

THE PROBLEM OF ISLAMIZED¹ ARMENIANS IN TURKEY

Ruben Melkonyan

The paper examines some details of the problem of Armenians in Turkey in the early 20th century, attempting to show a general view of the current situation. Also identified with regard to the issues of Armenians are the approaches of the scientific analytical community and the mass media, as well as individual elements of the official policies endorsed by the Turkish authorities.

In different centuries the Armenian nation was subject to various pressures and persecutions, as well as enforced Islamization. Invading the region, mostly Muslim conquerors had set an objective to Islamize the ethnic Christian majority, which turned out to become the corner stone of the policy administered by the state. Islamization of Armenians used to be enforced by a variety of techniques, including death threats, tax evasion charges and other legal persecutions [1, pp. 139-143, 187-188; 2, pp. 22-25]. Adopting the enforced Islam, that part of Armenians in the course of time by different reasons, willy-nilly distanced themselves from their mother roots and from their Christian compatriots, which eventually resulted in their partial or complete assimilation. It was also caused by the fact that both formerly and nowadays, the religious confession enjoys a priority over ethnic identity in the matter of differentiating the human individuals. Thus, the concepts of being Armenian and Christian have become identical to the exclusion of the concept of the Armenian apostasy. Orientalist Alexander Khachatrian noted in this connection: “Christianity for the Armenians is not only a confession, it is a world view, the base of the nation’s existence. By this reason, apostasy in the Medieval Armenia was tantamount to state treason. To be converted to another religion meant to switch national identity. To be Christian, therefore Armeno-Gregorian was regarded as an attribute of Christianity. Apostasy therefore is qualified as defection and treachery” [3, p. 26].

It is a known fact that the mandatory Islamization of Armenians took place

¹The term “Islamized Armenians” is used by the author to mention those Armenians, who were forcedly converted to Islam in the Ottoman Empire and Republic of Turkey (*ed.*).

on a large scale following the invasion of the Turkic tribes to Asia Minor and Armenian Highland [4]. Regarded as an easy target for religious conversion were children, whose islamization at an early age facilitated annihilation of the newly emerging national and religious self-consciousness. That was the operational logic of a wide-spread and long-time children institution (devshirme) of the Ottoman Empire, another name of this institution being “Blood Duty” [5; 6, pp. 247-256]:

The Armenians, being one of the main non-Muslim nations of the Ottoman Empire, have been coming naturally from time to time under enforced Islamization, varying in scale at different times. It is, however, generally known that the latest large-scale action of Islamizing Armenians occurred during the Armenian genocide in 1915-23.

It will not be superfluous to note that for decades the domestic scholarly periodicals and communities have discussed the imperative of studying the Turkey-based Armenians being placed at different levels of alienation. Many experts have called for the research to be conducted on the issue, giving the appropriate substantiation. The problem of Armenians can be classified among the crucial issues of Armenian studies, requiring a relevant level of attention. On the other hand, both within the region and in Turkey in particular, in the context of different actions, the problem of Armenians can produce certain political repercussions. It is quite natural, that for quite some time already the study of this problem has been supported by great European powers, like Germany, having collected a significant bulk of sub-ethnic information on Eastern Turkey through the efforts by religious missions and similar structures. This issue has been also discussed by Ruben Safrastian, a renowned Turkologist, head of the Institute of Oriental Studies, in his latest interview, stating that “only recently did we start showing interest in Turkey living population that survived as a result of enforced Islamization and Turkish assimilation. However, efforts in this domain have been underway since the 1970s, mostly on the part of Germany-based evangelic organizations. Their general data are fairly well known, although a little obsolete. According to those data, the number of veiled Christians in Eastern Turkey reaches one million. There can be no doubt that most of them are Armenians” [7, pp. 111-112].

