the votes of the minorities, but not to solve their problems.

After Hrant Dink’s assassination, thousands of people together were defending the Armenian question (during those times there was a legal restriction – article 301,
against intellectuals, academicians, who were interested in the Armenian question). It was after Hrant Dink’s assassination that the Turkish society found out that there is an Armenian question that they are suffering, they have problems. In this regard the “Football Diplomacy” initiated by Armenia was quite important, but unfortunately the AKP did not continue it and everything changed.

Today not only Armenians, but all the opposition has no right to speak. There is no freedom of press or independent judges in the country. Whoever is not an AKP supporter is targeted somehow. Of course, if you are a Christian and moreover, an Armenian, you are the easiest target, unfortunately. The political rhetoric, nationalism, as they always work, polarize the society and this is the main policy of AKP. I do not think that originally the Turkish society had this hostile attitude, but it is a question that is always provoked by the government. All the media are under the AKP control. It is so easy to change people’s minds. Here the education system also plays a role. The government wants people to be more uneducated, so that they do not question anything. In such circumstances it is so easy to make enemies.

After June 7, 2015, when the AKP saw that it was losing power and would have to form coalitions, the government became more authoritarian, more dictatorial. They provoked a conflict in the eastern part of Turkey with Kurds. Ethnic difference is being used in Turkey as a tool in their rhetoric and they are doing this every single day - the hate speech.

Our party had hopes last year, but unfortunately after November 1 (edt. – snap parliamentary elections), everything changed. The opposition has no right, we cannot question the government, and we cannot do our job, fixed by the Constitution, as the law is not respected here.

As for the everyday life of the Armenians in Turkey, then, of course, they try to arrange their lives according to the reality. It depends much on where you live. If you live in very conservative cities you cannot even say a word of your being an Armenian and to find a job you have to hide your nationality. In Istanbul, it is much easier. In Shishli neighborhood we have a Church, an Armenian school and you can easily say that you are an Armenian.

Referring to the reconciliation of the Armenian and Turkish societies, I should mention that Turkey’s foreign policy today is horrible. We are in conflict almost with all our neighbors – Iraq, Syria, and the EU and in this regard the Armenian-Turkish relations are the last concern of the government, unfortunately.

Actually, I think that in regard with the reconciliation of Turks and Armenians, NGOs are doing a very important job. I always try to encourage them. Personally, I think that cultural and social relations are very important. In the near future I do not see that there will be any significant step in this term. Unfortunately, the word Armenian is a “joker” in Turkey, which is used everywhere. I hope that we will be able to change this destiny, but as I said, the government now does not allow the deputies to fulfill their job.
We Used to Find Bones, Skeletons from the School Yard…
We Did Not Understand, We Were Playing with Them

*Tells Kurdish PhD Student Sedat Uluguna*

My name is Sedat Uluguna. I am studying in Paris. I am doing my PhD on genocide, nationalism. For my research I mainly use oral memories.

We are from Van, more precisely from Erciş, that is to say from Zilan area. Our ancestors came from Yerevan in the 1800s. They remembered Armenians, were using Armenian words. Still then, when the events of 1915 took place, they understood the talks of Armenian mothers and children. There was a 100-year-old woman in our village, who could still speak Armenian. The name of our village was Çevgeşim. When Armenians went from the village, it was not given to the Kurds, but was made a state one.

My father’s grandfather, Ibrahim, had Armenian neighbors – Peto, Peto’s wife Sirin, Tumo, Alaki. Kurdish ashirets, believing in the Turkish propaganda, started massacring Armenians very violently, but my family did not kill Armenians and did not even hand them to the state. But one night soldiers came and said that it was enough to keep them. They told my family to hand Armenians over and beat one of the children. I do not remember whether it was Tumo or Alaki. Later my family helped 7-8 other Armenian families as well, took them at night to the border with Iran, where a camp was and left them there.

Until 1915, a number of other cases also happened, but in 1915 Ibrahim Agha (Mr. Ibrahim) was no longer able to save Armenians, and the only way out was to take them to the other side of the border. They helped people with horses; shared bread, lived together. Sirin was my grandmother’s best friend.

I would like to meet the survivors.

In 1916, Russians came. Peto’s boys joined Andranik’s (Armenian military commander) army and killed Ibrahim’s son Yusuf. Ibrahim was angry and went to the Cossacks. 18 people died. When the body was sent to the village, the Armenians were there. They recognized Ibrahim’s corpse and told the Cossacks not to touch the members of his family. Armenians even asked to give Ibrahim’s stuff to his family. Kurdish men for the fear of Russians escaped, but Armenians saved their wives and children, their families.

There is a Kurd in Erciş calledSdkhe Haso. He has two Armenian wives; besides them he has other wives as well – 13-14 wives. He has a wife called Ani. He killed Ani’s parents and married the daughter. Suleyman Agha (Mr. Suleyman) also did the same. Sherife Telal threw Armenians under the soil and burned.

The Armenians in Erciş, when felt the threat of Genocide, were able to escape. But when the Kurdish militia came, they were not able to be saved.

We call Armenians “fele/felleh” (peasant/serf), which is insulting, while we call Armenia Felistan. The shores of Lake Van are called Felistan and great massacres took place there. We always talk about this in the family. For example, we were told that one of our sons-in-law wanted to forcibly Islamize an Armenian woman and marry her, but that woman committed a suicide. Up to now grandchildren are told that their grandfather wanted to do such a bad thing.

We were told everything, but the most important two things are – Armenian Genocide and the cruelties carried out in Zilan against Kurds. Those two events have always been compared. Lots of Kurds were killed in Zilan. Kurds were saying: “What we did against Armenians in 1915, the state did the same against us.”
Turkey:
View from Within

That time mullahs announced that those, who would kill 7 Armenians, would go straight to heaven. After Zilan massacre, we were settled in the houses of the Armenians. My uncles told how strong walls Armenians used to build, so that 4-5 people could not move that wall. Can you imagine what the state destroyed? The Armenians were creators, intellectuals. There was even a segment of Armenians that wanted to educate the Kurds, but the state prevented it as well, did not let the Kurds develop. The Kurds joined the Genocide. Our grandfathers did that. They played a great role. Our grandfathers became murderers. No matter how much the Kurds were influenced by the Young Turks, it cannot be justified.

The villages we live in are Armenian. I cannot understand how one can call Northern Kurdistan – Kurdistan. Those are Armenian villages. However, our grandfathers did not inject enmity towards Armenians in us. We know what those Kurds did with Armenians, but their grandchildren are not filled with enmity towards Armenians. Why? Because during Sheikh Said, Zilan, Dersim they understood very well how the state was using religion to deceive the soldiers, how it caused motivation. Then, too, for killing the Kurds Turkish soldiers said: “They are Kızılbaş, they are Armenians”. In that way they motivated the massacres. The Kurds understood quite well what it means to be cheated to slaughter others.

We were small; our school was near the church. In the yard of the school we used to find bones, skeletons. We were small children, did not understand, and played with them. Now how can one claim that there was no Genocide?

I Was 17, When My Father Told Me that We Are Armenians

Tells the Head of the Union of Dersim Armenians in Istanbul
Ismail Cem Halavurt, an Armenian Living in Turkey

I, Ismail Cem Halavurt, was born in Mardin city, where my father was a teacher. However, my family is from Dersim. Both my father and mother are Armenians. I was four years old, when we moved to Istanbul. I grew up in an Armenian district, but attended a Turkish school. I studied in the faculty of law at University and currently I work as an independent lawyer. I am also the head of the Union of Dersim Armenians. I am married and have one child. My son, of course, attends an Armenian school.

During 1915 massacres, some members of my family were saved; however, they also lost their identity. They were forced to give up their religion and live covertly among Alevis. Despite their being crypto-Armenians, there were villages with Armenian population in Dersim and everybody knew that. Our grandfathers, who survived Genocide in 1915, did not speak Armenian at all. They did not pass the Armenian history and culture to us, because they were afraid of pressure. This is the case today as well.

I was 17 years old, when my father openly declared that we are Armenians. He
thought that at the age of 17, a human being can perceive certain facts in a mature way. While being a child I could voice my being an Armenian and cause problems for myself. From that day on I have never hidden my identity anywhere. Of course, the problem did not stop there. The time had come for me to try to enter the Armenian community. We understood that we should not allow our generation to pass through what we have passed – first consider ourselves being a Turk, then reveal our being an Armenian. This issue has regularly been discussed at home. When someone from our grown-ups died, we faced the question how to bury them.

Many things have changed since the murder of Hrant Dink. People started to voice their Armenian identity more frequently. Everyone started to realize that we should no longer hide our Armenian identity. This made us, young Armenians, form the Union of Dersim Armenians to voice that there are Armenians in Dersim and to disseminate our culture. After the foundation of the Union in 2013, I came to Armenia and was baptized in Etchmiadzin. Last year (2015) my father at the age of 68 came to Armenia and was baptized. At that time 40 Dersim Armenians were baptized at different places. Currently my brother and his family are finalizing the process of becoming Christians.

Since the launch of the process of the European integration in Turkey the attitude towards Armenians has changed for the better a little bit. A number of laws were changed; however, they did no address essential issues. While during the last five years a regress has been recorded.

There has never been an absolute freedom in Turkey. There are some freedoms, but once you want to use them you come across difficulties. For example, the process of religious conversion has been facilitated. You can fill in an application and change your religion. However, once you have the word “Christian” in your passport, you will face many problems.

Today Armenians in Turkey have no security of life and property. Recently the President of Turkey Erdoğan stated that there are 100,000 Armenians in Turkey and if he wished he could take them out from the country during one night. We are witnessing through what the Kurds are passing those days. The Turkish authorities, who committed the Genocide, do not aim to change and will not change. What is currently being carried out against Kurds, we saw in 1915. We deal with the same situation.

What refers to the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations, it still needs a long time. Hrant Dink put forward the idea of brotherhood; however, after his murder that idea also vanished. The Armenians living in Turkey already have plans to leave the country. The number of people leaving for Armenia increases.

The society in Turkey now speaks more about the fact that in 1915 there was Genocide. However, a considerable part of the society, the followers of the Islamic ideology, does not accept the reality. In this context civil society organizations still have work to do in the direction of the reconciliation of the societies. This is a complicated process, since the media is not free in Turkey. To change the situation Armenia should become stronger, because if a state is not strong, Turkey will ignore it. Work is also needed to be carried out in Europe to end its duplicity. Once Europe takes serious steps towards recognition and reconciliation, Turkey will have no way out.
Perhaps My Father Was Not Able to Teach Us a Lot, but He Did Not Inject Hatred towards Armenians’

Tells Turkish Muslim Tufan

We are from Ulaş. Uncle Paşo was from an Armenian village, which is today called Yazıçık. One night, people came to Uncle Paşo’s place and told them to leave. Uncle Paşo had a brother and two sisters. He used to tell about them. He told that his sisters were opening dough at that time and they were not even allowed to wash their hands and were made out of their house.

Uncle Paşo went through many sufferings. They walked for days and when they reached Malatya, he witnessed how his family members were beheaded and their heads were thrown away. Only he and his brother managed to survive and leave Malatya. A soldier let them run away. That soldier told them to run away and be saved as they were to be killed on the way. Thus the two brothers ran away.

This is how uncle Paşo was rescued. The two brothers walked for days and lost each other on the way. Uncle Paşo returned to their village and saw there was nobody, the village was empty.

In Sivas, there was a Mihr Ali bey (bey - the governor of a district or province in the Ottoman Empire), who at that time led “Hamidiye” bands (the irregular Kurdish military units named after Sultan Abdul Hamid and mainly used to massacre Armenians). After his death, Rüştü bey took his place and Uncle Paşo, having no other way out, turned to him and started to live in their family. However, it was a real family of murderers. They owned seven Armenian villages. Uncle Paşo, having no place to go, until 1940s lived with them and only then came to our village.

After years we helped him to find his brother in Urfa, who became Sunni Muslim. When we found him, he told us not to disturb and turn to him anymore.

In our village, there were also Armenians, who changed their religion. The name of her husband was Osman, however the wife was praying secretly in her language and was close to Christian traditions.

Our village is also an old Armenian village. Uncle Paşo got married, then his wife died and he had nobody. Everyone in our village knew that uncle Paşo was an Armenian. We were Kızılbaş (one of the Alevi names), we were close to Armenians. Once I told my father: “You love uncle Paşo much, even too much, you always say that he is your brother. Can it be the case that we are from the same branch of family?” My father smiled at me and said that he had asked the same question to his grandfather,
who said that we go to Cem evi (Alevi place of worship), they go to church, but in reality it is the same place. We are the same, however we are different, I don’t know…. We love each other. For example, holiday of egg (St. Harutyun, Easter) was theirs, we said their holiday of Egg, meaning Easter. We never said that Easter was ours. We ourselves do not understand the matter of issues.

When we came to Europe, we understood uncle Paşo’s life better. In a foreign country, where you have no acquaintances, no relatives and no friends, you only then realize, what it means not to have anyone. How did uncle Paşo live alone all that time? When he died, they waited for my father to participate in the funeral, as he had no one. My father went to his funeral.

Uncle Poghos also lived in our village. We called his mother “yaya” (in Greek it means grandmother, which is also used by the Armenians in Constantinople). Her name was Hâticë, however we called her grandmother. In her family everyone was also killed and she ran to Rüştü bey and in that family worked day and night to earn a piece of bread. Uncle Poghos later married a woman from Uzun Yayla village. In our village there were many saved people. Grandchildren of some of them came from Paris and found their ancestral houses.

Now in that big village there are deserted Armenian houses, where no Armenian lives any longer. Guests from abroad are received well in our village; in other villages they do not receive the same attitude. Our village is Kızılbaş (one of the Alevi names) village left among Turkish villages. When the grandchildren of the Armenians, who left our villages, started visiting, the residents of the neighboring villages got angry and said: “Why do you let Armenians come to your village? They come to take with them the bones of their grandfathers.” It is a pity.

Last week I spoke with the uncle’s wife, Varduhi. She is also from our village. She spoke and we cried together. Even the Armenian graves in our village were destroyed and robbed, while in the Sunni villages no Armenian grave is left. Then to build a road in our village, the government destroyed the graves. Now, when I think I realize that it was done on purpose.

We were still children, when in Ulâş, people told how Armenians were killed near the mill. The elderly told. They told about the deserted houses. If only we could take photos to have a memory of them. Now everything gets ruined, the village is being lost.

In our places there were old Armenian villages. There are many stories, monuments. I have relatives there and go there once in two years.

When we were still at school, my father used to tell that we could learn nothing in that school. Even the walls of that school were built of Armenian graves. Perhaps my father did not manage to teach us a lot, but he did not inject hatred towards Armenians, Greeks. He always repeated that they were all our brothers.
Many Turks Endangering Their Own Lives, Saved the Lives of Their Neighbors
Tell Art Historian Baykar Demir, an Armenian Living in Turkey

I was born in Istanbul. I worked for ten years as a jeweler. Then I entered the University and studied at the faculty of Art History. I also graduated from the second university and got a Master’s Degree. Now I regularly organize exhibitions, during which the works of Armenian painters are also exhibited. Presenting Armenian culture in Turkey is important for me.

In 1915 a lot of Armenians were killed. However, we should remember that there were also Turks, who consciously endangering their own lives, saved the lives of their Armenian neighbors (the Turkish government would simply kill them, if they learned about it). This was a vivid manifestation of humanity. Today also there are Turks, who are our close friends; however I should state that they are minority.

So, I can say that nothing has changed today. The word “Armenian” is considered an invective. During the last years the government and people have become more conservative. If they are educated and if they read Quran, there will probably be no problem. However, some conservatives are not educated and they present a threat for the Christian minority in the country. If the number of this group grows, the threat will also grow for us. This group of conservatives, which is not educated, is ready to oppose anyone, whom they do not accept.

There is a Kurdish problem in Turkey now. In Eastern Turkey every day many Kurds and Turkish soldiers die. I think that in the future the situation will become worse. I did my military service for 15 months in Turkey. At that time my close friend knew that I was an Armenian, a Christian. In spite of that I had no problems. However, I am not indicating that everyone’s case is like mine.

I hear many stories from my friends. For example, one of my friends declared that he was a Christian and his friends started to fight with him. There are stories like that. I do not choose to directly say that I am an Armenian or Christian, however, if someone asks me I tell the truth, unless I feel any danger at that moment.

In Turkey many people are afraid to criticize the government in social networks today. You know about the fate of many journalists in Turkey. In social networks the freedoms of people are decreasing, not increasing.

The future in Turkey is cloudy; I would not like to say it is dark. The education system in the country is getting worse. When I walk in the streets in Turkey, I see a lot of young guys of about fourteen, fifteen years old, whose every second word is an invective. If you speak to them, you see that they do not read books and are not able to discuss intellectual topics. This shows that the new generation will not be better than the older one. Of course, there are exceptions, but I am talking about the situation in general.

In Turkey Armenians easily become scapegoats, because they are many here. If the situation becomes worse in Turkey, it will, of course, negatively affect both the Armenians and the Armenian-Turkish relations.

The reconciliation of Armenians and Turks largely depends on the government and the education system of the country. I think you remember when the President of Turkey Erdogan considered being an Armenian an insult for him. Such rhetoric affects common people. If they give up such rhetoric, the tension between the two nations will slightly decrease.
At That Time in Turkey Those Adopting a Child Inherited His Property As Well

Tells a Turkish Journalist Hakan Balaban

My name is Hakan Balaban. I was born in 1965 in Izmir. Now I live in Istanbul. I am a journalist. My family is from the Black Sea region. My great grandfather is from Fatsa. Our family has nationalistic approaches. Though my family considers itself as belonging to the left wing, in reality, it has clearly expressed nationalistic views and is guided with those perceptions.

Only at University, was I able to understand the nationalistic and xenophobic trends in our conversations at home. I would not say that previously they seemed to me to be normal, but did not worry me that much.

My uncle’s side is very rich. They have lots of properties, but if we look deeply, we will see that the members of that family had neither any profession, nor they had been engaged in any business during their life. When examining a little bit, one understands that they privatized the lands, houses, properties of the Armenians, Greeks and then they sold them to others and thus became rich. In parallel to this, they continue to say that Armenians are bad people and use the word “Armenian” as a blasphemy.

Something changed inside me, when I came to Istanbul and got acquainted with my girlfriend. She, as if was teaching me and explaining how tough and wrong our, the Turks’ approach is towards this issue.

My great grandfather’s name was Murteza. He worked at Mustafa Alba’s (colonel) house who was well-known in Ordu. Murteza was the head of the workers at that house. During the wartime, the colonel brought a small girl home, but his wife did not want to accept her. She said: “We could not get rid of Armenians, why did you bring this child?” During the first days, they quarreled a lot because of this child, but then she got used to it.

