

Türkiye and Azerbaijan in Response to Armenian Genocide Claims: The Construction of Discourse, Diplomacy, and Policy

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ABSTRACT

Although more than a century has passed since they occurred, the events of 1915 and the genocide claims built upon them remain among the most intractable subjects of dispute in historiography, international law, and regional politics. This study aims to set out, as an integrated whole, the architecture of defence and initiative that Türkiye and Azerbaijan have constructed at the levels of discourse, diplomacy, and policy in response to the Armenian genocide claims; the historical, legal, and archival sources from which this architecture draws; the institutional instruments through which it is conducted; and the manner in which coordination between the two countries is achieved. The research rests on a qualitative design, employing document analysis as its data-collection technique and combining descriptive analysis with content analysis in its analytical procedure. Türkiye and Azerbaijan are treated as two separate units of analysis; the stance of each country is described along the sub-axes of discourse, diplomacy, and policy construction, after which the two cases are compared in their shared and diverging aspects. The document pool was assembled from four groups—official archival publications, the current official texts of Türkiye and Azerbaijan, international resolutions and case law, and secondary sources—and the historical and contemporary layers were assessed together. The principal conclusion is that the two countries have moved from the defensive and reactive line of the 1980s toward an entrepreneurial and coordinated construction of discourse, diplomacy, and policy, resting upon archival accumulation, the jurisprudential ground furnished by international law, and the change in the regional balance of power. This construction is conducted through the proposal for a joint historical commission, an archive-based counter-narrative, the competent-tribunal and specific-intent standards of international law together with the ground offered by the Perinçek jurisprudence, and, finally, the alliance institutionalised by the Shusha Declaration. The findings show that parliamentary recognition resolutions are political rather than legal instruments; that the collapse of the Malta process for want of evidence supports the Turkish thesis; and that the regional transformation initiated by the 2020 Karabakh War has weakened the ground of conflict on which the claims fed. The Armenian Prime Minister's questioning of the established narrative before his own public in 2024-2025, and Yerevan's disowning of the claim in the face of a fresh recognition initiative in 2026, are assessed as contemporary instances supporting the Turkish thesis that the debate is shaped by conjunctural political calculation. The study proposes that a sound resolution of the controversy can be reached only through the reciprocal opening of archives, the joint examination of all losses, and the deepening of regional normalisation.

KEYWORDS: Armenian genocide claims, Türkiye, Azerbaijan, discourse analysis, diplomacy, policy construction, relocation (tehcir), politics of memory, Shusha Declaration, Türkiye-Armenia normalisation.

1. Introduction

More than a century after they took place, the events of 1915 remain among the most intractable subjects of dispute in international politics, historiography, and international law. On one side of the controversy stand successive Armenian governments and diaspora organisations, which characterise what happened as genocide and seek to entrench that characterisation through parliamentary resolutions, days of remembrance, monuments, educational programmes, and litigation initiatives; on the other side stand Türkiye and Azerbaijan, which regard that characterisation as devoid of historical and legal foundation and explain the events within the framework of the extraordinary conditions of the First World War and the immense suffering endured by all parties (Lütem, 2009; De Waal, 2015). What is particularly striking is that the community targeted by this grave accusation had, for centuries within the Ottoman order, been renowned for its loyalty to the state, had risen to the highest ranks in commerce, craftsmanship, and public service, and had even been known as the millet-i sadıka, "the loyal nation"

(Göyünç, 2005; Uras, 2015). The question of how an experience of coexistence spanning more than six hundred years could, within a quarter-century straddling the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, turn into a mutual catastrophe has long ceased to be one that historians alone can answer. For once numerous national parliaments began adopting resolutions on the matter, the issue moved from the historian's desk onto the agenda of inter-state relations, lobbying activity, electoral calculation, and international judicial bodies; the question of what happened in the past has become inseparable from the question of who stands to gain today (Armaoğlu, 2020; Zarakol, 2010).

For Türkiye, the matter is not merely about how the past is to be narrated. The possibility that the genocide characterisation might acquire official international status; the risk that it might lay a legal foundation for compensation and territorial claims; the annual flurry of statements in allied capitals in the run-up to 24 April; the negative image cultivated in international public opinion; and the reactions all of this provokes at home together make the issue a matter of foreign policy and national security in the most direct sense (Laçiner, 2008; Lütem, 2009). Nor has the cost of this pressure remained confined to paper: between 1973 and 1986, numerous Turkish diplomats and members of their families lost their lives in attacks carried out by Armenian terrorist organisations, and the recognition campaigns and the wave of violence unfolded side by side during those same years (Şimşir, 2005; McCarthy, 1984). For Azerbaijan, the same claims are inextricably interwoven with the Karabakh question: in Baku's eyes, Armenia's historical narrative and the occupation of roughly one-fifth of Azerbaijani territory for nearly three decades are parts of a single whole, while Azerbaijan's own memory of loss, stretching from the Baku massacres of 1918 to Khojaly in 1992, constitutes the other face of that whole (De Waal, 2003; Ak, 2019; Broers, 2019). Despite all this, the literature has for the most part examined the two countries' responses to the claims separately, and predominantly within the discipline of history; comparative studies that place the two countries side by side and ask how discourse, diplomacy, and policy are constructed together have remained scarce. This article situates itself precisely in that gap, examining comparatively how Türkiye and Azerbaijan construct their discourse, their diplomacy, and their policy in response to the genocide claims. The inquiry covers the period from 1965, when the claims were first put to a parliamentary vote, to mid-2026, as the peace process between Azerbaijan and Armenia continues; the emphasis falls on the post-2020 period, in which the regional balance shifted rapidly.

If the subject is to be discussed soundly, the basic concepts must first be set in their proper place. Genocide is not a loose epithet to be applied in everyday speech to every large-scale massacre; it is a legal term with clearly drawn boundaries. Under the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, genocide denotes acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group as such, and for the crime to be established this special intent — a will to destroy directed at the very existence of the group — must be proven (United Nations, 1948). By the terms of this definition, whether a given event qualifies as genocide is a determination to be made not by parliaments, governments, or public opinion, but by competent courts. No such judicial ruling has ever been rendered on the events of 1915. The judicial decisions that have come closest to the question confirm this picture. In *Perinçek v. Switzerland*, the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights stated that it was not required to rule on the legal characterisation of the events of 1915; it held that views rejecting that characterisation are protected under freedom of expression, thereby placing the matter in a framework distinct from denial of the Holocaust, which has been established by judicial verdicts (*Perinçek v. Switzerland*, 2015). In a similar vein, the French law of 2012 criminalising rejection of the genocide characterisation was struck down by the French Constitutional Council as incompatible with freedom of expression (Conseil constitutionnel, 2012). The preference for the word "claims" in the title and text of this article is therefore not an evasion but a requirement of this legal state of affairs: so long as no judicial ruling establishing special intent exists, the characterisation can, in the language of law, be spoken of only as a claim.

The article's other core concepts likewise require brief definition. The relocation — or, in the official terminology of the day, *sevk ve iskân* (dispatch and resettlement) — refers to the transfer, pursuant to the law of 27 May 1915, of the Armenian population living in the war zones and along the army's supply lines to Syria and its environs, away from the front; it was framed not as expulsion or destruction but as a wartime measure of displacement (Gürün, 2005; Özdemir et al., 2010; Kardeş, 2008). Discourse is used here to mean the ensemble of language, concepts, and narrative that states employ in making sense of the past; which event is named with which word, which document is invoked, and whose suffering is rendered visible are the building blocks of discourse. States' efforts to protect their own historical narratives are no idle stubbornness; the literature explains this effort through the concept of ontological security — the state's need to preserve its identity and the continuity of its self-narrative — and through studies of how official narratives are institutionally defended (Zarakol, 2010; Dixon, 2010). Diplomacy denotes the defence of this discourse in bilateral and multilateral relations, in international organisations, and on legal terrain; public diplomacy denotes the carrying of the same narrative to foreign publics,

the media, and academia (Laçiner, 2008). Policy construction, as used here, means the assembling of institutional instruments — from archival publications to days of remembrance, from research centres to lobbying, from educational programmes to legal initiatives — around a defined purpose. The concept of memory politics, within this framework, refers to the selection and institutionalisation of narratives about the past in the service of present political aims and to their contest with rival narratives (De Waal, 2015; Broers, 2019). By the diaspora is meant the organised Armenian communities living outside Armenia — above all in the United States, France, Russia, and Lebanon — which are the principal drivers of the recognition campaigns and which have at times pursued a harder line than the governments in Yerevan (De Waal, 2015).

The historical background of the question cannot be considered apart from the great powers' struggle for influence over the Ottoman Empire. In the nineteenth-century process known as the "Eastern Question," Russia, Britain, and France each carved out spheres of protection over the Christian populations of Ottoman territory; following the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-1878, the treaties of San Stefano and Berlin placed the question of reforms in the provinces densely inhabited by Armenians directly onto the international agenda (Öke, 1986; Armaoğlu, 2006; Kurat, 1990). The point insistently emphasised in this literature is that the driving force behind the process was geopolitical calculation rather than humanitarian concern: rivalry over the Straits, the mountain passes of Eastern Anatolia, the Caucasus, and the trade routes turned the Armenian population into an instrument of pressure in the hands of the great powers (Öke, 1986; Macit, 2008). In the same period, the Hunchak (1887, Geneva) and Dashnak (1890, Tiflis) committees — founded, strikingly, outside Ottoman borders — built armed structures, and a chain of actions unfolded that stretched from the Erzurum and Kumkapı incidents of 1890 to the Sasun uprising of 1894, the raid on the Ottoman Bank in 1896, the bomb attempt on the Sultan's life in 1905, and the Adana events of 1909 (Uras, 2015; Kılıç, 2000). The four-volume publication based on Ottoman archival documents sets out these uprisings and attacks of 1878-1916 at the level of individual records, with places and dates (Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2008, 2009). In short, the road to 1915 did not begin in 1915; it was laid over a quarter-century in which externally supported organised violence, counter-measures, and great-power interventions were piled one upon another.

The First World War carried this tension to breaking point. With the Ottoman Empire's entry into the war, the committees resolved to side with Russia; Armenian volunteer units served among the advance forces of the Russian army on the Caucasus Front, and in April 1915 a major uprising broke out in Van, astride the army's supply line (Kurat, 1990; Akçora, 2007; Erickson, 2021). In Eastern Anatolia under Russian occupation — and especially in the vacuum created by the withdrawal of Russian troops after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 — armed Armenian groups carried out large-scale massacres of Muslim civilians (Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 1995; Kırzioğlu, 1970). The reckoning of these massacres does not rest on Ottoman archival records alone. The notes of Kâzım Karabekir, the commander of the army that retook Erzincan and Erzurum; the testimony of Tverdohlebof, a Russian officer who served in the region; and the memoirs of Şevket Süreyya Aydemir contain detailed observations, from the corpses filling the courtyard of the mosque at Ilıca to the scenes of mass death at the entrance to the village of Cinis (Karabekir, 1990; Tverdohlebof, 2007; Aydemir, 1999). The mass-grave excavations conducted from the 1980s onwards around Erzurum — at settlements such as Cinis, Alaca, Yeşilyayla, Tımar, and Ilıca, on sites pointed out by witnesses who had survived the events — have brought the physical counterpart of these accounts to light: skeletons of women, children, and the elderly; pages of the Qur'an, amulets, tobacco cases bearing the star and crescent, and everyday belongings showing that the remains belonged to the region's Muslim inhabitants (Kırzioğlu, 1970; Gürçan, 1982; Karabekir, 1990). Studies based on demographic data have established that the number of Muslim civilians who lost their lives or were driven from their homes in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Anatolia between 1821 and 1922 reached a magnitude expressed in millions (McCarthy, 2024). It should also be placed on record that the Turkish archives are open to researchers and that this documentary corpus has been made available for international scrutiny (Sarınay, 2006).

Turning to the decisions of 1915 that stand at the centre of the claims: in an environment in which the Van uprising and attacks behind the front lines were intensifying, the Ottoman government closed down the committee headquarters on 24 April 1915 and arrested their leaders; the date now chosen for commemoration marks not any episode of mass violence but these arrests (Gürün, 2005; Lewy, 2011). Subsequently, by the law enacted on 27 May 1915, it was decided to relocate the Armenian population of the war zones to the south; in the course of the relocation, large numbers of Armenians lost their lives to epidemic disease, famine, severe road and weather conditions, and, in places, attacks by armed bands (Özdemir et al., 2010; Lewy, 2011). The number of losses varies widely among researchers depending on the demographic data taken as a basis; studies of the Ottoman population statistics of the period have shown that the highest figures frequently cited in the debate are irreconcilable with the total Armenian population of the country (Karpas, 2010; McCarthy, 2024). A substantial part of the international literature characterises these events as genocide (Bloxxham, 2005; Suny, 2015). The

official Turkish thesis and the researchers who support it maintain, by contrast, that an intent to destroy has not been proven by documents; that the government issued instructions concerning the provisioning and safety of those relocated and the protection of their property; that the Armenian populations of many areas, including Istanbul, Izmir, and Aleppo, were exempted from the relocation; and that officials and functionaries who abused their office and became implicated in crimes were tried before the courts-martial of 1916, while the war was still in progress, with some of them executed (Gürün, 2005; Lewy, 2011; Gunter, 2011; Sarıay, 2006). One of the strongest legal foundations of this thesis is the Malta episode: with respect to the more than one hundred Ottoman officials arrested during the occupation and deported to Malta, the British authorities of the day, despite combing the Ottoman, British, and American archives, were unable to find evidence sufficient to bring prosecutions, and the deportees were released in 1921 (Gürkan, 2015). As Sonyel (1990) has pointed out, the analogies drawn between the events of 1915 and the Jewish Holocaust likewise meet with serious objections on grounds of intent, method, and context. This article does not presume to deliver a final verdict in that historical controversy; it proceeds, however, from the observation that the archival, testimonial, and excavation evidence underpinning the thesis defended by Türkiye and Azerbaijan has not attained the visibility it deserves in international public opinion. The real question under examination is how this evidentiary base has been translated into the two states' construction of discourse, diplomacy, and policy.

The internationalisation of the claims has followed a discernible timetable. In 1965, on the fiftieth anniversary of the events, the parliament of Uruguay adopted the first recognition resolution; the large commemorations held in Yerevan that same year, and the monument erected thereafter, showed that the subject had entered the official agenda of Soviet Armenia as well (De Waal, 2015). While the diaspora's organisational structures were being consolidated in the 1970s, more than forty Turkish diplomats, family members, and staff lost their lives between 1973 and 1986 in attacks by ASALA and similar organisations, and Türkiye's missions abroad were targeted across the world (Şimşir, 2005; McCarthy, 1984; Lütem, 2009). This wave of terrorism compelled Türkiye to engage with the issue far more systematically, while at the same time laying bare before world opinion the methods by which the recognition campaigns were being supported. In the process that began with the European Parliament's resolution of 1987, a large number of national parliaments adopted similar resolutions; the law passed by France in 2001 plunged bilateral relations into severe crisis, while the second French law of 2012, which criminalised rejection of the characterisation, was annulled by the Constitutional Council (Lütem, 2009; Conseil constitutionnel, 2012). In 2015, the *Perinçek v. Switzerland* judgment demonstrated that attempts to impose a single narrative by means of criminal penalties had run into a wall in European law (*Perinçek v. Switzerland*, 2015); in 2021, the President of the United States used the word genocide for the first time in the annual 24 April statement (The White House, 2021). This record suggests that the factor determining the trajectory of the claims has been not new historical findings but the domestic politics of the countries concerned, their electoral balances, and the state of their relations with Türkiye at the given moment; indeed, the parallel between the timing of these countries' resolutions and the timing of their political tensions with Türkiye is frequently underlined in the literature (Laçiner, 2008; Lütem, 2009).