In the problem of the Turkey’s Armenians and its interpretation (wheter they should be recognized as Armenians) there are different, often contradictory opinions in the Armenian specialized literature. Thus, the historian Karen Khanlarian noted: “...One who considers himself an Armenian, and is aware of his Armenian origin and routes, is Armenian, indisputably, no matter where he lives, what language he speaks, what his name is, or confession he was forced to accept.

With regard to this approach, we are confronted with the renewed

commitment to recognize the situation of our Armenian brothers residing now in Turkey” [8, p. 4]:

As noted by another author, Arsen Artsruni, “An Armenian is one who in his cumulative entity has at least a single element within his overall identity allowing him to declare and admit that he is Armenian. One of those is having and admitting the Armenian ancestors, as well as the idea of nation, regarding that everyone belongs to the nation of his ancestors. This attribute is decisive, in contrast to the one of being an Armenian speaker or a Christian... The roots as a determinant of identity is the most important factor, because many “alienated” Armenians are Armenians because they remember their predecessors to have been Armenian. They have to be always accepted on our part as Armenians, not only when they achieve international recognition. ...Therefore, being Armenian by a home-country resident who understands the roots, does not have to cause any doubt at all” [9, pp. 128, 130], concludes the author.

With regard to this issue, there is another viewpoint put forward by Armen Aivazian, a political scientist, that “An Armenian is one, who adopts Armenia as his unique home country, has a strong psychological attachment to Armenia’s land, nation, language and culture, has a feeling of personal responsibility for Armenia’s future, and is a carrier of Armenian language and culture” [10]. Thus, according to Aivazian, this and other factors make the Armenian differ from one who is Armenian by origin. He thinks that with regard to the Armenian identity, origin is of an inferior significance, so that the issue of the real national identity is determined in the course of life of the person in question, his personal involvement and the relevant traditions.

Emerging from even a superficial examination of the Armenians problem in Turkey were many facts enabling to talk about some locally maintained national identity, or at least its memory, which, in case of a favorable situation, can theoretically become a basis for their improved organization. It is obvious that within the mass of Crypto (Hidden) and Islamized Armenians living in Turkey there is a tendency to retain the national origins or at least an interest to them. Thus, it is expressed in different manners: efforts at being loyal to both purely ethnic features, and to the principles of the former religion - Christianity. However, for the Armenians maintaining their existence in Turkey, placed at different levels of assimilation and loss of identity, a mandatory and crucial condition for evaluating the elements of ethnic and religious self-consciousness would be to be exactly aware and to account for the environment wherein they live, only outwardly. In Turkey, where being an Armenian or non-Muslim even today is dangerous, retaining a classical Armenianness is difficult, if not impossible,

all the more so, not only in Istanbul, but also in incomparably more remote underdeveloped western provinces. That is, before “putting a blame” on the apostate Armenians or judging them using the standards of Armenian behavior inside Armenia, all those factors have to be taken into account. As much as only a full or misrepresented secret administration of certain national or Christian elements of customs under a better set of conditions can become a pledge for their possible reconversion. One of the best proofs of retaining the different layers of Armenian self-consciousness is the fact that if a favorable opportunity offers, the Armenians cut off from their roots by violence and force, are trying to return to their roots. The striking example is that among the Armenians at different periods of time, there occur officially registered reconversions. Thus, there were reconversions of Armenians, belonging to different generations, which confirms their retaining the collective and historical memory on their roots. It is also known that an important factor of being Armenian is the mastery of the native language. Meanwhile, it is also known, to what scale the problem of Armenian language nowadays is spread in the midst of the Armenian nation dispersed worldwide. As for the Turkish apostate Armenians one can say that until now they use certain individual Armenian words. There is also another important fact, witnessed personally many times. A manual textbook for learning Armenian in Turkish was spread among Crypto and Islamized Armenians in Western Armenia last year. In Van and Mush, many Crypto and Islamized Armenians showed us that book that had enabled them to learn their native tongue, with great inspiration and somewhat in secret. This fact attest that among the locally based Armenians there is a great desire to learn their native language. However, it is not realistic to require of the Islamized and Crypto Armenians a knowledge of Armenian as a guarantee for being Armenian, with regard to the situation that because of the poor knowledge of Armenian, the preaching in the Armenian Church of Istanbul is conducted in Turkish, and the number of Armenian schools would go down very rapidly, being on the verge of extinction.

