

Last week's planned conference on the Armenian issue was cancelled but if the speakers could speak, or the uninvited parties attended, what would they say?

Nursun Erel The New Anatolian / Ankara



TNA put the microphone in front of them, here's what they said:

Professor Baskin Oran:

- '1 million Armenians were deported'

- 'But number has no meaning, even one death is a scandal, because their deportation inevitably ended up with deaths'

- 'Turkey must say sorry not to the Armenians but to its own people that a free atmosphere was not created up to now to discuss this issue'

- We must open the Armenian border and provide the harbor of Trabzon to the Armenians'

TNA: You were also planning to attend the cancelled conference. What do you say to critics who charge the conference would reflect only a 'common voice'?

ORAN: Our only common idea is this: For 80 years in Turkey the same voices were listened to, so

Professor Yusuf Halacoglu:

- 'The number of the deported Armenians is around half a million'

TNA: In 1915 how was the deportation decision taken towards the Armenians in Turkey?

HALACOGLU: In fact, even before 1915 many insurgencies were faced, like the ones in 1894, the Trabzon, Sason and Van insurgencies. But the government never felt the necessity to make such a decision.

TNA: So why did the deportation order come out in 1915?

HALACOGLU: According to the documents of the French archives, these uprisings became a general insurgency. They (the Armenians) tried to block the Ottoman Army's ammunition and logistics lines, they tried to stop military movements, and they sabotaged the railroads so there was such a need.

TNA: But most of the deported Armenians were children, women or old people, because most of the men had already been taken

now there is the need for other voices. For example I think 'genocide' is the wrong word, but others consider it proper. Also some of those invited were defenders of the official thesis, like Ilter Turkmen. So it's a lie that a common voice would come out of the conference.

TNA: If you could speak there, what would you say?

ORAN: I would be speaking on the historical and psychological reasons for the Armenian taboo in Turkey. Even before we had too many taboos like Kemalism, Kurdistan, and secularism, but the taboo of the Armenian issue is our last.

TNA: If the organizers foresaw such advantages, why didn't they insist on the conference being held?

ORAN: Because the cancellation wasn't our decision. It came out from the rector of Bogazici University where the conference was to be held. The Istanbul governor telephoned the rector, he said there could be some unpleasantness and protests, and in such a case nothing could be done. The prosecutor called the organizers and asks for the full texts of the speakers. The justice minister said, 'I regret that I no longer have my personal capacity to file a suit' then said, 'We were stabbed in the back'. Then a former distinguished ambassador spoke in the same tone. So all this led to the cancellation.

Both sides are conditione

TNA: So what would you be saying at the conference?

ORAN: The Turkish official thesis and the diaspora's thesis, both of them are conditioned. Because the diaspora never wants to change the subject from 1915. They never discuss what was done by the Armenian gangs before 1915 and after. And the government is very reluctant to talk about what happened in 1915, and I'd speak about that

into the Ottoman Army, so there are claims that the Ottomans inevitably sent these people to their deaths.

HALACOGLU: The number of the Armenians in the Ottoman Army was about 50,000, so can one assume the whole Armenian population as 150,000?

Memoirs of Talat Pasha

TNA: There's a lot of arguing about the numbers. Recently Murat Bardakci published the personal notes of Talat Pasha (the last Ottoman prime minister) with some statistics. What do you think of them?

HALACOGLU: Mr. Bardakci published those notes without being aware of their meaning. First they were not related to Talat Pasha. In fact the same documents were also published by the General Staff. But Bardakci called them deported Armenians. In fact they were not the deported Armenians, they were the ones who were moved between the provinces. When you check the numbers you see the contradiction.

TNA: So everyone claims the numbers differently.

HALACOGLU: Based on the documents, I gave the numbers of the deported people, even listing their cities and provinces. The total number is 438,000.

According to the letter sent by the U.S. Consulate in Aleppo to Ambassador Morgenthau, many efforts were made to help the deported Armenians. That letter says that 500,000 Armenians were sent to Syria. According to the Armenian delegation head, Nubar Pasha, who sent a notice to the French Foreign Ministry, 700,000 Armenians were deported, 290,000 of them sent to the Caucasus region, and 490,000 of them sent to Syria. Also in Morgenthau's memoirs, Armenian Pastor Genop Telciyan says the number of people deported to that area was around 300,000. Also according to the

dilemma.

TNA: So how did the Ottomans decide on Armenian deportation?

ORAN: There were three phases, first the Armenians lost their security, then Armenian gangs like the Hinchaks and the Tashnaks attacked Muslims, and then French, Russian and British intervention came. The last phase was the Ottoman initiative. They couldn't deal with those interventions and weren't able to end the Tashnak and Hinchak terror, so the Ottomans decided to deport the Armenians from Anatolia.