My great grandfather was sure that there was an issue of property, as during those times, those, who adopted a child, inherited his/her property as well. The girl was very small and even did not remember her name. She was then named Semra. When the girl turned 14, she was so beautiful that it worried the house mistress. One day my great grandfather Murteza heard voices, when cleaning the stable of the colonel and saw Semra crying with bloody hands. My great grandfather cleaned her hands, bandaged them and when asked what had happened, she answered that her mother had done that to her and had told her that if she did not leave the house, next time she would kill her.

The girl was very frightened and that night she slept in the stable, as she was afraid to go home. At night my grandfather told Mustafa about it, but it turned out that he knew about it, yet was not able to find a way out. My great grandfather suggested marrying Semra. Mustafa agreed and he even told my great grandfather that if she loved anyone, she could marry him. However, Semra did not want to marry. After a while, Mustafa called my great grandfather and Semra and asked, whether she would like to go to Istanbul, assuming that she could get married with an Armenian there. Semra agreed and then my great grandfather understood that the girl had always known, perceived that she was an Armenian.

My great grandfather took her to Istanbul and gave her to an orphanage. She was not married; she was just taken and left there. Later my great grandfather told his children that Semra looked at him like a deer, cried, that she was left there.

My family talked a lot about such girls in Fatsa, in Ordu and in other Black Sea regions. There were many Armenian orphan girls. In our villages, if the grandmother from the maternal side was not a Turk, it was not considered a problem. The most important was the paternal side. One of my friends, who was also from the Black Sea region – from Fatsa, found out that his grandmother from maternal side was an Armenian orphan girl, and when he began to ask about it, one of the relatives from the paternal side told him not to search a lot, as here in everyone’s house there is a

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1 Fatsa is a town and a district of Ordu Province in the central Black Sea region of Turkey.
giavour (those, who have no belief), “your grandmother was our giavour.”

What happened, of course, is awful and it is very difficult to explain this only with war situation. You destroy a whole nation, uproot them, seize their property, and then, as if this is not enough, try to clear the memory about them. And this is also not enough, you are not ashamed to say that it was not us that killed them, but they killed us. Even not being satisfied with this, you curse, say “Armenian giavour.” I do not know how we can be cured, turn better. The Armenian nation waits for an apology, for compensation, but they should see that Turks are ill. Until they are cured, this issue cannot be solved. When I see today’s political situation in Turkey, I understand that it is not easy to be cured to become better. To cut it short, the solution is not close.

To Make My Father Angry My Mother Called Him “A Seed of an Armenian,” My Father Did Not Respond

Tells Kurdish Devrim Demir

I was a child. When my mother and father quarreled from time to time, my mother called my father “a seed of an Armenian” to make him angry. My father did not respond and their conversation ended at that point.

I guess I was thirty years old, when one day, remembering all that, I asked my parents, what meaning those words had. And my father started telling.

Our village was in the region of Kayseri. I think originally it was an Armenian village, as there are different places with Armenian names in our village. For example, there is a place, which is called “harabe” (abandoned area) another place is called “kilise” (church). There are destructed places on the way to Marash. In some novels, there is clear mentioning about our and neighboring villages. I don’t remember well now, I think the name of the author was Suleyman Cikasin. The name of the book was “Withdrawers of Last Jar”.
Even today people here talk about a very deep ditch, which was called “Cancan. My grandfather told us that the ditch was very deep and empty. When they were children, they threw stones there; however, the ditch was so deep, that they could not hear the sound of the dropping stones. It was called “a massacre ditch.” I think, if one explores the ditch, he can find human bones there.

I was told the following: a caravan of women and children reached our village from Bayburd. Some of the villagers gave water and bread to those people.

A woman came to the village with a child in her hands. They kept her in the village, later she married my dad’s grandfather. That very child became my father’s uncle. The name of my grandmother was Meryem, however, I do not know whether it is her real name or not. To honor her memory, I called my daughter Sarin, as far as I know in Armenian it means the one, who came from mountains.

We did not speak much about this topic in our family, as my father was a teacher and we did not live long in the village. We lived in different cities (teachers were frequently sent to different cities to work). Later, when I grew up, many questions came to my mind. I started asking my father and understood everything.

I tried to understand the life of my father’s uncle and spoke to him. He was a very good man and had not broken anyone’s heart.

We are Alevis, the ones who are considered to be strangers, “other people” in Turkey. However, my father’s uncle felt even worse in this case. Can you imagine what it is to be a stranger, to always feel alone among the minority, who is already isolated in Turkey? I understand that he was not treated badly, but whenever there was a problem, he was called “giaour.” It means that you are isolated from others.

As for relatives, I can say that among “Kapali Carsi” jewelers there was a man, who from time to time came to our village to meet Meyrem (Kapali Carsi is a covered market in Bayazet district of Istanbul, which was a gathering place for Armenian jewelers. Today their number has considerably reduced. The market is one of the sightseeings in Istanbul). They used to speak with each other for a long time. I think they were relatives. We knew only him as a relative, but now we have lost ties with him.

After learning all this, I did not face an identity crisis. I think this is an issue of gratitude. We should understand what those people felt at that time. For example, Meryem got married. However, did she want to marry? I have always tried to understand. She had children and brought them up. This was the reason, why I wanted to call my daughter with an Armenian name. This deportation should be seen; the pain of those people should be felt. We need all this, to be called humans. I have the blood of an Alevi, of a Kurd, of an Armenian, while my daughter, to some extent, has the blood of a Turk.
Armenians and Turks Should Find a Common Interest for Reconciliation

Tells Co-Founder of “Nor Zartonk”
Nshan Kivreh, an Armenian Living in Turkey

I was born in Shishli district in Istanbul. I am a co-founder of “Nor Zartonk”, which struggles for equality, justice, democracy and peace in Turkey, considering them basic values.

During the years of the Genocide many innocent people were killed, Armenian, Greek, Assyrian churches were destroyed. There are many common things in the policy of Turkish authorities during the years of the Genocide and that of today. Turkey now has the Kurdish issue, because of which many Kurds are being killed like Armenians during the Genocide.

Even during the military coups of the recent years in Turkey Armenians were again subjected to repressions and were arrested merely for their nationality. Besides, this problem, there is also religious discrimination, for example, the policy of the Turkish authorities towards Alevi.

Today, those Armenians in Turkey, who talk about the Genocide and try to voice the problems of Armenians, face the same fate as Hrant Dink. He was the first, who voiced the problems of Armenians in Turkey.

It is “craziness” to be an Armenian in Turkey. For example, when I was studying in one of the boarding schools in Istanbul, Turkish nationalists, asking my name and understanding that I was an Armenian started cursing me. Fortunately, I was not physically injured.

Let me tell about another incident that happened to me in Turkey. During another clash between Turks and Kurds, when Turkish nationalists were moving in the direction of Kurdish districts, they passed near our office and we hardly managed to be saved. Fortunately, they did not enter our office. If they had entered, they would have destroyed us as well.

There are two major problems concerning the freedoms in Turkey: there is no freedom of speech and of analytical thinking. Being an Armenian in Turkey, you cannot defend your rights.

During the 1990s in terms of freedoms some positive changes took place in Turkey – several prisoners were released, Kurdish movement started. Then, however, Erdogan’s cruel government came to power. From 2002 to 2016 again we witnessed killings of minorities.

As for the Turkish-Armenian reconciliation, then Turks and Armenians should gradually get rid of the existing enmity towards each other. However, this does not mean to forget everything. We should be able to trust each other and for doing so we should first of all get rid of the negative stereotypes towards each other. For reconciliation, Armenians and Turks should find and have a common interest, which, for example, could be living in peace or just the wish to live.
“For Hundred Years We Have Lived Side by Side with Armenians”

Tells a Turkish Retired Lecturer Perihan Polat

My name is Perihan Polat. I was born in 1967 in Yozgat. Now I live in Ankara, I am a retired lecturer. The village, where I was born - Taskisla, belongs to Yozgat center. Previously, no Armenian lived in our village, but in my mother’s village – Sefahatli, in the neighboring Güzelli village, half of the people were Armenians, while during my mother’s time, there were already Armenian cemeteries.

Near my father’s village there was a town called Keller. Its new name is Yenipazar (new market). Previously Armenian families went shopping there. I think the most developed part nearby was our village.

I remember certain things from what my father told, then I myself did a research, read about the Genocide. After that everything as if became clear. It should be mentioned that our village is an Alevi one, my father is also Alevi. In 1915, my father was small, soldiers came to the village and stated several times that they would go to a village, and if anyone wanted could join them. My grandfather was small, but remembered that some people joined that looting.

I think, in Middle Anatolia these events took place later. People told that one night a little girl of about 4-5 appeared in the village – barefoot, afraid. A family from the village took the girl to them. That woman lived in our village until her death. She got married and had a son.

She was called “gavurun kızı”, i.e., the daughter of giavour, one who does not believe. We do not know what her name and surname were. She lived and died as a Muslim. It is difficult to say the extent one can be a Muslim in an Alevi village, but she was not able to remain Christian.

In reality, I know very little about our village, but I have always been interested in the story of this woman. I do not know her name, but will learn it. In the recent years, we went to Keller. The village children were blonde and white. I could not, but ask how the children could be blonde and white. They calmly answered that after massacring Armenians, they brought here refugees from the Balkans. I was very upset that they could tell about these horrible events so calmly. This is not a usual thing, so as one can speak about it so easily in daily conversations. Of course, hiding it is also a very bad phenomenon, but I cannot understand how one can talk about it in such an easy way.

When my grandfather was in the village, 50 families lived there, but at this moment, only 29 live. That woman’s son is now 70 years old. I think, he went away from the village, but we do know that he has become a Turkish nationalist. They say that the girl was not treated badly, she was not physically damaged, but I do not know what a great burden it is, when a person throughout her life is called “giavour’s daughter”.

The events of 1915 were the project of İttihat Terakkiye party, the Young Turks, to Turkify Anatolia. Especially after losing the Balkans, they developed this policy. I do not say that to justify their actions or to say that their actions had a meaning. I also do not try to convince that their policy was correct.

I tell about this to describe those times. In addition to all this, the Young Turks wanted to seize the properties of the Armenians and I do not think that they chose Armenians accidentally. The choice of the Armenians had serious reasons. The Young Turks needed the Turkish nation to become rich, and the damages of war to be compensated. They wanted to make Anatolia Muslim. This was Genocide, coordinated and pre-planned activity, which had its reasons.

I think to obtain peace, it is very important to build a common life. We and Ar-
menians are very similar to each other. Some parts of our languages, speaking style are similar, even our meals are similar. We have lived hundreds of years side by side, have a common history. In this regard, I attach great importance to the exchange programs of pupils, students, professionals.

Every year on April 24, I come to Istanbul to participate in the Genocide march and stay at my aunt’s place. When she asks whether I am tired, I say yes, because I have participated in the march in the memory of the Armenian Genocide martyrs. Our hands are not bloody, we are not murderers. That is why, I can say that easily. Those in favor of life and peace should no longer hide their activities. If I say that my hands are clean, that does not mean that my grandfather’s hands are clean, but Perihan’s hands are clean, because Perihan wants peace.

For so many years Turkey has been ruled by authoritarian regimes, Turkey and the Turkish people so long worshipped its government, that when Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that he would build peace with the Kurds, everyone applauded. While recently he announced he has broken the dialogue. After such words again everyone applauded. It is difficult to understand the people.

Armenian Genocide was a loss for all of us. I do not mean the loss of the Armenian people, it is a great loss, but for us it was also a loss. For example, today I could have had an Armenian neighbor, but I do not have. I do not have that wealth.

1915 Events Deprived Us of Our Entire Heritage

Tells Editor-in-Chief of “Zhamanak” Daily Newspaper in Turkey, Ara Kochunyan, an Armenian Living in Turkey

My great grandfather, Sargis Kochunyan, was born in Constantinople (today’s Istanbul) and was engaged in the works of “Zhamanak” daily newspaper founded by his ancestors back in 1908. I was born and raised in Constantinople as well and now I am the Editor-in-Chief of “Zhamanak” daily.

In 1915, the situation was quite different in Turkey. At that time, the Armenians were quite many in their number. Both in political and economic, cultural and social spheres they had great levers of influence, including on the Empire in general. However, 1915 events deprived us of our heritage, we lost many compatriots... it was a great shock, which inevitably impacted our development and the levers of influence.

After 1915, especially after the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the Armenians, in the aftermath of Genocide, received a new status. The Armenians in Turkey turned into an ethnic, religious minority and in the next decades, began to organize their life and work with this status. If previously the Armenians had a key
role in the country, after 1915, they became a community with the status of minority.

During the recent 25 years the life of Armenians all over the world has changed with the independence of Armenia. This was a crucial and fatal event, which referred also to the Armenians in Turkey. This is the case especially if one takes into consideration the fact that Turkey is one of the neighboring countries of Armenia despite the fact that there are no relations between them and they have quite a problematic agenda. However, according to the Armenians in Turkey, Armenia’s independence played quite a significant role, because, the so called new agenda was developed. Today, under the mentioned conditions the Armenians in Turkey continue their existence.

During the recent 25 years the democratization process in Turkey has somewhat strengthened. Turkey is not one of the countries with the world’s best level of democracy, and this is true. However, if we look at the question from the point of view of the domestic life, it should be noted that, over the last 10-15 years there have been improvements in the lives of ethnic minorities in the country. This gives an opportunity to plan the future of our community.

Issues of ethnicity are among of those that are much easier to voice today, because there is a tolerant attitude towards the citizens belonging to different ethnic groups. Of course, there is also a certain amount of discrimination, but the Turkish authorities show political will to overcome this attitude.

We also have problems with the education system. There are also problems concerning the recognition of the official status of Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul. We have lots of problems, they have existed for decades. In case of some problems we need to realize that it is not possible to expect a definite solution immediately. We are witnessing interim solutions, which strengthen the belief that there is consistent work.

As for the reconciliation of the Turkish and Armenian societies, it is quite a difficult task. Until the relations between Turkey and Armenia are normalized, that is to say, until there are normal diplomatic relations, communication, free contacts and cooperation between the two societies, it is difficult to speak about the prospects of reconciliation purely on the level of societies.

Although there are some positive signals in the two societies, by saying society we should not only understand the civil society or NGOs, because they do not represent the whole society. There are different moods in the societies, formed during the decades and conditioned by historical factors and current issues.

One should take into account the fact that the two societies also have their responsibilities as citizens towards their own states, while the attitude of the states is based purely on pragmatic interests. It is true, we all dream about an environment, an atmosphere, which will develop normal, tolerant relations between Armenian and Turkish societies. However, we need a little patience in this regard, because there are no prerequisites for this in the near future. I wish the authorities of the two states to find the political strength for ensuring that breakthrough moment.
Now the Youth Has Forgotten What Happened in the Past

Tells a Turkish Ismail Adanur

My wife is from the last villages of Bingöl, from Gutsi. I think Gutsi is in Armenian (referring to gtsu (spicy) village). Father Ghazar lived in this village. My wife’s grandfather was Ghazar’s grandson. He was eight to ten years old at the time of deportations. Everyone was deported from the village. He had an elder sister who came up to him telling to run as fast as he could and leave the village. He also had a little sister with whom he escaped. My wife was told this story. Escaping together and passing several heights, he realized that his sister was no longer beside him, but continued to run at the same time looking around trying to find her.

He was able to reach the Manakher family from Badgan ashiret (Kurdish tribe). This ashiret was known by its stance towards “zulum” (terror, massacre, etc) and its willingness to help the victims. They were very powerful and strong, thus they declared they would keep the child and would not give him to anybody.

When ashiret moved to Silvan, they took the child with them, who later married one of the daughters of the family. In the region they called Armenians “giavours” (infidels, a derogatory name given to Christians). My wife is from this grandfather’s tribe, with the same blood as his.

We always talk about it with our village friends. The elderly people there, when seeing my wife, still call her “Giavour’s daughter”. In the village everyone knew, who came from where. But now the youth has different views, they have forgotten what happened in the past.

Ten years ago, we tried to find my wife’s relatives. We started exploring; we visited “Agos”, gave an announcement there both in Armenian and in Turkish, but could not find anything. Then we met Nairi Hokhikyan from “Kentron TV”. His story was very similar to ours so we found many parallels with the history of my wife’s grandfather. Afterwards Nairi came to Turkey, visited Mush, we went to our village, where we did some shooting.

As far as we know, Ghazar had four brothers, one was 17 years old student in Istanbul at that time. The two other brothers fled to Alashkert, then passed to Armenia and lived in the town of Martuni. We believe that Nairi’s grandfathers are our own grandpa’s brothers from Martuni.

My wife and Nairi were deeply convinced that they were relatives. We even went to the genetics analysis center of Yerevan State University hospital. As a result they had a 69 percent similarity. This is a very high indicator and means that they are indeed relatives. We keep the test results until now.

Thus we were able to find a relative, but we cannot find the brother from Istanbul, as we do not know his name. If the name was known, we would try to find lists of pupils of orphanages in Armenia. My wife wanted to find her relatives. When she visited “Agos” in her headscarf, everybody got so excited. She is a Muslim and she knows that her relatives are Armenians, and she has a very strong desire to find them.

Nairi came to us, and we went to Armenia for a week. When I saw the relatives of my wife, it became clear how much our boys looked like each other. Their facial features were very similar. We do not have photos, I think neither Nairi has. My wife gave interviews to various newspapers in Armenia and abroad. We passed through the past, and my wife, being a Muslim, is eager to find her relatives. It is no problem whether they are Christians, or Armenians. She wants to find them.
Thanks God We Have Remained Armenian and Will Remain So until the End

Tells a Specialist in Tobacco Expertise,
Armen Galstyan, an Armenian Living in Turkey

I was born in Mush and live there till now. I have 7 children – 4 boys and 3 girls. Everyone speaks Armenian in my family. Thanks God, we have remained Armenian and will remain so until the end. I have received higher education - graduated from the department of Tobacco Expertise. However, now I do not work by my profession. Instead, I deal with questions of the property rights of the Armenians – churches, cemeteries, etc. To put it otherwise, I do not let the authorities destroy Armenian property.

My grandfather was 16 during the massacres, was forced to escape and live 8 years in Tigranakert, where a Kurdish family gave him a shelter. Then my grandfather returned to his homeland – Mush, but to avoid massacres was forced to escape for the second time, this time to Syria and remained there for 8 months. Then he again returned home, met my grandmother and married her. They had 5 boys and 2 girls. Now they have many grandchildren.

