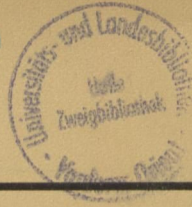


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INTERVIEW WITH
PRIME MINISTER

BÜLENT ECEVİT

THE ARMENIAN REPORTER







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TRANSCRIPT OF THE
HIGHLIGHTS OF THE INTERVIEW
WITH MR. BÜLENT ECEVİT, PRIME
MINISTER OF TURKEY. THE
INTERVIEW WAS MADE IN
ANKARA BY EDWARD
BOGHOSIAN, EDITOR OF THE
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QUESTION : We greatly feel that based on your past close relations with Armenians in general, and as the head of the Turkish government, you may become instrumental in an effort to improve relations between Armenians and Turkey. Of course it is not secret to anyone that these relations have been quite tense and hostile in recent years. Mr. Simon Kadirap, the son of Ambassador Karapap, whose wife was killed in Mardin, allegedly by Armenian terrorists, has proposed the formation of a special foundation which will conduct joint scholarly research to discover more about the events and those responsible for the tragedies which occurred in 1915-1918. Would you care to comment on this proposal?

ANSWER : The latter part of the history of the Ottoman Empire is full of bitter memories, not only for the Armenians but for the Turks as well. In fact, the present Turkish Republic was born out of a revolution, an uprising against the disintegration of the Ottoman State which was a multi-national state in many ways.

I am inclined to think that the memories of the latter part of the Ottoman State would rather be buried and forgotten. The Ottoman Empire was a state that made great contributions naturally during the period of integration.

But in the period of integration, the various elements that made up the Ottoman Empire were disintegrated and ended.

So I think it would be a good thing for all of us not to place our hopes for the future on the memories of the period of disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. Rather, we should base our hopes for the future on the memories of these other periods when all the elements that made up the Ottoman Empire coexisted in peace. After all, it should be the aspiration of the people to try to build a better

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QUESTION : We usually feel that based on your past close relations with Armenians in general, and as the head of the Turkish government, you may become instrumental in an effort to improve relations between Armenians and Turks. Of course it is not secret to anyone that these relations have been quite tense and hostile in recent years. Mr. Sinan Kunalalp, the son of Ambassador Kunalalp whose wife was killed in Madrid, allegedly by Armenian terrorists, has proposed the formation of a special foundation which will conduct joint scholarly research to discover more about the events and those responsible for the tragedies which occurred in 1915 - 1918. Would you care to comment on this proposal?

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I am inclined to think that the memories of the latter part of the Ottoman State would better be buried with the state that was buried. The Ottoman Empire was a state under whose roof numerous communities coexisted in peace for a long time. It was a state that made great contributions to world civilization and these contributions naturally consisted of contributions by all the elements which made up the Ottoman State.

But in the period of integration, there were clashes between various elements that made up the State, and as a result it disintegrated and ended.

So I think it would be a good thing for all of us not to base our hopes for the future on the memories of the period of disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. Rather, we should base our hopes for the future on the memories of these other periods when all the elements that made up the Ottoman Empire coexisted in peace. After all, it should be the aspiration of the people to try to build a better

and peaceful future. On one occasion I said that hate and animosity are burdens on one's heart and curtains on the mind. So, I think we are to relieve ourselves of these burdens.

Turks and Armenians have lived in peace for a long time, and live presently in the Turkish Republic. Armenians in our country live in complete peace and friendship. When we took over the responsibilities of government at the beginning of this year, we decided to take up any issue that either of the Greek and Armenian minorities may have had. Delegations, first from the Greek community and then from the Armenian community, as well as from the Syriac community, visited me.

They told me some of their problems-in fact, all of their problems-and some grievances they had.

I immediately set up an interministerial committee headed by Vice Prime Minister Orhan Eyüboğlu to take up these matters. We started solving all of the problems brought before me. I am sure many of those have been resolved already. It is our policy to see to it that citizens of any ethnic group are treated completely as equals. And I am sure any remaining problems of Armenian citizens in Turkey will be solved soon.

QUESTION : How would you explain the hostile feelings of Armenians throughout the Diaspora toward Turkey in general?

ANSWER : I have had frequent contacts with Armenians from my childhood on. As I told you already, I had several Armenian friends at school. I lived for two years with an Armenian family in Istanbul while I was studying. And then again, when I was at Harvard in 1957, I used to frequent the Watertown area where, as you know, there is a large Armenian community. My wife and I felt drawn there all the time because we felt so close, and my impression at that time was that, in the first encounter, some Armenians would revive their bitter memories, but in the second meeting, all the goodness

in their hearts would come to the surface and they would forget about the bitter memories of the past.