It is important to be aware that the issue of the Turkish Armenians is multi-level, that will in turn require a special approach, otherwise resulting wrong conclusions. It is also important to realize that smoothing the differences between different layers of Islamized Armenians in Turkey or showing preference to optimistic or pessimistic approaches is completely wrong. We cannot alienate those who under such a difficult conditions are striving to retain their Armenian elements in a clandestine way. We have already seen multiple former Armenians who have unfortunately been lost for us for good.

The majority of the apostate Armenians in Turkey nowadays has forcedly

adopted Islam, being constrained to choose between life and death under duress, confronted with the choice of life or death. Looking at the presently assimilated Armenians or along that line in Turkey, we often argue about their disputable and complex situation and its definition. It may be assumed that to clarify this issue, one has to consider the following arguments: The Armenians of Turkey are people at different stages of the loss of identity and assimilation, very few of them having a distinct Armenian ethnic image. They can be provisionally divided into two groups: праздник

- Ethnically pure Armenians, who had retained certain elements of the national and religious (Christian) customs, festivals, rituals, forgot the language, but kept, although perhaps in a fragmentary way, some portion of their Armenian self-consciousness. They have been clandestinely trying to retain it and pass it over to the next generations. The partakers of this group are herein provisionally called *Crypto Armenians*.
- Generations of Armenians, whose predecessors have been forced into Islam, most of them know and accept it, however, being severed from the Armenian environment, they have retained very few elements of the national and religious customs, being Kurdish-speaking, Arab-speaking, or Turkish-speaking, while culturally they have become Kurdish or Turkish. This group, e.g., in contrast to the *Crypto Armenians*, have lost the institute of internal marriages, resulting in their ethnic assimilation as well. To be placed in the same group are also people having a certain portion of Armenian origin, whose grandmothers or grandfathers were Armenians, and the memory of that fact has been kept among them. They do constitute the great army of half-breeds that are constantly in the focus of public attention both in Turkey and abroad. Part of those half-breeds take pride in declaring their partial Armenian origin, meanwhile, there are also people inside that group who for different reasons flatly deny their Armenian origin, moreover, according to some sources, included in their ranks are even extreme Turkish nationalists, members of the “Grey Wolves” organization. We think that this phenomenon has also a specifically psychological aspect, as commented by the aforementioned A. Artsruni. While writing on the negative attitude of the Apostolic Armenians to the Armenians converted to Catholicism, he notes: “By classifying the Catholic Armenians, “Franks”, as non-Armenians, we pushed them into becoming Greek, Georgian, Arab... After being banished by the majority of Armenians, some of those “Greeks”, “Georgians”, or “Arabs” found no reason to forego adopting the Muslim religion or the Turkish nationality. *In fact that article is a subconscious Armenian revenge through Islamization*” [9, p. 129].

Those groups of apostate Armenians are suppressed both spiritually and psychologically, living in fear, real and sub-conscious, have a double identity, for the outside and the inside world. The relevant specialists study the genocide survivors and their emerging issues, however, we think that the psychological image of converted Armenians should be made subject of special examination.

The Armenians Islamized in the early 20th century and currently living in Turkey have mostly evolved from the following groups:

- During the Armenian genocide, the Armenians who, if only externally, had adopted Islam,
- Armenian girls and women kidnapped during the genocide and married to Kurds or Turks,
- Armenian children forcibly adopted by Muslims during the genocide,
- a certain number of Armenians having found shelter with Muslim neighbors or others,
- a limited number of Armenian craftsmen or exclusive specialists with the knowledge and will of the authorities.