Nothing has changed in Turkey during these years. The attitude towards the Armenians in Turkey is the same as in 1915. So many years have passed, but nothing has changed in the attitude of the Turks towards Armenians. Maybe today the only difference is that different countries of the world are linked to each other by the Internet and the fear from the EU, the US and Russia becomes a deterring factor for the Turks to commit the same offence against Armenians. Today Turks cannot treat us the same way as they did before, as the warning letters do not reach by hands: it is a question of one minute to send a letter.

Today in Turkey we are not even free to possess our churches and cemeteries. It may take years for us to solve any problem connected with our properties. The Armenians cannot have a state job, even if they are scientists. Only those Armenians are given jobs that are not able to criticize. Turks, themselves being immigrants, treat Armenians as immigrants.

The overall situation in Turkey is not good either, though the Turkish authorities are trying to convince the outer world of the opposite. What can we say about a country, where the rights and freedoms of their own nation are not taken into consideration? As for the future, then it is not moving towards anything good. Here everything is solved by power; everything should be the way the authorities say – particularly the ones from the highest circles, where they want to be kings. How can there be such kind of things? In what century do we live?

At present the relations between Turks and Armenians are not good, the word “Armenian” is a blasphemy for Turks. Though the world knows, who has massacred whom, Turks say Armenians have massacred them. There is no confidence between Armenians and Turks now and there hardly will be in the future. As Armenians do not trust Turks, the same way Turks do not trust Armenians.

I want to tell about an incident that occurred with me last year in an airport. I was sitting in an airport and was waiting for my plane, so as to come to Mush. A man approached me and seeing that I was sweaty, offered water. However, after he had asked my name and learned that I was an Armenian, stood up and went away.

There can be reconciliation only in case Armenians and Turks start trusting each other.
The Name of My Grandmother Raised Questions: the Name Gohar Was neither among Alevis, nor Among Kurds

Tell Turkish Actor Baris Akengin

My name is Baris Akengin. I was born in Istanbul in 1976. Currently I live in the Kartal district of Istanbul. I work in the sphere of pharmacy; I am also an actor in the theatre. I try to combine both jobs.

Our village was an Alevi village in Kemah region of Erzincan. Its name is Mezra. Mezra means the part of the village, which consists of fields and each village has its mezra. Our Mezra village belonged to the village called “Ermenik” (Ermeni – Armenian, Ermenik – young Armenian, which means Armenian populated).

The heroine of my story is grandmother Gohar. I think she was born in 1870. She had two children. Her first son was born in 1890. This child was my grandfather’s father. The name Gohar made me engage in a search as during those years there was Gohar name neither among Alevis, nor Kurds. Only after 1915, the name Gohar began to be used. I started to think whether my grandmother Gohar had other relatives. Then, I tried to find the meaning of Gohar and saw that it had an Armenian meaning. The thing that in the village each woman had 8-10 children, while Gohar had only two, made me suspicious.

Gohar grandmother had an ability to cure, which was surprising for us. In Anatolia, in that case they say that one has a strong hand. If one had a headache or backache, he came to Gohar grandmother and she cured him. She could remedy pains of the body. They say she was praying in another language and also could get rid of any formation on one’s body. It is about such an interesting person. We, her grandchildren, always spoke about grandmother Gohar.

When participating in a conference in Dersim, I told about Gohar grandmother to one of the Armenian participants. When I finished my story, he said in surprise that what I told was common to the Armenian culture. At that time, I was also surprised because the nationality of Gohar grandmother was unknown to me. I repeat that the name Gohar was neither among Alevis, nor among Kurds. And the ability to cure was not in our cultures as well. We call ourselves Alevi, but we do not belong to any Alevi institution. We were told that we are Alevi. My father told me, while he was told by his father. Grandmother Gohar’s grandchild, that is the sister of my grandfather, told me about her. She is still alive and lives in the village. This year, I am going to visit her and I will record her stories. I think she will tell me more interesting things and I want to know all.

In 1915, Gohar grandmother, perhaps, was 40-45 years old. Our village has a distinctive advantage. In 1915, it was saved, because it was high in the mountains. The village was 6 kilometers away from the main road and to reach there you should climb on foot. It was not that easy at that time. I think this is the reason why big cruelties did not happen there.

We have information that Gohar grandmother’s husband, Ibrahim grandfather, was engaged in leather crafting at that time. When I was studying the life of Armenians in Erzincan, I read that the Armenians mainly were engaged in leather crafting and trading. It also raised questions in me: maybe my grandfather was not Alevi as well, but he was an assimilated Armenian. As for Gohar grandmother, I have no doubt, as I am sure that she was an Armenian.

There is a “Vank” not far from away our village. It is an old church, we call “Vank”. They say, that Gohar grandmother often went to that church, because an Armenian lived there.

During the Genocide that Armenian hid in the church and managed to stay alive. Afterwards, he thought that it was safe in the church and continued to live there. Later on, I learned that he was a brother of our grandmother Gohar’s, “kardeşlik.” This word has no meaning in Turkish. Is there anything like that in the Armenian culture? I don’t know, but I was told that Gohar grandmother’s brother lived there.
When villagers noticed her going to “Vank”, to that Armenian, they warned her not to go there not to come across a disaster. She answered that he was her brother and she would go there, whenever she wanted. She alone passed two hours’ way on a donkey to go to her brother and often took food to him. They tell that that man, in his turn, gathered food for Gohar grandmother. and she brought it to the village on the donkey.

Gohar grandmother was a very brave woman. I decided to find her grave. I believe that on her gravestone something in Ottoman or Armenian will be written.

How did I learn that our village was an old Armenian one? The villages around our village were also Armenian and even today they are called by their Armenian names. Gohar grandmother was from Ardos. I can enumerate the names of nearby villages one by one. No matter that now they call our village Mezra, I think previously it had another name. In reality it was a part of Ermenik village. Many people from Ermenik village came and hid here, not to be massacred in 1915. Later on, Mezra, its field part, was enlarged and became a separate village.

When I visited the graves of our relatives, I found a stone near my uncle’s grave. I took a picture of it and showed Aris Nalci. He told me that it was a cross stone and showed the eternity symbol used by Armenians. All this proves that our village was previously an Armenian one.

The people of my father’s age mainly do not know about that. They were not told about those issues, while my grandfathers, knowing all this, did not pass it to their grandchildren, although spoke about that with each other. Both my grandfather and grandmother died, but I remember them speaking in a secret way. They say they were speaking in Kurdish: the so-called Kurdish, which was unknown to other Kurds.

I remember that the daily life of our family was different; we were different from others also by our physical characteristics. One day, I heard the speech of Karo Paylan in the Turkish mejlis. He spoke about the coding of Armenians, which caused a big discussion in the mejlis. I started to become interested in the coding issue. At that time, I was reading the research studies of the YSU (Yerevan State University) lecturer Lusine Sahakyan, where she mentioned that the passports of the Armenians citizens of Turkey contained number 31, as a hidden sign of their being an Armenian. I checked our passports. In reality, there was written 31. Is it an accident or a reality? I cannot say. However, Gohar grandmother’s name, her ability to cure, her brother, the fact that she always went to the church and the Armenian cross stone, on our grave, are serious bases.

We now speak, we are not afraid. My father respects me. I will continue my re-search study. In 1915, among old nations, besides Armenians, Assyrians and other minorities were exterminated on these lands. Their art, cuisine, culture, theatre, language were exterminated. The main reason was their being Christians. If they were Muslims, there would be no Genocide. But it happened. 1915 was the conclusion of all this, but there was also an introduction. In 1915, just the game ended.

I suggest trying to reconcile nations mainly via art. The art of language has an ability to reconcile. The next are our children – the children of Armenians, Turks, and Kurds. We should not interfere. They will find a way.
If Genocide Is Not Recognized, the Incidents Taking Place in Kurdish Cities These Days Will Not End

Tells Member of “Nor Zartonq” Movement Arev Berkin Elvan, an Armenian Living in Turkey

My name is Arev Berkin Elvan. I was born in 1998 in Istanbul. I am a last grade student at high school and I am a member of “Nor Zartonq” movement. I use Mirakyan surname, thus I present myself as Arev Berkin Mirakyan.

It is a long story how our surname Mirakyan became Berkin. My grandfather’s grandfather was engaged in horse trading in Hozat. Then he was called Binatliyan - a thousand horsemen. In 1915, his family decided to leave Turkey, first to go to Georgia and then to the US.

My grandfather’s father is from Aghveran. It is one of the largest villages. They packed their belongings and went. On their way, my grandfather’s father and two sons were killed, while the daughters were lost. My grandfather’s mother was telling this story. The two guys walked behind the group and someone shot them. The name of my grandfather’s father was Abraham, but people called him Apo. His first wife’s name was Huri, one of the daughters’ name was Gulo and the son’s name, if I am not mistaken, was Peto. The name of my grandfather’s mother was Kudret. These names have remained in my memory.

People in Dersim were usually Apostolic Christians. When still children, my grandmother was telling us a lot, that my maternal blood was both Armenian and Kurdish, while my grandfather was an Alevi dede, grandpa. This grandfather’s wife and all wives of the grandfathers were orphaned Armenian girls.

As for Mirakyans, they are brothers, and one of them is my grandfather’s grandfather. They went from Ter-Ohannes and came to Hozat, there the connection between the brothers was cut. One of the brothers went to Armenia, another to Russia, and the other to the city of Batman in Turkey. In Batman, still there is a village called Binatli. It was our village.

On their way, the wife of my grandfather’s father got sick, while the children died. My great grandmother saw girls throwing themselves into the river to get rid of Turks and understood that they had escaped from Erzurum. Witnessing all this my great grandmother’s health worsened, and they were not able to go to Georgia and reach Erzincan.
In Erzincan, Sağiroğlu family took my grandmother’s family to help them. They worked and later their names were changed. In reality, they were not an innocent family, they had taken away lots of properties of Armenians, while took my grandmother’s family as cheap labor. For years they worked for free.

This family was Sunni Muslim and lived in Kemah center in Erzincan. Frankly speaking, I do not know what they do, where they are now. I remember only what my grandfathers told.

Working for this family, they became Alevis, changed surnames, names became Muslims and Turkish. But they became Alevi forcibly. For example, Munzur area was a sacred place for them, there they tried to be baptized. During Easter and other religious holidays of Armenians they went there. There is no much difference between being an Alevi in Dersim and Armenian, simply the name of the religion was changed.

We began to talk about these topics at home, when my grandfather’s mother died. She was a very strong woman at home; in her presence no one could say that we are Turks. She had very clearly drawn boundaries. My grandmother died ten years ago, we started to talk about it again during the recent years. We even thought to change our passports, our names.

The mother of my grandfather became an orphan in 1938, a Kurdish ashiret took her, but she did not assimilate. Koçgil Kurdish ashiret always reminded her that she is an Armenian girl. She was 5 years old and they treated her as their child. Then she came to Erzincan and married my grandfather. Afterwards they moved to Istanbul.

In our family these topics have not been discussed much, everyone was more silent and we were also silenced. My grandmother and uncle were in favor of speaking about it, but my grandfather and my father did not want to speak, according to them, it’s the past, the reality is what we have now. My grandfather says that he is an Alevi, and when he is asked about his nationality, he does not give an answer. There is the prayer “Our Father” in Armenian in the middle of his room. How could he be an Alevi?

I consider myself an Armenian and I present myself as an Armenian. I did not keep in touch with the people, saving my family. When ours came to Istanbul, the ties were cut.

The family of my uncle’s wife has also very interesting stories. They are Kurd Alevis from Havşakar village, it is also in Hozat. They went from their village and came to Havşakar, which is an Armenian village, and started to live together with the Armenians. My uncle’s wife told that when the 1915 events began, the Kurds wanted to protect Armenians and took them to various cities, some were taken to Harput (Kharberd). Those, who reached Harput, reached Aleppo. Some were taken to Erzurum and from Erzurum they reached America. Then they wrote letters offering Alevis to accept one of their children in America as a sign of gratitude for their help.

I would like to meet those, who saved Armenians. That would help me to say that not everyone was bad people, that not everyone killed, there were also good people among them.

For peace people should get acquainted with each other. There is no dialogue. The hate speech should be eliminated. Besides the people, the state should also deal with that, but it is not possible. Half of the people voted for the head of a party (the head of Justice and Development party), who said: “I am very sorry that they call me Armenian.” This means that they also think the same way.

Genocide should be recognized. If Genocide is not recognized, the events taking place in the Kurdish towns these days will not end. Until Genocide recognition, the wounds will not be healed. Genocide should be recognized without preconditions.

I have also felt anti-Armenian hate, especially in the high school. There was an optional subject in our school, that is, if the majority chose, in addition to the plan, this subject was also studied. I voted for a foreign language, but the majority wanted a subject called “Muhammad’s life.” As if it was a scientific high school, but seemed to be an Islamic school.

The lecturer entered the classroom and told me to write in Arabic ‘kelimei shaa-det’, which means “God and Muhammad are irreplaceable.” How could I know how to write in Arabic a religious thing? He understood that I cannot and said: “What kind of Muslim are you?” I said that I was a Christian, not a Muslim. He looked at my face and said. “So you are surely an Armenian.”

My grandmother has hopes from the latest developments. She says before one could not so calmly say that he is an Alevi, but now says. Later, perhaps we can also easily say that we are Armenians. The murder of Hrant Dink changed a lot in Turkey. We managed to overcome the closeness. Ten years ago no one would have thought about a march of the Genocide Remembrance on April 24, but today it happens. Freedoms in Turkey are becoming less. However, we are shaping the future, if we do good things, everything can go well. ■
Tells Turkish Retired Pharmacist Fatmagul Soylu

My name is Fatmagul Soylu. My family is from Bahçeçikli. I was born in 1980 in Istanbul. My family came here from Bahçeçikli in the 1930s. Previously Bahçeçikli was a very nice place to live, but after the departure of Armenians, it lost all of its colors. My family used to say so. It seemed that everything they went through, kind of alienated them from the place they lived. My family was talking with respect about Armenians, but always secretly and quietly.

My grandfather was a child at that time, but he remembered everything. News was spread that soldiers were coming to the village. The father and grandfathers of my grandfather said: “In fact this reached also us, and now they will slaughter the Armenians living here, as well.” Grandpa Hasan’s father went to the neighbors to warn them to flee, but saw that they were already going to escape. They had learned the news earlier.

Mr. Puzant’s family, as my grandfather used to call them, was quite wealthy. Their daughters attended the local American college, everyone knew horseback riding. My grandfather Hasan used to take care of their horses. He always said that they were very generous people - both Mr. Puzant and all the members of his family. My grandfather did not tell the certain date, but he always said it happened during the war.

My grandfather told me that Mr. Puzant had called him and said that they could not live there any longer, and before they were exiled, it was preferable to go to Istanbul. However, his wife was pregnant and he had no idea how to get to Istanbul. Then my grandfather heard that Mr. Puzant’s family agreed with a Turkish family to go to Istanbul by their horse-drawn carriage. Hearing that, he calmed down and returned home saying: “God save them.” But the next morning Hasan heard rumors that some Turkish families deceived Armenians promising to save them, but even not reaching Istanbul, cheated them, looted their property, and even kidnapped the girls. My grandfather was very worried and went to those people, those Turkish looters, in order to understand whether Mr. Puzant also had an arrangement with the same cheaters. After he had realized that Puzant had also dealt with those people, he ran immediately to tell Puzant: “My Bey, my Agha, those people will rob you, have a pity towards your children.”

When I first heard this story, I was very surprised. I tried to understand what Mr. Puzant’s feelings were at that moment. Imagine only, if you remain at your place, you will be killed and looted, if you try to escape, you will never know through what you will go. That night my grandfather and Mr. Puzant talked till morning consulting what they could do. Mr. Puzant gave money to my grandpa to go and buy a horse-drawn carriage. When my grandfather brought it and came back, Puzant’s whole family got into the carriage, and they left for Istanbul at night. My grandfather did not know the way to Istanbul, but in the morning they realized that they were close to Istanbul.

At the time Puzant’s wife Haykanush’s labor pains began. They told her to wait a little as they would reach soon, but the poor woman gave birth under a tree on the road. Mr. Puzant’s son was born. After a short rest, they continued down the road and came to Istanbul. When they reached the city, Mr. Puzant gave a large amount of money to my grandpa. My grandfather did not want to take it, but he was convinced to. Even Mr. Puzant’s wife gave some of her gold to my grandfather. Hasan opposed, saying that they were in trouble and in a foreign city, but Haykanush filled his pockets with gold, blessing him.

My grandfather told me that Mr. Puzant bribed all the police officers that stopped them on the way to Istanbul. Poor people did everything to save their lives. After returning home from Istanbul, my grandfather told his family about everything.

They had a lot of Armenian friends, but they were much closer to Mr. Puzant and, as far as I understand, my grandfather was working for them. Our family in their turn left their houses 15-20 years later and moved to Istanbul, because after the exile of the Armenians it was impossible to survive in those areas. When they reached Istanbul, grandfather went to visit Mr. Puzant, and when they saw them, they got very upset because once rich, well-off family was in poverty then. However, Mrs. Haykanush told them that their life was saved, and the rest was not important. Then, as I know, Mr. Puzant’s family left Turkey and went abroad during the September 6-7 incidents.
in 1955 (Istanbul pogrom). In other words, there is none of them now that I can con-
tact.

How to call all those events? I cannot say, and I think maybe there is no need to
name them at all. Why do I say so? I will explain. Whatever we call these events, the
pain will not decrease. What had Armenians done to deserve such a fate? I always
argue with my friends. They tell about the Armenian gangs, their dreams of Great
Armenia. Well, we knew there were such cases. But what did Mr. Puzant have to do
with Armenian gangs and Great Armenia? No one can answer these questions. They
were not in Eastern cities. Why were Armenians deported from the Marmara region?
There are many such questions that remain unanswered, and we cannot live our day
calmly. I think that we do not have that right, either.

My name is Nimetullah Erdogmus. I was born in Bingol. In our region, as everyone
knows and as we have been told since our childhood, there are some families, who
even witnessed those events. There are still families especially in Gencbey district,
where we lived, who tell about what happened.

The people in our region, to the extent of their abilities, tried to prevent the con-
tinuation of those events, and then they tried to save Armenians. There have been a
number of such families, but, of course, a larger number of families have remained
silent.

When you hear the stories of the survivors and those, who saved, you understand
how difficult cases they were in reality. Up to now, people tell about the families, who
took responsibility and saved Armenians.

Back then and later, during Sheikh Said’s time, our family’s attitude was very clear.
In the region, as well as in other villages, people know about our family. When the
massacres took place, “zulum” (catastrophe) happened. Our family, first of all because
of their religious beliefs, tried to help Armenians, and different people witnessed that.