Türkiye's responses to this process have evolved over time from defence towards initiative. In the early period the weight lay on diplomatic reactions to parliamentary resolutions and on the struggle against terrorism; from the 1980s onwards, archival work, the publications of the Turkish Historical Society, and documentary editions were accelerated, and the Ottoman archives were opened to researchers (Sarıay, 2006; Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 1995). The year 2005 marks a turning point: Türkiye formally proposed to Armenia the establishment of a joint historical commission, to be composed of historians from the two countries and, where necessary, from third countries, with all archives to be opened; the proposal was left unanswered by Yerevan (Lütem, 2009; Görgülü, 2008). The message carried by this proposal is plain: the party confident in its documents is the one asking that the matter be taken out of the parliaments and placed before panels of scholars. The Zurich Protocols, signed in 2009 under Swiss mediation but never brought into force, revealed the limits of normalisation attempts and the carrying capacity of steps taken before the Karabakh question was resolved (Phillips, 2012; Görgülü, 2008). The 24 April messages issued at the highest level from 2014 onwards point, in turn, to a new discursive instrument: these texts contain no admission of fault and no apology; they bear the character of condolence and of a call for "just memory," commemorating the suffering of the Armenians in the First World War together with the suffering of the millions of Ottoman citizens who lost their lives in the same period (T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı, 2014; Davutoğlu, 2014). Within a section of Turkish public opinion and strategic circles, these messages have been read as a deliberate manoeuvre: one designed to lower tensions and thereby detach Armenia from the diaspora's most rigid demands, to draw the interlocutor onto realistic ground where discussion would proceed on the basis of documents, and, in the meantime, to open space for the diplomacy aimed at ending the occupation of Azerbaijani territory; and it may be said that developments in the years that followed — the end of the occupation and the discursive shift in Yerevan — traced a course consistent with that reading. In the same

period, the prominence given in 2015, the centenary year of 1915, to the centennial ceremonies of the Gallipoli victory is a further illustration that memory politics proceeds by reciprocal moves (De Waal, 2015).

Azerbaijan's position lends the question a depth at once historical and contemporary. The massacres carried out by Armenian-Bolshevik units in and around Baku in the final year of the First World War, and the liberation of the city by the Caucasus Islamic Army in September 1918, retain a living place in Azerbaijani memory to this day; Baku commemorates these events officially under the name of the 31 March Day of Genocide, and the Ottoman press of the period recorded the campaign in detail (Ak, 2019). That the events of Eastern Anatolia and the developments in Nakhchivan, Zangezur, and Karabakh were parts of one and the same historical process is a shared premise of the two countries' historiographies (Kürkçüoğlu, 1994). The Karabakh war that erupted as the Soviet Union disintegrated ended with the occupation of roughly one-fifth of Azerbaijani territory, the killing of hundreds of civilians at Khojaly in February 1992, and the displacement of close to a million Azerbaijanis (De Waal, 2003; Broers, 2019). In Baku's eyes, these experiences were taken as proof that the party championing the genocide claims had not confronted its own recent past; while Azerbaijani diplomacy pursued its own campaign for the international recognition of Khojaly, it converged with Türkiye on a single discursive line (Broers, 2019). The recovery of the occupied territories in the Forty-Four-Day War of autumn 2020 and the end of the conflict under the trilateral statement of 10 November 2020 transformed the regional balance root and branch; with the Shusha Declaration, signed in Shusha itself on 15 June 2021, Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations were raised to the level of alliance and the understanding of "one nation, two states" was given a legal framework (T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı, 2021). The Declaration provides for the two countries to act in coordination on foreign policy and security matters and to adopt common positions on international platforms; this removes the unity of discourse and diplomacy in the face of the genocide claims from the realm of preference dependent on individuals or governments and sets it on an institutional footing. The strengthening of the Organization of Turkic States in the same years has furnished this common stance with a still broader regional framework.

Developments after 2020 have visibly altered the terrain of the debate. Türkiye and Armenia appointed special representatives in 2022 and opened normalisation talks; steps such as the opening of the border gate to Armenian relief teams after the earthquakes of February 2023 showed that a line closed for decades could function, if only for humanitarian purposes. Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan chose in 2024 to use the expressions "Great Calamity" (Meds Yeghern) and "massacre" rather than genocide for the events of 1915, setting off a controversy in his country (Anadolu Ajansı, 2024); at a meeting with representatives of the Armenian community in Switzerland in January 2025 he went further still, asking how, when no such agenda existed in 1939, a genocide agenda came into being in the 1950s, and calling for history to be re-examined in order to understand "what happened, why it happened, and through whom we perceived the events." These words were met with reactions in Armenia so severe as to include accusations of treason from the opposition and the diaspora organisations; yet they have been recorded as the sign of a fundamental shift in Yerevan's official discourse, one moving the claims away from the centre of the foreign-policy agenda (Hürriyet, 2025). What is remarkable is that the formulations closest to Türkiye's decades-old proposal — that history be re-examined, jointly — were heard this time from the mouth of an Armenian prime minister. On 8 August of the same year, at the summit held in Washington, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Pashinyan signed a joint peace declaration; the two countries' foreign ministers initialled the text of a peace agreement enshrining mutual recognition of territorial integrity and the renunciation of territorial claims, the parties resolved to apply jointly for the dissolution of the OSCE Minsk Group, and an arrangement concerning the operation of the Zangezur route was adopted (Anadolu Ajansı, 2025). Türkiye supported this step with an official statement, describing it as a development of the utmost importance for regional peace (T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı, 2025). As of mid-2026, when this article was completed, the final signature of the agreement remains pending upon the amendment of the provisions of the Armenian constitution relating to territorial claims; on the other hand, the cessation of clashes along the border, the parties' joint action towards the closure of the Minsk Group, and the actual commencement of trade between the two countries show that the process is advancing on the ground (Anadolu Ajansı, 2025; Euronews, 2025). Taken as a whole, this picture indicates that the diplomatic weight of the genocide claims is diminishing in step with the change in the regional balance of power and the discursive transformation in Yerevan.

These developments are read in Turkish and Azerbaijani public opinion together with strong expectations. In the literature grounded in Ottoman archival documents, the view has long been defended that the claims function — today as in the past — as an instrument of the great powers' calculations of influence over the region (Öke, 1986; Macit, 2008). The public expectations nourished by this view cluster around several points: that the archives of all parties — not only the Ottoman archives, but those of the great powers that played a role in the events of the period — be opened in full; that the Muslim civilians who lost their lives before and after 1915 be researched with the same scholarly rigour, including the findings brought to light by the mass-grave excavations; that the task of

passing judgment on history be taken away from the parliaments of third countries and entrusted to impartial panels of scholars and, where necessary, to independent legal mechanisms; and that one-sided accusation give way to a reckoning in which all the responsibilities of the period are examined reciprocally. Within a section of public opinion, sharper demands are voiced to the effect that this reckoning should be conducted before international courts and that the states implicated in the massacres of Muslim civilians in Anatolia should also be held to account. Some of these expectations have been translated into official policy steps, such as the proposal of a joint historical commission in 2005; others have remained at the level of discourse. The article treats them not as verified policy outcomes but as components of the discursive field under examination, and it also traces which expectation has filtered into official policy through which channel.

The aim of the article is to set out, in an integrated manner, what architecture of defence and initiative Türkiye and Azerbaijan have built at the levels of discourse, diplomacy, and policy in response to the genocide claims; from which historical, legal, and archival sources this architecture draws; through which institutional instruments it is operated; and how coordination between the two countries is achieved. The study rests on a qualitative research design; document analysis is employed as the data-collection technique, and discourse analysis supported by descriptive analysis as the technique of interpretation. The primary source group comprises Ottoman archival publications and documentary editions; memoirs and testimonies; reports relating to the mass-grave excavations around Erzurum; official statements and message texts; treaty and declaration texts such as the Shusha Declaration, the Zurich Protocols of 2009, and the Washington documents of 2025; and judicial decisions such as *Perinçek v. Switzerland* and the ruling of the French Constitutional Council, together with parliamentary resolutions. The secondary source group consists of the academic literature on the subject in Turkish and in foreign languages; studies defending opposing views are deliberately included in the data set, for the construction of a discourse can be understood only together with the discourse it confronts. Designed as a comparative case study, the inquiry treats Türkiye and Azerbaijan as two cases which, despite a common discursive line, possess different historical experiences, different institutional traditions, and different sets of instruments; in this way the sources of similarity and difference are rendered visible. The time frame has been set at 1965-2026, with the analysis focused on the transformation after 2020. The limitation of the research should also be stated at the outset: the study is not a new archival investigation into the historical reality of the events of 1915; it is a study in international relations examining how the existing corpus of documents and findings is reflected in state behaviour.

Within this framework, the article's principal research question is the following: from which sources, through which instruments, and with what degree of coordination do Türkiye and Azerbaijan construct their discourse, their diplomacy, and their policy in response to the Armenian genocide claims? Four subsidiary questions complete this main question. First, how, and to what extent, are the Ottoman archival documents, the memoirs and testimonies, and the findings obtained from the mass-grave excavations in Eastern Anatolia reflected in the two countries' official discourse? Second, how are legal foundations such as the special-intent requirement of the 1948 Genocide Convention, the *Perinçek v. Switzerland* judgment, and the annulment by the French Constitutional Council employed in the two countries' line of diplomatic defence? Third, how have the Second Karabakh War, the Shusha Declaration, and the Washington process of 2025 affected the two countries' common stance towards the claims and their bargaining power? Fourth, what kind of window of opportunity does the discursive change in Armenian domestic politics — in particular the Pashinyan government's statements questioning the 1915 agenda — create for the construction of policy by Türkiye and Azerbaijan?

The principal hypothesis tied to the research question has been formulated as follows: in response to the genocide claims, Türkiye and Azerbaijan have moved from the defensive and reactive line of the 1980s to an enterprising and coordinated construction of discourse, diplomacy, and policy resting on the accumulated archival record, on the jurisprudential ground supplied by international law, and on the change in the regional balance of power; this construction was institutionalised by the Shusha Declaration and has gained in effect with the developments after 2020. The subsidiary hypotheses corresponding to the subsidiary questions are these: according to the first subsidiary hypothesis, the archival documents, the testimonies, and the excavation findings serve as the principal foundation that shifts the two countries' discourse away from a one-sided narrative of victimhood towards a framework of mutual suffering and document-based debate; the confidence and assertiveness of the discourse derive in large measure from resting on this evidentiary base. According to the second subsidiary hypothesis, the special-intent requirement together with the *Perinçek v. Switzerland* and French Constitutional Council jurisprudence provides the two countries with a defensible and increasingly invoked ground in international law for the position that parliaments' passing judgment on history, and the imposition of a single narrative under threat of criminal penalty, are legally baseless. According to the third subsidiary hypothesis, the military and diplomatic outcomes after 2020 have weakened the capacity of the claims to be used as an instrument of pressure upon Türkiye and Azerbaijan, while increasing the two countries' power to set the regional agenda. According to the

fourth subsidiary hypothesis, the discursive transformation in Yerevan is deepening the divergence between the rigid, diaspora-centred line of the claims and the regional interests of the Armenian state, and is offering Ankara and Baku the possibility of redefining the question — lifting it out of the spiral of accusation and defence and placing it within a framework of normalisation, joint historical research, and regional cooperation.

In sum, this article interrogates a single main question — with which sources, through which instruments, and with what degree of coordination Türkiye and Azerbaijan carry out the construction of discourse, diplomacy, and policy in response to the genocide claims — and, bound to it, the reflection of the archival and excavation findings in discourse, the place of international law in the line of defence, the effect of the post-2020 regional developments, and the window of opportunity opened by the discursive change in Armenia. The contributions expected of the article may be gathered at several levels. The first contribution concerns the literature: the responses of Türkiye and Azerbaijan to the claims have to date been examined for the most part separately, and predominantly within the discipline of history; comparative studies treating the two countries within a framework that attends jointly to the levels of discourse, diplomacy, and policy have remained scarce. The article aims to fill this gap and to bring the two countries together on a single plane of analysis. The second contribution is conceptual and methodological: the threefold framework uniting discourse, diplomacy, and policy construction in a single model offers a generalisable instrument for examining state behaviour in the face of historical accusations, and proposes a model that can also be employed in the study of comparable disputes — for instance, debates over retrospective accusation and recognition directed at other countries. The third contribution lies at the level of data: the findings obtained from the mass-grave excavations around Erzurum, the testimonies of the period, and the Ottoman archival publications have to date been chiefly the province of historical research; the article carries this accumulated material into the analysis of international relations and foreign policy, rendering visible the link between archival and field evidence and diplomatic practice. The fourth contribution belongs to the legal dimension: by examining systematically the use made in Turkish and Azerbaijani diplomacy of precedents such as *Perinçek v. Switzerland* and the annulment by the French Constitutional Council, the article supplies the literature on the judicialisation of historical controversies with a concrete case. The fifth contribution is topical: very recent developments — the Pashinyan government's statements questioning the 1915 agenda, the Washington declaration of 2025, the initialled peace agreement, and the normalisation steps extending into 2026 — are here evaluated for the first time within this unified whole, and the record of the 2020-2026 period is thereby committed to the academic literature. The sixth contribution is practical: the findings propose to decision-makers a concrete framework showing that, rather than resting content with reactive statements against the recognition campaigns, an integrated strategy that operates archival sharing, joint scholarly commissions, the accumulation of legal jurisprudence, public diplomacy, and the instruments of regional normalisation in concert is the more productive course. Finally, by demonstrating that a language of debate is possible which does not set the parties' sufferings in competition but takes documents and law as its ground, the article hopes to make a modest yet lasting intellectual contribution to the peace now taking shape in the South Caucasus and to the field of Turkic-world studies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The events of 1915 and the genocide claims built upon them have occupied historians, legal scholars, and students of international relations for more than a century. The literature that has accumulated on the subject is not merely vast in volume; it is also deeply divided along lines of language, archive, discipline, and political position. Works written in Turkish, English, Armenian, Russian, German, and French have largely proceeded without reading one another, so that the same events are narrated through different bodies of documents and different conceptual vocabularies. Gathering a body of scholarship of this breadth under a single roof is no easy task; even so, the literature can be read in four main strands. The first strand comprises the historical studies that examine the origins of the Armenian question and the process leading to 1915; within this strand, great-power policies, the committees, the First World War, and the deportation debate form separate branches. The second strand is the international law debate conducted along the axis of the Genocide Convention of 1948. The third consists of the studies devoted to the memory, identity, and discourse dimensions of the issue. The fourth is the literature of diplomacy and foreign policy concerned with the positions of states, parliaments, and diaspora organizations. Below, these strands are reviewed in turn together with their internal branches; the connection of each to the responses given by Türkiye and Azerbaijan is shown, and the gap in the existing literature is set out at the end of the section.

The historiography on the origins of the question converges on the point that it took shape long before 1915, within the great-power rivalry of the nineteenth century. Esat Uras's study, first published in 1950 and regarded as the first comprehensive work in the field in Turkish, traces through documents the process extending from the place of the Armenian community within the Ottoman order to the transformation of the question into an international problem (Uras, 2015). Uras was followed by the work of Kamuran Gürün, a retired ambassador

drawing on the archival holdings of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which addressed the claims item by item and for many years served as the reference book of the official thesis (Gürün, 1983). The report of Münir Süreyya Bey, a member of the Ottoman foreign-service bureaucracy of the period, covering the years 1877–1914, shows at first hand how the question was viewed at the level of the state (Münir Süreyya Bey, 2001). Şimşir (2005) frames the subject as a diplomatic history of two hundred and thirty years, beginning with Küçük Kaynarca in 1774; Karal and Aydoğan (2010), Armaoğlu (2006), and Saral (1971) read the question as part of the Eastern Question; in the same vein, Öke (1986) and Göyünç (2005) focus on the process by which the Armenian community was pried away from its position as the millet-i sadıka, the “loyal community.” Ortaylı (2002), for his part, produced a popular assessment that sets the political calculations behind the claims within a brief but effective frame. The common finding of this literature is the following: with Article 16 of the Treaty of San Stefano and Article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin, which concluded the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877–1878, the question of reforms in the provinces inhabited by the Armenian population entered an international instrument for the first time, and an internal matter was thereby opened to the intervention of the great powers. The dispatch of a delegation to the Congress of Berlin by the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul is an early instance of this internationalization (Yavuz & İskefiyeli, 2020). The reflection of the events of the Hamidian era in German sources has been examined by Çalık (2000), while the part played by intra-church and intra-communal struggles in the politicization of the question has been studied by Kılıç (2000).