TNA: Who was deported?

ORAN: It was wrong to deport the entire Armenian people, because they were not armed. The armed Armenians, the gangs were in the mountains. So 1 million Armenians were deported. We can't say that they were killed by the Ottomans, but the Ottomans made them walk through Kurdish, Arab and Cerkez areas. So it was unavoidable for the Armenians to be killed by them. Neither Turks nor Turkey want to face up to this reality.

Armenian attacks

TNA: What about the Armenian attacks?

ORAN: The Armenian attacks occurred after 1918 as revenge, Turkey only talks about this, and the diaspora is only talking about 1915. So both sides are lacking some realities. We would have discussed all these realities at the conference.

TNA: Why were some circles not invited to the conference, even though they had worked on the Armenian issue for years?

ORAN: Why was the Turkish Historical Society (TTK) not invited? Because what TTK keeps on saying has been known for 80 years. Why was Gunduz Aktan not invited? Because his views have been known for years. For

railroad workers the number is around 500,000. Various sources produce almost the same number, so it's up to you to believe it or not.

The deaths and the Ottomans

TNA: But what do you say to the claims that the deported people were sent to death, because most of them were women and children, so they were defenseless?

HALACOGLU: Some people are talking without thinking. Who would ever guess that they would die? The Ottoman authorities were allocating food, drink, plantation fields, and even carriages for them. The deported people were also given tools at their final destination. All this was planned. So how could the government be assuming they would die? In addition, the Red Cross people were there, missionaries were there. How could they (the Ottomans) allow this help to reach the deported Armenians?

TNA: Does it prove that the deaths were not on purpose?

HALACOGLU: The Red Cross was allowed to enter the area. According to the U.S. Consulate in Aleppo, 486,000 Armenians were helped by the Ottomans. Why?

TNA: This could have been discussed by people at the cancelled conference, don't you think?

HALACOGLU: If such a conference was being held for scholarly aims, they wouldn't just invite people who think in the same way.

TNA: How can people investigating this have such conflicts on the same issue? Aren't they using the documents? Or are they conditioned differently?

HALACOGLU: When we look at the speeches of these people we see that mostly they depend on

the first time in Turkey, different voices would have been heard, but this was avoided. So Turkey from now on will be seen as less democratic than it is.

TNA: If scholars and investigators are depending on documents, how come they come to such controversies? Are they conditioned?

ORAN: Because nationalism causes obsessions, it's not open to other realities.

TNA: Researcher Murat Bardakci published the notes of Talat Pasha (the last Ottoman prime minister) in which there were some statistics. What did these figures say?

ORAN: First it is a scandal to say the number of deaths was less or more. Even one person killed through this deportation process it is a scandal. Because there was no insurrection from the innocent Armenian people, unarmed people were sent to their deaths. That's the point.

Talat Pasha's numbers

TNA: But Talat Pasha's notes reflected the number of deported Armenians, right?

ORAN: It's the same if even one person was killed or a million died. The document which was revealed by Murat Bardakci ends the arguments of both the Turkish and the diaspora. Because according to the Turkish thesis, at most 300,000 Armenians died, and the deported Armenians were at most 450,000. But the diaspora claims 1.5 million Armenians were killed. So if the number of the deported Armenians is only 1 million, how come such a number of deaths can be assumed?

TNA: There were allegations that these notes didn't belong to Talat Pasha.

ORAN: Can you imagine a prime minister taking notes with his own hands? Certainly his men

what they were told by some witnesses. In fact I also talked to many people who lived during the deportation years. So if I decided to write a book based just on these observations, it would be a very controversial book claiming the Turks were the real victims of Armenian genocide, but history isn't written like this. It has its own methodologies. That's why the prime minister insisted on such a commission in which all the sides would take part and investigate. In fact this was a sincere call, what's wrong with such an effort? Then they talk about freedom of expression, so why don't they say anything about my case [the charges against him in Switzerland for denying the so-called genocide]? How come they stay silent on that Swiss action against me?

Mustafa Kemal's initiative

TNA: According to them, Mustafa Kemal was never a part of the Committee of Union and Progress members but in fact was among those aiming to punish those who caused the tragedy during the deportation.

HALACOGLU: I advise them to study the British archives. Some of its members, like Sait Halim Pasha, who was exiled in Europe, after some time became free, but was killed by Armenian assassins. But Ataturk asked British authorities to hand over those assassins immediately to Turkey and it was done at Trabzon harbor. This shows Ataturk's point of view.

TNA: Recently Armenian Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanyan spoke as if they were accepting the Kars agreement or at least not protesting it. Would this help to ease the tension?

HALACOGLU: So let them act, let them remove such wording from their Constitution. Because not words but actions would be proof. Let them say that they recognize the Kars Agreement (which demarcates Turkey's eastern borders, not officially recognized by Armenians). There's no need

were doing this on his behalf.

