

Turkeys War Against Mountainous Karabakh

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The 9th May is the anniversary of the great victory in the war for the liberation of Mountainous Karabakh. On the 8th of May 1992 the military offensive began and led one day later to the liberation of Shushi. A few days later the Lachin Corridor was taken and the essential land connection with Armenia was secured. This was an historic event and led to a strategic turn around in the Liberation War as on the 12th May 1994 a ceasefire agreement was signed which has held up until today. Nevertheless, Mountainous Karabakh is a long way off from enjoying a real peace. What is so often forgotten when the issue of solving the conflict is discussed is the role of Turkey in the conflict. Turkey has a strong influence on the Government in Baku and during the war did its utmost to support the Azerbaijani government. In essence the Armenians had to fight not only Azerbaijan but Turkey too.

A historical assessment of the events in the South Caucasus during the First World War shows that the current Turkish Government is to a great extent continuing the anti-Armenian policies of the Young Turk regime. The Bolshevik revolution was a godsend for the Ottoman Empire and its anti-Armenian policies as it gave the opportunity and excuse to advance towards Turan. This idea was enthusiastically promoted by the Young Turk ideologists and Enver Pascha was possessed by the idea of creating a new and powerful empire that should stretch as far as Central Asia. In February 1918 Turkish troops went into the offensive and occupied Erzindjan and Trabzon. Through advancing towards South Caucasus the Turkish troops were able to continue its annihilation campaign against the Armenians. They simply took over the criminal murder policy which led to the destruction of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire and continued the policy in South Caucasus. They fuelled anti-Armenian sentiment among the Azerbaijani and fuelled their xenophobia. The extreme anti-Armenian character of the Azerbaijani Nationalism which developed between 1918 and 1920 was clearly influenced by Turkey and its racist Young Turk government. The exiled Georgian politician Matschabelli reported to the German Foreign Office on the 10th April 1918 that Turkey had decided to decimate "this Nation with the help of the Muslim tribes in the Caucasus". The German General von Lossow who was regarded as a glowing example of German

Imperialism and was also an eye witness to Turkish expansionism in the Caucasus, wrote that “Turkey was prepared to bleed dry the Caucasus countries and eliminate the Armenians”.

The Turkish troops who had advanced up to Baku carried out with their Azerbaijani allies a brutal massacre. Within a few days over 30,000 Armenians had been slaughtered. This unbridled hatred for Armenians which the Young Turks had sowed amongst the Azerbaijani in 1918 rose to the surface in February 1988 as in Sumgait, Kirowbad, Baku and other cities in Azerbaijan Pogroms against Armenians were instigated. These events were described in the Western press as “nationality conflicts” or “national disturbances between Islamic Azerbaidjani and Christian Armenians”. In reality, these incidents were nothing short of a one-sided war against the Armenian population. The Pogroms were not just spontaneous attacks of Azerbaijani against their Armenian neighbors, but the start of a planned campaign, organized and led by the authorities and nationalistic circles, against all Armenians living in Azerbaijan and Mountainous Karabakh. A repeat of the events which occurred under the Young Turk regime Seventy years ago, which in turn was a continuation of the policy beginning in 1915 under the Ottoman Empire to annihilate through Genocide, expulsion and war the Armenian people.

It is no secret that in June 1992, after the “Azerbaijan Peoples Front” had taken over the government in Turkey there was a torrent of Turks volunteering to go in Azerbaijan to fight against the Armenians. There were also Turks who fought as mercenaries in Azerbaijan. In July 1993 a long interview was published in the Turkish magazine NOKTA with a Legionnaire. He had already served in the French Foreign legion and had gained war experience in several conflict regions. As leader of a 65 man band of mercenaries, he participated in war against Armenians in Mountainous Karabakh. According to his statement thousands of Turkish fascists took part in this war. Especially, after Ebulfez Elcibey had come to power, the influence of the Turkish fascists increased in Azerbaidjan. Moreover numerous military advisors took part in the war against the Armenians but due to the secrecy surrounding this operation the true extent of Turkish involvement is difficult to assess. It was not just Turkey who either openly or undercover supported the war against Armenians in Mountainous Karabakh. Almost unnoticed and out of the public eye, Germany was also a supporter of the Azerbaijani military effort. After the German reunification Germany disposed of the military inventory of the “National Peoples Army” of the former German Democratic Republic and donated the weapons to various needy countries. Turkey received over 100,000 anti-tank

grenades, 250,000 Kalashnikovs, 5000 heavy machine guns and countless armored vehicles. This arsenal was partly used in subduing the Kurdish liberation Movement, but at the beginning of 1992 it became public that most of the weapons from the “National Peoples Army” had somehow reached the war zone in Mountainous Karabakh. In the German Parliament, the left Socialist opposition faction demanded the Government to account for the donated weapons which had found their way to Azerbaijan. “According to our information, weapons belonging to the former “National Peoples Army” which were donated to Turkey are now in Azerbaijan” was the wording of a parliamentary question in February 1992. Naturally, the Government claimed not to have any information or knowledge as to how or if the weapons donated to Turkey had been passed on to Azerbaijan.

The southern Caucasus is viewed by the Turkish government as being in their realm of influence and the region is regarded as essential for “national interests and “national security” of Turkey. Any positive development for Armenia is recorded in Ankara as a threat to Turkish regional influence. This means that in the interest of “national interest” and “national security” Armenia must remain weak and isolated in the region, thereby being sensitive to Turkish pressure at any time. Turkey is aware of its strategic importance for the West and will therefore continue to display self-confidence in its dealings with the Western allies in furthering their interests in the southern Caucasus. In view of this scenario it is hardly possible that an agreement between Baku and Yerevan could be reached without taking into account Turkey and their interests. Even though the Turkish Foreign Minister in a letter to the new Armenian government wrote that Turkey was interested in the normalization of relationships between the two states, there will be no movement in this direction in the coming years. “Cooperation is out of discussion unless there is improvement in the settlement of the Mountainous Karabakh conflict” Turkey’s Ambassador to Azerbaijan Hulusi Kilic told journalists in Baku. He said that Turkey had two terms for establishing diplomatic relations with Armenia. First of all, progress should be obtained in the settlement of Mountainous Karabakh conflict and secondly, Armenia should give up attempts for the recognition of 1915 events as Armenian genocide.

Turkey and Azerbaijan will continue their customary policy against Armenia. On one hand they will send out signals to the West showing their willingness in finding a peaceful solution to the conflict. On the other hand, they will reinforce the isolation of Armenia and accelerate the military preparations for a war. The new Armenian government will not have any more possibilities than the previous. For 14 years the

policy of “Winning Time” has worked out well. However, Turkey and Azerbaijan have also used this time for preparations and at the moment they are in a better position than Armenia, politically and economically. This fact should not be forgotten. Unfortunately, as has happened so often in the past, Armenians tend to underestimate their enemies and overestimate themselves and this time the consequences could be irreversible.

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