Looking at the Armenians Islamized in the genocide years, some Turkish sources emphasized that many Armenians had adopted Islam willingly. As however noted above, that willingness was in reality a choice between life and death, and so some Armenians preferred to adopt Islam. However, it was not wide-spread, and could not be a widespread phenomenon, since the Turkish state-run machine in 1915 desired to annihilate, rather than assimilate the Armenians. That is also attested by the fact that in the years of the genocide the readiness of Armenians to adopt Islam voluntarily has not always been approved by the authorities. For example, preserved in the archives of the Turkish government were executive orders and instructions from high-ranking Turkish officials of the Interior Ministry headed by Taleat Pasha, demanding to ignore the religious conversion by the Armenians and to exile the Armenians to pre-determined locations.

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The problem of Crypto and Islamized Armenians is naturally disquieting and causing some concerns within the Turkish academic and “under-academic” communities, as attested by the ever-increasing research and publications on the subject. However, it is to be noted that all those things can be set up in a broader concept of an “identity crisis”, which can be currently regarded as a fairly timely and agenda-oriented issue in Turkey. Turkey has lately been more and more preoccupied with

the issues of national identity. Remarkable in that respect is the idea expressed by the late Hrant Dink on the crisis of identity in Turkey: “If some day Turkey should collapse, it will not be by weapons, but through the identity issue”¹.

The same issue was approached at another angle by the ethnologist Harutyun Marutyan, in whose opinion Turkey refuses to recognize the past, particularly the genocide of Armenians, in order not only to evade losses in finances, territory or morality, but also due to “fear of a possible collapse in national identity, constructed upon decades of negation, that can trigger not only political, but also ethnic disturbances, and may jeopardize the unity of the state under the present-day conditions of multi-ethnicity” [11, p. 60].

It is quite natural that a number of eminent Turkish historians have publicly expressed published their views on the problem of Crypto and Islamized Armenians. One of those, professor Salim Johje, head of the Chair of History, Inonu University, suggested a direct link between the Crypto Armenians and the rally at the Hrant Dink funeral, calling that an awakening mark . He specifically noted: “I think that many of those taking part in Dink’s funeral were Crypto Armenians. To my mind, the Turkish Armenians having kept their identity hidden until that moment, going around under the names of Ahmet, Mehmet, at the time of the funeral burst suddenly open, as shown by the statement: “We are all Armenians, we are all Hrants”. Thus, the murder of Hrant Dink was actually a revelation for the Crypto Armenians [12, p. 8]. Addressing the same problem was also Chairman of the Turkish Historical Society, Yusoof Halachoghlu, a well-known faker of history, in whose opinion of the 50 000-strong Armenian community of Turkey, in Dink’s funeral took part 20 000 Armenians and 10 000 Turks, who raised their voice in solidarity, i.e., about 30 000 people in all. “Where are the rest of them?”, asks Halachoghlu, adding: “It is necessary now to study it all so as to know”. So, citing the thought by Dink that there are also Muslim Armenians in Turkey, Halachoglu expresses a suspicion that perhaps the rest of the funeral procession were those Armenians, suggesting that this should be assessed by the state investigatory institutions [13].

Some Turkish scholars and analysts consider the Crypto under-cover and Islamized Armenians a serious threat to Turkish security, calling for the state structures to take measures in this direction. Thus, the analyst Mehmet Shevket Eiq shows concern that in the Kars region the Crypto Armenians are buying land plots, which is suspicious. “It is already said that in this country Crypto Armenians live in large numbers, they look like Turks or Muslims, but if they indeed have Armenian identity and consciousness, that would mean that in the

¹ Hrant Dink expressed this idea in the US at a meeting of the Armenian community in 2007 and it is included in the film “Hrant Dink” by the director Hrant Hakobian.