TNA: Since there is a huge gap between the thesis of the Turks and the diaspora, can we ever expect a compromise?

ORAN: There is one thing which Turks need to do urgently: not to leave any taboos.

Mustafa Kemal's approach

TNA: What was Mustafa Kemal's approach?

ORAN: Mustafa Kemal never got involved with the issue, that's why he was always critical. In fact, at the beginning of the Turkish Republic, the deaths which were caused by the Ottoman Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) were going to be investigated, but afterwards this was forgotten. By the establishment of Turkish Republic, Armenian identity was designated the identity of the other. That is why Turkey has such a taboo, this is an argument about identity.

TNA: Why is the the Turkish side always asked to do something? The Kars Agreement (the agreement demarcating Turkey's eastern borders) is not recognized by Armenians -- isn't this a hostile approach?

ORAN: This is because Armenia is less democratic but more nationalistic than Turkey. Turks have such paranoias too, like about the 1920 Treaty of Sevres, and the Armenian paranoia is about the 1915 Armenian deportation. But in Yerevan, I personally heard what was said by Armenian Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanyan. He said they no longer contest the Kars Agreement. Since he is a foreign minister, I believe his words are an assessment on behalf of the Armenian state.

TNA: So what can be done?

ORAN: Because of our mistaken policies towards Armenia, there is an ongoing embargo and severe economic problems there,

for more words.

-Azerbaijan impact

TNA: According to some circles, Turkey's Armenian policy is dominated by Azerbaijan. Do you agree?

HALACOGLU: So why is the U.S. in Iraq then? If the invader is Armenia and the invaded country is a part of Azerbaijan, why shouldn't we react? These are our brothers, and Armenia has bad intentions towards their homeland. Governments act according to their vital interests. Turkey can never forsake Azerbaijan, we have too many interests in common.

TNA: If Turkey expresses sorrow about what happened during those years, don't you think it would help to ease the tension?

HALACOGLU: Why is the burden always on Turkey's shoulders? Why don't they ever express their sorrow for the Muslims deaths of that time? Going just by the names the number of murders is 530,000 Muslims dead, so why not a bit of sorrow for these deaths?

TNA: Don't you think the cancellation of the conference is in a way showing Turkey's democratic standards?

HALACOGLU: They (the Armenians) don't care about democratic standards in Turkey. They just want us to act the way they want. Let them examine their own standards. Who in Turkey has been interrupted while arguing the genocide allegations? Didn't we watch hundreds of programs on TV where everyone defended his own ideas?

TNA: So leaving yesterday behind us, how can we look to tomorrow? If Turkey opens customs relations with Armenia for example, what's wrong with that?

HALACOGLU: If Armenia is facing economic difficulties, what it

that's why Armenian nationalism is rising. If we opened our borders and provided them access to the Trabzon harbor, they'd have an economic recovery so this nationalism would wane.

TNA: What would Turkey lose then? Do you think this is because of Azerbaijani domination over our policies towards the area?

ORAN: We have nothing to lose. But the Azerbaijan factor and the fundamentalist circles in Turkey avoid such an attempt. In fact back in 2000, the Foreign Ministry prepared a plan to ease our relations with Armenia, but Prime Minister Ecevit put an end to it by asking for the Azeris to weigh in.

Misplaced expectations

TNA: What can be the next realistic step towards Armenia?

ORAN: Even one step is enough, creating an atmosphere to discuss the issue freely.

TNA: What about the aggressive approach of the diaspora?

ORAN: First of all, it's not valid to say that Turkey is responsible for genocide or Turkey must pay compensation. Because genocide was defined by the UN in 1948 and it is not done retroactively. If there's an expectation of an apology from the Turks, it's not the Turks who will do it, because this was done by a group of gangs within the CUP. So Turkey is not in a position to say sorry, forget about it. In fact Turkey must say sorry for avoiding these free discussions of the issue, and this apology is for the Turkish people, not for Armenians abroad. Compensation is related to individual ownership, and if there are claims they can be processed individually. What about the demand for land? Well this is even too ridiculous even to be taken into consideration.

TNA: Why is the Armenian side

needs to do is to reach a peaceful solution. First they must officially declare that they recognize the Kars Agreement, secondly they should withdraw from Nagorno-Karabakh. That would be one little step, but there would be more forward steps from Turkey.

rejecting the call by Turkey for a joint historical commission?

ORAN: What will be discussed in such a commission? The two different sides will raise radically different points, so nothing will come out. In fact these issues must be discussed between civil society groups. To stop the diaspora talking, Turkey should do this. But instead it was avoided. Believe me that the enemies of Turkey are very happy that this conference was cancelled.