The second branch of the same strand concerns how the great powers used the question for their own strategic calculations. On the British side, Baykal’s early studies on the Congress of Berlin and on Salisbury’s designs for partition (Baykal, 1944, 1988), Başak’s archive-based book tracing Britain’s Armenian policy from 1830 to 1923 together with his article on Britain’s Caucasus policy (Başak, 2008, 2013a), and his study comparing the implementation of the Armistice of Mudros through Turkish and British sources (Başak, 2013b) form the backbone of this branch; Cooper (1976) and Dyer (1972) likewise read the British policies of the armistice period from Western sources. On the Russian side, Kurat’s classic study (Kurat, 1990), Bolsover’s article surveying Russian foreign policy between 1815 and 1914 (Bolsover, 1966), Badem’s books on the Tsarist administration of the province of Kars and on the War of 1877–1878 (Badem, 2010, 2018), and Tunçay (2020), who directly problematizes the role of Russian policies and strategies in the formation of the question, lay out St. Petersburg’s calculations of population and influence in Eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus. Macit (2008) added a further dimension to the literature by reading the religious-strategic layer of this power struggle through missionary networks and the concept of theo-strategies. Somakian’s (1995) comparative study of the great powers’ Armenia policies between 1895 and 1920 concludes that no great power gave priority to the Armenian population itself, but rather to the strategic gains to be obtained through it; as will be seen below, this conclusion coincides with the judgment reached by Bloxham (2005) in Western scholarship. A further heading completes the human background of the question, namely the Muslim migrations from the Caucasus into Anatolia: the plight of the widows and orphans of the refugees after the War of 1877–1878 (Tiryaki & Özlü, 2021), the Caucasian migration movements (Akyüz, 2006), and the measures taken in Anatolia in the wake of the war of 1828–1829 (Kara, 2005) show how the demographic balance of the region had been overturned by wars and migrations long before 1915. The academic ground underlying the view, widespread in Turkish public opinion, that great-power politics lies at the root of the genocide claims is largely this branch.

A third branch takes as its subject the Armenian committees founded at the end of the nineteenth century and their actions. The Turkish literature on the foundation, programs, and armed operations of the Armenakan (1885, Van), Hunchak (1887, Geneva), and Dashnaktsutun (1890, Tiflis) organizations is considerable. Karakoç (2009) is among the few studies to treat in an integrated manner the line running from these organizations to the ASALA terrorism of the 1970s; Altınay’s (1992) early account and the local picture given by Fırat (1998) through Varto and the eastern provinces complete this cluster. Among event-based studies one may cite the international dimension of the Sasun risings (Görgen, 2020), the effects of the events of 1895–1896 on provincial administration in the case of Aleppo (Gullu, 2012), the repercussions of the risings in Erzincan (Birol, 2017), and the Van-centered insurrections (Akçora, 2007). Primary-source publications constitute the documentary base of this branch: the transcription of the committee reports compiled in the period of the Committee of Union and Progress (Cengiz, 1983), the archival compilation on the Armenian committees (Ermeni komiteleri [1891–1895], 2001), the four-volume series of insurrection documents covering 1878–1916 published by the State Archives (Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2008, 2009), the two-volume compilation on the Adana events of 1909 (Osmanlı belgelerinde 1909 Adana olayları, 2010), and the publications assembling documents on the massacres (Binark, 2007; Türközü, 2005). This corpus contains the record of thousands of incidents ranging from village raids and attacks on gendarmerie posts to assassination attempts, including the Yıldız attempt of 1905, and constitutes the documentary foundation of the official Turkish thesis. A conceptual divergence must be noted here: whereas Ottoman documents and the Turkish literature mostly designate these structures as committees,

bands, or terrorist organizations, Armenian historiography and the Western studies that follow it define the same structures as revolutionary or national liberation movements (Dadrian, 1995; Kévorkian, 2011). The dispute thus begins at the very stage of naming, the parties looking at the same phenomenon through two different vocabularies; this difference of designation is also the kernel of the discursive struggle to be examined in the following sections.

The literature on the First World War and the Caucasus front occupies a distinct place for understanding the military environment within which the decision of 1915 was taken. Studies examining the battlefield realities of the Ottoman army (Erickson, 2011, 2021; Muratoff & Allen, 1966), together with the official war history of the Turkish General Staff (Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi: Kafkas Cephesi, 1993), establish that after the Sarıkamış disaster the eastern provinces fell step by step under Russian occupation. Erickson's conclusion is frequently cited in this debate: according to the author, the military intelligence available to the Ottoman high command in the spring of 1915 presented the uprisings behind the front and the threat to the supply lines as a genuine security problem. The formation, strength, and operations of the Armenian volunteer units fighting in the ranks of the Russian army have been examined in detail by Hasanlı (2015) and Çaykiran (2021); Çaykiran, moreover, treats within the same framework the Armenian soldiers under arms in the Ottoman army and the Légion d'Orient in French uniform, thereby displaying both faces of the picture. The occupation of Erzurum has been studied by Yüksel (2010), the demographic structure of the province before and during the war by Karataş (2018), and the attempted declaration of independence undertaken in the occupied zone in 1918 by Başak (2022). The testimonies of the period are the most heavily worked material of this literature and are varied in kind: the memoirs of Kâzım Karabekir (Karabekir, 1990), the records of Tverdohlebof, the Russian artillery officer in Erzurum (Tverdohlebof, 2007), the Austro-Hungarian diplomatic correspondence (Atnur, 2014), the corps report submitted to the American Harbord mission (I. Kafkas Kolordusu, 1919), and the memoirs of Turkish intellectuals such as Halide Edib and Şevket Süreyya (Adıvar, 1996; Aydemir, 1999) record, from different eyes, the mass killings directed at the Muslim population in and around Erzurum at the beginning of 1918. Examples of the Western literature of testimony also find their place in the field: the diaries of Atkinson, the American missionary at Harput (Atkinson, 2000), represent the face of this genre focused on Armenian losses, while the sources enumerated above represent the face focused on Muslim losses; that these two bodies of testimony have continued to be published in ignorance of each other is a striking indicator of the compartmentalization of the field.

The phase of the war after 1917 produced the documentary base of the counter-victimhood narrative that occupies a central place in the present-day discourse of Türkiye and Azerbaijan. What was done in and around Erzurum, Erzincan, and Kars by the Armenian units and bands remaining in the region after the dissolution of the Russian army in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution has been treated in the Turkish literature at the levels of archive, testimony, and field alike: Kırzioğlu (1970) covers the province of Kars and its environs, Demirel (1996, 1998) the Erzurum countryside and Oltu, while Sonyel (1990) treats the subject within a frame of comparison with the Jewish Holocaust. Local history and oral history products thicken the body of this cluster: the studies on the massacre at the village of Alaca (Akbulut, 1989; Çiğdem, 2002; Gürcan, 1982), the records concerning the liberation of Oltu and Tortum (Haşimoğlu, 1960; Kardaş, 1964; Er, 1996; Akan, 1999), and the first-hand information on the Baku Islamic Charitable Society and the Oltu National Islamic Committee (Haşimoğlu, 1959) are examples of regional memory committed to writing. Aslan (2004) is the study that binds this scattered material to a method in the case of Erzurum: bringing together memoirs, archival documents, and the findings of the excavations conducted at sites such as Yeşilyayla, Alaca, and Tımar, she has essayed a model in which the three types of source test one another. There are also studies following the human burden of the war through institutions; the compilation on the activities of the Ottoman Red Crescent (Akgün & Uluğtekin, 2002) is among them. McCarthy (2024), who treats Muslim losses across the whole of the Ottoman lands and over a long period such as 1821–1922, argues on the basis of population data that the chain of wars, insurrections, and migrations resulted in the death and displacement of millions of Muslims. The invisibility of these losses in international public opinion is one of the most persistent objections of the Turkish literature and constitutes the ground of the emphasis on shared suffering and losses on both sides found in the official discourses of Türkiye and Azerbaijan.

The most contested area of the literature is the character of the deportation implemented under the Law on Relocation and Resettlement (Sevk ve İskân Kanunu) of 27 May 1915. Two main schools and one intermediate position can be distinguished here. The first school, also known in Türkiye as the official thesis, holds that the decision was a security measure taken under wartime conditions against armed structures that had risen behind the front and were collaborating with the invading army; that the implementation carried no intent to destroy; that legislation was enacted for the provisioning and security of the relocated population and the protection of its property; that the greater part of the losses stemmed from wartime conditions, epidemic disease, famine, and local attacks; and that officials who committed crimes during the relocation were tried, while the war was still in

progress, before courts-martial and sentenced to punishments that included executions. The fundamental works of this school were produced by Gürün (1983), Halaçoğlu (2001), Çiçek (2005), Özdemir et al. (2010), and Sarıay (2006); Çaycı (2000), Bakar et al. (2007), and Serdar (2004) have supported this line with documentary publications. Within the same school, the financial and administrative dimension of the deportation has been studied through the legislation on abandoned properties (*emval-i metruke*) (Kardeş, 2008; Aytaç, 2012), the resettlement of the Armenians who returned after the war (Çelik, 2008), the situation of women and children (Atnur, 2005), and the personal papers of Talat Pasha, the decision-maker of the period (Bardakçı, 2008; Çolak, 2020). The second school characterizes 1915 as a centrally planned destruction and employs the concept of genocide; this line, pioneered by Hovannisian (1967, 1971), has been continued by Dadrian (1995), Akçam (1999, 2008), Kévorkian (2011), and Suny (2015), while Göçek (2015) has worked the same thesis through the transformation of the narratives found in Turkish sources. Akçam's claim that the official thesis can be refuted from its own sources, on the basis of Ottoman documents, has been criticized in the Turkish and international literature alike on grounds both of method and of document reading (Lewy, 2011; Perinçek, 2013). Lewy (2011), occupying the intermediate position, tests the evidence of both sides separately and concludes that a central plan of destruction cannot be proven from the available documents, whereas administrative negligence and wartime conditions led to heavy losses. Bloxham (2005) carries the question to another plane altogether: in his view, the determinant both of the spiral of violence leading to 1915 and of the manner in which the events were subsequently kept on the international agenda has been great-power politics; imperial rivalry first set the peoples of the region against one another and then determined, according to its own interests, how what had happened would be named. The casualty figures are likewise part of the dispute: against the figures that have risen over time, studies proceeding from the Ottoman population statistics argue that both the pre-war Armenian population and the losses were lower than has been asserted (McCarthy, 2006; Karpas, 2010); Karataş (2018) has tested this debate against local data in the case of the province of Erzurum, and the existence of the Armenian population that fell outside the scope of the deportation and remained in place has been pointed out on the basis of the same data.

Adjacent to this main debate is a branch of propaganda and source-criticism studies that interrogates the reliability of the most frequently cited sources of the period; the most original contribution of the Turkish literature to the international debate lies in this branch. The three great texts on which the claims rest were produced in the war years: the Blue Book, prepared under the British war-propaganda bureau at Wellington House and bearing the signatures of Bryce and Toynbee (Bryce & Toynbee, 1916); the memoirs of the American Ambassador Morgenthau (Morgenthau, 1918); and the diplomatic documents compiled by the German pastor Lepsius (Lepsius, 1919). Bayraktar (2016) examines through documents the conditions of composition and the war-propaganda function of the first two; Lowry (1990) is the classic critique showing how Morgenthau's memoirs were constructed when compared with the ambassador's own diaries and correspondence; and that selections and interventions were made upon the documents in the preparation of the Lepsius compilation for publication has been established by comparisons carried out with the German archives themselves (Gust, 2014). Küçükvan (2012) examines how the deportation decision was processed in American public opinion, Özdoğan (2022) the striking difference between the reports of Morgenthau and of Admiral Bristol, his successor in station, and Özel (2007) the diversity within the ranks of the Western observers themselves. The documents compiled by Perinçek from the Russian state archives (Perinçek, 2013), his study conveying the responsibility of the Dashnak administration from the pen of Boryan, one of the founding cadres of Soviet Armenia (Perinçek, 2014), and his examination tracing the line from the Dashnaks to ASALA with new documents (Perinçek, 2012) are examples showing that the claims can be tested against Armenian and Russian sources themselves. The face of this branch turned toward legal history is the Malta episode: between 1919 and 1921 Britain held on Malta one hundred and forty-four Ottoman officials, among them a former grand vizier and ministers, and released the detainees when it could find, neither in its own archives nor in the American records it requested from Washington, evidence sufficient for prosecution (Gürkan, 2015). On the diaspora side, the path taken was the compilation and publication of American official documents (United States Official Documents on the Armenian Genocide, 1995), so that each side put its own documentary corpus into international circulation. That the official and public discourse in Türkiye regards the genocide claims as an accusation derived from war propaganda and untested at law rests in large measure upon this literature.

The international law literature carries the dispute from the field of history to that of concept and procedure. Genocide is a legal crime defined by the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of 1948 and requires proof of the special intent to destroy a group in whole or in part (Birleşmiş Milletler, 1948). Turkish jurists and official authorities draw two conclusions from this: the Convention cannot be applied retroactively, and the characterization of genocide is a judgment that only a competent court can render through evidence-based adjudication; parliamentary resolutions, consequently, can produce neither historical nor legal reality (Lütem, 2009). The independent legal opinion prepared at the request of the Turkish-Armenian

Reconciliation Commission established in 2001 is likewise among the turning points of this debate: the opinion determined that the Convention imposes no retroactive obligation and that no legal claim based upon the Convention can be advanced on account of the events of 1915, while also including a historical assessment to the effect that the events contained the elements of the definition; owing to this dual structure the text has been read by each side in its own favor (International Center for Transitional Justice, 2003). One of the most orderly encounters on the academic plane is the debate between Avedian (2012), who derives responsibility from the continuity of state between the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Türkiye, and Tacar and Gauin (2012), who oppose this on grounds both legal and historical. Judicial decisions have also shaped the field: the French Constitutional Council annulled the law of 2012 criminalizing genocide denial as contrary to freedom of expression (Conseil constitutionnel, 2012); and the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights, in its *Perinçek v. Switzerland* judgment, held that objection to the characterization of the events of 1915 as genocide falls within the scope of freedom of expression and stated that the matter cannot be placed on the same footing as Holocaust denial (Perinçek/İsviçre, 2015). These two decisions have entered the literature as precedents strengthening Türkiye's line of defense in international fora. The expectations voiced in Turkish public opinion are likewise consonant with this legal framework: that the matter be removed from parliaments and political resolutions and carried onto the ground of archive-based scholarly examination and of an impartial, independent international legal forum; indeed, in one section of public opinion there are expectations for the establishment of an independent international judicial process in which all the states and parties concerned would participate and whose judges would be drawn from a broad range of countries, and for all the victimizations of the 1915 period, including the losses of the Muslim population, to be addressed on the same legal ground.