We Should Learn How to Be Courageous from Our Elders

Tells Kurdish Deputy from Tigranakert

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of their religious beliefs, tried to help Armenians, and different people witnessed that.
I know our relatives living near us, who adopted Islam. Our relations continued until the end, but some of them went abroad or to other cities in Turkey, and our relationship was cut off. We would like our relationship to continue to this day and we would like to see our friends and neighbors. Of course, we would like to know, to understand the life of the people, who passed through that “zulum”, who suffered because of that “zulum”.

Of course rescuing others is difficult and very few people were able to do that, but on the other hand, it was a matter of honor and dignity. At that time our elders took a right stance and were able to help people. They overcame many challenges.

And now we should learn how to be courageous having their example and try to build a new relationship with the survivors. For this purpose, we ourselves still have to understand what happened. We share what we know and keep these stories alive.

Today We Are Allowed to Talk, but in the Morning They Will Come and Arrest

Tells Salesman Erol Daron Kalk, an Armenian Living in Turkey

My name is Erol Daron Kalk. I was born in 1959 in Sasun. I am a salesman. We came to Istanbul in 1969. Here a child can receive a passport only at the age of 3-4. When we came to Istanbul, I knew only Armenian and Arabic. I learned Turkish in Istanbul. It was summer, when we moved to a camp in Kinali Island, and when the summer was over and the camp was also over, we were settled in Karagozian Armenian College in Istanbul, where I began my education.

The house in Sasun, where I was born, was an Armenian school in 1915. We have the property certificate, it is our house and we have kept it till now as a memory. In some parts of Sasun, people spoke Kurdish and in other parts- Arabic. Our elders knew Arabic, but not us. In reality, our Armenian was a little bit different from the Armenian spoken in Constantinople, but I got used to both the school and the classes. In Karagozian, I was studying very well, but because of poverty I was not able to continue. My teachers came to our house, talked with my parents, so as I continued my
I call myself Erol Kalk, I do not use Daron, I have never had a business card with my name, it has always been with a company’s name. When I came to Istanbul, with the court decision, I changed my name to Daron. My first name was Gülamiri. When I married, my wife’s father told me to change the name Gülamiri with Erol. Thus, I became Erol.

As for 1915, it seems we have passed a path and now we can talk about it more calmly. Sometimes it seems that we can tell everyone that it was Genocide and can tell everything that happened to our grandparents. As if a confidence was born in us. We saw people, who were complaining more for Genocide that we have passed through. They made our case their case, and as the situation was like that, we started thinking, why we should stay so frightened. At some point, we also thought that we have lost 1.5 million people, what more can we lose? What else is left to be frightened?

We had a grandfather, who died at 120. His name was Ghazar. He was not our real grandfather, but all of us, including my father, were calling him grandfather. My grandparents are from Kusket village. When still children, they escaped to the mountains to be saved, not to be slaughtered and be able to preserve their lives. They were accompanied by several boys only a few years older than them. Winters are very cold here. Thus, not being able to stay longer, they came down from the mountains to Prşenk village. The village is located at the foot of the Maratun Mountains. An Armenian man, named Ghazar, lived there and he took care of all the children. Thus, children from 20-25 different families resettled in this village.

Manuk grandfather is from my father’s side, that is to say he is one of the boys, who hid in the mountains and then found refuge at Ghazar grandfather’s place. Manuk grandfather has always told about those days, he was telling that he had been in the mountains for 4-5 months. He remembered those mountains very clearly. In the whole village there were Armenians and there were only few Islamized Armenian families, we were calling them “dönmeler” (literally - converted).

My father’s family was one of the first that came to Istanbul. After us, others also left the village and came to Istanbul. Now it seems the village is deserted and only dönmeler, forcibly Islamized families are left.

In the southeast the system of “aghayutyun” (early serfdom relations) existed. Under the name of “aghayutyun” system, certain Kurdish tribes came to Armenians and collected money from the villagers. They said that they were leaders - “aghas”, of the Armenians and protected them. Although from whom were they protecting? Armenians had no enemies. Whatever Armenians sowed, reaped, Kurds were taking the half. One day my father could not stand anymore and said: “It’s enough.”

My father, taking my brothers, me and my sister Anush, who was one year old, moved towards the center of Sasun. I had taken Anush in my hands, while my brothers had collected our items. At that moment, one of the Kurdish tribal leaders approached. He was accompanied by horsemen. In an answer to the question where we were going, my father said that to Istanbul. They said that without their permission we were not allowed to go and started to discuss with my father whether we could go or not. In the end the Kurd said in Arabic: “We do not let your children and wife go. If you want, you can go.” My father said: “You can take my children only over my dead body. As for my wife, I will ask her in your presence, if she does not want to come, I will not force her.” And he asked my second mother. “You are my husband, wherever you go, I will come with you,” my mother said. The Kurds saw that we had definitely decided to go and they could not hinder us.

For some days we stayed in a tobacco stock, then we went to Kurtalan and from there we came to Istanbul by train. For fifteen days we stayed in Kumkapı Mother Church, and then my father was told that there was a job in Gedikpaşa. When my father started working, he already had poor eyesight, while my mother started working as a cleaner in houses. We were baptized in Istanbul. There was a church in our village – Maratuk Church, but it had no priest. In fact, it was very interesting, there was a priest, but he was an Islamized Armenian. Yes, he was also - “dönmeler”. His children now live in Istanbul and are very fanatic Muslims.

I am asked, whether I feel free or not. I do not feel free. I could be free, if one street should have been named after architect Balyan – the architect of Dolmabahçe Palace, Beylerbeyi Palace, Selimiye Kışlası, of various other structures, at least the shortest street, leading to a deadlock should have carried his name. Another thing – the Turkish alphabet, about which Turks tell their children proudly – Hakob Martayan put great efforts on this alphabet. Even Ataturk gave him the name Dilcar – creator of language. For many years Martayan was the president of Turkish language inspection. Why hasn’t any school been called after him?

A Turkish musician once told me that Turkish music without Hambardzumyan music is not possible to imagine. That is to say Hambardzumyan music is the basis for Turkish music. I can bring lots of examples. Until whatever I mentioned does not exist, Armenians cannot feel free in this land. I cannot say that during the last ten years we have not seen any difference. Today we are allowed to talk, but in the morning education, but it was not possible. My father was blind, while my mother was working as a cleaner in different houses. Being the eldest of the brothers, I was obliged to work. In those days my godfather found me a job in a publishing house in Cagaloglu district, and I started working.
they can come and arrest us. We cannot say about this confidently, either.

Initially those fighting were few - writer Sabahattin Ali, Nazım Hikmet, some other people, but today much more people fight for the truth and without any reason they are being arrested. Today all prisons are full of such people.

I felt discrimination for being an Armenian during my work when a salesman. After finding out that I am an Armenian, several people canceled the agreements reached with me. There was a company that called us and said that they wanted to establish trade links with us. I asked why they did not work with the companies they knew. They said that they brought the goods late. Thus we gave our price list – our prices were good and we were able to deliver on time. We started working together very well, both sides were satisfied. Although very satisfied, after a year they broke the relations. I could not learn the reason from them, but tried to find out from other sources and learned that they had declared that they would not work with an Armenian. I will not hide, I was very upset. I do not want to work with people, who have such mentality. However, there are Turks, who say that Armenians are good businessmen, they do not cheat, do not let down, thus they choose to work with Armenians.

It is difficult to establish peace between Armenians and Turks, but I do not see any offence. For example, I am not offended from any Kurd or a Turk, just there is a reality and one should accept it. A part of the society already accepts it. Thus, there is no offence; the problem is in accepting or not accepting.

The Real Purpose of the Saviors Was Not Always to Save Armenians, but to Seize Their Property

Tells Kurdish Teacher Mustafa Balaban

My name is Mustafa Balaban. I was born in Elazığ city in 1967, where I live until now. I am a teacher.

My mother’s mother, Yeğsa, was born in 1900. She had a brother whose name was Ruben and a sister - Marta. Their family lived in Hindzor village (in Armenian “apple”), which was an Armenian village. When their family was forced to migrate, for some reason, they were not able to take their children with them and left them in the village. Mehmet took care of them.

When it turned out that nobody would return from my grandparent’s family, Mehmet married Marta to a Kurd and sent to another village. Marta was older and took her brother, Ruben, with her. Marta’s husband killed Ruben with a weapon. The same day Marta ran away, came back to my grandmother and hid. Mehmet helped them and found some way to send her to America, where she married an Armenian, who had gone to America before 1915.

My grandmother Yeğsa had three children – two boys and one girl. Later on, my grandfather brought to their place another wife. Then, they sold all the lands of my grandmother Yeğsa, registered everything as his new wife’s property and made Yeğ-
sa leave. She went to Elazığ, to the Armenians, who saved her.

My two uncles started working from 15. My grandmother made dough, baked lavash in tonir (a cylindrical clay or metal oven used in cooking). Although my mother was very young, she became a tailor. In the 1940s, they tried to earn for their living themselves. My grandmother, Yeğsa, marrying, changed her name to Güllü that is she became a Muslim. Her sister Marta, I think, preserved her religion, Christianity and managed to go back to her roots. After Marta’s death, our ties with her children and grandchildren were cut. I, my mother and my sister would like to reestablish our ties, to continue our relations.

My mother used to tell about everything what happened to my cousin, and felt sad. She remembered everything, as she herself experienced that in her life. My mother did not accept her father, as he had left them and deprived them of their property.

In their village, there was a Kurd by the name Güzel Agha (Mr. Güzel). Güzel Agha’s wife saw my grandfather in a village and angrily shouted that so many people had suffered because of him, as he deprived them of their property. My grandfather answered: “Do you know who I am? I am the one, who will not leave property to a giavour.”

That woman came and told my mother everything. This was the reason why my mother always cursed him. She told her grandchildren that her father was a very cruel man.

I want to note that the real purpose of the saviors was not always to save Armenians, but to seize their property, land in that way. We know many cases, when they married Armenian girls, then seizing their property, threw them out of their houses.

We spoke a lot about those issues at our place. We told it everyone - the children, uncle's children. We grew up having the example of our grandmother. The relatives of the Armenians, who were saved by our grandmother, visited her. We all knew that they were Armenians, but we did not tell about it outside our family. We could discuss it only with very close relatives. My mother did not speak about that for a very long time. My father was a Muslim Kurd, he never made any pressure on us, but he never spoke about those issues. When we talk about the people saved in 1915, in reality, we speak about the people, who were forcibly converted to Islam. In general, we do not speak much about that. As long as I am engaged in studying history, I have asked questions many times and learned the causes. If in the family there is a grandmother or another Armenian relative, they hid it, did not speak. For example, at the school, where I was a teacher, there was a child, who one day came very sadly and said, that his grandfather was an Armenian, and he was sad for that. I tried to calm him down and said that I also had Armenian relatives. I told him that during the war they became orphans and they were adopted by other people. He told that his grandfather was from Harpuk and was Islamized, when still a child. The child calmed down a little.

The father of that child was an officer, I tried to speak to him, but he did not want. After he was retired, we met and had a long conversation. He told that his uncle was also a military servant and when he got ill, he was afraid to go to hospital not to reveal his Armenian nationality. I cannot speak on this topic, it is very hard, it is a murder, and it is a massacre or whatever you call it.

There was a big shock in the region, the effect of which continues even today. I think that a dialogue is a medicine to all this. We should talk about what happened during the history. The communication is also important; we should make it more often. Popular, cultural basis should be established, instead of disinformation, there should be a real education and everyone should learn what happened during the history in reality.
Everyone Knew that I Was an Armenian, however on Fridays, They Came and Said: Let’s Pray Namaz

Tells Karnik Olgar, an Armenian Living in Turkey

My name is Karnik. I was born in the Manazkert region of Dersim in 1965. I have two children. I am one of the six children of my father. When I was 5 years old, my father died and we came to Istanbul. My mother, before coming to Istanbul, sold our house and lands at a very low price. Her aim was to grow us up in Istanbul. Before coming to Istanbul, it was written in our passports that we were Turks.

No matter how safe Dersim was for Armenians as compared to other cities, we were Turks in the eyes of the government. My mother appealed to the court, the procedure lasted for three months, and we, as my mother wished, were registered as Armenians in the state passport department. The court procedure was very problematic, they asked my mother: “What is bad about being Muslim, that you want to change your religion?” My mother explained that she wanted to move to Istanbul, in order to be able to send her children to an Armenian college. We had no acquaintance to stay there. Thus we managed to return to our identity.

Before my name was Kader, later it was changed to Karnik. The name of my father was Ahmet and he died with that name. His real name was Khoren, but in his passport it was written Ahmet. The villagers called him Khidir. When I went to our village, they called me the son of Khdo, the son of Armenian Khdo, Kader.

My elder sister fell in love with an Alevi young person. My father did not accept that marriage and did not speak to my elder sister. My father did not want to have a foreign son-in-law, he wanted an Armenian one. My sister stayed in the village, although our son-in-law was a very good person.

I cannot remember, whether we knew in the village that we were Armenians. I was 5 years old; I can only remember that after the death of my father, we came to Istanbul crying. We were accepted to Karagözyan College. We did not see Istanbul and immediately went to school. We did not know Turkish, did not know Armenian, we opened our eyes in the Armenian college.

Those days were very hard for children. Our childhood was a difficult one; I can remember how we were crying at nights in the night school.

As long as I did not know Armenian, I had to study in the same grade two years, however in the second grade, I became the first in the class. My mother had to face difficult days.

When I left school, I started to work; we were not able to continue our education. We, three brothers, started to engage in leather crafting. We continued our work for 30 years; we even traded with Armenia sending products there. Our business went well, however, everything changed at once, and we were bankrupted. In the recent 12 years, I have been hired as an employee. I do not have a house and live by rent. It is hard to earn our living. My son studies at Ferikoy Armenian School. My daughter is in the first grade of Getronagan Armenian High School.

We looked for my grandfather for a long time in Armenia, in America and other countries, but we could not find. I think he was either killed or moved to Lebanon.

My father was born in Selçuk village of Manazkert region. The name of his father was Khachik Boyajyan. Khachik Boyajyan was a quite rich person. My father was a child born from his first wife. In 1915, she took her children and ran away. At that time, my father was lost for an unknown reason. He insisted that he was 5 years old in 1915, but we counted that he was 8-9 years old.

He was frightened very much, he could not go out. He hid in the village houses, while at nights he went into the empty houses of Armenians and found wheat, rice. He ate whatever he found.
One day an Alevi soldier came on horse to the village. He told the villagers that he was looking for an Armenian rescued child to take and bring up. He was told that there was an Armenian child, who came out only at nights. The soldier found my father, took him on his horse and went to Mkhındı village in Manazkert region.

The Alevi soldier, who adopted my father, was not able to keep him quietly. My father often ran away to look for his parents, as he believed that he could find them. However, one day he realized that he couldn't find them. I cannot remember the name of the soldier. He did not assimilate my father, always telling he was an Armenian. He even gave the first seed of his land to my father to sow telling that a hand of an Armenian brings success.

In their village there was a forty-year old woman, who was saved from Genocide. The soldier told my father to marry her, but my father did not want to marry, as he was very young. The soldier wanted him to marry her, because she was an Armenian and nobody would marry her. If he married her, her generation would continue.

My father married her and had two children. When his wife died, my father and his two girls remained without anyone to care after them. At that time Dersim massacres took place and they were deported to Kütahya Sandıklı town. At that time my mother was also there, as they had also been deported. She lived in the mountains for many days eating only grass. Then, the Armenians were pardoned and were told to come down the mountains. However, when they came down, they were deported again.

In the exile, my mother and father were together. At that time Armenian girls were kidnapped by Muslims. My mother's father was afraid that her daughter could also be kidnapped and married her to my father. At that time my father was 45 years old, while my mother was 13. My grandmother only wished that nobody harmed her daughter.

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My father was a successful trader. He also constructed walls and did other works. I did not know how my mother's side was rescued. I asked many times my mother, she did not tell, I only know that she was from Dersim.

My sisters visited the soldier, who saved my father, got acquainted with their children. We later learnt that in the first months my father ran away, the soldier found him and brought back. My father did not tell about that. I don't know whether he was sad about that or was afraid, but he did not tell. I would like to meet that soldier, we owe him a greeting. I don't know for what reason he saved my father to make him work or just to take care of him, but one thing is clear: today we exist due to that soldier.

In the exam questionnaire, there were questions about Islam. I was able to answer those questions, because on daily basis we were in touch of that religion. When I was to become a headman, I saw that centurion took my name out of the list. At that time the commander called him and asked why he had taken my name out, while he responded directly looking into my eyes: “He is a giaour that is why I took his name out.” My commander got angry and said: “There are 200 people here, and I wished all of you were as hard working as he is. He has passed the exam and should become a headman.”

I became a headman, but I often heard blasphemies in my address and felt bad. At that time, I again went to the commander and told him, what they were telling me. I think he punished them.

There were also pressures for circumcision. They told us that we should be circumcised for medical reasons. They tried to make us change our mind, but we did not accept. In the army, there were many such cases. The army and working place are the spheres, where you are forced to hide and not to be sharp in your words. Even today, we hear people saying not to buy anything from Armenians, not to give them...
There are no changes in terms of democracy in Turkey. They say that the church in Akhtamar was reconstructed. So what? They don’t let us even go and pray once a year. They just want to cozen us. But the society becomes more knowledgeable on Genocide. There are many Turks, who help us to understand and recognize Genocide. We witnessed that during the Genocide march on April 24 and at the anniversary of brother Hrant’s murder.

Among a small segment of the society there are some changes. I thought that the country moved in a positive direction, but witnessing the events of the last year, I have no hope. The nationalism continues to grow in this country. They want to exterminate other nations and they speak loudly about that. I have lived my life, but I am worried for my children, the country does not move in a positive direction.

How can we build peace between Turks and Armenians? I think if there are no external pressures on the Republic of Turkey, it will not accept the Genocide, as long as it thinks like Young Turks. That is if the Genocide is accepted, there can be reconciliation. The ideology of a state is like that: to invade what others build, to steal, and at the end to deny. To cut it short, Armenians and Turks cannot find solutions, unless there is pressure from big countries.

In 1915, during those days, my grandfather lived in Erzincan for one and a half years. Then, once at the train stop, two Armenian girls came up to him to ask for help. I do not know the details very well. At that time my great grandfather reared cattle; he was a shepherd.

Our family lived near the village of Garni, and the girls were right from Garni, so they knew my grandpa, that is why they asked him for help. They even called him by name and asked to save them. One of these girls came as a bride to our family and the other one married my grandpa’s cousin. The family did not talk about this much. When I first heard about it, I was eight years old. In our family there are still people, who do not know the truth.