middle of it there is an abnormal situation” [8, p. 105]. The same Salim Johje even suggested that towards 2015 the Crypto Armenians would start a war of terror: “It is interesting to note that in the early 20th century by whatever reason the efforts being carried out with regard of our citizens of Armenian origin in the last eight to ten years have achieved an unprecedented scale. This development could not happen just so, it is clear that lying in its basis are some designs for the future. By the year 2015, holding explanations with the Turks, acts of revenge against them, the objectives of rehabilitating the “Armenian Paradise,” all those things by the approach of the 100 anniversary of taking the decision on the exile and deportation, constitute the threats inherent to the problem of Crypto Armenians. Therefore I think that in the future, perhaps around 2013 – 2014, Turkey will undergo a salient or a clandestine assault on the part of the Crypto Armenians, particularly, that will differ a great deal from those in the early last century... I think that the armed movement by the Armenians will start in the cities. Specifically, in whatever city in the East or South-East of Anatolia, to undertake certain actions a colony of 10 – 12 000 is quite sufficient. As a matter of fact, approximately this number of Crypto Armenians is available” [14, p. 24-26].

The Turkish media and analysts often express opinions that the Crypto Armenians are very numerous in state-run institutions, as well as in the private sector. However, the Crypto Armenians are mostly blamed for cooperation with the Kurdish Workers’ Party (PKK), that has deployed a terrorist activity against the Turkish state. The apostate Armenians, according to the Turkish sources, play also an important role within other radical left organizations. That problem has again been greatly puffed up by the Chairman of the Turkish Historical Society, the “courtier” historian Yusoof Halachoghlu: on August 18, 2007 at a symposium in Caesaria he declared that the Turkey’s Kurds are mostly of Turkmen origin, while the Alevi Kurds are in reality apostate Armenians, who had falsely adopted Islam and changed their names in order to evade the “deportation” in 1915: “Many people today known as Alevi Kurds, are unfortunately apostate Armenians. Many members of the PKK and TIKKO terrorist organizations are those Armenians who try to separate our country. Thus, as we had suggested, the PKK and TIKKO are in actual fact not Kurdish movements” [15]. These words were immediately received with great enthusiasm, both positive and negative, in Turkish media and in the political, academic, and intellectual circles. During widely spread hot discussions, journalists like Mehmet Ylmaz from the *Hurriyet* paper, used to ask rhetorical question like: why should those Armenians have changed their names and presented themselves as Muslims? [16]. Meanwhile, a popular writer and journalist Murat Belge uttered an idea that by adopting Islam the saved Armenian showed what happened to those who did not take that step

[17]. Trying to counter the wave of criticism to be directed against him, Halachoghlu added that he possessed the list of Armenians and was in control of all data about them. “The details on 100 thousand apostate Armenians are at my disposal, their previous Armenian names, Turkish names, places of residence, etc.”, he declared, adding, that it should not be regarded as a threat [18]. According to Halachoghlu, he and his subordinate Turkish Historical Society “is a fortress against the claims of Armenian genocide,” and today in his works he is trying to answer to the question by the Armenian party as to where the 1 500 000 Armenians inhabiting those areas before 1915 are. The history faker presents this so-called “scholarly research” on the Armenians as the answer to that question, and pointing at the Armenians’ salvation from death by enforced Islamization, states: “Here are those “disappeared” Armenians, they had not been massacred, that means that the Armenian party has been lying all along. My statements completely obliterate the claims of the Armenian Diaspora” [19].