The third strand, the studies of memory and discourse, has grown rapidly since the two thousands. Dixon (2010) is among the first systematic studies of the instruments through which Turkish state officials have defended and updated the official narrative; in her later book comparing Türkiye and Japan the author argued that this narrative has displayed continuity within change over time, evolving from a language of rigid rejection toward a language of shared suffering (Dixon, 2018). Zarakol (2010) constructs the same comparison through the concept of ontological security: states take positions in the face of historical accusations threatening their identity not only from calculations of interest but also from the drive to protect their identity and international standing; in the Turkish case, the fact that the accusation touches the founding period and the national identity is among the factors explaining the sharpness of the reaction. De Waal (2015) narrates a century of Turkish-Armenian relations through the memory politics of the two societies, while Göçek (2015) follows the transformation of narratives in Turkish sources across periods. The problematic aspect of this cluster from the standpoint of the Turkish literature is that it codes Türkiye's position almost entirely through the concept of denial and mostly does not deem the archival corpus and the legal reasoning on which the official thesis rests worthy of examination; conversely, the Turkish literature has not sufficiently engaged with these theoretical frameworks either, and has not translated its own documentary accumulation into the concepts of discourse and memory. The diaspora is the key actor of this literature: Laçiner (2008) describes the manner in which the Armenian diaspora organizes the recognition campaigns and their cost to Türkiye's external relations, while Bobelian (2009) recounts the century-long American career of the same campaigns. The wave of recognition resolutions is the concrete output of these campaigns: the process that began with the Uruguayan parliament in 1965 continued with the resolutions of the legislatures of numerous countries, among them France, Russia, and Germany, and entered a new phase in 2021 when the President of the United States used the word genocide in his 24 April statement (The White House, 2021). Türkiye has rejected the entirety of these resolutions as political acts devoid of historical and legal foundation; Azerbaijan, too, has made permanent the practice of reacting to the same resolutions simultaneously with Türkiye. The period in which the struggle over discourse turned to violence also finds ample place in the literature: the assassinations carried out between 1973 and 1985 by organizations such as ASALA and JCAG against more than forty Turkish diplomats and members of their families (Gunter, 1986; Karakoç, 2009) were decisive in the coding of the question in Türkiye as a problem of external pressure and national security, opening a period in which, in McCarthy's (1984) phrase, history was used as both poison and antidote; Türkiye's opening of its archives and its encouragement of academic production are likewise in large measure products of this period.

The literature of diplomacy records that Türkiye's posture in the face of the claims has evolved from defense toward initiative. The first institutional experiment was the Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission, established in 2001 upon an American initiative, which brought together former diplomats and academics of the two sides; the commission's most lasting output was the legal opinion mentioned above (International Center for Transitional Justice, 2003). In 2005 Türkiye proposed to Armenia the establishment of a joint historical commission composed of historians of the two countries and, if necessary, of third countries, together with the reciprocal opening of all archives; while the Ottoman archives were opened to researchers, the proposal found no response from the government in Yerevan (Görgülü, 2008). The football diplomacy of 2008–2009 and the Zurich

Protocols that were signed thereafter but never ratified are the continuation of this line, with their provision tying the historical dimension to the idea of a joint commission; that Azerbaijan's objection to normalization while the occupation of Karabakh continued was decisive in the blockage of the process is likewise on record in the same literature (Phillips, 2012). The message of condolences published before 24 April 2014 by the then Prime Minister is a text extending condolences to the descendants of the Ottoman Armenians who lost their lives in the First World War and carrying an emphasis on shared suffering and just memory (T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı, 2014). In Turkish public opinion this message was read not as an apology but as a diplomatic move directed at lowering tension and at drawing Armenia onto the ground of direct dialogue by separating it from the pressure of the diaspora and of third countries; in certain circles, moreover, interpretations were voiced to the effect that it was a maneuver directed at obtaining results in the regional equation in favor of Türkiye and Azerbaijan, including in the matter of the recovery of the occupied Azerbaijani territories. Indeed, in the years that followed, Türkiye's discourse neither hardened nor turned concessive: the emphasis on shared suffering and the call for archives and a commission were sustained together.

The current link of the same literature is the rapidly changing regional equation of the post-2020 period. The conclusion of the Karabakh War of 2020 in Azerbaijan's victory, the Türkiye-Armenia normalization talks conducted through special envoys from 2021 onward, and the change of discourse in Yerevan have fundamentally altered the context of the question of the claims. In his 24 April messages of 2024 and 2025 Prime Minister Pashinyan brought forward the expression *Medz Yeghern* (the Great Calamity) in place of the word genocide; in January 2025, in a meeting with the Armenian community in Switzerland on his return from Davos, he said that the manner in which the perception of 1915 had been constructed, and through whom, needed to be interrogated, asking how the heading of genocide, absent from the Armenian agenda in 1939, had come into being in the 1950s, and was compelled to soften his statements in the face of sharp reactions from the diaspora and the opposition (Avrasya İncelemeleri Merkezi [AVİM], 2025). In the same line, Pashinyan responded to the recognition initiative raised in 2025 by the Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu with the reply that the use of the matter as a bargaining chip by parties having nothing to do with the interests of the Armenian people could not be consented to; this reaction has been interpreted as the voicing from Yerevan, this time, of the thesis long defended in the Turkish literature that recognition resolutions are political instruments serving the agendas of third states. The most recent link in the process, for the present, is the initialing in Washington on 8 August 2025 of the text of the peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia, the joint application for the termination of the OSCE Minsk process, and the understanding directed at the opening of regional transport routes (The White House, 2025). These developments have prepared the ground for assessments to the effect that the genocide claims have begun to lose their central place in Armenian foreign policy while the gap between the diaspora and Yerevan widens; in Turkish public opinion they have likewise given rise to expectations that the steps of normalization may open the way, in time, to the acknowledgment by the governments of Armenia themselves of the political fabrication underlying the claims.

The literature connecting Azerbaijan to the subject is two-layered, and the two layers feed each other. The historical layer takes as its subject what happened in and around Baku in 1918 and the Anatolia-Azerbaijan solidarity: the mass killings of the Muslim population in Baku in March 1918 by forces among which the Dashnak units took part, the liberation of Baku by the Army of Islam of the Caucasus and its reflection in the Ottoman press (Ak, 2019), the "brotherly aid" (*kardeş kömeği*) extended by the Azerbaijani Turks to Anatolia during the First World War (Aslan, 2014), the relief activities of the Baku Islamic Charitable Society in Anatolia (Haşımoğlu, 1959), the struggle over the status of Nakhchivan (Atnur, 2001), and Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations in 1918–1920 (Kürkçüoğlu, 1994) are the principal subjects of this layer; the geographical continuity of the Erzurum-centered events extending to Nakhchivan and Zangezur is treated in the same literature. The current layer belongs to the period after independence. The occupation of Karabakh and the Khojaly massacre of 26 February 1992 (Human Rights Watch, 1992; de Waal, 2003) led the debate over 1915 in Azerbaijan to become intertwined with the country's own memory of victimhood; by Heydar Aliyev's decree of 1998, 31 March was proclaimed the Day of Genocide of Azerbaijanis (Aliyev, 1998), and the mass grave site uncovered at Quba in 2007 was converted into a memorial complex, institutionalizing this memory (Broers, 2019). Baku has thereby positioned itself not as an actor defending itself against accusations directed at it, but as one carrying its own genocide narrative onto the international agenda. The Türkiye-Azerbaijan relationship summarized in the formula of one nation, two states (Cornell, 2011) has operated in the face of the genocide claims as well: the two countries have made permanent the practices of reacting simultaneously to the recognition resolutions of third-country parliaments, of coordination in archival and public-diplomacy work, and of the joint defense of their historical theses in international fora. The Shusha Declaration signed after the Karabakh War of 2020 is the document that raised this partnership to the level of alliance (Şuşa Beyannamesi, 2021). By contrast, Azerbaijan's contribution in discourse and diplomacy has mostly been confined, in the Turkish and English literatures alike, to the Karabakh context;

Baku's role in the debate over 1915, the connection between its memory politics and its foreign policy, and the workings of the discursive partnership it has built with Türkiye have not been examined systematically.

Surveying this accumulated body of work, four findings stand out. First, the Turkish literature is very rich at the level of document and event; the archival series, the testimonies, the products of local history, and the excavation findings offer a density of material to be seen in few other historical controversies. Yet studies binding this accumulation to theoretical frameworks such as discourse, diplomacy, and policy construction remain few; the archival material and international relations theory mostly stand on separate shelves. Second, the English-language literature reads Türkiye's position predominantly through the concept of denial and, for the most part, does not deem worthy of examination the archival corpus on which the official thesis rests, judicial facts such as the Malta episode, the findings of source criticism, or the legal reasoning. This mutual non-reading has produced two separate debates deaf to each other; the same century has continued to be told as two different stories in the two literatures. Third, it can hardly be said that the division of labor between the legal literature and the historical literature is settled: parliamentary resolutions, judicial precedents, and expert opinions are carried unsystematically into the historical debate, and historical findings into the legal debate, which magnifies the conceptual confusion. Fourth, and decisive for this article, studies addressing within a single analytical framework, comparatively, and in a manner encompassing the rapidly changing regional equation of the post-2020 period, the discourse developed, the diplomacy conducted, and the policies constructed by Türkiye and Azerbaijan in the face of the genocide claims are all but nonexistent. This article stands precisely at that intersection: in the sections that follow, the discourse, diplomacy, and policy construction of the two countries will be examined together, drawing on the concepts and findings supplied by the four strands summarized above, yet through a method that tests every claim against its source and gives place to opposing views as well.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study examines how Türkiye and Azerbaijan construct their discourse, diplomacy, and policy in response to the Armenian genocide claims. The subject is too multi-layered to fit within the boundaries of any single theory; history, international relations, law, communication, and memory studies are all involved at once. For this reason, this section brings together five complementary theoretical strands: social constructivism, collective memory theory, framing and discourse analysis, securitization together with the ontological security approach, and, finally, the dimension of soft power and international law. Three supporting conceptual sets have also been added to the framework: international norm dynamics, diaspora politics, and the two-level game approach. The aim is not to line concepts up side by side, but to build an integrated analytical model capable of explaining on what ground the claims are produced, through which channels they are put into circulation, and with which instruments the two states respond. Throughout the section, the question each theory answers will be stated explicitly, and at the end of the section it will be shown how these parts combine into a single model.

The backbone of the framework is social constructivism. According to this approach, the identities and interests of states in international politics are not given; they are constituted through interaction, language, and shared meanings, and they can be reconstituted over time (Wendt, 1999). Material elements of power certainly matter; yet what determines the meaning of those elements, who is to be counted a friend and who a threat, and which past is to be remembered and how, are the shared structures of meaning. The controversy surrounding the events of 1915 is likewise not merely a competition among answers to the question of "what happened"; it is at the same time a struggle over which meaning is to be attached to the past, which name is to be given to it, and what that name is to signify for present-day identities and interstate relations. The fundamental insight that the constructivist perspective lends to this study is the following: this file, which has remained open for more than a century, is nourished by a divergence of meanings as much as by a divergence of facts among the parties; consequently, the analysis must attend to the struggle over meaning alongside the debate over documents.

The most visible face of this struggle over meaning is the politics of naming. That one side calls the same historical process "genocide" while the other calls it "relocation and resettlement" (*sevk ve iskân*), "deportation" (*tehcir*), or "the events of 1915" is not a simple choice of words; each designation carries with it a particular historical narrative, a particular distribution of responsibility, and a particular political agenda. Because the word "genocide" names the gravest crime of post-1948 international law, it produces legal and political connotations directed at the present even when used retrospectively; it calls to mind recognition, condemnation, compensation, and loss of standing. The expression "relocation and resettlement," by contrast, situates the decision within the context of the law of war and state security, points to extraordinary circumstances, and leaves the element of intent outside the frame. This is why the parties are so insistent about words: to have one's word accepted is the first step toward having one's narrative accepted. In this study, the designations employed by each side will be retained when that

side's position is presented, while in the language of analysis descriptive expressions such as "the events of 1915" and "genocide claims" will be preferred.

The distance between the two poles of the controversy is profound. While a substantial part of the international literature characterizes what happened in 1915 as genocide, the main current of Turkish historiography rejects that characterization; it reads the relocation and resettlement decision as a security measure taken under the gravest conditions of a world war, in the face of armed uprisings behind the front and collaboration with enemy armies, and it emphasizes that both sides suffered great losses in the wartime environment (Halaçoğlu, 2001; Çiçek, 2005; Lewy, 2011; McCarthy, 2024). This article addresses the controversy from the side of Türkiye and Azerbaijan; it examines the theses of the two states, the body of documents and sources on which those theses rest, and the manner in which that body of material is translated into diplomacy. The task of the theoretical framework is to equip this examination not with a partisan idiom, but with a perspective that renders visible how the opposing narratives are constructed and how they collide. An analysis that ignored the existence of the counter-narrative would fall into precisely the error to which the theories introduced in this section point, namely the error of mistaking one's own frame of memory for universal truth.

Another front of the struggle over meaning runs through numbers. The size of the pre-war Ottoman Armenian population, the number of those relocated, the number of those who lost their lives on the road and throughout the war, together with the losses suffered by the Muslim population in the same period, have been the subject of a statistical controversy lasting for decades. Studies of Ottoman population records, taking the official censuses of the period as their basis, contend that the ambitious figures advanced for the Armenian population and for wartime losses are exaggerated (Karpas, 2010; Özdemir, Çiçek, Turan, Çalık & Halaçoğlu, 2010). The same literature draws attention to the fact that the mass losses and forced migrations suffered by the Muslim population in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Anatolia between 1821 and 1922 remain almost entirely unknown to international public opinion (McCarthy, 2024). The theoretical lesson here is this: demographic data are not a neutral arbiter in this controversy but themselves a battlefield; which figure enters circulation, which source is deemed reliable, and whose loss is rendered visible are all part of the framing contest. For this reason, whenever figures are invoked in the subsequent sections of this article, the quality of the source and the narrative within which the figure does its work will be assessed together.

The historical and analytical foundation of the Turkish thesis is the reading of the question as part of the great-power rivalry known as the "Eastern Question." On this reading, from the nineteenth century onward Armenian political movements developed in close entanglement with the designs of the great powers of the day, Russia above all, upon Ottoman territory; the great powers employed the Armenian element as a lever in their contests for influence (Öke, 1986; Kurat, 1990; Muratoff & Allen, 1966; Uras, 1987). The Ottoman archival publications concerning the committee activities and uprisings of the period constitute the documentary basis of this reading (Cengiz, 1983; Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2008, 2009); the documents compiled from the Russian state archives and the documentary publications on the attacks directed at the Muslim population of Anatolia during the war years complete the same corpus (Perinçek, 2013; Binark, 2007; Türközü, 2005). What matters theoretically here is this: the present-day official discourse of Türkiye and Azerbaijan presents the genocide claims not merely as a mistaken historical interpretation, but as a continuation into the present of the great-power politics once aimed at partitioning the Ottoman State. The conviction widespread in Turkish public opinion that behind the claims lie external calculations intended to corner Türkiye and to obstruct its resurgence is nourished by the same historical reading. That perception must be incorporated into the analysis, beyond being a contention whose accuracy is to be debated separately, as a social fact that shapes the construction of discourse and policy; for what a society believes directly affects which policies its state is able to defend.

A sub-heading of this historical reading is the propaganda dimension of the First World War years. The war was waged not only at the fronts but also in public opinion; the belligerent states of the period built extensive propaganda apparatuses aimed at discrediting the enemy. In the Turkish literature, certain foundational texts that entered circulation in allied public opinion during the war years, among them the compilations prepared in the context of British war propaganda and the accounts attributed to the American Ambassador Morgenthau, are subjected to serious criticism with respect to their value as sources (Bayrakdar, 2016; Köse, 2012). Studies examining how the relocation decision was presented to American public opinion likewise demonstrate that the accounts circulating in the press of the period were intertwined with the dynamics of propaganda (Küçükvatan, 2012). The significance of this literature for the theoretical framework is that it shows the roots of today's framing contest reaching back to the war period itself: a portion of the narratives debated today were born, from the very outset, not of impartial observation but of the struggle for public opinion under wartime conditions. This finding

does not by itself pass judgment on the claims as a whole; but it explains why source criticism is indispensable in this file.

The second principal strand is collective memory theory. According to Halbwachs's (2017) classic thesis, remembering is not an individual affair; people remember the past through the social frameworks within which they are situated, and as those frameworks change, the remembered past is reconstructed as well. Every community, whether family, congregation, or nation, produces its own framework of memory; the individual sees the past from within that framework. Assmann (2015) carried this idea a step further by distinguishing between "communicative memory," which lives in everyday communication and is confined to three or four generations, and "cultural memory," which is transmitted across generations through commemorative ceremonies, monuments, canonized texts, and education. This distinction is particularly illuminating for the controversy over 1915: as the living witnesses of the events have passed from the scene, the question has left the domain of communicative memory and moved entirely into the domain of cultural memory, that is, into an order of remembrance carried by institutions, rituals, and texts. What collides today is not personal recollections but organized regimes of memory; and such regimes do not live of their own accord, they demand constant maintenance, and it is precisely this work of maintenance, the commemorations, monuments, publications, and campaigns, that constitutes a significant part of the construction of discourse and policy examined in this article.