Girls cut ties with their families; they were not able to keep in touch with them. This topic was not discussed in the family. The word “Armenian” was a blasphemy in the village. I remember us talking about a family calling them just “the Nikolays”. Now I understand that “the Nikolays” were Armenians. Perhaps we knew that they were Armenians, but still continued to be friends with them.

When dying, my grandmother pronounced some words; she was either praying or singing. She was 90 years old, dying; she was recalling her youth years, full of pain.
and sorrow. I think the other girl was her sister or niece. When she died, I was 16 and I remember her very well. We knew she was Armenian, but we were not talking about it.

Hasan Celanin Erzincan's mother, brother and sister

Murder of Dink as if Refreshed Our Past Memories
Tells Fatmanur Cete, an Armenian Living in Turkey

I will tell the story of my mother’s grandfather. I was told about him, when I was a child. Later on, I myself was engaged in search and realized what had happened. I saw her grandfather; he died at the age of 96. They lived in Kulp town of Diyarbekir and had Armenian names: that is they were Armenians and lived as Armenians. While during the Genocide, they started to live with Muslim families and changed their names. For example, the grandfather’s name was Süleyman.

The area of Kulp mainly belonged to Armenians. Those were Armenian lands, but they were deceived in different ways and deprived of their lands. My mother’s grandfather is also engaged in legal processes, as he was also deprived of his lands. However, I have no hope that it will work.

As I count, at that time the grandfather was 8-9 years old. The members of my family tell that he was 5 years old at that time; however I think he should have been approximately 8-9 years old. He ran away from the house. My grandfather turned to a Muslim family for help. Then, other Turks came to that family and asked whether there were Armenians in their place. As for me that family hid my grandfather because of their profit, as they knew how much land was registered by his name. Thus another life started for my grandfather, he became a Muslim. He remembered, he
saw, who killed his mother and brothers, he heard the sound of the weapons, he remembered everything.

For a long time he was hired to work in the lands that belonged to his father. Then that family did not let him go to the army telling that there would be dangerous for him after they realized he was an Armenian, and he gave up the idea of going to the army. My grandfather lost his property and everything was left to the family that saved him. He died as a Muslim.

I am a descent of grandfather’s family and have no relation with the family that saved him. My grandfather married my grandmother, who was also an Armenian and, being rescued from the Genocide, grew up in a Muslim family. In our family they always talked about Armenians. Then, they asked for a bride from Armenians families, they gave them a bride, they celebrated Easter together, they had good days together. Problems started later on. I remember in Kurdish they called Armenians “fille” (slave peasant). In reality, they have always been under pressure. Whatever Armenians did, they were not perceived well by Muslims.

I and people like me started to talk about that problem, when we were still young, and we changed our mind. In the recent years, we proudly say that we have Armenian roots. In Diyarbakir, I remember, when we were still children and did not know that we were Armenians, we used to go on excursions and went to Armenian St. Mary Church. There I saw an Armenian woman and angrily said: “All Armenians had left, why did you stay?” That woman got angry with me. Today, I remember my words and feel sorry and ashamed. It seems I will not forget that pain until the end of my life. I cannot forget how that woman got angry. Today, when I think, I realize what a bad thing I did, but at that time it was our attitude. When I learned that I also have Armenian roots, I completely changed my mind. Today I would like my grandmother to have lived as an Armenian and taught us Armenian culture.

In Kulp, everyone knew each other as “Dönme”, which means “converted”. Mainly they call like that the ones, who were previously Armenians and later became Muslims. For example, I remember uncle Süleyman, who was a shoemaker. He did not marry, as he had not changed his religion. Nobody gave him a girl and he did not marry anyone. In Kulp, everybody knew about everyone.

We had a relative in Bakırköy (an Armenian populated district in Istanbul). My uncle’s wife lived there. When my uncle was still alive, she lived as a Muslim, as my uncle was also a Muslim. When my uncle died at the age of 47, his wife went to Istanbul to her relatives and started to live as an Armenian.

Diyarbakir has also changed. Until the recent years everything was good. The fact that we knew each other helped us. I think the death of Hrant Dink had also a decisive role. For example, my mother prayed Namaz five times a day, she was a very religious Muslim, but when Hrant Dink was murdered, she cried for days, could not control herself. As if our past memories were refreshed. After that we came closer to the Armenian culture. In our family the word “stranger” does not exist any longer, all of them are humans. However, there are not many Armenians in Kulp today. All of them have left or have hidden their identity so as one cannot understand who is an Armenian, who - not.

We have also relatives, who live in Paris and continue to live as Armenians. We have no connections with them. However, we still continue to keep ties with my uncle’s wife in Bakırköy. I would like her to speak to you for this project, she could help a lot, but she did not want, maybe she was afraid.
The Real Name of Grandmother Meyrem Was Mariam

Tells Turkish Extreme Driving Instructor Onur Uzun

My name is Onur Uzun. I was born in Ankara in 1970. I work as an extreme driving instructor in Istanbul. I am married and have two children. My story is quite interesting. My family, after leaving Malatia, resided in Ankara. I, as a city child, always visited Malatia with my family members. My grandfather is from the village Gunpinar. After long searches, I found out that our village in the past was an Armenian Asod village, and the number of Armenians, living in our village, was big.

Since childhood, I have often been in Malatia. There were many old houses, which were like castles. However, nobody told us that they were Armenian houses. At our rather old age, we learned that they remained from the Armenians; however, it was vivid that they were not peculiar to the Turkish architecture.

In 1995, I took my girlfriend for the first time to our house. I wanted to introduce her to my family and say that I was going to marry her. My future wife, Umut, and I were already in a quite strained mood, when we reached our place. My father, mother and my maternal grandmother were at home. We introduced each other. Grandmother Meryem at that time was very old and physically weak. My grandmother loved Umut at once. My wife is very sociable and engages in a very good dialogue with grown-ups. Grandmother Meryem and Umut became friends very quickly.

Once, I noticed that she called Umut to her room and said something, while Umut responded: “No, no…”

We were very happy, when we left our place. We had just left, when my wife told me that although she had said my grandfather “No”, the latter did not obey and gave her a golden bracelet, saying that she was already old, tomorrow would not be alive, and possibly, would not be able to be present at our wedding. I was very surprised. My grandmother Meryem had never hidden anything from me, and I did not know that she had such a golden bracelet. I became thoughtful and did not know whether to tell my family about grandmother’s present or remain silent. On the other hand, we faced a number of financial problems connected with our marriage. I decided not to tell.

After three days, we went to the Grand Bazaar, Covered Market, to sell the bracelet presented by my grandmother to jewelers, as we needed money very much. My wife did not want us to sell it. She even cried on the way, saying: “That woman gave me that to keep as a memory, it is a very old thing, please, let’s not sell it.” What could we do? We were young and needed money very much, so we sold it. When we entered the market and approached a jeweler, we understood that he was an Armenian. He looked at the bracelet and asked: “Where have you got this bracelet, young people? This is a very old Armenian piece and can hardly be found.” We were surprised very much and did not know what to do.

At first, I did not understand anything; however my wife seemed to understand and asked the jeweler: “What do you think, could it belong to Armenians?” The jeweler got angry and said: “How can you bring to sell something, when you do not know to whom it belongs.” I realized that the jeweler took us for thieves and hurried to tell the reality.

Very surprised, we left the jeweler. I tried to understand, why my grandmother kept it so long and why she gave it to Umut, whom she knew for less than an hour. Later, I understood that Umut, seeing the white handkerchief of my grandmother, said: “Dear grandmother, we had an Armenian neighbor and she knitted a handkerchief like that.” My grandmother realized that Umut feels no enmity towards Armenians, treated them well and decided to share it with Umut.

After a few days we again went to our house. There was nobody, my grandmother was alone. We asked her thousands of questions, asked about her mother, father and other relatives. At that time only, I asked myself, why I had not thought before, how my grandmother could not have any relatives. Why couldn’t I realize, what she had undergone? She told us that she had been kidnapped from a caravan, taken home, where she was told: “Your name is Meyrem and your life begins anew.” Then she was
married to my grandfather. Neither my grandfather, nor my mother knew about that. My grandmother made us vow not to tell anyone about that. As far as we could understand, her real name was Mariam. She told about her father, mother and eight brothers.

We forgot about our wedding and could not come to our senses for a long time after hearing that story. My daughter, Mariam, was not born yet, when my grandmother died. I am very sad and sorry that she was not able to see little Mariamik.

When my daughter was born and we called her Mariam, all our family members were very much surprised. I could not resist and when my baby turned forty days, I told my mother and father my grandmother’s story. My mother cried a lot and confessed that she felt it. My grandmother prepared various meals and called them by various names. She even prayed in her own language from time to time. My mother told that when she had seen what my grandmother was doing, got angry at her and insulted her. Once, grandmother Meryem’s husband, that is my grandfather, told her: “Those children are Turks, I am a Turk, you are also a Turk, even do not try to do something opposite in their presence.”

My mother was afraid to reveal that she was not a Turk and never asked about that. After that I could forgive neither my grandfather, nor my mother. How could they treat an orphan girl like that? If it was not Umut, I could never understand what had happened. What happened is not just Genocide. See, my grandmother, Mariam, was a girl, whose whole family was massacred. Her memory was erased, even my roots were erased, our family tree was erased. We lived in a lie. My daughter, Mariam, now tries to learn Armenian to honor the memory of her grandmother, whom she has never seen. If my grandmother saw Mariam, I think, she would live more in calm.

My Father-In-Law Did Not Allow Anyone to Hurt Armenians

Tells Kurdish Housewife Zubeyde Isık

My name is Zubeyde Isık. I was born in one of the villages of Diyarbekir in 1945. I lived together with my father, mother, sisters and brothers. In 1958, I came to an Armenian district in Diyarbekir to marry my cousin. I became a bride at a very young age. It was a usual thing at that time.

When I came to Sur district in Diyarbekir, there was no water in houses, we had to bring water from outside. As long as I was a bride, I had to bring water. Our neighboring Armenians felt sorry for me and did not let me bring water. I used to say: “Sister Mary, let me do it myself,” while my Armenian neighbor responded “Oh, Zubeyde, how can I leave you? You are very young.” My father-in-law was a very brave man and did not let anyone hurt Armenians; this was the reason why we were respected very much. They attended the celebrations of our holidays, we attended theirs. We made fun together.

We had no problem. Armenian women told our grown-ups their life stories, while we were young and were listening. For example, a very beautiful Armenian woman used to tell that during massacres she gave birth to her first child.
She told: “They killed my husband, when my baby was not even 40-day-old. I hugged my baby and ran away. Soldiers caught, put my baby at the edge of a weapon, waved and threw away on the ground.” A Kurd, who had climbed mountains to save Armenians, saw that woman and gave her to his friend, saying: “Take her to our house, give her to my mother and tell her she is our bride.”

They saved also other women, girls and married them to young Kurds or kept them in their villages. That woman married that Kurd. She told that they saved her and kept well. She adopted Islam. I cannot say if she was forced, or she did it willingly.

In our family, there were also Armenians. At that time, as you know horses were tied in studs. One of my uncles went to take his horse, when he saw a young woman sitting in front of the stud door. My uncle took her to his house and married her. Her name was Paytsar, some of her family members were killed, and the rest had run away. My uncle did not force her to adopt Islam saying, “You are an Armenian, stay an Armenian.” Later on, she found her brother in Aleppo, however, after a short time they heard her brother and his wife died. Paytsar asked her husband to go to Aleppo to take care of her brother’s orphaned children, to bring them up, as they were the last descendants of their family. My uncle agreed and they sent her to Aleppo with gifts, gold accompanied by music (with Armenian drum and zurna).

So many bad things they did to Armenians. If now you ask the government, they will answer “the so-called genocide.” Let them come and ask us, we know that it was a real Genocide, they committed it and continue doing it now in Nusaybin, Cizre. Where are Kurds being lost? What love is it towards genocide? How long is it going to continue?

We had no problems with Armenians, we even protected them from the ones, who wanted to hurt them. My father-in-law used to say they are poor people, nobody should hurt them.

In our family, we spoke about it, because we were a family of intellectuals. My grandchildren all know what happened to Armenians, what happened to Alevi’s. I am not afraid to tell about it. Why couldn’t one save others? Is it shameful, is it a sin? I always tell about it.

Perhaps there were people in Diyarbakir, who did not love Armenians, but many of them loved. When we came to Istanbul, we saw our Armenian neighbors from Diyarbakir, even the ones, who had left for Holland and France, and came there for vacation. We met each other in street, hugged each other, cried, as if we were relatives.

Our neighbors were taken out of their houses late at night in 1915. A woman used to tell: “The mother of our neighbor told her run away, get free. She ran away, while other members of her family were slaughtered. Then, she found her brother in Madrid. Her brother afterwards came to Diyarbakir to be able to live together.” Can you imagine that? From their big family, only two members were saved. What does it mean to enter others’ houses at 4 o’clock in the morning… what does it mean? We, Kurds, face the same thing. The Turkish army attacked us. At first, they attacked Armenians and now they attack Kurds. We have always been their target. Why? We don’t know,

My grandfather used to go to Saint Mariam Church and say: “Both a mosque and a church are sacred places. It is the same for us.”

I think there will be no problem between Armenians and Kurds, we understand each other. Turkey is in a very bad situation. Where does it go? We do not understand. The countries outside stay silent, they do not want to speak. But the youth already knows everything, they read a lot…”
The Situation Is Now Better for the Armenians in Istanbul

Tells Computer Engineer Arsen Demircian,
an Armenian Living in Turkey

I was born in Tigranakert (present day Diyarbakır). My family moved from Tigranakert to Istanbul when I was 6. We moved to be able to attend an Armenian school here, because in Tigranakert there were no Armenian schools. In Istanbul, I attended the Armenian school for 12 years. Then I graduated from the University and got my degree in computer engineering. Now I work. In Tigranakert, when people learned that we are Armenians, looked at us quite strangely. Compared to other cities in Turkey, in Istanbul the situation is better for the Armenians.

What the Turks did in 1915 against the Armenians did not aim at just physically exterminating them; they also wanted to destroy their culture. I think money played a major role in this. At that time the Armenians were richer and earned more money. With their policy against the Armenians, the Turks wanted to change this situation to their advantage. To achieve it they simply took the property of the Armenians and gave to the Turks.

The policy of the Turkish government towards the Armenians remains the same after so many years. The Armenians are more isolated now in Turkey. They do not have the right to self-expression. They are isolated and their lives are not like the ones of the Turks. We have got used to living in an isolated way and do not have Turkish or other Muslim friends.

During the time the situation for the Armenians is getting even worse as their number is reducing, which leads to their assimilation. It becomes harder for us to preserve our culture, language, etc. The schools, churches of Armenians are either being closed or pass under the jurisdiction of the Turkish government. After this the churches are either turned into mosques or are used for other purposes.

A part of the Armenians hides its nationality; the rest is not afraid to reveal it. However, you can never know who stands in front of you and in general you prefer to hide your ethnic belonging. According to the government, to be an Armenian is still a bad thing. After revealing their identity the Armenians can be deprived of the opportunity to get a job, as in general the Armenians do not enjoy trust here.

If we speak about freedoms in Turkey in general, then I am to state that the situation is getting worse not only for the Armenians, but also for the very Turks. The majority of the population in the country does not like the fact that the government is getting more religious, because simultaneously the freedoms of people become limited. Those, who speak against the government, get arrested. This is the reason why people are afraid to express their opinions. The situation in Turkey now is like this: if you do not oppose the government, you will not have big problems, but then you are to admit their rules of the game.

Finally, if we turn to the reconciliation between Armenians and Turks, then I must state that to achieve it, the government should create the opportunities for the nations to have a dialogue. Armenians and Turks should communicate more, should discuss more issues… ■
We Have Always Known that We Have a Grandmother Named Sona, but Did Not Know She Was an Armenian

*Tells Turkish Eyyup Altun Van Ercis*

I was at secondary school, when I learned that my grandmother Sona was Armenian. I had always known that we have a grandmother named Sona, but I did not know that she was an Armenian. My uncle told me that she was an Armenian, and then adopted Islam. My grandfather, his wife and others told about my Sona grandmother.

In 2000, I realized that my grandmother was a woman with Armenian roots. I decided to write the story of my grandmother. Previously, I had written stories and novels. I had written and put aside, but I had never been so motivated in writing.

Her story was very shocking for me. In those years, this topic was quite widely discussed. In 2004, I started reading various books on the Armenian issue; I also talked with the elders of the family. I spoke to my uncle as well. My uncle was the only surviving child of Sona grandmother, the others had already died.

She was born in 1895 in Van Erciş (Arches) village. She was a daughter of quite a wealthy family. Her first husband, as far as I know, was a Muslim. They loved each other, got married and escaped. Then a complicated situation started, Russians came to Van and the Muslims were forced to flee.

Sona’s father was a salesman. He was not engaged in politics, and therefore want-
At High School, I Learned that My Mother Has Armenian Roots

Tells Naira Yıldız, an Armenian Living in Turkey

My name is Naira Yıldız. I am 30 years old. I was born in Istanbul. I have always attended state - that is Turkish colleges. I live in Kadıköy district in Istanbul. At high school, I learned that my mother has Armenian roots and in 1915, to stay alive, she adopted Alevism and then became one of the girls given to Alevis.

I have no information about the roots of my father, but I want to study them. I work in a non-state institution. I have felt no discrimination during my work experience, as I have always showed my Alevi identity and told that I am an Alevi.

After being baptized, I was free to say that I was an Armenian and show my Armenian identity. There are times, when I think that I have no right to call myself an Armenian, as I don't know the roots of my father's side.

On the other hand, I had to face discrimination because of being an Alevi in the month of Ramadan, when I could not eat bread and drink water. Our neighbors, although by joke, showed discrimination and hurt us. After being baptized, I became stronger, and now I can say more freely that I am an Armenian. Although I am still pondering, I can tell others that I am an Armenian. I feel more at ease inside, when I
am able to say that I am an Armenian.

Why was I baptized and became an Armenian? I think from religious point of view I was not able to experience Alevism. I admit it not as a religion, but as a philosophy. However, I wanted to posses more religious values, to have something to be able to turn to for help when falling.

My mother had Armenian roots and that was the main reason for me to recover. Christianity was not very far away from Alevism. I had a very big wish to become a Christian.

In the second grade of the high school, I learned from my aunt’s children that I am an Armenian. They lived abroad and consequently, were freer, knowledgeable and told me everything, they knew. There was always a discussion among my cousins, but I always kept silence. Few days after learning the reality, I decided to speak to my mother; however, I felt that she wanted to avoid the topic. She even told my aunt in Armenian not to speak on the topic, but my aunt, as it is typical of her, told what she knew, and I learnt everything. I did not know what I felt at that time. The Armenian nationality was far from me, however according to Alevism, one should love a person irrespective of his religion or nationality. We were always taught in that way.