As expected, the Turkish state propaganda is trying in every way to present the issue in their favor, and it will be appropriate to note that presenting the enforced islamization of Armenians in this wrong way, distortion of facts, and drawing illogical conclusions is quite predictable, particularly as viewed by the specialists. It is however important to understand that the statements by Halachoghlu are not taken seriously even by some Turkish scholars. It is sufficient to cite the historian Taner Akcham, that “in 1915, some Armenians saved their lives by adopting Muslim religion. They had received permission first, but later, when more Armenians started to adopt Islam, there was a special order banning the apostasy [20]. Meanwhile, Osman Qoqer, former editor of the journal “Toplumsal tarih,” noted that Armenians used to adopt Islam not only in 1915, but starting from the time when the Turkic people appeared in Anatolia. Qoqer also rejects the statements by Halachoghlu, saying that it is at least not serious to think that Armenians could get saved by this simple method, that is by declaring themselves Kurdish or Alevi. According to him, the state knew in detail, which villages were Armenian and which were Kurdish. Qoqer also states that Islamization of Armenian women and orphans was a component of the state policy at that time [21].

As for the presence of apostate Armenians among Kurdish Alevis and Zazas, it is to be noted, that there are facts approving this statement and during the years of the Armenian genocide a lot of Armenians (about 20 to 40 thousand) found refuge with the Alevis of Dersim [22, p. 75]. The choice of Dersim was probably due to the fact that the Ottoman army, engaged in war, could not control this area too closely (because of the war going on at the time), enabling the local population to give them refuge. It is to be noted that the refuge to the Armenians

was granted mostly by the Alevis. After some personal communication with the Alevis of Dersim we learned that even today they remember the phrase "the Armenian of our house" which is a clear indication of the Armenians having been given refuge in their homes.

Those and other facts show that the problem of Islamized and Crypto Armenians is coming under more and more scrutiny, and that even evaluating Armenian musicians by Turkey at the European musical competition is linked with the issue of the Crypto Armenians, for allegedly they voted in favor of their compatriots. It is to be noted here that the Turkish telephone operators examined the SMS-messages to determine their origins.

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It is quite natural that many Turkish state structures pay a special attention to the problems of Islamized and Crypto Armenians. These are testified by detailed information about current locations, number, and the processes taken place within Apostate Armenian communities that appeared in media, analytical publications time to time. As noted by Taner Akcham, the Turkish state had taken measures beforehand to identify the Armenians converted to Islam during the genocide, for example demanding of the relevant entities to make special markings against the names of those Armenians in the registration books and in their identification documents [20]. Kemal Yalchin, a Germany-based Turkish writer also thinks that the Turkish state structures have always traced and continue tracing the Islamized and Crypto Armenians [23, p.10].

To be noted in this connection is another shading of the mentioned statement by Halachoglu: The history faker declared that he was in possession of the inventories of the Armenian apostates, carefully prepared, moreover, "checked by government entities visiting every home"[24]. The problem acquires a more interesting aspect, for Halachoglu evades indicating the exact sources. Naturally, there goes a question, if those people had been registered by the state, then it must have been done by the state-run circles and their operational environment. As to the more conventional means of accounting for the population, it is the census. It is known that the first ever census in Turkey was conducted in 1927, thence forward it was decided to run a census every five years [24]. However, found in the Turkish sources are data showing that in 1935 Turkey held repetitive censuses. Thus, data held in Turkey's parliamentary minutes showed that on May 29, 1934 the Turkish Mejlis passed the bill No. 2465, ruling to hold a census in 1935. It is remarkable that about one month later the same Mejlis passed another act, No. 2576, on a census of "secret population" which entered into force on June 15 of the same year.

Thus, there were two censuses, the census of “secret population” was completed in July 1935, while the general one went on until October of the same year [24]. The mentioned act consisted of 12 clauses, the first of which ruled that each person within 1.5 months should inform on the secret population residing at his home or subsidiary facilities, clause four established a 1 – 10 lyra fine for failing to report correct information [24]. Naturally, the official argumentation of the “secret population” was quite logical, so that it is quite possible that those censuses had indeed been designed to determine the true number of the population. It would have however been naive to suggest that in the course of this census of “secret population” no additional clarification was made of the numbers of Crypto Armenians sheltered by the Muslims or later. The fact gathering on the part of the State, particularly on the apostate Armenians residing in Dersim province, had certainly a specific purpose. It is known that in 1938 the Turkish government organized a massacre in Dersim, and talking about that, our companions among Alevi of Dersim quoted what they heard from their seniors about the massacre, saying that at that time number one target for the Turkish Army were Armenians hiding there after 1915. As noted by an old Dersim resident, “The unfinished work of 1915 was continued in 1938, so that at the time of that massacre many Armenians had been murdered”.