Two further concepts are required to understand how memory becomes institutionalized. Nora's (2006) concept of "sites of memory" describes how, as spontaneously living memory weakens, societies entrust the past to monuments, museums, archives, anniversaries, and symbolic places. Connerton (1999), in turn, shows that societies remember the past not only through texts but also through repeated ceremonies and bodily practices; commemorations performed each year on the same day, in the same place, with the same words are a living mechanism of transmission that carries the narrative from generation to generation. Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1983) concept of "invented tradition" adds to this picture the caution that such rituals are often of far more recent date, and far more deliberate construction, than is supposed. This conceptual set holds for both camps: for the Armenian diaspora, the April 24 commemorations, the monument complexes, the museums, and the school curricula have become a regime of memory that keeps identity alive; on the Turkish side, in turn, the publication of the archives, the documentation of the losses suffered by the Muslim population of Anatolia during the war years, the compilation of testimonies, the excavations of mass graves, and the memorials erected upon them can be read as the instruments of a counter-construction of memory (Aslan, 2004; Sarımay, 2006). Both sides remember the past within their own social frameworks and inscribe those frameworks upon space, calendar, and ceremony; the conflict is knotted precisely at the encounter of these regimes of memory.

The concept of the politics of memory also assigns a meaningful place to the discursive instruments Türkiye has developed in the recent period. The concept of "just memory," advanced by Davutoğlu as the Foreign Minister of the period, is an approach that proposes, in place of one-sided narratives of suffering, a joint remembrance of the losses of all the communities that lived in the region during the war period (Davutoğlu, 2014). The message published in April 2014 by the Prime Minister of the period, offering condolences to the descendants of the Ottoman Armenians who lost their lives in 1915, is a product of the same line. One point must be underlined here with particular care: the text in question is not a statement of apology; it is a message of condolence and a call for dialogue which does not accept the genocide characterization, which points to a shared pain, and which proposes that history be debated on scholarly ground. In Turkish public opinion this step was read as a diplomatic move designed to balance the harshness of the diaspora discourse, to soften the international atmosphere, and to draw the debate away from the terrain of emotional campaigning toward the terrain of documents and historical research; in the same public opinion, the expectation was also voiced that, should such gestures remain unreciprocated, it would become self-evident that the real purpose of the claimants was not a reckoning with history but the establishment of permanent pressure upon Türkiye. In theoretical terms, the discourse of just memory is an initiative of memory diplomacy that attempts, rather than confronting the other side's regime of memory head-on, to dissolve it within a broader and reciprocal framework of remembrance; its success and its failure alike depend on whether that framework finds acceptance on the other side.

The third principal strand is framing theory together with discourse analysis. By Entman's (1993) definition, framing consists in selecting and rendering salient certain aspects of an issue so as to suggest a particular problem definition, a particular causal interpretation, a particular moral evaluation, and a particular recommended remedy. The international controversy surrounding the genocide claims is a contest between two great frames that confront each other across all four of these functions. The "genocide" frame defines the problem as a planned policy of annihilation, locates the cause in state intent, builds its moral evaluation upon the perpetrator-victim dyad, and proposes recognition and redress as the remedy. The frame of the Turkish thesis defines the problem as war,

insurrection, and mutual slaughter, locates the cause in great-power interventions and wartime conditions, builds its moral evaluation upon the shared suffering of all communities, and proposes document-based joint historical research as the remedy. The two frames look at the same facts and see different pictures; for frames do their work not only through what they show but also through what they do not show. In the discourse-analysis sections of the article, the official texts will be examined comparatively across these four functions.

The recognition resolutions adopted in foreign parliaments stand at the intersection of framing theory and the two-level game approach. According to Putnam's (1988) classic model, governments and politicians play simultaneously at two tables: on the one side stand the requirements of international relations, on the other the electoral balances of domestic politics, and foreign policy decisions take shape, more often than not, at the intersection of these two tables. When the history of the recognition resolutions is examined, the model proves explanatory: the resolutions generally come onto the agenda in countries with strong diaspora communities, in electoral seasons, or in periods when the country in question is experiencing tension in its relations with Türkiye; these texts, which produce no legal consequence, perform the function of a message delivered to particular constituencies in domestic politics. The Turkish thesis's objection that "history cannot be put to a vote in parliaments" is aimed precisely at this point: parliamentary resolutions are not judicial findings but acts of political framing, and which assembly adopted what kind of text on what date must, more often than not, be read together with the domestic balances of that country (Lütem, 2009). The intensity of Türkiye's reactions to these resolutions likewise stems from the framing power the resolutions carry despite their legal weakness, that is, from their effect of fixing the narrative in international public opinion.

The literature on norm dynamics is also necessary in order to understand the international spread of the recognition campaign. According to Finnemore and Sikkink (1998), international norms follow a typical life cycle: first, "norm entrepreneurs" carry a cause onto the agenda; then, with the participation of a sufficient number of states, a threshold is crossed and the norm begins to spread like an avalanche; in the end it becomes an unquestioned standard. The campaign for the recognition of the genocide can be read, in the concepts of this literature, as a process of norm construction in which diaspora organizations operate as norm entrepreneurs and attempt, through parliamentary resolutions, to generate a cascade of recognition. The strategy of Türkiye and Azerbaijan becomes intelligible in the same concepts: the two states endeavor to prevent the threshold from being crossed, to break the cascade effect by raising the cost of each new recognition resolution, and to put into international circulation a counter-norm proposal, namely the principle that historical disputes are to be addressed not in parliaments but on the ground of documents and expertise. This perspective makes it possible to see the continuity and resolve in the two countries' reactions not as defensive reflexes to isolated events but as a deliberate counter-norm strategy.

Since the principal actor of norm entrepreneurship is the diaspora, the literature on diaspora politics constitutes a separate link of the framework. As Shain and Barth (2003) have shown, diasporas are genuine actors of international relations; they seek to influence the foreign policy of the countries in which they live, and at the same time they shape the identity and the foreign policy agenda of the homeland. The same literature examines the Armenian diaspora as one of the most pronounced examples of this influence: the cause of recognition performs the function of a cause that holds a dispersed community together around a common identity, and the diaspora organizations work that cause with great skill within the political systems of the countries in which they live. This picture has two important consequences. First, the foreign policy of the Armenian state and the agenda of the diaspora do not always coincide; whereas the homeland stands to gain concretely from normalization with its neighbors, the identity cause of the diaspora is less open to compromise, and this tension is one of the variables affecting the course of Türkiye-Armenia relations. Second, Türkiye and Azerbaijan have likewise turned to transforming their own communities abroad and their friendship groups into a comparable network of public diplomacy; the diaspora struggle is no longer one-sided but reciprocal. In the diplomacy section of the article this reciprocity will be traced through concrete examples.

Discourse analysis makes it possible to see how the frames and norms described thus far operate in concrete texts. According to critical discourse analysis, language is at once the product and the producer of social practice; choices of words, uses of mood, passive and active constructions, and the points passed over in silence reflect and reproduce relations of power (Fairclough, 1995). The material addressed in the subsequent sections of this article consists largely of texts of this kind: the April 24 statements of heads of state and governments, the communiqués of foreign ministries, parliamentary records, commemoration-day messages, and official historical publications. If it is borne in mind that nations are constituted, as "imagined communities," through shared narratives, and that those narratives are reproduced daily through education, the press, and ceremony (Anderson, 1995), it becomes easier to understand why the texts in question are drafted with such care and why every word carries a weight capable of precipitating a diplomatic crisis. In the analysis, the texts will be considered not only in their content

but also with respect to whom they address, which words they avoid, and in which direction they change over time; for in this file the shifts of tone are as meaningful as the continuities.

The fourth principal strand is securitization theory together with the ontological security approach. According to the Copenhagen School, an issue becomes securitized when an authorized speaker presents it as an existential threat and the audience accepts that presentation; the securitized issue is carried outside ordinary politics and legitimates extraordinary measures (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde, 1998). For Türkiye, the genocide claims were treated for a long period as precisely such a security matter. There is a concrete reason for this: in the 1970s and 1980s, the armed attacks of ASALA and similar organizations against Turkish diplomats, their families, and Turkish missions turned the question from an abstract historical debate into an actual security problem costing human lives (Karakoç, 2009; Lütem, 2009). That wave of attacks established, in the Turkish state mind and in public opinion, a lasting associative bond between the claims and violence; moreover, the apprehension that recognition resolutions might be the first link in a chain extending to demands for compensation and territory led to the claims being associated with the survival of the state. The familiar consequences of securitization are visible here as well: discourse hardens, the space for concession narrows, and the issue passes out of the hands of experts and diplomats to become part of a debate over national survival.

The same theory also permits reflection on the movement in the opposite direction, that is, desecuritization. To carry an issue out of the security domain and back into the domain of ordinary politics, diplomacy, and expert debate is a political act as deliberate as securitization, and often more difficult. The Zurich Protocols, signed in 2009 but never brought into force, are an instructive example in this respect: by providing for the establishment of diplomatic relations between Türkiye and Armenia and for the referral of the historical dimension to a scholarly examination, the protocols attempted to lift the question off the security axis; yet the process met the resistance of domestic politics in both countries, the Karabakh concerns of Azerbaijan, and the objections of the diaspora, and came to nothing. In theoretical terms, the attempt at desecuritization failed to win the acceptance of the audiences; that failure shows how difficult normalization by diplomatic engineering alone is, so long as the dimension of memory and identity remains unresolved. The same lesson can be read through the two-level game model: the agreement reached by the two governments at the international table could not be ratified at the domestic tables.

The ontological security approach completes this picture. States seek to protect not only their territory but also the coherent story they tell about themselves; the shaking of the self-narrative produces an unease as disturbing as a physical threat (Mitzen, 2006). With the dimension added by Steele (2008), states construct their foreign policies not only by calculation of interest but also out of concern for consistency with their own identity narratives; shame and standing are among the real springs of state behavior. Studies applying this approach to the controversies over 1915 demonstrate that external pressures directed at founding narratives are perceived by states as a problem of identity security, and that this perception renders a change of position more difficult (Zarakol, 2010). The same mechanism holds for the other side as well: for Armenia and the diaspora, the narrative of 1915 is one of the founding stones of national identity, and the questioning of that narrative produces a comparable existential anxiety. Why all three capitals display so little flexibility with regard to the past acquires a rational explanation when viewed through the lens of ontological security: for the parties, the question concerns not so much the past as the defense of present identity and legitimacy. This lens also explains why the parties at times persist in a rigidity that appears to work against their own interests; for a concession made from the identity narrative is felt as heavier than a material loss.

Azerbaijan's position in this controversy must be considered together with its own politics of memory; for Azerbaijan is not an actor lending outside support to Türkiye's theses, but a party with a memory cause of its own. The Karabakh wars, the years of occupation, and the attacks upon civilians in that period, above all the Khojaly massacre of 1992, have left a deep imprint on Azerbaijani social memory and have settled at the center of the state's identity narrative (de Waal, 2003; Cornell, 2011). Azerbaijan has institutionalized this memory through commemoration days, monuments, and international outreach campaigns; it has thereby entered the international contest of memory with a victim narrative of its own. This circumstance lends the cooperation of the two countries a particular quality: Türkiye and Azerbaijan stand not merely on a common defensive line, but in a solidarity in which each takes up the memory cause of the other. Azerbaijan's effort to carry Khojaly onto the international agenda, in the face of the genocide campaign conducted from the Armenian side, is a concrete example showing that the politics of memory is not a one-way order of accusation but a field in which reciprocal narratives compete. This reciprocity will be treated further in the comparative analysis of the article.

The nature of the relationship between Türkiye and Azerbaijan constitutes a separate link of the framework. Classical alliance theory holds that states align according to the balance of threat (Walt, 1987); viewed from that angle, the two countries' shared threat perceptions already account for their cooperation. Yet the relationship summarized in the formula "one nation, two states" is an alliance resting, beyond a convergence of interests, on a common ground of language, history, and identity, and it constitutes one of the textbook examples of the constructivist understanding of alliance (Cornell, 2011). This ground has historical depth: the 1918 operation of the Caucasus Islamic Army reaching Baku, and the fraternal assistance organized reciprocally between Anatolia and the Caucasus in those same years, laid the foundation of the narrative of brotherhood in the common memory of the two societies (Kürkçüoğlu, 1994; Aslan, 2014; Ak, 2019). Today that common memory is translated into a coordinated diplomacy in the face of the genocide claims: Azerbaijan defends Türkiye's theses on international platforms and conducts parliamentary diplomacy against recognition resolutions; Türkiye, for its part, has stood beside Azerbaijan on the Karabakh question and for many years tied normalization with Armenia to progress on the Karabakh problem. The Shusha Declaration signed in 2021 institutionalized this coordination at the level of alliance (Şuşa Beyannamesi, 2021). Theoretically, this picture is a striking example of how identity-based alliances are interwoven with the politics of memory: the narrative of a common past nourishes the alliance, and the alliance converts the narrative of a common past into a diplomatic force.

The first wing of the fifth principal strand is soft power and public diplomacy. By Nye's (2005) definition, soft power is influence resting not on coercion but on attraction and persuasion; the contests of memory are waged largely in this field, that is, in the field of persuading publics, parliaments, the media, and academic circles. Against the decades-long lobbying accumulation of the diaspora organizations, Türkiye and Azerbaijan have developed public diplomacy instruments of their own: the opening of the Ottoman archives to research and the systematic documentary publications (Sarıay, 2006; Perinçek, 2013), the research centers established at universities, the international symposia, the multilingual publications, and the proposal for a joint historical commission made by Türkiye to Armenia in 2005 are the chief among these instruments (Lütem, 2009). The joint commission proposal is theoretically significant in particular; for it proposes to move the ground of the debate away from parliaments and media campaigns onto documents and expertise, and it thereby converts the Turkish thesis's principle that "history should be debated by historians" into a concrete diplomatic offer difficult to refuse. That the proposal has remained unanswered has itself become a distinct argument in Turkish official discourse: the inference that whoever shrinks from the documents does not trust his own claim is a line of reasoning to which Turkish diplomacy has had frequent recourse since that date. An important characteristic of the soft power contest is that its results are slow and cumulative; for this reason, in the policy section of the article, long-term tendencies rather than individual campaigns will be assessed.

The second wing of the fifth strand is international law, the most technical and yet the most decisive field of the struggle over discourse. Genocide is a crime defined in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of 1948, and at the center of that definition stands the special intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group as such (Birleşmiş Milletler, 1948). The legal literature emphasizes that the proof of this special intent is extremely difficult, that the characterization of genocide requires a heavy standard of evidence, and that the characterization can be made only by competent judicial organs; the principle of the non-retroactivity of criminal law renders the direct application of the convention to pre-1948 events separately contentious (Schabas, 2009). Here lies the legal backbone of the Turkish thesis: no such judicial determination has been made with respect to the events of 1915; indeed, the fact that the investigation conducted by Britain at Malta into the Ottoman officials held in custody after the First World War ended without result, never reaching trial despite all the means available to the period, is assessed in Turkish historiography as an early indication that the claims lack an evidentiary ground (Gürkan, 2015). The judgment of the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights in *Perinçek v. Switzerland* of 2015 is likewise an important threshold in this controversy: the Court held that Switzerland, by punishing the expression of views against the characterization of the events of 1915 as genocide, had violated the freedom of expression; while stating expressly that it was not deciding the substance of the historical debate, it confirmed that the contesting of that characterization is a domain protected in law (*Avrupa İnsan Hakları Mahkemesi*, 2015). Turkish official discourse employs this judgment as the support, at the level of international adjudication, of the thesis that the question is not a matter to be voted upon in parliaments but a matter to be addressed on the ground of documents and law.