QUESTION : What would you attribute this to?

ANSWER : Well, I believe in the basic goodness of man, and the Armenians are usually very kindhearted, and when we are left alone, and not provoked against one another, the Turks and the Armenians get along very well. They have a mutual affinity and there is so much in common in their cultural background and heritage. After all, it is the culture of Anatolia, to which we jointly contributed for so many centuries. This in itself is a very strong bond between our people.

In recent years, obviously, there has been some provocation against the Turks among the Armenians, not only in the US, but in other parts of the world as well. And I am sure that these provocations come from certain non - Armenian sources. I do not wish to name these sources since I do not intend to hurt anyone's feelings. However I am sure these sources do not emanate from within the Armenian community.

QUESTION : Armenians in general place major emphasis on an acknowledgement of guilt on the part of the present government of your country for the acts of the rulers of the Ottoman Empire for the massacres of the Armenians as the first prerequisite for an eventual reconciliation. Would you, Mr. Prime Minister, wish to comment on this?

ANSWER : Certainly an objective study of all the aspects of history is useful and certainly we would have no objection at all to an objective study evaluating the period of disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. Many people may find many things worth learning from objective study and analysis of this period. But as I said earlier, I think that the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire should not in any way influence our relations because it was the disintegration of a multi-communal empire and during that period many of the

elements making up the empire suffered a lot and fought among themselves. There were many provocations from outside as well. And Turks from Anatolia themselves suffered a great deal. During this same period, and as I reminded you earlier, the present Turkish state is the result of an uprising against that state.

QUESTION : Would you care to be more specific on this issue? Would your government be prepared to revise its stand on the interpretation of the events of 1915 - 1918 in the event that an independent scholarly study proves otherwise?

ANSWER : Well, there is no such thing as an official government view on the events preceding the foundation of the Republic. However, certainly we will have no objection to a scholarly study of that period.

QUESTION : If I may refresh your memory, Mr. Prime Minister, in recent years there has always been an attempt on the part of Turkish scholars and historians to minimize the suffering of the Armenian people during World War I. Your scholars have portrayed these events as mere uprisings. My question is whether your people - historians and scholars - would accept the results of joint research which may prove that there is indeed a major injustice committed against the Armenians?

ANSWER : Well, as I said, I personally am in favor of an objective evaluation of the history of these events. No one can make progress in any field to the degree that people can evaluate past or present events without an a priori attitude, and without prejudices. Therefore, I would be in favor of such an objective study but beyond that I would recommend that we should not base our feelings toward each other on the memories of past history, particularly on the memories of a state which has been buried in history. Rather we should look up to the future.

QUESTION : In the event that the assassinations of the diplomatic representatives of your government are proven to be committed by

Armenians, would you feel that such a discovery would further widen the gap between Turks and Armenians and may reflect adversely on attempts to initiate a dialogue?

ANSWER : Let me again say that such studies must be made. But we should not base our feelings on the possible outcome of such studies. We should not be bound by the bitter memories of history. As I said, it is a very complicated period, the period of the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. The emergences of nationalist feelings was to a large degree exploited by outside elements. I am not saying this in a critical way, but trying to make an objective evaluation of the way things were in the Ottoman period. So we should not wait for a study and evaluation of history in order to build up a peaceful future.

QUESTION : In other words what you are saying is that even if proven to have been committed by Armenians, they are not to influence in any manner the success of such a proposal.

ANSWER : My mentality in all cases has more or less, to a large extent been formed during the Atatürk period in which we were taught to look to the future rather than to the past. Not only in regard to the Armenian question, but in all matters. Ours is a future - oriented state and society to a large extent, although there are small groups which are trying to make us turn into a past-oriented society. These groups have not been successful at all. This trend, established in Atatürk's time, still persists.

My outlook on the world was formed at the time of the establishment of the Republic in 1923 and I was born in 1925. So I am not saying this not only in regard to the Armenian question, but the so - called Atatürk generation is, by nature or by education, future oriented.

QUESTION : You'll excuse me Mr. Prime Minister, for being somewhat frank in my questions. Armenians usually place a great deal of importance on a claim to territories which were predominantly

inhabited by Armenians and now part of your country. Would you care to comment on this?

ANSWER : An objective study and the reevaluation of history is one thing, and efforts to restore history is another thing. I think efforts to try to restore «disappeared» history would create immense problems in the world. It would have such a chain reaction that one wouldn't know where to stop. So I don't think this is practical.

QUESTION : A little earlier, your Foreign Minister asserted that no sovereign state would accept such a claim for territorial demands. Do you share his views?