We never spoke about the events of 1915, although recently the relatives of my mother’s side started to talk. However, not everybody spoke. For example, my elder sister kept silence. Whatever I heard, I learned outside our house. Especially, my aunt opened my eyes with her stories. Although she came once a year, she told those stories, she wished to tell, and I managed to learn them in a short period of time.

My father was against my being baptized. I think it was because of the fear from the society, although there was no pressure in Alevi culture and a person could choose himself. We never grew up under pressure. My father, perhaps, was afraid of the reaction coming from the society and of possible difficulties that I might face in my work and social activities. In any case that was what I believed in. We had discussions, especially when I was attending church for Christian classes. At that time the discussion became tenser. My mother was also worried that I could face problems. She even told my aunt in Armenian not to speak on the topic, but my aunt, as it is typical of her, told what she knew, and I learnt everything. I did not know what I felt at that time. The Armenian nationality was far from me, however according to Alevism, one should love a person irrespective of his religion or nationality. We were always taught in that way.

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I was not discriminated for being an Armenian; however I witnessed that discrimination against the Armenians and unfortunately, kept silence. At that time nobody knew my being an Armenian. When Hrant (Hrant Dink is a Turkish-Armenian editor, journalist and columnist murdered in Turkey) was killed, some people said that they all were Hrant. At that time some attacked insisting that thousands of Mehmetçik (short name for soldiers in the Turkish army) died and nobody cared, while an Armenian was killed and everybody went out to streets.

Armenian nationality is a sphere unknown to me, but I want to be a part of it. I am not a much politized person. I can say that only in the recent two years I have started to read political topics. During the recent years, people have become able to speak more loudly. Although I do not believe in the ruling party, do not accept it, I think that this party also had its role. On the one hand, they say, “I am sorry, I was also called an Armenian” (the expression of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, when he mentioned that his opponents even called him an Armenian), on the other hand, they leave an open door, for people to be able to speak. I can already talk about many things. Dink’s murder, that was also discussed abroad a lot, became a big pressure on the government. In this country many unknown people, journalists were killed, however Hrant’s murder was another case and changed many things. Another example is the murder of an Armenian soldier, Sevak, and the fact that it was not covered. Despite it, freedom has become a little more available. Perhaps, people really want to know, who they are, what their roots are. Previously, they wanted to live hiding it, perhaps, now they want to know who they are, who their ancestors were.

I have no hope about the future in Turkey. I cannot see the future. I don’t know, if I will be alive tomorrow, or not. On the other hand, what is a future? Does it mean only to live, not to lose your life? I cannot wake up calmly, I cannot walk calmly, and I cannot live hiding my identity. Does it mean I am free? I want to feel free, I don’t want to change my sentences for others and as I mentioned, I cannot see the future, as the things get even worse.

Two societies, Armenians and Turks, do not believe in establishing peace. What happened to Armenians in 1915 now happens to Kurds. Many stupid people grew up on this land. Those stupid people live only for their profit; do not ask questions, they only want to be strong and successful. They have no respect, no love, they adore power. They take all means to have power, no doubt, they love power very much. Money is very important for these people, mainly they run after it. The governors teach them to be like that. This is the reason why the peace between these two societies is difficult to achieve. It is time for the Turkish nation to wake up.

I think, Armenians have nothing to do to reach peace. I have no expectations from Armenians and it is always the case with minorities, be them Alevis, or Jews. When the majority gives its hand for peace, the minority does not reject and accepts it. If they do not accept, that this country belongs to all of us, we will not move a step forward. I repeat, if the majority, Turks, give their hand to Armenians, the Armenians will, for sure, accept it. I have no doubt that in that case there will not be any problem.
We Were Told Who Killed Seven Armenians Would Go to Heaven

Tells a Kurdish Biologist Mustafa Celebi

My name is Mustafa Celebi. I was born in Şehitpazar village of Van’s Erciş town. Until 10 years old, I lived in an old Armenian village. In Kurdish we call that village Sarbazar, however in Nisanyan’s dictionary of place names; I saw that it was previously called Vank, as a small church was here. I graduated from University in Diyarbekir. First, I studied Biology, then I moved to Mimar Sinan University. Until now I am studying. I am 28. It is important for me to understand and study cultural memory.

My aunt’s husband’s father, Bekir agha, has lots of memories of saving the lives of Armenians. Before 1915, the majority of Marcaz village was Armenians. My aunt Zubeyde told that their current house previously belonged to the priest of the village, while the church was very close to the house. Bekir agha’s family lives there until now. That village is now called Cubuklu.

Until now they remember the names of their Armenian neighbors – Rakel, Apo, Poghos, Khosrov. They even remember how the elections of the head of the village were held. They called the head of the village “Kia”. Maybe it is in Armenian; I do not know what it means. They went to church and put a cross in a bowl with cold water, and the one, who was able to insert the head into the water and take the cross, became the head of the village. Until now we remember that month and call it cross.

As we were told, the government made the Kurds act against the Armenians. Relations between the Kurds and the Armenians have always been very good. Neighbor Khosrov was Bekir agha’s friend. In 1915, when the state attacked, Khosrov, like other men of the village, escaped, while his wife and the children remained. Can you imagine, at that time the state officials and clergymen said that those, who killed seven Armenians, would go to heaven? They were also told that the land, the whole property of the Armenians would be left to them. I cannot explain in words. There were even cases that Armenians were buried alive. As if people had become insane.

Bekir agha saved Khosrov’s wife, Sirin and their children saying that they were his family. Then on a donkey he took them away from the village to a safe place.

When the Russians came, Khosrov returned to his village. Seeing Bekir agha, he warned him to escape, otherwise he would be killed. Thus, Bekir agha saved Khos-
rov’s family and Khosrov saved Bekir agha.

Khosrov, however, was left without anything – his relatives were killed and property taken. During wartime Muslims always did so, but even now we know which lands belong to Armenians. Then, the ties with Khosrov’s family were cut. I would like to meet Khosrov’s family, his grandchildren.

There are still lots of stories. For example, the story of Kurdish Sheikh Savet that fought against the Russians. Turkish soldiers envied him because they were not able to fight against Russians, but he could. Sheikh Savet had an Armenian friend called Hzo, who hid Savet from Russians. One day the soldiers kidnapped Hzo, took off his teeth so as he told Savet’s place, but he did not reveal his place.

Until now Kurds are telling this, saying that Armenians are very trustworthy people. This is being told in families, neighbors talk about this. For example, my father cannot definitely accept his guilt, but when he hears stories of Armenians, who were buried alive, he cries. As all these were done by their authorities, they have a great feeling of guilt. They lived with Armenians, before they were killed. Now the Kurds say: “What we did with Armenians, now the state does with us.”

After Armenians as if the life has stopped. For example, until 1950, there was no flour factory near our place. From 1915 to 1950, they were not able to bake bread. Until now people tell how good masters, builders Armenians were. There are still some architectural monuments, crosses in our village. Whatever Armenians built, were like art works.

And now we say Kurdistan. How can we call those territories Kurdistan, when all of them are Armenian villages? Ercis, Van – all of them. We – Kurds, should not be mistaken. All the villages we live in are Armenian. We have killed Armenians; we have erased their memory, the memory of these lands…

We should accept, face whatever happened; otherwise we will not have peace. As Kurds, we witness that discrimination, which along with enmity comes from the history told at the official level and is expressed in everyday life and in media. The society does not read, its opinion is formed by the media, while the authorities always deny the reality. The society should read. The level of education is very low in Turkey, it should develop. One should attach importance to oral memories. In every side of Kurdistan, there is an Armenian trace. The words, that we think to be Kurdish, turn to be Armenian.

We live with closed eyes. We are very backward people. However, it turns out that before 1915, before the Genocide, we were not that regressive… ■

It Is Hard to Say whether There Is Any Change in the State Policy towards the Armenians

Tells Salesman Isa Paylan, an Armenian Living in Turkey

The Ottoman Empire was based on the system of millets, nations. It was divided into two parts: the governing people and the people, who were under pressure. When the Ottoman Empire started to weaken, to save it, the idea of nation-state was brought forward. To stop the division, they wanted everyone to become Turks and Sunni Muslims. When they realized, that they could not Islamize non-Muslims, they decided to deport them, while Circassians, Kurds should be assimilated. Such a policy was accepted during World War I. The Greeks were driven out, while the Armenians were sent to deserts. After the war, some Christian minority was left, however they themselves had to leave, tired of property tax, of the events of September 6-7, and of the policy violating the Treaty of Lausanne. All of them left. Today there are
only 50,000 Armenians in Turkey. Today it is hard to say whether there is a change in the state policy towards the Armenians.

When the Justice and Development Party came to power, many things did not change. There were some steps taken with the property of the Armenian foundations, however it was mainly the reason of the appeals to the European Court by the minorities. I think due to these legal cases, some properties were given back.

When the Justice and Development Party came to power, they insisted that they themselves had suffered and democracy was the main value for them. People believed in them, I also had hopes. However, the most important thing for the state is to be consistent, not to change a policy. When this regime totally changes, only in that case we can expect changes.

In reality, this party came to continue the state plans that came from Young Turks. Is there a fear of Genocide in Turkey now? No, there is not, as no Armenians are left here. Whom to kill?

I think no Armenians will be left in Turkey after some generations. Even if they stay, they will not be able to preserve their culture and language. It is not beneficial to be an Armenian in Turkey. The most positive thing is that living among Turks; you become more sensitive, you are able to view Turkey both from within and outside. However, you are a loser in economic and other spheres, because as a minority, you cannot have important, ruling positions, become a military servant, a judge, or to engage in politics. Previously, there were big factories, now there are not. Today they are engaged in arts and are among middle and higher class of people.

When I joined the army, non-Muslims could only be common soldiers and serve only in the ground forces. They all were sent to the east, and they could not serve near their cities. I was sent to officers’ club, however, when I came to the place I served, I got an order that all non-Muslims should be sent back.

I have never applied to become a policeman or a soldier. I knew I cannot. No Armenian lawyer will apply to become a judge, as he knows he has no chance. I did not feel that many difficulties connected with being an Armenian, but my ancestors faced more difficult times as they lived during the time of property tax. Before that in 1915, they lost their whole property. The second generation was able to stand on their feet a little, when they tried to make them weak by taxes.

When we were children and played in the yard, we were called giavour (infidel). When we heard the word “giavour”, we ran to our houses. We were always told in our families not to engage in quarrels with them. We kept silence, when they addressed us. We had neighbors, who made friends with us. However, our neighbors often revealed our identity telling the people, who traded with us, that we were “giavours” and they should not buy goods from us. Still, we were able to continue our business being good traders. We lied to no one. There were Turks, who loved Armenians and Greeks, because they thought we were honest traders. However, next to them, there were people, who considered us foreigners and did not let us next to them.

In some districts of Istanbul, there are people, who have Armenian acquaintances, they have Armenian friends. However, today, in main cities of Anatolia, people do not see Armenians, they don’t know, who is an Armenian. In the education system, in the media, in religious preaching, Armenians are addressed in a negative way. For example, they say that PKK consists of Armenians.

Previously there were socialist Armenians. I cannot forget that in the “Tercüman” newspaper, there were two columnists, who in the 1970s, preached that Communism is a very bad thing, it is harmful for Muslims and Turks and the youth was poisoned by Armenians, saying allegedly the left wing was formed only by Armenians.

In the 1990s, when the events connected with PKK started, they began to say that Apo (Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of PKK) is an Armenian and the Kurds were not circumcised, because they were Armenians. Naturally, Kurds’ mothers could be Armenians, because hundreds of thousands Armenian orphaned girls were made Kurds’ wives.

Then during the ASALA (Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia), the anti-Armenian propaganda started. The things were so bad, that Armenians wanted to go neither to church, nor to the Armenian Unions. At that time, many Armenians emigrated. In the recent years, we again witness that the Kurds are blamed for being Armenian, as the peace process between Kurds and Turks was interrupted. In the social media, senseless news is disseminated that in Karabakh and Armenia, there are PKK camps. I think Azerbaijan also likes those statements.

It is said, that we are equal citizens before the state, however it is obvious that there is coding. If we turn to the issue of freedom, we managed to get back 15 percent of the confiscated properties belonging to the Armenian foundations. Only that amount was given back. During the period of the Justice and Development Party, some developments have been observed only in that direction, and it can be considered a positive trend. However, everything does not end there. For example, previously, the Armenians from Constantinople were able to speak Armenian, now the number of people, speaking Armenian, has been reduced. The number of pupils, going to Armenian colleges, had also reduced, while the number of mixed marriages continues to grow. Even if there is no pressure from the government, today the
Armenian community cannot behave like it did previously.

There are different wrong things in the state policy towards the Armenians, for example coding. This is a very wrong policy, which means that you are persecuted and you are given a number from the very first day of your life.

I know that I am not an equal citizen, but I don’t know the level of inequality. They say, a fish swims in water, but has no idea what water is. If state policy changes, we will become more modern and democratic, while the normalization process will become easier. I don’t think, a positive thing has happened so far.

Even if I become a president, there will be no change in the state policy towards Armenians, as the state policy itself should be changed. The way of thinking of the society should be changed. It is hard to say, how we can change it. Perhaps, we should start from education. We should stop hate slogans.

For Intellectual Turks My Being an Armenian Is Not a Reason for Discrimination

Tells Stock Broker Sayat Didoyan, an Armenian Living in Turkey

I, Sayat Didoyan, was born in 1984 in Istanbul. I attended the local Armenian high school. From the age of 6 to 23 I was also attending “Maral” song and dance group, founded in 1980, where from nine years old have started dancing Armenian dances. After leaving school, I began to study in the department of Capital Market and Stock Exchange at Marmara University. Now I work as a stock broker.

I have a large family, which in its turn, has interesting stories passed from generation to generation. At the end of the 1800s my grandmother’s father was a trader. During the persecutions that started at that time, they were forced to convert to Islam. They were told to change their religion not to have any problem. However, one of the family members - my grandmother’s sister, who sang in the church choir every Sunday, being against the demand, declared that she was not going to change her religion. My grandfather, seeing her firmness, decided, that the whole family should be against the demand and they together should pass through all the hardships. After this decision all the males of the family were forcibly taken to war zones, while females were deported to the Der Zor.

When I was a child, my grandmother Zabel told that one of her two sisters, who sang in the church choir, had gone mad and thrown herself into a pit, while her sec-
ond sister was lost in the desert. A Kurdish family found my grandmother naked under a tree and started to take care of her. During that time after converting her religion my grandmother even forgot Armenian. However, at the age of 16-17, a woman accidentally met her in a market, recognized her and informed that her sister was living in Istanbul. However, the Kurdish family did not let Zabel go back.

After some time, the father of the Kurdish family was taken ill and the family had to take him to Istanbul, where Zabel wished to meet her sister. She then decided to stay in Istanbul to live with her. In the beginning, like other Muslims, my grandmother, dressed black from head to toe, read prayers five times a day. However, after some time at the age of 18, she again returned to her Armenian origins and became a Christian.

Such problems in Turkey, putting pressure on ethnic minorities, have almost been the same for centuries. Very little has changed. To give a clearer picture I should refer to the actions carried out against the Kurds today, when the word “Armenian” is used as an invective. One can state that nothing has changed during these years. Now in Diyarbakir (of course not the Prime Minister or other high level representatives of the government), the police forces and lower layers of the government often mention that the Kurds are Armenians, therefore all of them should be massacred. This is not only my personal interpretation; I cite what is written in the media. There is even a video, in which the police moves around in the car and declares about it via a loudspeaker. So many years have passed, but we still witness the same situation.

Ethnic problems usually derive from the policy employed by the government. To give a better understanding in this regard I would like to bring the example of my friend Aras, who is the co-author of one of the books published with the initiative of Hrant Dink Foundation. My friend mentioned about this in his autobiography to be submitted to a university. As a result of this until the end of his life he will be deprived of the opportunity to be accepted to any university. The dean of the university just considered that kind of information mentioned in his autobiography unacceptable.

The government has also taken under its control all the educational institutions. Deans, professors and lectures are under their direct control. There are no equal rights in those institutions. Of course, if you stay silent and do not complain, you will not face any problem. However, when you speak, the problems become inevitable. You can even be fired from your work or be excluded from an educational institution. To put it otherwise, you should be cautious in your words.

Sometimes, I also criticize the government via social networks after which I immediately get warnings from my mother’s acquaintances to limit my posts otherwise I will have problems.

The Armenians and in general other minorities in the country face similar problems. The pressure against them has not changed so much. For example, when my mother was still a child, my grandfather forbade her to speak Armenian outdoors, they were even afraid to pronounce the word Genocide at home.

However, today such problems are not so many in the society, among common people. Of course there are people, who being unaware of history, demonstrate some discriminatory attitude against the minorities and think that the government committed no violence against them. In this sense I can consider myself to be a lucky one, because I work by my profession and communicate mainly with intellectual people, who are not of that opinion and for them being an Armenian is not a reason for discrimination.

I myself cannot accept the argument according to which the government demonstrates no discrimination against the minorities. This is known even from history. I do not mean only Genocide. We know from the history that in 1944 there were additional taxes put on the minorities and if they were not able to pay they had to go to Erzurum and work in road construction. My grandfather was also engaged in that work and each time coming back home he got ill and was always coughing.

When I think of the reconciliation between the two nations, I understand that in general it is not real, because the pressure of the Turkish government on the society (particularly on the layer of the society, which is not informed of anything or is not
educated), is quite high. Racism is rooted deep in them. In addition their bad attitude towards the Armenians is because of their rare or even complete absence of communication with the Armenians.

For example, in such places as the residences near the Black Sea, where there are few or no Armenians at all, the Armenians are considered as the nation which is deprived of any human characteristics. However, when they accidently meet and communicate with the Armenians, the existing stereotypes about the Armenians disappear. In spite of this, however, one should be cautious in using the word Genocide, because it is unacceptable for the Turks.

Economically Turkey today has become a more capitalist state, where the culture is also capitalized; to put it otherwise the culture is sold at a very high price today. From the political perspective this means that uneducated people have become easily controlled. They just obey not understanding anything. The number of uneducated people increases, which is connected with the low level of education in the country. I do not mean only the Armenians or Turks, in my opinion this is happening all over the world.

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Armenian Identity Is a Tool that Makes One an Evil in Turkey

Tells Student Sayat Tekir, an Armenian Living in Turkey

My name is Sayat Tekir. I was born in Istanbul in the year of 1984. Currently I study Turkish-Armenian relations, problems connected with identity, nationality in the Department of Sociology at Istanbul University. I work at Bilgi University.