The societal counterpart of the legal dimension must also be incorporated into the analysis. In Turkish public opinion, expectations go beyond official discourse: a strong demand is voiced that the debate be removed entirely from the political ground; that the massacres directed at Muslim civilians in Anatolia and the Caucasus during the war years be carried onto the international agenda with the same seriousness; that the historical responsibility of the states implicated in those massacres be examined; and that, where necessary, the question be addressed in all

its aspects before impartial judicial or arbitral mechanisms. In the same public opinion there is also a widespread distrust to the effect that the existing order of international adjudication is open to the influence of the great powers and would therefore not approach Türkiye's theses with an even hand. Independently of the likelihood of realization and of the merits of these expectations and distrusts, they must be included in the analysis inasmuch as they display the social climate that nourishes, and sets the limits of, the legal emphasis of official discourse; for, as the two-level game model reminds us, no government can long defend at the international table a line its domestic public will not accept. A phenomenon noted by the comparative memory literature should also be recalled here: in protracted disputes the parties compete for the visibility of their own losses and begin to perceive the recognition of the other side's suffering as a weakening of their own cause; the studies that attempt a reciprocal reading of the losses of the war period show how difficult that lock is to break (Sonyel, 1990; McCarthy, 2024). The target of the discourse of just memory is precisely that lock; and its success is possible not through one-sided good will but through reciprocity.

When these strands are brought together, the integrated model to be used in the subsequent sections of the article emerges. At the broadest layer, social constructivism states that the controversy is a struggle over meaning and identity and lays the general ground of the analysis. At the societal layer, collective memory theory together with the concepts of sites of memory, ceremony, and invented tradition shows through which institutions and rituals the opposing narratives are kept alive. At the textual layer, framing and discourse analysis supply the instruments for examining how official statements and parliamentary resolutions are constructed. At the layer of state behavior, the securitization and ontological security approaches explain why the parties harden or soften; the concepts of norm dynamics, diaspora politics, and the two-level game render visible the mechanism by which the recognition campaign spreads and the domestic political anchoring of the reactions to it. At the instrumental layer, soft power, public diplomacy, and international law set out in which arenas and with which weapons the struggle is waged. These layers are not alternatives to one another but complements: the 2014 message of condolence, for instance, can be read at one and the same time as a move of memory diplomacy, an attempt at reframing, and an essay in desecuritization; the Shusha Declaration is the document at once of the identity-based alliance and of the coordination of memory; the Perinçek judgment is at once a legal gain and a discursive support of the counter-norm strategy. The model will be applied in the following sections to three questions: with which concepts, and with which shifts, is the discourse constructed; through which channels, and with which instruments, is the diplomacy conducted; and through which institutions, and with which long-term aims, is the policy built.

The limitations of the framework must also be stated plainly. To employ several theories together carries the risk of conceptual confusion and eclecticism; that risk has been mitigated by determining from the outset which question each theory answers, and by using the concepts within their own bounds without reducing them to one another. A considerable portion of the theories was produced in Western academia and may have been shaped within the political climate of one of the parties to the historical controversy; for this reason the concepts are employed here not as ready-made molds but with a critical distance, attentive to the specificity of the Turkish and Azerbaijani experience. Furthermore, the framework gives its weight to state-centered approaches; the memory practices of civil society, of academia, and of individual families can be addressed only insofar as they intersect with state policy, which is a limit of scope. Finally, a theoretical framework cannot by itself pass judgment on the accuracy of historical facts; the debate over facts is the business of the subsequent sections resting on archival documents and primary sources. The contribution of this section is to determine the conceptual map by which that debate is to be read, to bring together on a single analytical plane the approaches of memory, discourse, security, and law which are mostly used separately in the Turkish literature, and to propose a model within which the construction of discourse, diplomacy, and policy can be examined together.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study examines, as an integrated whole, the discourse produced, the diplomacy conducted, and the policies constructed by Türkiye and Azerbaijan in response to the Armenian genocide claims. The questions the research seeks to answer converge on three points: from which sources the official discourse of the two countries draws and upon which theses it is built; through which instruments and toward which interlocutors this discourse is deployed in the diplomatic arena; and what kind of policy construction emerges at the point where discourse and diplomacy meet. Since the subject rests largely on written material—state declarations, archival publications, parliamentary resolutions, diplomatic texts, and academic publications—a qualitative research approach was adopted. Qualitative research makes it possible to address a phenomenon within its own context, in depth, and with a focus on meaning (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). As Baltacı (2019) notes, this approach aims to uncover the patterns of meaning inherent in the subject under investigation rather than to test pre-established molds. The debate surrounding the genocide claims cuts simultaneously across history, international relations, law, and

communication, and is difficult to reduce to numbers; the systematic analysis of written sources was therefore regarded as the path best suited to the nature of the subject.

The research was designed as a comparative case study within the family of qualitative designs. Türkiye and Azerbaijan were treated as two separate cases—that is, two separate units of analysis—and each case was examined through three sub-units: discourse, diplomacy, and policy construction. In this way, the position of each country was first described within its own integrity, after which the two cases were compared in terms of their shared and diverging aspects. The case study is a design well suited to examining a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context and by drawing on multiple sources of data (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). Phenomenology, another design frequently employed in the qualitative tradition, focuses on individuals' lived experiences and the meanings they attach to those experiences (Tekindal & Uğuz Arsu, 2020). Because the units of analysis here are not individuals but states, institutions, and texts, the phenomenological design was deemed unsuitable, and the comparative case study was adopted as a deliberate choice.

The mixed methods option was also weighed while the research was being designed. Mixed methods research requires that quantitative and qualitative data be collected, analyzed, and integrated with one another within the same study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2021). Toraman (2021) emphasizes that this integration is the distinguishing feature of mixed methods and that the mere juxtaposition of the two types of data does not, by itself, amount to a mixed design. The joint use of quantitative and qualitative methods can strengthen a study; yet this demands a design capable of operating both methods competently (Butgel Tunalı et al., 2016). In this study, no primary quantitative data such as surveys or scales were collected; only numerical information—such as the distribution, by year and by country, of resolutions adopted in foreign parliaments—was used at a descriptive level. Here, numerical information serves not as an independent strand of data but as a background supporting the qualitative analysis. The study is therefore defined not as mixed methods research but as a predominantly qualitative study supported by numerical information.

The main body of the data consists of documents. Document analysis is a qualitative means of data collection and analysis that encompasses the systematic examination of written and electronic material containing information on the subject under investigation (Kıral, 2020). The material examined falls into two temporal layers. The historical layer covers document publications pertaining to the period at issue in the claims, namely the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the years of the First World War. The contemporary layer comprises official texts produced from 1965 onward—when the claims were carried onto the international agenda—up to the date on which the writing of this article was completed. Considering these two layers together has made it possible to view the historical foundations of the discourse and its present-day use within a single frame.

The document pool was assembled from four groups of sources. The first group consists of official archival publications: the document compilations issued by the Directorate General of State Archives, military and administrative records from the Ottoman period, and published examples of foreign diplomatic correspondence concerning the era. The second group contains the current official texts of Türkiye and Azerbaijan: statements by the presidencies and the ministries of foreign affairs, messages issued around 24 April, the resolutions and minutes of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye and of the Milli Majlis of Azerbaijan, and the joint declarations between the two countries. The third group is made up of texts at the international level: resolutions of foreign parliaments on the subject, the relevant case law of international judicial bodies, and the publicly accessible portions of intergovernmental correspondence. The fourth group comprises secondary sources, namely monographs, peer-reviewed articles, memoirs, and field research reports on the subject. Criterion sampling, one of the purposeful sampling strategies, was employed in selecting the documents (Baltacı, 2019); direct relevance to the research questions, verifiability of the bibliographic record, and open accessibility were set as the basic criteria. Material failing to meet any one of these criteria was excluded from the pool, however striking its content.

In processing the documents, the stages described by Kıral (2020) were followed: the documents were first accessed, their authenticity was then verified, their contents were comprehended, the data were analyzed, and the findings were finally transferred into writing. In the authenticity check, each document was interrogated as to by whom, when, and for what purpose it had been produced; material of uncertain origin or with an unverifiable bibliographic record was excluded from the analysis. The advantages that document analysis affords the researcher are well established: documents are unaffected by the researcher's presence, lend themselves to retrospective examination, and allow a broad span of time to be surveyed at low cost; on the other hand, every document carries the perspective of its producer, and which documents have survived to the present is a matter of selection (Bowen, 2009; Kıral, 2020). As Bowen (2009) notes, documents gain strength to the extent that they permit information from different sources to test one another—that is, to the extent that they enable triangulation.

Proceeding from this principle, texts of Ottoman, Russian, Western, and Armenian origin concerning the same event were read side by side wherever possible, and information resting on a single source was presented in the findings with a note of caution.

Descriptive analysis and content analysis were used together in analyzing the data. In the descriptive analysis, the data were organized along the axes of discourse, diplomacy, and policy construction derived from the study's conceptual framework; in the content analysis, the codes and themes beneath these axes were drawn from the data themselves (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). Coding was carried out in two rounds: in the first round the texts were scanned through open coding, and in the second round similar codes were merged to arrive at themes. Themes that came to the fore in this process included the emphasis on archives, the proposal for a joint historical commission, reactions to the resolutions of third-country parliaments, and the language of solidarity between Türkiye and Azerbaijan. The texts belonging to the two countries were coded separately, and the comparison was conducted over this shared set of themes.

In analyzing official statements and diplomatic texts, attention was paid not only to what was said but also to how it was said. In each text, the principal thesis advanced, the grounds on which that thesis rested, the intended interlocutor, and the tone of the language employed were noted separately; the continuity and change of the discourse over time were thereby rendered traceable. Direct quotation was resorted to when it was necessary to display the language of the official discourse and of the claims as it stood; quotations were given without being severed from their context, together with the date and the authority by which they were produced. Representativeness was taken as the basis in selecting quotations, and care was taken not to let a single striking expression stand in for the general position.

In qualitative research, validity and reliability are met through the criteria of credibility, transferability, consistency, and confirmability (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). To enhance credibility, source triangulation was carried out and documents of different origins were tested against one another. For transferability, the data sources, the selection criteria, and the analytical steps were described in detail, so that the reader may follow the process step by step. For consistency, the coding process was reviewed at regular intervals, and discrepancies between codes and themes were recorded and resolved. For confirmability, every finding was preserved together with the bibliographic record of the document on which it rests; the chain of operations extending from raw data to interpretations was archived in a traceable manner, and a one-to-one correspondence between in-text citations and the reference list was maintained. As Baltacı (2019) emphasizes, the fundamental guarantee of credibility in qualitative research is that the researcher renders every operation open and traceable.

The politically charged nature of the subject places a distinct responsibility on the researcher. In this study, therefore, information supported by documents was carefully separated from interpretations, expectations, and claims. Information resting on archival documents, official decisions, or verifiable records was presented within the findings together with its source; assessments that could not be verified by documents were conveyed as views and expectations voiced in Turkish public opinion, with their character as claims explicitly indicated. The same distinction applies to the discourses of the state parties: the statements of Türkiye and Azerbaijan, as well as those of Armenia and of third countries, were treated not as information whose accuracy is accepted in advance but as discourse data requiring analysis. This stance is the principal means by which the study preserves its scholarly distance in a contested field.

The research involves no human participants and rests entirely on publicly available written sources; no data collection process requiring ethics committee approval was therefore conducted. Nevertheless, the principles of scholarly integrity were observed in the use of the documents, and every quotation and paraphrase was tied to its source. The limitations of the study must also be stated plainly. The examination is confined to openly accessible documents; closed archival material lies outside its scope. In terms of language, sources in Turkish, Azerbaijani Turkish, and English were surveyed, and material in other languages was reached through published translations. The possibility that official texts reflect the outlook of their own producers was counterbalanced, as far as possible, by comparing sources of different origins; it should nonetheless be borne in mind that the findings are bounded by the documentary record that has survived and remains accessible. Within these limits, the method adopted was constructed so as to yield reliable and traceable answers to the research questions.

5. FINDINGS

This section presents the findings obtained through the descriptive and content analysis of the document pool which, in line with the comparative case study design defined in the methodology section, was compiled from four source groups (official archival publications; the current official texts of Türkiye and Azerbaijan; decisions

and case law at the international level; and scholarly monographs, memoirs, and field research reports) and classified into two temporal layers (a historical layer extending from the last quarter of the nineteenth century to the First World War, and a contemporary layer covering the period after 1965). The themes that emerged from the content analysis, namely the emphasis on archives, the proposal for a joint historical commission, the debate over the legal definition, the reactions to the resolutions of third-country parliaments, and the language of solidarity between Türkiye and Azerbaijan, were linked to the axes of discourse, diplomacy, and policy construction derived from the conceptual framework, and were organized into five main clusters of findings: the historical and documentary ground of the events; the construction of Türkiye's line of discourse and diplomacy; Azerbaijan's position and the coordination between the two countries; international recognition processes and the shift in discourse within Armenia; and the expectations and assessments voiced in Turkish public opinion. In each cluster, the picture established by the documents and the literature is presented first, followed by a demonstration of how that picture is reflected in the construction of discourse, diplomacy, and policy. In accordance with the principle adopted in the methodology section, Ottoman, Russian, Western, and Armenian texts concerning the same events were read side by side wherever possible; information resting on a single source was presented with a note of caution, and judgments that could not be directly tested against the documentary evidence were recorded separately as public opinion assessments rather than as findings.

The principal finding reached on the first axis is that the events of 1915 and their surroundings must be read not in isolation but as part of a process of roughly forty years, stretching from the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877–1878 to the end of the First World War, in which great power rivalry, foreign intervention, and organized armed movements were intertwined. The turning point in the transformation of the Armenian question into an international problem was Article 61 of the 1878 Treaty of Berlin, which placed the implementation of reforms in the provinces inhabited by Armenians under the supervision of the great powers; with this arrangement, the question ceased to be an internal administrative matter of the Ottoman State and became an instrument of the contest waged by Russia, Britain, and France over Ottoman territory within the framework of the “Eastern Question” (Münir Süreyya Bey, 2001; Şimşir, 2005; Uras, 2015). The documents and literature examined show that this external framework was completed by organized structures at home: the Armenakan was founded in Van in 1885, the Hunchak in Geneva in 1887, and the Dashnaksutyun in Tiflis in 1890; under the leadership of these organizations, a chain of actions and uprisings unfolded, beginning with the Erzurum and Kumkapı incidents of 1890 and extending through Sasun, Zeytun, and Van to the Ottoman Bank raid of 1896 (Akçora, 2007; Cengiz, 1983; Uras, 2015). The four-volume document series published by the General Directorate of State Archives, covering the period 1878–1916, sets out the geographical breadth and the continuous character of this chain chronologically through official correspondence (Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2008, 2009). The fact that these structures, characterized in Ottoman sources as “committees” and “bands,” are designated in Armenian historiography as “revolutionaries” or a “national liberation movement” is recorded as an early example of how the same phenomena were conceptualized differently in two separate discursive universes; this struggle over naming is the historical root of the discourse construction discussed in the theoretical framework of this study.

By the time of the First World War, this picture had turned into direct military cooperation. That Russia had planned to make use of Armenian elements even before the war, that Armenian volunteer regiments were formed within the Russian army upon mobilization, and that these regiments were deployed as vanguard forces along the Oltu–Sarıkamış–Kağızman line is set out in detail both in Turkish archival studies and in Russian eyewitness accounts themselves (Kurat, 1990; Sarınoy, 2006; Tverdohlebof, 2007). The notes of Tverdohlebof, a Russian officer who served in Erzurum, record that the volunteer units were equipped with artillery and machine guns, that they advanced in the direction of Narman, Kötek, and Pasinler, and that they were involved in looting and acts of violence in the villages they passed through; his account thus stands as a source confirming the Ottoman allegations from the enemy's own ranks (Tverdohlebof, 2007). It is likewise documented in the same literature that, with the offensive of the Russian Caucasus Army in November 1914, civilians whose villages were left undefended crowded into centers such as Erzurum, Van, and Bitlis, and that the countryside was left unprotected because the male population was at the front (Kurat, 1990; Muratoff & Allen, 1966). One of the striking findings on this axis is that the consequences of this cooperation were acknowledged by Armenian politicians and historians themselves: the assessments in the 1923 party report of Katchaznoui, the first Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, in which he described the formation of the volunteer units and the unconditional attachment to Russia as a mistake, together with the criticisms directed at Dashnak politics by the Soviet Armenian historian Borian, are used in the Turkish literature within this framework (Kürkçüoğlu, 1994; Öke, 1986; Perinçek, 2014).