ANSWER : This is the natural and logical result of what I said before.

QUESTION : Allow me to repeat a question that I already asked your Foreign Minister. I am referring to certain unconfirmed reports to the effect that some time ago there had been secret negotiations to effect minor rectification of the international agreement in such a way that the ruins of Ani would be annexed by Armenia in return for a parcel of land of lesser importance. Would your government consent to such a modification, particularly in view of the major significance that Ani represents to the Armenian people?

ANSWER : I am not aware of such negotiations. I would have been notified if such negotiations had taken place. What I know is that there are certain technical border problems between many neighbouring countries, including the Soviet Union, that were taken up some years ago. As far as I know, there have not been any important problems, especially since in some cases there are what one can call natural boundaries between Turkey and the Soviet Union, and it would create more problems to touch upon this issue.

QUESTION : The case of Ani is not one of natural boundaries inasmuch as the ruins lie on the Turkish side of the Akhourian



- River, which forms a natural boundary. However, while these ruins may have tremendous significance to Armenians, they have little meaning for Turks.

ANSWER : If any country starts taking such points into consideration, then there will be no stopping, since other similar considerations may arise.

QUESTION : How do you, Mr. Prime Minister, propose to initiate a dialogue between our two peoples? Do you see it on a governmental basis or on a scholarly level?

ANSWER : There are Armenian communities in many countries, including Turkey, which include Turkish citizens. I can't see how such an effort can be made on a diplomatic level. However, it could be done on a human basis, through personal contact, through the media and through other forms. Dialogues certainly could and should be initiated, and I am prepared to think of the ways and means of establishing the practical ways to start such a dialogue.

QUESTION : Is your government prepared to invite a group of Armenian scholars for the specific purpose of exchanging notes and discussing Turkish - Armenian relations on an official level?

ANSWER : We can think of ways of doing this whether on an official or an unofficial basis. I would have no objection to this as a Prime Minister. But we should certainly think of the best way of doing it. We wouldn't want to create new complications in problems both at home and abroad.

QUESTION : I am aware of your problems at home and most likely there will always be some elements which will oppose any and all efforts.

ANSWER : I personally, as I said, in my contact with Armenians and I had excellent relations with some of them - have had no problems in communication and establishing mutual friendly feelings.

I think that with the right approach - again I would like to repeat, we are future oriented people-we can solve all these problems.

QUESTION : The Armenian Patriarch appears to be quite satisfied with the outcome of his visit with you and His Beatitude wanted me to tell you this.

ANSWER : Some problems may remain unsolved on the bureaucratic level, but I would consider it my duty to intervene whenever I am informed that some of my promises have not been fulfilled promptly. In many countries there is this problem. And recently, in particular in Turkey, bureaucracy has suffered a lot during the period of political crisis which we have been through in recent years. Most of the Armenians are in Istanbul and both the governor and the mayor have very constructive attitudes in this matter. They are responsible for these areas. And whenever I am personally informed about any delay regarding an early solution of some of the problems brought to my attention, I will take them up personally.

QUESTION : Granting that the Armenian community presently enjoys all types of freedoms, as I found out in my own investigative reporting, the question arises as to what may happen in the event that your government is no longer in power.

ANSWER : Well, we do not think that we shall leave so soon... I am sure that Turkish society is developing and advancing in the right direction. And I am not using the term in the political and ideological sense when I say «right direction.» I don't think there will be any problem.

QUESTION : Do you anticipate success with your trip to Moscow?

ANSWER : Yes, we have had increasingly good relations with the Soviet Union in recent years and an increasing degree of mutual confidence has been built up between the two countries. We have cooperated in many areas. In fact, Turkey has been lagging behind

many of her allies in establishing closer relations with the Soviet Union after the Cold War period ended. We are trying to make up for lost time.

(The interview ended when the editor reminded Mr. Ecevit that Armenia is one of the republics of the Soviet Union and is now undergoing rapid industrial development. Mr. Boghosian added that computers are presently being manufactured there.

When the editor told the Turkish Prime Minister that a Turkish music group had a series of concerts in Yerevan to sellout audiences over a year ago, the Prime Minister concluded his observations with these remarks :

«Well, that confirms my experience and expression. When a Turk and an Armenian meet anywhere in the world and let their feelings be free, they cannot help but feel genuine friendship and an affinity for each other.»)

...for the first time...

...The Minister of Industry...

ANSWER: ...the Minister of Industry...

QUESTION: ...the Minister of Industry...

ANSWER: ...the Minister of Industry...

QUESTION: ...the Minister of Industry...

ANSWER: ...the Minister of Industry...



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