The undisputable situation is that Armenians in Turkey, either open or hidden or Islamized, are always under serious scrutiny by the state, being regarded as a potential hazard. This is attested by the following data: it is well known that on September 12, 1980 there was a military coup in Turkey, and the power was seized by the high-ranking military officers of the National Security Council who appointed all local commanders of the State of Emergency, who were given unlimited power. On September 8, 1982 the State of Emergency Command demanded the Security Service to check the territories for any Armenians or people with Armenian origin, and if any, to register them and to take them under surveillance [25]. The Turkish newspaper “The Radical” even published a report by a former member of the Turkish Security Service, stating particularly that “We received a written order from the State of Emergency Command. We have examined the area under our jurisdiction, asking whether there were citizens of Armenian origin. At the time of the state of emergency, everybody was afraid, since the Armenians were considered “secessionists,” so that if there were any, no one would dare to conceal them” [25]. It is to be added that similar orders are not unique in Turkey’s history, having been reiterated at different periods of time.

It should be noted that the issue of apostate Armenians is also a delicate question for Turkey, since it is directly linked with the crisis of ethnic identity, which, as noted above, can carry a formidable threat for the Turkish state. Some-

body may remember a sensation when the “Akos” newspaper on February 6, 2004 published an article by Hrant Dink, disclosing that Sabiha Gyoqchen, the great symbol of Turkey, the first woman pilot and the stepdaughter of Ataturk, was in actual fact an Armenian [26]. She had been one of the orphans of the Armenian genocide, and her real name was Khatun Sebiljian. This article found an extraordinarily large audience in Turkey, different organizations, structures came out with declarations. Particularly important was the strict warning issued by the Turkish army headquarters. But if we try to examine the underlying reasons of the public outcry after revealing the Armenian origin of Sabiha Gyoqchen, we shall see that the unveiling of the real ethnicity of the Turkish symbol, a popular female pilot, is directly linked with the security of the contemporary Turkish state. And if one of the main symbols is proven to be what the Turks imagine to be enemy, Armenian “Gyaur”, then some things in their self-consciousness must have got broken. Millions of Turks who have grown up in the atmosphere of hatred toward the Armenians, and have endorsed Sabiha Gyoqchen for a symbol, are now certainly living through a psychological crisis, since it has become clear that the symbol of their national greatness is actually of Armenian origin. Thus, it can be suggested that Dink’s persecution and assassination are linked first and foremost not with the fact that he pronounced the word “genocide”, but what is deep inside is that the actions and thoughts by Dink could shake up the very basis of the state: the Turkish identity.

Finally, it would be interesting to quote several versions concerning the numbers of apostate Armenians. Different Turkish sources indicate those numbers as 80 000 to 600 000. Karen Khanlarian shows the figure of around 2 million, of which 700 – 750 thousands are Crypto Armenians, and those who are Islamized – 1 300 000 [8, p. 104]. Incidentally, this version is coincidental with the numbers given by Hrant Dink. In one of his latest interviews he touches upon the issue of Armenians in Turkey and their numbers. “ Today there are thousands of people in Turkey who have the courage to openly express themselves, to write books and articles about their Armenian ancestors. There is a movement in Turkey presently in this direction, and I should say, that it will further grow and develop. ***If one day Turkey becomes a member of the European Union, the number of Armenians will grow by two million, on account of the two million Islamized Armenians in Turkey.*** (Underlined by Ruben Melkonyan) For me, it is very important to resolve this issue and to find those lost souls, to revive them from the dead. It is important to find those Armenians and to give them their Armenian identity” [27].

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