In the last 15-20 years in Turkey changes have taken place on the issue of Genocide. Since the end of the 1990s people have started to talk more frequently about identity. The opening of “Agos” weekly newspaper, as well as voicing the problems of Armenians on TV by Hrant Dink, had a huge role in that. That, of course, was still a beginning.

The law adopted in France on the Armenian Genocide in 2001 also had its impact on the Genocide discourse in Turkey. Materials rejecting Genocide started to be written in state schools, and they found more room in history textbooks.

A wave of alarm rose after the murder of Hrant Dink. 250 thousand people declared: “All of us are Armenians; all of us are Hrant Dink,” which shook the country. People started to think about their Armenian identity. Simultaneously, there was also a fascistic wave, the representatives of which did not want to speak about the Geno-
Previously people were put on trial because of pronouncing the word “Genocide.” After Hrant Dink’s murder the Armenian organizations and Armenian intellectuals in Turkey made the voice of the Armenians living in Turkey and their problems heard. The existence of Armenian candidates in the local elections and of the three Armenian deputies in the Turkish parliament also added to the discourse on the Genocide, which had a positive impact of the Turkish society.

Of course, the Armenians in Turkey are used to discrimination. Especially in the last few years discrimination has become stronger, although in the past there were also Kemalists and Turkey was not that much of a democratic country. Only 6 months ago a major telecommunication company did not accept my CV only because of my being an Armenian. You can often hear such stories in Turkey. The impunity for killing Armenians has a negative impact. In the Kurdish movement the Kurds are being accused of being Armenians. Armenian identity is a tool that makes one an evil in Turkey. The word “Armenian” is used as a blasphemy. Of course, there are also people who posit against that discrimination.

There have also been changes in freedom issues in Turkey. During 2002-2007 some steps were initiated in this direction; however the situation became even worse after that. Journalists, scientists are imprisoned. They do not want to hear any opposing word. No opposition media agencies are left in Turkey and the government is engaged in its propaganda every day. We are gradually being deprived of our freedoms.

Unfortunately, I am not so much optimistic about the future of Turkey. The hatred is gradually increasing in Turkey. In the end such a polarization can lead to a civil war. In case of the introduction of the presidential system in the country, Erdogan will rule like a sultan.

When speaking about the reconciliation of the Armenian and Turkish people, I highlight the recognition of Genocide, apology, identification of criminals, because the ones, who carried out the Genocide, are treated like heroes here. There are schools, streets named after them. They should be condemned. The Armenian-Turkish border should be opened. It is also important for me that the successors of Genocide survivors get citizenship of Turkey; the property of the Armenians is returned. I would also like Armenia and Diaspora get rid of their anti-Turkish policy and conduct a policy of reconciliation. An appropriate atmosphere is needed for the Turks and Armenians to live together. In a more democratic country it will certainly be possible, no matter how difficult it will be.
Interviews

- With the descendants of Turks/Kurds, who saved Armenians in 1915

- With the descendants of Armenians, saved by Turks/Kurds
There Is Indignation inside Me: I Cannot Come to Terms with It

Interviewee: Dean of the Faculty of International Relations of YSU, Gegham Petrosyan

- Will you, please, briefly tell the story of your family?

- Both my grandfather and grandmother were from rich and prominent families. My grandfather, Gabriel Petrosyan, was from Shenik village of Sasun. Their family was very large. Basically they were people known as fighters and participants of Fidayi movement. During the Genocide, their neighbors kept my grandfather in their house, dressed in Turkish clothes and took him to the Armenian refugees, with whom my grandfather reached Gyumri. Until 16-years-old, he lived in Gyumri orphanage, then moved to Talin and settled in Vosketas village. There were many refugees in the village, mainly from Sasun, who knew about the prominent roots of my grandfather. They supported my grandfather, and then married him.

My grandmother Vardanush, who was from Kakhki village of Khnus, was saved almost in the same way. She was only two years old and was saved by Kurds or Turks, now it is difficult for me to clearly remember. My grandmother’s brother was able to settle in Persia. His father, Misak, was a very famous person; his heroism is being mentioned in different books. From this large family only my grandmother survived.
- **What do you know about the person who saved your grandparents?**

- I was a very little boy, when they were telling us their story. Their neighbors were Turks or Kurds, even though I have the same approach towards both of them. The fact that my grandfather and grandmother were saved is just the result of close neighborly relations.

- **Until the 1915 events what relations did they have with Turks?**

- Both of them died in deep grief. The atrocities they witnessed had a psychological impact on them. My grandfather was always crying when talking about this. It is not enough to call this barbarism. It does not contain the whole essence of what Turks did.

- **Have you ever been to Turkey? If yes, what did you feel?**

- Being in Western Armenia was the lifetime dream of my grandmother and grandfather. My grandfather used to say: “Lao, will there be a time when I go to my father’s house and see it?” Unfortunately, he could not. But my father made my grandfather’s lifetime dream come true. When he was quite old, I gave him the opportunity to see his father’s house, although I was afraid that he could not stand the excitement. But then I decided: let it be what will be. My father visited Shenik. He told me that there were people, who remembered my grandfather. He believed that his lifetime dream had been fulfilled. To see his father’s house, Western Armenia was something holy for him.

- **What is your vision of the reconciliation of the two societies? Do you have your own suggestions on this?**

- When you derive from a family, who survived the Genocide, no reconciliation can exist in your mental world. I have many controversial approaches on this issue. I believe that there is a need to establish diplomatic relations with the neighbor. However, this process does not work because of the Turkish preconditions, which are unacceptable for us.

On the other hand, for decades I’ve seen my grandparents’ tears and it is not possible to take it out of my mind or psychology. There is indignation inside me, I am in a conflict. There is a battle inside me. As an Armenian, I cannot come in terms with it.

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**My Grandfather Not Being Able to Help All Armenians, Was Going to His Room and Crying**

*Interviewee: Turkish Huseyin Nesimi*

- **Will you share the story how your family saved Armenians in 1915?**

- My grandfather’s name was Huseyin Nesimi. We are from Crete. My name is also Huseyin Nesimi. In 1870, my great father, as the best student of the school, came to Istanbul to study at “Mülkiye” school. His life was built on equality and justice. He was exiled because he had opposing views on sultan and was sent first to Palu, then Lice.

In 1915, my grandfather was in Lice. He used to tell about those years, but we were too young and could not imagine. We understood the importance of what he had done only years later. If we could perceive the importance of what he had done from an early age, we would have been able to collect more documents. During the deportation he had problems with the governor and was sent to Diyarbekir. The governor of Diyarbekir at that time wanted to deport Armenians from the region, but my grandfather was against that decision. Turkish gangs organized attacks, killings took place, and people’s properties were stolen. My grandfather tried to save them, and this was the reason he had disagreements with the governor. My grandfather said to the governor: “Show me the written document about your intention so that I carry it out.” The governor did not give any written document. My grandfather said: “If you are going to do that, take people’s property, do not kill them.” Armenians were displaced, on the way the looters attacked them.
I do not know whether my grandfather wanted to save Armenians or to fight for justice. My family told that Armenians came to my grandfather’s house and begged him to save them. My grandfather was not able to help them all and was going to his room and crying. We are talking about a very bad period. When my grandfather was sent to Diyarbekir, he understood that something could happen to him. He left my grandmother, my 4-year-old father and the nurse at the man’s house, where they lived for rent. He said goodbye to my grandmother, prayed Namaz and then left. He knew he would be killed. Indeed, he was caught on the heights of Karaz and was killed together with his soldiers. After he was killed, the owner of the house sent my grandfather’s family to Istanbul. My father and his family reached Istanbul by train. They were given a state pension and the two women with a little boy – my father – found themselves in a difficult situation in Istanbul.

They had no job, no place to live. They lived in a little hut in Topkapi district, tried to survive by collecting the thrown vegetables in the market at late hours. In such difficult conditions my father continued his education at school, but he was telling he had neither clothes, nor stationery. He was cold in winter and was putting paper sheets under the clothes to get warm. Then free of charge he was accepted at Istanbul’s Boarding School - ”Istanbul Erkek”. His teachers helped him a lot and he could graduate from school and become an architect. His name is Abidin Nesimi. He writes political books, as well as has conducted researches on Genocide.

The name Nesimi has been with us for three generations. My grandson’s name is also Nesimi. My grandfather’s father was Sheikh of the inner castle in Crete. They had Beqtasi roots and the name Nesimi comes from there.

- **What kind of person was your grandfather?**

  - I think he was a humanist, his actions prove that. He fought for that all his life. He was a humanist. In reality, Beqtasi is based on humanity. I did not have a chance to get acquainted with my grandfather, but I think he was like my father. My father was also a humanist, he loved people a lot.

- **As far as I know, you want to make your grandfather’s grave a monument.**

  - Oral Çalışlar wrote articles on this issue and I am grateful to him. We know my grandfather was killed on the way from Lice to Diyarbekir, but we do not know the certain place, where he was killed. Mr. Oral carried out a big research on this issue and managed to find the exact place, where he was killed. He informed us and I visited that place.

  When you talk to old villagers, they know that place quite well, which is called Kaymakam grave. I talked to the mayor and explained to him that I want to build a monument there, but I do not imagine yet what it should be.

  I hope the mayor will also help us to build a road leading to the future monument. It is located on the road from Diyarbekir to Lice.
After 1915 My Grandparents’ Lives Were Ruined

Interviewee: Lecturer at the faculty of International Relations of YSU, Gohar Melik-Bakhshyan

- Will you, please, briefly tell the story of your family?

- My mother’s family was from old Bayazet, which was a small town. Most of the population were Kurds, but there were also Armenians and Turks. My grandfather, Haykak Kajberuni, was the taxman of Bayazet, while my grandfather’s father, priest Nerses Kajberuni, was the Primate of the Diocese. During the years of Genocide, realizing that they could no longer stay in their native town, they escaped with the help of their Turkish neighbor and moved to Dilijan, then to Yerevan.

My grandfather had five daughters and two sons. My mother was not born at that time. On the way of deportation the two boys died of cholera. Grandfather was always telling with the feeling of sorrow and regret that they had to bury their children almost half-dead and run away. They were being chased by Turkish Yenicheris and if they slowed down, they all would be killed.

Until 1915, as much as I remember from the words of my grandparents, the situation was quite calm. The Kajberunis were very wealthy. In a place, where you do not feel confident and good, you can hardly be able to accumulate wealth. They had both Turkish and Kurdish neighbors, with whom they had very good relations. My grandmother was speaking fluent Kurdish and Turkish.

My grandmother’s memories about their visits to different cities also speak about the calm and good atmosphere of that time. My grandmother told about Artamet apple with a special enthusiasm. She said: “When we were going to Artamet, from the strong smell of the apples we realized that we would soon reach the gardens, and when you picked an apple from that garden and kept it in the sun, you could see the apple-stones.”

What refers to aftermath of 1915, you already know… My grandparents used to say that after that their lives were ruined. My grandmother always remembered some scenes, saw her lost children in her dreams. My grandfather could not sleep at all. They told how in front of their eyes Turks beheaded someone, tore another pregnant woman’s belly and took the baby, raped someone else. Everything, we see now in films, is right. I’ve heard about it with my own ears. Even fewer things are being shown today than it was in reality.

- How were the Kajberunis saved during the 1915 events?

- I was a little girl, but remember my grandmother telling that before Yeghern, the Turkish officials, who were in close relations with my grandfather, several times had made remarks that it would be better for them to leave Bayazet, as they would soon be removed from there. In addition to these remarks, from the overall atmosphere and attitude towards the Armenians, they, too, felt that something was going to happen.

Fortunately, my grandfather’s family had a very good relationship with the neighbors, and it is thanks to these neighbors that they were saved. My grandparents told that one of the neighbors, to save their lives, moved all the Kajberunis to their house at night, kept them there and early in the morning took them out of the town.

My grandfather told that they were really lucky. There were many Turkish neighbors, who betrayed the Armenians. They had always wanted to possess the Armenians’ property, thus they took the opportunity. My grandfather’s family was able to take very few things with them. Before escaping they filled their gold in jugs and buried in their “tonir” (a hole deep in the ground serving as an oven, where lavash is baked), thinking that they would surely come back again, but...

- What do you know about the neighbor who saved your ancestors?

- Unfortunately, I do not know much about the savior, just as much as I have heard from my grandfather and grandmother. They were very close neighbors. My grand-
mother told that their neighbor’s wife used to cook very well and she had learnt much from her. My grandmother could cook wonderful Bayazet “kufta” (traditional Armenian food), she had learnt it from her neighbor.

- Did you use to talk about this story in your family?

- Yes, we have always talked about this in our family and we are talking about it until now.

- Have you ever been to Turkey? If yes, what did you feel?

- In 2008 I went with my family to Antalya. Honestly, I regretted a lot and not because we were treated badly there, but subconsciously I had some fears. When walking in the streets I was constantly looking back. It seemed to me that someone was going to hit me from my back.

I want to go to Western Armenia. It is not only my wish, but was also my father’s dream and desire. My father was a famous historian, Stepan Melik-Bakhshyan. During the Soviet era with his scientist friends he went to the border many times, but they were not allowed to cross. Now this is possible, and I want to go there very much, but I cannot. It seems to me, if I go, I will die ... Really, I cannot.

- What is your vision of the reconciliation of the two societies? Do you have your own suggestions on this?

- It is very difficult to say. I have always tried to find something good in Turks, but I cannot, despite the fact that my grandmother told me that they had good neighbors. It’s hard to define a formula for reconciliation. For me only economic relations are acceptable, until Turkey recognizes the Armenian Genocide. I am even against cultural ties. For sure they should recognize the Armenian Genocide, give financial and moral compensation.

It is true, I am not a survivor of the Genocide, but on April 24 I am always half dead, when I see these terrible scenes on television and remember my family, my grandparents. I cannot forget...

My Grandfather Was in Love with Nvard, but He Did Not Become Her Husband Not to Hurt Her

Interviewee: Turkish Dentist Ayse Gokce

- Will you share the story how your family saved Armenians in 1915?

- This story is about Bagl village of Mush. It happened with my great grandfather. His name was Kazım. He was 18 years old then. One of his uncles was a military serviceman.

They first tried to exterminate Armenians by burning them. They were thrown to different places, churches, schools, houses, pits, and burned. Then, they threw their bodies into rivers. However, when the river waters turned dirty, it caused protests and they did not know how to otherwise exterminate the Armenians.

The uncle of my grandfather, when accompanying another Armenian caravan, I don’t know how, but also took with him my grandfather Kazım. When Kazım witnessed what was happening, could not stand it and wanted to leave, return home, but he was not allowed. At that time Kazım saw Nvard and her brother Aram. Nvard was pregnant, while she was holding her elder child in her arms. Walking inside the caravan, Nvard asked soldiers for water, but they refused her. Kazım grandfather gave her a little water from a bottle, but when the soldiers noticed it, started to beat him for helping an Armenian. At that time my grandfather was forced to say that he liked her and wanted to marry her that was why he gave her water. At that time, he was mocked by the soldiers, who told him: “All of them are ours, why do you need to marry her?” However grandfather Kazım took Nvard out from the caravan and
brought home, still not being able to save her brother. Because of those sufferings, Nvard aborted her baby. Although village women tried to help, they were not able to save the baby.

After some time, family members noticed that my grandfather and Nvard were not sleeping in the same room. My grandfather tried to bring excuses, saying that she had aborted and the like. However, after several weeks, he went to Nvard and said that they could not continue like that as the family members would notice and would not allow her to stay at their place. At that time Nvard was 18-19 years old and said that she would die, but would not marry my grandfather, as the bones of her killed husband would ache, noting that she had lost one of her children, while the other is sick. Parallel to that, the events in Mush were continuing. My grandfather convinced Nvard to live in the same room. They lived like that for two years, but my grandfather’s family members started to say that she was barren and they needed to expel her from their house. At that time the second child of Nvard also died. Nvard always insisted that her child was healthy and the mother of my grandfather, that is her mother-in-law, killed her.

My grandfather realized that they could no longer live in the village like that and decided to move to Ankara. From Ankara, my grandfather sent Nvard to Istanbul. In the end, he managed to turn to patriarchate and get some help.

In Ankara, my grandfather married a Turkish girl. He and Nvard sent letters to each other. Nvard was writing that she was well, but she did not get married. My grandfather gradually lost her track, but did not go back to the village. After several years, the reality was revealed and the family members realized that my grandfather was really in love with Nvard but he did not want to frighten her: he did not become Nvard’s husband not to hurt her.

- Do you talk about that with your acquaintances?

- I don’t talk much about it. I was 15, when I heard this story. When I was in Istanbul to get education in a lyceum, I had an Armenian friend. When I told my father about my friend, he told me the story of Nvard and even asked, whether he could possibly be a relative of Nvard.

- Did you use to talk about this story in your family?

- In the family we do not speak much about it. Even not all grandchildren know this story. You know, there was also a love story. That is my grandfather was in love with an Armenian girl, Nvard. Later on, he married another girl, our grandmother and perhaps he did not love his real wife as much as he loved Nvard. It was not such an easy thing to tell. The worst is the fact that after years, my grandfather realized that Nvard’s suspicions were true and his mother killed Nvard’s child, choked him with a pillow. Later on when my grandfather’s mother learned that my grandfather married a Turkish girl, said: “I myself killed Nvard’s child, for her to have a child from my son.” Now I don’t know how one can tell about it. How can one voice it in the family?

- Has your family tried to learn about the fate of the family saved or get in connection with them? Would you like today to learn about them or contact them?

- I would like it very much, but I think it is very difficult. Besides, if we find those people, what shall we say to them? When I heard about that, I asked my father: “How can a human choke a child?” My father said that during those years, the years of war, such barbarities happened frequently. Even the grandmother, who choked the child, told that the child was a child of an Armenian, a seed of an Armenian. “We admitted that our daughter-in-law was an Armenian, but we could not keep a seed of an Armenian under our roof.”

- What is your vision of the reconciliation of the two societies? Do you have your own suggestions on this?

- I think justice is very important. When there is no justice, we cannot reach anywhere. We should speak about what happened. ■
I Have Learned the Words of the Song “Adana Lamentation” in Western Armenian from My Grandmother

Interviewee: Doctor-Laborant Naira Poghosyan

- Will you, please, briefly tell the story of your family?