The documents show that the measures of 24 April 1915 and the subsequent relocation and resettlement practice were adopted within this security picture. The large-scale uprising that broke out in Van in April 1915 and the

passing of the city into the control of Russian forces immediately preceded the decisions that resulted in the Ottoman government closing down the Armenian committees and arresting approximately 235 committee leaders in Istanbul (Akçora, 2007; Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2009; Özdemir, Çiçek, Turan, Çalık & Halaçoğlu, 2010). The finding to be underlined at this point is that what took place on 24 April, later turned into a “genocide remembrance day,” was not an event of mass death but an arrest measure taken by a state at war against the leadership cadre of insurgent organizations. The memorandum in which Talat Pasha explained the grounds for the relocation decision, together with the papers of the Foreign Ministry, establishes that the decision was presented as a wartime measure taken in the face of attacks on supply and communication lines behind the front (Özdemir et al., 2010; Sarıнай, 2006). The documents concerning the scope of the practice point in the same direction: the relocation targeted, as a matter of principle, the population of areas threatening the rear of the front; Armenians in cities such as Istanbul and Izmir remained largely outside its scope; exemptions were granted for the sick, the elderly, orphaned children, and certain occupational groups; and the Syrian territories, regarded as remote from Russian influence, were chosen as the resettlement area (Halaçoğlu, 2006; Özdemir et al., 2010). The existence of loss of life during the relocation is acknowledged in the official Turkish discourse as well; it is argued, however, that these losses were the product of war, epidemic disease, famine, climatic conditions, and, in places, lawlessness and attacks by armed bands, and that a premeditated intent to destroy has not been established by documents (Halaçoğlu, 2006; Lewy, 2011). One of the documentary bases of this defense is the judicial process that the Ottoman State set in motion against its own officials: through the commissions of inquiry and courts-martial established in 1915–1916, more than a thousand officials and civilians implicated in crimes during the relocation were tried, and convictions were handed down that included death sentences (Halaçoğlu, 2006; Sarıнай, 2006). That a state allegedly planning to destroy its own citizens should, in the same period, have had its own officers executed for such acts constitutes a contradiction requiring explanation; this is one of the fundamental arguments on the legal axis of the Turkish thesis. The findings concerning Germany’s position are two-layered: German archival sources show that Berlin had been following the Armenian question closely since the end of the nineteenth century (Çalık, 2000), while assessments to the effect that allied German staff circles steered the Ottoman administration during the First World War toward securing the rear of the front are debated in the literature (Lewy, 2011).

The most distinctive component of the historical axis consists of the field findings concerning Muslim civilian losses. In the period that began with the Russian army’s occupation of Erzurum in February 1916 and deepened with the withdrawal of Russian units after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, a substantial portion of the weapons and ammunition passed into the hands of Armenian units; the forces under the command of Andranik, together with groups linked to the Dashnak and Hunchak organizations, established *de facto* control over the region (Kürkçüoğlu, 1994). The telegram sent by Vehip Pasha, Commander of the Ottoman Third Army, to the Russian command, demanding that the attacks on the civilian population be stopped, and the fact that this appeal went unanswered, are on record in the diplomatic document collections of the period (Kürkçüoğlu, 1994). The attempt to declare Armenian independence in Erzurum in the same period is treated in the literature as a development that made visible the political project behind the violence in the region (Başak, 2022). The picture encountered during the Ottoman army’s forward operation at the beginning of 1918 is documented by three mutually independent types of testimony. The memoirs of Kâzım Karabekir relate that in Ilıca a great number of corpses of women, men, children, and the elderly were found in the courtyard of a mosque, and that this scene was among the most harrowing sights he witnessed throughout the war (Karabekir, 1990); the memoirs of Şevket Süreyya Aydemir describe, through the eyes of an eyewitness, the scene of mass death at the entrance to the village of Cinis (Aydemir, 1999); and the notes of Tverдохлеbof corroborate, in his capacity as a Russian officer, the events in central Erzurum and in Tepeköy (Tverдохлеbof, 2007). In the case of Cinis (present-day Ortahabçe), the records based on the statement of the village headman of the period relate that of approximately six hundred people gathered from the surrounding villages, the great majority of them women, children, and the elderly, only a small number survived. In the village of Alaca, the testimony shared with the public years later by İsmail Gürcan, who survived the events wounded (Gürcan, 1982), and the study on the history of the village (Çiğdem, 2002) became the principal narratives guiding the excavation research.

The excavations conducted by the Research Center for Turkish-Armenian Relations at Atatürk University in Cinis, Alaca, Yeşilyayla, Tımar, and the surrounding villages followed, in methodological terms, an approach that tested three types of data against one another: archival documents, oral testimonies, and archaeological findings. A significant portion of the excavation sites were opened at points indicated by elderly witnesses who had seen the events in their childhood or by survivors; in Alaca, skeletal remains belonging to hundreds of individuals were reached in more than one mass grave site, and in Yeşilyayla remains belonging to approximately one hundred individuals; alongside the skeletons of women and children, the graves yielded personal effects associated with the Muslim population of the region, such as a tobacco case bearing the star and crescent, pages of the Qur’an,

amulets, rings, and bracelets. The correspondence of these finds with the accounts in written sources and with witness statements was recorded as a finding demonstrating that the events can be examined not only through political documents but also through the remains of material culture. The crowning of the excavation results with memorial tomb projects shows, moreover, that this research became part of a politics of memory, that is, that the findings supplied material directly to the construction of discourse and policy. The findings on the geographical breadth of the events complete the picture: the studies on the 1918–1920 period in the environs of Kars and Ardahan (Kırzioğlu, 1970), the research on the occupation years in and around Oltu (Demirel, 1998), and the records extending to Nakhchivan and Zangezur (Kürkçüoğlu, 1994) establish that the Erzurum-centered picture was not a singular and local phenomenon but part of an integral geography of conflict stretching from Eastern Anatolia to the South Caucasus. On the Azerbaijani side of this whole stand the massacres perpetrated against the Muslim population in and around Baku in March 1918 and the liberation of Baku by the Caucasus Islamic Army in September 1918; the Ottoman press of the period reflected these developments in detail (Ak, 2019).

These local and regional findings acquire their meaning when read together with demographic research. Studies on Ottoman population statistics establish that in prewar Anatolia the Armenian population did not constitute a majority in any province (Karpat, 2010), while loss calculations covering the period 1821–1922 show that in the century-long process extending from the Balkans and the Caucasus to Anatolia, millions of Muslims died or were displaced (McCarthy, 2024). Here lies the documentary basis of the Turkish side’s discourse of “shared pain”: it is argued that in the same theater of war, alongside Armenian civilians, a great number of Muslim civilians also lost their lives, and that the suffering therefore cannot be compressed into a one-sided narrative of victimhood (Göyünç, 2005; Sonyel, 1990). The findings show that this discourse is not a defensive line produced after the fact; the archival, testimonial, excavation, and demographic data had long been accumulating in this direction. Indeed, comparative studies emphasize that the question of who started the events and who was reacting to what can be answered not by looking at the 1915 cross-section alone, but within the spiral of reciprocal violence that had been operating since the end of 1914 (McCarthy, 2006).

The second axis contains the findings concerning Türkiye’s line of discourse and diplomacy. In the official texts examined and in practice, the Turkish thesis is seen to rest on four pillars. The first is the legal axis. The 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide requires, for the crime of genocide to be established, proof of the specific intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, and stipulates that this determination be made by a competent tribunal (Birleşmiş Milletler, 1948). Türkiye argues that no such judicial ruling exists with respect to the events of 1915, that the Convention cannot be applied retroactively, and that the characterization of “genocide” by parliaments is a political act, not a legal one. As the historical foundation of this axis, the Turkish literature brings the Malta process to the fore: regarding the more than one hundred high-ranking Ottoman officials arrested by the occupying powers after the First World War and deported to Malta, the search for evidence conducted by the British authorities in their own archives and in American sources proved fruitless, and the deportees were released in 1921 without trial; this outcome is used as proof that the allegations could not be substantiated before a court even by the victorious powers of the day (Gunter, 2011; Şimşir, 2005). The most important example of this defense finding a response in contemporary international adjudication is the 2015 judgment of the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights in *Perinçek v. Switzerland*: the Court accepted that the legal characterization of the events of 1915 is disputed among historians and lawyers, held that expressing views contrary to the official narrative on this matter is protected under freedom of expression, and treated the question on a plane distinct from facts established by judicial decision (Avrupa İnsan Hakları Mahkemesi, 2015). Another finding in the same direction comes from France: in France, which adopted a recognition law consisting of a single article in 2001, the law providing for the punishment of denial of the recognized view was annulled in 2012 by the Constitutional Council as contrary to freedom of expression (Conseil constitutionnel, 2012). These rulings have supplied the Turkish diplomacy’s thesis that “the matter has not been settled in law, and the debate is legitimate” with support drawn from international judicial practice.

The second pillar of the Turkish discourse is the call to refer the matter from political institutions to the discipline of history. The proposal that Türkiye addressed to Armenia in 2005 for the establishment of a joint historical commission, to be composed of historians from the two countries and, where necessary, experts from third countries, together with the keeping of the Ottoman archives open to all researchers, domestic and foreign, constitutes the concrete steps of this call (Sarıay, 2006). In the mainstream of Turkish historiography, too, the matter is regarded as the subject of archive-based historical research rather than of parliamentary votes, and the incompatibility of settling historical disputes by political organs with scientific method is emphasized (Ortaylı, 2002). The findings show that the failure of this call to receive a response has been turned into a significant field of rhetorical advantage in the Turkish discourse: the fact that it was Türkiye that opened its archives and proposed

the joint commission has become the basis of the argument that the proponents of the allegations shy away from confronting the documents. Conversely, the fact that certain archives, above all the Dashnaksutyun archive in Boston, are not fully open to access is kept constantly on the agenda by the Turkish side as a lack of reciprocity (Sarinay, 2006).

The third pillar is the dimension that the experience of combating terrorism added to the discourse. In the period beginning in 1973 and lasting until the mid-1980s, more than forty diplomats, officials, and family members lost their lives in the attacks carried out by organizations such as ASALA and the Justice Commandos against Turkish diplomats and missions in many cities around the world; actions such as the Esenboğa attack of 1982 and the Orly attack of 1983 targeted civilians as well (Gunter, 2011; Perinçek, 2012). The findings show that this wave of terror produced a rupture in Türkiye's stance: Türkiye, which until that period had largely passed over the matter in silence, turned from the 1980s onward to publishing archival documents systematically, founding academic institutions and research centers, and undertaking publication activity directed at international public opinion; the four-volume uprising series and the 1915–1920 documents mentioned above are products of this period (Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 1995, 2008, 2009). The approach that history must be defended with documents against the use of history as a weapon of terror was voiced explicitly in the academic literature of the period (McCarthy, 1984). In other words, Türkiye's present document-based discourse took shape directly as an institutional response to this wave of attacks; this is an important finding showing that the discourse was constructed in reaction to an agenda imposed from outside.

The fourth pillar is the humanitarian and conscientious language. In the high-level messages published every year from 2014 onward around 23–24 April, condolences are conveyed to the grandchildren of the Ottoman Armenians who lost their lives in the conditions of the First World War, a language of common mourning embracing the suffering of all Ottoman citizens of the period is employed, and the concept of “just memory” is brought to the fore (Erdoğan, 2014). In none of the texts examined is there any admission of fault or expression of apology; the messages are built on a discourse of condolence that shares the pain without stepping back from the historical theses. The prevalent assessment voiced in Turkish public opinion and in expert circles regarding the function of this language is that the condolence discourse is a deliberate diplomatic maneuver aimed at softening the atmosphere and drawing Armenia onto a realistic ground of dialogue in the face of the rigidity of the diaspora-centered campaigns; indeed, that within the regional equation it served as an instrument of détente facilitating the process leading to the liberation of Azerbaijan's occupied territories. Although it is not possible to verify these interpretations directly from official documents, it must be recorded that the developments of the following years, namely the liberation of Karabakh in 2020 and the Armenian government's turn toward normalization, followed a course consistent with this reading. The Zurich protocols of 2009, standing further back chronologically, are a link in the same chain: the protocols, which envisaged the establishment of diplomatic relations and brought onto the agenda a subcommission for the examination of the historical dimension by experts, never entered into force, yet they documented that Turkish diplomacy kept the option of dialogue on the table (T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı, 2009).

The third axis covers the findings concerning Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan's stance in the face of the genocide claims cannot be considered independently of the Karabakh question. As a result of the conflicts that began during the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Armenia's occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh and the seven surrounding districts, that is, roughly one fifth of Azerbaijan's internationally recognized territory, and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis in this process, show that for Baku the matter carries not only a historical but also a current dimension of victimhood (Broers, 2019; de Waal, 2003). The mass killing of civilians at Khojaly in February 1992 settled at the center of Azerbaijan's politics of memory; Baku has conducted systematic campaigns on international platforms for the recognition both of Khojaly and of the Baku massacres of March 1918 (Ak, 2019; de Waal, 2003). The declaration of 31 March as an official day of remembrance in 1998 is one of the steps showing that Azerbaijan institutionalized its own narrative of victimhood (Aliyev, 1998). The current official texts examined complete this picture as well: the publication by the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye and the Milli Majlis of Azerbaijan of parallel declarations of condemnation following recognition resolutions adopted in third-country parliaments shows that the two countries conduct a coordinated parliamentary diplomacy under this heading. The meaning of this from the standpoint of the findings is as follows: in the face of the Armenian side's one-sided discourse of victimhood, Türkiye's thesis of “shared pain” and Azerbaijan's effort to document its own losses complement each other; the two countries have ceased to be merely the addressees of the allegations and have passed to an active memory diplomacy that carries their own grievances onto the international agenda. The inclusion in Armenia's Declaration of Independence of 1990 of the expression “Western Armenia,” alluding to Eastern Anatolia, and the inscription of the recognition objective into state documents are used in the Turkish and

Azerbaijani discourse as proof that the claims are not confined to history but are tied to current territorial and political demands (Ermenistan Bağımsızlık Bildirgesi, 1990).

The findings concerning the coordination between the two countries point to a historical continuity. The solidarity established with the Baku operation of the Caucasus Islamic Army in 1918 (Ak, 2019; Kürkçüoğlu, 1994) became visible again a century later with the open political and technological support that Türkiye gave Azerbaijan in the Forty-Four Day War of autumn 2020; the conclusion of the war with Azerbaijan's military success, and the full establishment of control over the region in 2023, shifted the center of gravity in the two countries' common discourse. The Shusha Declaration, signed in Shusha itself on 15 June 2021, elevated the understanding of "two states, one nation" to the level of alliance; it provided for joint action in the event of a threat against either party and stipulated a common stance in the face of the claims and impositions of third states (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti ile Azerbaycan Cumhuriyeti Arasında Müttefiklik İlişkileri Hakkında Şuşa Beyannamesi, 2021). The findings show that, with the end of the occupation, the Türkiye–Azerbaijan line passed from a predominantly defensive discourse to a constructive one foregrounding normalization, transport corridors, and regional connectivity projects. The understanding reached between Azerbaijan and Armenia in Washington in August 2025 and the joint declaration are among the most concrete indicators of this new phase; the declaration envisaged the initialing of the text of a peace agreement and the opening of regional transport links (The White House, 2025). The confirmation, in reverse, of the prediction long voiced in the literature that normalization between Türkiye and Armenia would not be possible while the occupation of Karabakh continued, that is, the *de facto* opening of normalization channels after the occupation ended, is noteworthy from the standpoint of the findings.