- My grandmother, Veronika Berberyan (Mkrtchyan) daughter of Gaspar, was born in the family of intellectuals in Bogazliyan village of Yozgat Province, Anatolia, in 1907. My grandmother’s grandfather Hakob was a representative of the Armenians in the local governing body. He was a senior priest of St. Astvatsatin (Mother of God) Church and was popular in Bogazliyan village for his solid appearance, knowledge and position. The name of my grandmother’s grandmother, whom my grandmother called “iritskin” (pastor’s wife), was Narik. My grandmother’s grandfather had a study at home, where intellectuals gathered to discuss interesting events, politics and secretly sang patriotic songs. Although the Armenian language was forbidden at that time, it was always spoken at my grandmother’s place. In contrast to their family, many Armenian families could not speak Armenian. When my grandmother was put to sleep, she used to get up secretly to listen to those patriotic songs to memorize them. By the way, I have learned the words of the song “Adana Lamentation” in Western Armenian from my grandmother.

- Until the 1915 events what relations did your family have with Turks?

- Before the massacre, the Armenians and Turks lived peacefully. The population of Bogazliyan village, with 700 Armenian families, mainly comprised cultivators. The Armenians were mainly rich there; they had either a shop or a hair salon, like my grandmother’s uncle. The fields, streets of the Armenians and Turks differed from each other. Those of Armenians were clean and neat, while those of the Turks were not that neat. My grandmother used to tell that there had been no serious incidents between the Armenians and Turks before the massacre.

- What was the situation there after 1915?

- In 1915, Kemal Bey (district governor) came to the village. Under the building of the local authorities, there was a prison, from where all the prisoners were released beforehand. As you know the massacre was mainly carried out by prisoners. Turkish and Armenian men were gathered to be sent to war. My grandmother said that they had learned about the start of the Balkan war from newspapers. At that time priest Hakob noticed that the Armenians were separated from the Turks. He asked why they had done it and Turkish hazarapet (governor) replied: “Papaz effendi, we take Armenians for work.”

- All these happened on Friday evening. Already on Sunday, Turks came with truncheons, knocked at the door of priest Hakob’s house and even did not allow him to put on his clothes. Hazarapet said to him, that his life had come to its end and he could say his last word. Then my grandmother’s grandfather began to pray on his knees. Afterwards he was beheaded and his head was used instead of a football ball. During the massacre, there were Armenians, who gave gold to save their lives. However, after taking gold, Turks killed them as well.

- How was your family saved?

- All the males of our family were taken away. To save the life of my grandmother’s uncle, Harutyun, my grandmother’s family took out a stone from a barn wall, dug a place for Harutyun to hide him there during the daytime. The police came, searched, but could not find him. He could come out from the hiding place only at night. To save his uncle’s life, my grandmother went to hazarapet, whose wife was an Armenian, and asked him to save Harutyun’s life. Hazarapet pulled a button off his uniform, showed it to my grandmother and told her to send Harutyun with a policeman, who would bring that button to them. Hazarapet went to the Bey and asked him to save Harutyun’s life as a good barber. At first Bey objected, asking whether they did not have a good Turkish barber, so that he wanted to save an Armenian. However, in the end, they managed to persuade him, as Harutyun was a very good barber. Thus, he saved the lives of Harutyun and his wife. Accompanied by a policeman, Harutyun reached their place. There was an order posted on the door of their house by the
authorities not to touch the family members. Thus, as long as their house was intact, many Armenians found shelter at their place. As my grandmother used to say, the number of people reached 40 at their place.

- Did you use to talk about this story in your family?

- My grandmother used to tell it. I loved asking questions. After my grandfather died, at nights I lay next to my grandmother and asked her to tell about their country, about the massacre. She called Turkey “the country”. One day my grandmother told me that she did not know how she had managed to survive at that time, but now her heart ached. She asked me not to speak about it, as she could not stand it any longer.

- Have you been to Turkey? If yes, what were your feelings there?

- I have not been to Turkey, but I have always wanted to be there. I want to see, to feel the land, on which my grandmother, grandfather and my ancestors walked. I would also like to walk through the exile path to Deir ez-Zor, on which my grandfather walked.

- What is your vision of the reconciliation of the two societies? Do you have your own suggestions on this?

- The story of my family, all the cruel stories that we hear come to prove that the reconciliation with Turks, unfortunately, is not possible yet. It is impossible to forget that pain…
I Wonder Whether Zaven Told That It Was a Turk or a Kurd that Saved Him

Interviewee: Kurdish Retired Teacher Hasan Okat

- Will you share the story how your family saved Armenians in 1915?

- This story happened to my great uncle, i.e. my grandfather’s brother. We were from Sasun. During those events, my grandfather’s uncle hid the 9-year-old Armenian boy Zaven in a stable. Zaven’s whole family was killed and exiled. Great uncle, Mehmet, gave Zaven to the Russians, when they arrived in Sasun. I do not know whether Zaven or my great uncle wanted to do so. We did not talk about it, but they said that the moment of farewell was very impressive. Zaven walked to the Russian side, but then ran towards my uncle, hugged him and said: “I cannot live anywhere else, Memo.” At home we were always told about this incident. Our family always wondered where Zaven would go and what future he would have.

- Do you talk about that with your acquaintances?

- In Sasun we used to speak about it. There are many such stories, there were Armenian women, who adopted Islam and remained in Turkey, but when we came to Istanbul in 1980, we saw that it was not easy to speak about those things.

- Did you use to talk about this story in your family?

- Of course we were talking about it. "What would have happened if they had not come to live with us?" This was a usual question we tried to find an answer to. We also talked about the people, who had taken the possessions and the property of Armenians, but were not able to enjoy them. The elderly people, commenting on the latest events taking place in Kurdish towns¹, say: “It’s the Armenians’ curse, the Armenians were killed on these lands, and their curse stayed here.”

- Has your family tried to learn about the fate of the family saved or get in connection with them? Would you like today to learn about them or contact them?

- I would certainly like to, but I think the elderly ones would like it more. They lived with the Armenians side by side, they were neighbors. My great uncle found Zaven starving; he was the only one from the family, who survived. My uncle hid him and told that if someone had noticed him they would have harmed our family, too. I wonder whether Zaven told that it was a Turk or a Kurd that saved him. This is a huge puzzle for me.

- What is your vision of the reconciliation of the two societies? Do you have your own suggestions on this?

- I do not know, I think the answer is quite difficult. Turkey seems to want to accept what happened, but there comes a moment that it denies again and says that what happened was a joint pain, a common pain. On the other hand, people living abroad, i.e. Zaven’s grandchildren, show increasingly tough attitude. The gap seems to be growing between us, it becomes more and more difficult to come together and communicate.

¹ The continuous destruction of the Kurdish populated areas, continuous clashes between Kurdish militias and government forces in the Turkish Southeastern towns - in the territory of Western Armenia
Time Heals All Wounds, but Does Not Let Them Disappear

Interviewee: President of “Roman” Condominium
Hrant Karamyan

- **Will you, please, briefly tell the story of your family?**

  - “Armenia’s wrestling patriarch” this was how people surrounding my father were calling him. My father, Ashot Karamyan, son of Mnatsakan, was born in 1908 in Stahan village of Kars. He lost his parents, all the members of his family during Yeghern (Armenian Genocide) and stayed alone. His father, Mnatsakan, was beheaded in his presence. His mother and brother died on the way of deportation. He had two sisters but got no information about them. The elder one, Ashkhen, according to my father, was a very beautiful girl and she was kidnapped by the very Armenians in the village.

  My father told us his story, when we were still children. However, he did not like talking about it much; he always became sad remembering his relatives.

- **How was your father’s life saved during the 1915 events?**

  - He told that he had a friend, whose name was Sanasar. Both of them were saved by a Turkish woman, who hid them under her skirt. The horror of Genocide was always present in his childhood memories. He told the details about their deportation, what he did together with his friend Sanasar to survive the hunger.

  Somehow they managed to reach Etchmiadzin, from where they were sent to the American orphanage of the Leninakan polygon. The life in the orphanage, however, did not become an obstacle for him. Almost all his orphanage friends later became great people: judges, scientists, poets.

  In the very orphanage his career in sport started. He had a football team in the orphanage and then started to go in for wrestling. During the period of 1927-1931 he was an absolute champion of Armenia and Transcaucasia. Then he was sent to Moscow to study at Moscow Institute of Physical Culture and Sport. Returning, he held leading positions in Leninakan and Yerevan. To cut it short, he devoted his life to sport. He participated in the Patriotic War. My father died in 1993 at the age of 85.

- **In what relations was your family with the Turks before the events of 1915?**

  - My father told that there were Turks, who living next to the Armenians for many years, risked their lives to save their neighbors. He told that they were in good relations with their Turkish neighbors. In the end common people are not guilty; the government should be blamed and its policy of “cleansing.”

- **Have you ever been to Turkey? If yes, what did you feel?**
- No. My father used to say, “If you take me there I will find our house.” He had a large family; all of them lived in the same place. When we were still children, people, who came from there, told my father, that he had a very large family. However, only he managed to survive.

- What is your vision of the reconciliation of the two societies? Do you have your own suggestions on this?

- Time heals all wounds, but of course, does not let them be forgotten. Life continues. A neighbor should find a common language with a neighbor; they should come to a common conclusion. This is only possible in case of compromise. However, we cannot stand their tough policy. Even the Germans apologized, but they do not want to speak about it.

The Turkish government should understand that this issue must be resolved. Perhaps one day the Turkish government will be represented by such people, who will realize that you can never run away from your past. We have nothing against the Turkish people.

We should stick to our claims. They should at least apologize. This situation cannot continue for a long time.

Hatice Became a Muslim, but on Sundays She Prayed in Her Room

Interviewee: a Turkish Musician Mert Akdamar

- Will you share the story how your family saved Armenians in 1915?

- We are a Turkish family from Ardvin. We do not know the extent we are Turks, as the ethnic map here is very complicated. There are Georgians, Greeks here. However, we have always been told that we are Turks. After all, if we try to examine, I think we will not be able to exactly say, to what extent we are Turks and to what not. Our elders have already died.

I do not remember the name of the village of my family, if I am not mistaken, it was connected with Ardanush. When the deportations and the robbery of the Armenians started, my grandfather saw a girl in torn clothes from the window. He understood what was happening and let her in; fed her and that night she remained there. I do not remember it quite well, but if I am not mistaken her name was Anahit, though everyone called her Hatrice. In the morning, she asked to hide her, otherwise she would be killed. My family liked her very much, one of the women said: “Stay with us, become our daughter-in-law, we will marry you to one of our sons” But Hatice’s aim was to find her relatives, members of the family. I do not know whether on purpose (either she did not want to become their daughter-in-law, or wanted to avoid
further problem), she said that she was not “clean” (meaning virgin), as bad things had been done with her.

My family started thinking after those words as honor was very important for them. Afterwards they told her just to live in their house and help them in the housework. My grandfather, who had first seen her and brought her home, on the one hand felt pity for her, on the other hand liked Hatice a lot.

Hatice agreed and started living with my family. After a week she was better and her beauty became even more vivid.

Hatice was very beautiful and my great grandmother was very jealous of her husband. Seeing that his son – my grandfather, was not indifferent towards Hatice, she decided to marry them. I still remember Hatice. She prepared “Corek” (a sweet cake) and after many years we understood that it was the “Corek” prepared by Christians during Easter. In fact, she wanted to keep her traditions. She became Muslim, but our women knew that on Sundays, she was praying in her bedroom. When they were angry with our children, they were saying “giavourcuk” (children, who do have no belief). We did not understand why they were calling our children like that. Later we understood.

- Do you talk about that with your acquaintances?

- An interesting thing happened. We were trying to understand Armenians, but Hatice’s grandchildren never wanted to talk about Armenians, they did not touch that topic. Then, we understood that they were afraid that people would understand that they have Armenian blood. Afterwards, we did not tell this to anyone.

- Did you use to talk about this story in your family?

- How to say, so as to put it correctly. I am not competent to tell about this, as Hatice has children and grandchildren. I can say, it is not a problem for me, but maybe they do not want this topic to be touched. I have not shared this with anyone except you.

We are talking about this in our family, but not in the context of politics. That is to say, we do not ask what happened with the Armenians, what we did, mostly we remember the food Hatice prepared. No one knew how that food was prepared. Or we remember how much grandfather Mahmut was in love with Hatice. My great uncle loved her very much.

- What is your vision of the reconciliation of the two societies? Do you have your own suggestions on this?

- It is difficult to say. The word “peace” is very far away from Turkey and is a very difficult word. We are engaged in a fight both inside and outside the country, we are going far away from the EU, the Kurdish peace process was deliberately destroyed. There is a big fight between the religious and secular ones. Nothing like this has ever happened. Maybe, what I say may sound very cruel, but in such conditions Armenian-Turkish peace seems quite far away and difficult.
Lena Kalvuryan (the first one from the left), her grandmother Aghavni Kalvuryan and her brother Minas Kalvuryan

My Grandfather Answered to the Turk: I Will Die on My Feet, but Will Not Live on My Knees

Interviewee: Philologist Lena Kalvuryan

- Will you, please, briefly tell the story of your family?

- My family - my grandfather (Minas Kalvuryan), grandmother (Aghavni Kalvuryan), my father and two sisters - migrated from Adabazar in 1916. My father graduated from Constantinople’s (Turkish Istanbul) Central College. Vardapet (priest) Komitas was teaching him music, and Khrimyan Hayrik - theology. During World War I Turkish authorities took advantage of the opportunity and began to massacre the Armenians. Armenians were forcibly moved from their homes, and those who did not obey were killed on the spot. Grandmother’s elder sister was living in Adana. She had 9 children - 6 boys and 3 girls. His whole family - 30 people, was killed overnight during Adana massacres.

- Until the 1915 events what relations did your family have with Turks?

- Until the 1915 the people were very friendly, they were like brothers and sisters. My grandfather used to cooperate with Turkish Pashas, to sell them horses. My grandmother often stressed that the Turkish people were not guilty of the Genocide against the Armenians. She claimed that the crime was committed by specially trained groups of killers, formed just for the purpose of slaughtering the Armenians. They carried out the orders of the Turkish authorities.

- How was your grandmother’s family saved during the 1915 events?

- My grandmother told that one day the local priest went to their place and told them to quickly leave the house without taking anything with them. Leaving the house, they reached the station, where a large crowd of Armenians had already gathered. In such a crowd even mother and son did not recognize each other. At that time a Turkish pasha, to whom my grandfather had sold horses, approached my grandfather and offered him to give shelter to the family in his house, on condition that the names of the girls should be changed into Turkish ones. My grandfather refused, replying: “I will die standing on my feet, but will not live on my knees.”

After that the Turkish Pasha advised my grandmother’s family to skip the first train and go by the second one. When the family reached Derzor by the second train, they saw that the Turks had massacred those Armenians who had reached there by the first train and built a barricade with their bodies. When seeing this, people like madmen ran out of the train, crying, “My son,” “My husband,” “My wife,” but in vain...

On their way, my grandfather died of typhus. Grandmother and her children dug a hole as much as they could and buried him just near the road. The next day they saw that the wolves had devoured my grandfather’s body, as they had not been able to dig the hole deep enough. My grandmother could not forgive herself the fact that my grandfather did not rest in peace.

With great difficulties my family at last reached Greece, and then they moved to...
- Have you ever been to Turkey? If yes, what did you feel?

- I have not been to Turkey, but remember that my grandmother said very often: “Oh, I wish the roads were opened and I could go to the country.” She did not come to terms with the loss of her native home in Turkey.

- What is your vision of the reconciliation of the two societies? Do you have your own suggestions on this?

- I do not blame the working class. We have lived together as brothers and sisters, without making any distinction between the nationalities. Reconciliation will happen only when the current Turkish government finally understands that dictatorship cannot survive long. In the end this dictatorship will be overthrown by its own people, because people can no longer live under the hand of a torturer. I have nothing against the Turkish people. If they were bad people, today representatives of our society would not be able to enter Turkey and trade with the Turks.

- Hambardzum Was Renamed “Halil”, Circumcised, but He Never Forgot that He Was an Armenian

Interviewee: Kurdish Cook Huseyin Akce

- Will you share the story how your family saved Armenians in 1915?

- When everything began in Bitlis, when things got worse there, Armenians asked for help from their neighbors. Our village was called Sekh, if I am not mistaken. This was an Armenian village, or a village, where Armenians and Kurds used to live together. I do not know for sure.

The Turks came and began to slaughter. I should note that not every Kurd in the village helped the Armenians, many of them participated in the robbery and “Zouloum” (tragedy).

One night the neighbor’s wife came to our house and said that they were being exiled and asked to leave their son Hambardzum with us. Hambardzum was only 7 years old at that time. My grandfather refused saying that they would harm both the child and our family. Then my grandmother came and agreed to take the child. Grandpa got very angry with grandma Telli and even beat her at night.
They renamed Hambardzum Halil, circumcised, but he never forgot that he was an Armenian. When he turned 20, they wanted to marry him to a Kurdish girl. Hambardzum refused saying that he wanted to get married to an Armenian girl. However, he was forced to marry a Kurd.

Uncle Halil became a father of three boys, whom he sent to Istanbul, where they regained their Armenian identity. Like our other uncles, we loved Halil very much. My family also loved Halil. And he loved our granny Telli, but he did not love the grandfather, whose “heart was from stone”, as he used to say. Halil also said that if not his mother, he would not be alive.

I remember him, he was a good person, but he was not happy. Even when he was smiling, his eyes were not smiling. He could not get fully happy.

- Do you talk about that with your acquaintances?

- When we moved to Istanbul, we could not get close friends and relatives there, and could not speak about this to anybody. We did not speak much in Bitlis either. We were hiding the truth for many years. After the death of Hrant Dink, these topics caused less tension; people began to speak much easily. I have participated in April 24 commemoration events every year except the one this year. Of course Hrant Dink had a huge role, but we lost the appropriate atmosphere of the previous years.

- Did you use to talk about this story in your family?

- We used to talk about it in our family, especially women did. As far as I know, there were many such cases in the neighboring villages, too.

- Has your family tried to learn about the fate of the family saved or get in connection with them? Would you like today to learn about them or contact them?

- We used to have contacts; we keep in touch with the grandchildren.

- What is your vision of the reconciliation of the two societies? Do you have your own suggestions on this?

- We should talk, we should keep in touch. It will be difficult for Armenians to make the first step. The Turks should do it. After all it was us, who made these people leave their lands, and we should heal the wounds.
### Turkey: View from Within

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The front cover demonstrates Hagia Sophia and the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, as well as the heroes of stories/interviews and their families. The back cover demonstrates dilapidated bridge on the Armenian-Turkish border. The photo of the bridge was provided by Lika Khachatryan, to whom we express our gratitude. Photos of the heroes of interviews/stories are placed with the relevant story/interview. In case no such photo was available, one of the person's birthplace has been placed.