The fourth axis presents the findings concerning international recognition processes and the shift in discourse within Armenia. The examination establishes that the recognition decisions coincide with political conjunctures rather than with developments in historical research. The year 1965, the starting point of the contemporary layer, is the date on which, with the great commemorative demonstrations held in Yerevan on the fiftieth anniversary of the events and the first recognition resolution adopted by the parliament of Uruguay, the claims were transformed into an international campaign under Cold War conditions (Gunter, 2011). The subsequent waves followed a similar pattern: the single-article recognition law adopted by France in 2001 (Loi n° 2001-70, 2001), the resolutions adopted by the United States House of Representatives and Senate in the autumn of 2019, when relations with Türkiye had grown tense, and the commemoration message published by the President of the United States on 24 April 2021 employing the term "genocide" (The White House, 2021) have been read in Türkiye as examples reinforcing the thesis that these decisions are political acts contingent on domestic political calculations, on electoral and lobbying balances, and on the course of relations with Türkiye. The effective role of diaspora organizations in the adoption of these decisions is treated extensively in the literature (Gunter, 2011; Perinçek, 2012). Another finding supporting the same thesis is the tendency of statements of similar content to come onto the agenda in periods of bilateral tension: the recognition statements coming from the highest levels in Israel in 2025 were likewise assessed in Turkish public opinion and official circles within this framework, that is, as an instrument of the tension experienced with Türkiye; government spokespersons rejected the statements in the strongest terms as devoid of historical and legal foundation (Hürriyet, 2025). What is particularly striking in this picture is that Prime Minister Pashinyan of Armenia himself distanced his country from the statements in question and openly objected to the matter being turned into a "bargaining chip by parties that have nothing to do with the interests of the Armenian people" (Hürriyet, 2025). That a recognition decision was instrumentalized not by the state that is the principal proponent of the claims but by third parties in spite of that state has been recorded as a development supporting, from the mouth of the addressee itself, the Turkish thesis concerning the geopolitical function of the claims.

Pashinyan's statements in the 2024–2025 period constitute the newest and most contested finding on this axis. In some of his speeches in 2024, the Prime Minister preferred the expressions "Great Calamity (Meds Yeghern)" and "massacre" in place of the word "genocide," and this preference gave rise to fierce debates in Armenia (Anadolu Ajansı, 2024). At the beginning of 2025, he drew reactions in domestic politics and in the diaspora by saying that it must be questioned through which processes and under whose influence the international recognition agenda took shape from the mid-twentieth century onward (Hürriyet, 2025). In his message of 24 April 2025, he likewise placed the matter within a framework that separated it from retrospective territorial and restitution demands, calling for "the search for a lost homeland to be abandoned" and for attention to focus on the future of the present-day Armenian state (Agos, 2025). These statements must be read with scholarly caution: Pashinyan does not deny the mass deaths that occurred in 1915; what he objects to is the matter being turned, at the hands of the diaspora and third states, into an immutable foreign policy agenda placed before Armenia, and its blocking of normalization with neighbors (Serbestiyet, 2024). Nevertheless, that a Prime Minister of Armenia should question the process by which the recognition agenda was formed, change the choice of concept in state discourse, decline

to embrace the recognition statement originating from Israel, and place normalization ahead of this agenda amounts to the thesis defended by Türkiye and Azerbaijan for decades, namely that “the matter has been politicized, and the solution lies in documents and dialogue,” finding an echo at the highest office of the addressee country. It has also been observed that in Turkish public opinion these statements were presented as though they were a far more advanced confession; the verifications carried out, however, established that the accounts circulating on social media in the form of “he said no genocide was committed” were a distorted version of Pashinyan’s words (Serbestiyet, 2024). The important point from the standpoint of the findings is that, without any need for distorted accounts, even the verified statements demonstrate that the triad of discourse, diplomacy, and policy is capable of producing transformation on the opposing side.

For the sake of academic integrity, it must be stated that a significant portion of the international literature, together with the parliaments of more than thirty countries, characterizes the events of 1915 as genocide, and that comprehensive studies defending this view exist (Hovannisian, 1967, 1971; Somakian, 1995). The findings of this study set out the documents and arguments with which the parties construct their respective discourses; they make no claim to deliver the final historical-legal verdict on a century-old dispute. The findings do, however, clearly demonstrate two points. First, the Turkish and Azerbaijani theses are not a baseless discourse of denial; they are a systematic body of argument woven from archival documents, testimonies from the enemy’s own ranks, excavation findings, demographic data, and instruments of international law, resting on more than forty years of institutional accumulation. Second, the one-sided victimhood construction of the opposing discourse is a narrative whose scholarly defense grows steadily more difficult in the face of the accumulated data on Muslim civilian losses and the self-critical assessments found in Armenian sources themselves.

The fifth axis is devoted to the expectations and assessments voiced in Turkish public opinion. Certain judgments prominent in media surveys, public debates, and expert assessments which, however, could not be directly tested against the documentary data of this study have been recorded, in accordance with the principle set out in the methodology section, not as findings but as public opinion expectations. Foremost among these is the demand that the debate over 1915 be handled in a manner encompassing not only the Ottoman State and the Armenian committees but also the roles of the great powers of the period, namely Russia, Britain, France, and others, in encouraging, arming, and directing the uprisings; the widespread judgment among the public is that the exclusion from the debate of the responsibility of the states that fielded the committees is the greatest deficiency of the matter. The second expectation is that the matter be removed from the votes of national parliaments and carried to an independent and multinational mechanism of scholarly or judicial examination, before which the archives of all parties and of the relevant great powers would be laid open, and whose judges and experts would be drawn from a large number of countries; the fact that, whereas Türkiye has opened its archives and proposed a joint commission, certain archives remain closed and the proposal has been left unanswered is the principal factor nourishing this expectation. Third, there is a strong perception of double standards among the public: it is thought that large-scale civilian losses of recent history, though documented, are not placed on the agenda by the same circles with the same sensitivity, whereas the wartime conditions of a century ago are turned against a single state. Fourth, a judgment that finds occasional echo in official discourse is widespread among the public to the effect that the genocide claims are used as an instrument of geopolitical projects aimed at encircling Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and, in a broader sense, the Turkic world, and that the rise and fall in the intensity of the claims according to the course of relations between Türkiye and the states concerned is an indicator of this. Finally, the interpretation voiced among the public and in certain authorized circles regarding the post-2014 language of condolence and “just memory” is that this language is not a weakness but a planned maneuver aimed at softening the atmosphere, thereby both facilitating the resolution of the Karabakh question and drawing Armenia out of the tutelage of the diaspora onto a realistic ground. The accuracy of these assessments has not been tested in this study; they take their place among the findings, however, insofar as they display the social climate surrounding the room for maneuver of policymakers and reflect the reception of the official discourse in society.

When the five axes are assessed together, the general picture that emerges is as follows: the stance of Türkiye and Azerbaijan in the face of the genocide claims has ceased to be a reactive and defensive reflex and has become an integrated strategy resting on a historical discourse grounded in documentary, testimonial, excavation, and demographic data; a legal line leaning on the 1948 Convention and on a judicial practice extending from the Malta process to the Perinçek judgment; a public diplomacy conducted through the language of condolence and “just memory”; an institutional documentary publishing effort inherited from the era of terrorism; and a policy of regional normalization in the aftermath of Karabakh. The themes that emerged in the content analysis confirm this integration as well: the emphasis on archives carries the historical discourse, the joint commission proposal and the reactions to parliamentary resolutions carry the diplomatic line, and the language of solidarity carries the coordination with Azerbaijan, as theme clusters displaying continuity in the texts of both countries. The element

securing the internal coherence of this strategy is that each pillar nourishes the others: the field and archival findings supply material for the discourse of “shared pain,” the legal line erodes the legitimacy of parliamentary resolutions, the language of condolence disarms the accusations of harshness, and the coordination with Azerbaijan lends the discourse regional depth. The Armenian government’s recent distancing from the recognition agenda, its change of conceptual preferences, and its prioritization of normalization may be read as a sign that this strategy has begun to produce results upon the addressee. The comparative assessment of the findings against the theoretical framework and the literature is undertaken in the discussion section that follows.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the controversy surrounding the events of 1915 is not merely a matter of historiography; it is a multi-layered field in which discourse, law, the politics of memory, and regional balances of power are deeply intertwined. In a dispute that has continued for more than a century, the parties look at the same events and construct entirely different narratives; each narrative produces its own corpus of documents, its own conceptual vocabulary, and its own network of international support. The position developed by Türkiye and Azerbaijan in response to genocide claims rests, in turn, on three mutually reinforcing pillars: a historical counter-narrative grounded in archival documents, objections concerning the legal nature of the concept of genocide, and the common foreign policy ground shared by the two countries. In this discussion section, these three pillars are examined by first tracing the demographic and diplomatic roots of the question, then confronting them with opposing views in the literature, and finally testing them in the light of current developments.

A proper understanding of the question requires looking first at the demographic background of the nineteenth century. Russia's step-by-step expansion in the Caucasus radically altered the demographic structure of the region from the 1820s onward; following the war of 1828-1829, tens of thousands of Armenians from Iranian and Ottoman territories were settled by the Russian administration in and around Revan (Erivan), while the Muslim population was forced to migrate to Anatolia in successive waves (Bilge, 2005; Kara, 2005). The great migration waves that followed the Crimean War, the Circassian expulsion of 1864, and above all the war of 1877-1878 carried a mass of refugees numbering in the millions into Anatolia; the settlement of this population and the livelihood of its widows and orphans became one of the heaviest burdens of the Ottoman administration (J. Akyüz, 2006; Tiryaki & Özlü, 2021). The cession of Kars, Ardahan, and Batum to Russia in 1878, moreover, created on the far side of the border a buffer zone that would remain under Russian rule for forty years, and in which demographic balances were deliberately altered in favour of the Armenians (Badem, 2010). The great rupture experienced in Eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus, therefore, did not appear suddenly in 1915; it was the cumulative outcome of nearly a century of population engineering, migration, and mutual displacement. Without knowledge of this background, anything said about 1915 is condemned to remain incomplete.

The diplomatic roots reach back to the same century. With the treaties of San Stefano and Berlin signed after the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878, and in particular with Article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin, the implementation of reforms in the provinces inhabited by Armenians was placed under the supervision of the great powers; the question was thus carried, at a stroke, onto the bargaining table of international diplomacy (Baykal, 1988). The activities pursued in the European capitals by the delegation that the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul sent to the Congress of Berlin show that the problem was shaped by external support from this very first stage (Yavuz & İskefiyeli, 2020). Lord Salisbury's designs for the partition of Ottoman territory are products of the same period (Baykal, 1944). As Somakian (1995) has shown, between 1895 and 1920 the Armenian question never followed a course independent of the calculations of the great powers; at every moment of crisis, the regional interests of Britain, Russia, and France were decisive. The official account produced by the Ottoman Foreign Ministry itself likewise recorded the question, from the outset, as a problem of foreign intervention (Münir Süreyya Bey, 2001). These findings accord with the central argument of this study, namely that the problem developed, from its very beginning, in intimate connection with external interference.

Russia's role deserves separate treatment in this framework. The objective of Russian foreign policy to reach the Straits and the warm seas turned the eastern provinces of the Ottoman State into a zone of pressure and intervention throughout the nineteenth century (Bolsover, 1966; Kurat, 1990). The government in St. Petersburg used the Armenian element as an instrument of its own Caucasus policy, at times patronising it and at times reining it in; this attitude was decisive in the formation of the Armenian question (Tunçay, 2020). Both the military course of the war of 1877-1878 and the social devastation it produced constitute the gravest example of the impact of Russia's eastern policy upon Anatolia (Badem, 2018). What is striking is that this assessment does not belong to the Turkish literature alone: studies based on the work of the Soviet-era Armenian historian Boryan demonstrate that Tsarist Russia used the Armenian movement for its own imperial ends, and that Boryan criticised the Dashnak government in the harshest terms (Perinçek, 2013, 2014). A similar instrumentality is visible on the British side:

London's Armenian policy, from the 1830s to Lausanne, was shaped far less by humanitarian concern than by the security of the route to India and by calculations of balancing Russia (Başak, 2008). Britain's policy towards the Caucasus in the final phase of the First World War was a continuation of the same logic of interest (Başak, 2013). This body of scholarship supports the thesis that the radicalisation into which Armenian society was drawn at the end of the nineteenth century developed not spontaneously, but in an environment of external encouragement and patronage.

The channels of information that shaped Western public opinion on the question likewise deserve scrutiny. By the end of the nineteenth century, an extensive network of missionary schools and stations had been established across Anatolia; a substantial part of the information flowing to Western capitals passed through the filter of this network, which was itself a party to events. First-hand texts such as the diaries of the American mission at Harput reveal at once the testimonial value and the one-sidedness of this perspective (Atkinson, 2000). Studies of the reports of Western observers show how selectively the same events were framed in the Western press (Özel, 2007). By contrast, the German sources of the period — the documents of a state that, while allied to the Ottomans, possessed its own independent channels of reporting — recorded the events of the 1890s in a frame markedly different from the British and American narrative (Çalık, 2000). These mutually contradictory Western testimonies concerning the same events demonstrate once more how unsound categorical judgements based on a single body of sources are, and that the question can be illuminated only through the comparative reading of all the archives.

The documentary record concerning the activities of the committees is likewise of a breadth that cannot be dismissed. The four-volume series published by the General Directorate of State Archives documents, through the correspondence of the period, the armed actions and uprisings carried out by the Armenian committees between 1878 and 1916 and the security crisis these created for the Ottoman administration (Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2008, 2009). The line of action of the Hunchak organisation, founded in Geneva in 1887, and of the Dashnak organisation, founded in Tiflis in 1890, extended across a broad spectrum: from the Kumkapı demonstration to the Sasun and Zeytun uprisings, from the raid on the Ottoman Bank in 1896 to the attempted assassination of the Sultan in 1905 (Altınay, 1992; Karakoç, 2009; Uras, 2015). The international dimension of the Sasun uprisings — that is, the manner in which the cycle of insurrection, intervention, and propaganda operated — has been demonstrated in detail in recent research (Görgen, 2020). The uprisings in and around Van formed an unbroken line from 1896 to 1916 (Akçora, 2007); the wave of insurrections of the 1890s spread to centres such as Erzincan (Bırol, 2017) and shook the administrative order even in provinces as distant as Aleppo (Gullu, 2012). Compilations based on the committees' own publications and on captured documents set out the aims and methods of these organisations at first hand (Cengiz, 1983). The religious and political power struggles within the Armenian community under Ottoman rule are also important for understanding the internal dynamics of this radicalisation (Kılıç, 2000); for the committees frequently directed their first violence at their own kin — at those Armenians who wished to live at peace with the Ottoman order. All of this accumulated evidence shows that the road to 1915 was paved not in a day, but in a quarter-century spiral of violence and counter-violence. Every crisis, including the Adana events of 1909, produced both the pretext and the propaganda material for the next (Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2010).

The outbreak of the First World War escalated this spiral irreversibly. The desertion of large numbers of Armenian soldiers to the Russian army despite the declaration of mobilisation, the formation of Armenian volunteer units fighting against Ottoman forces on the Caucasus front, and the creation of the Légion d'Orient under French uniform are confirmed by both Ottoman and Russian sources of the period (Çaykiran, 2021; Hasanlı, 2015). The Sarıkamış disaster, suffered in the severe winter conditions of the Caucasus front, and the Russian army's occupation of Erzurum in 1916 left the eastern provinces defenceless; research on the first days of the occupation has recorded the actions against the civilian population of the Armenian detachments operating alongside the Russian troops (Muratoff & Allen, 1966; Yüksel, 2010). The uprising that broke out in Van in April 1915 and ended with the surrender of the city to the Russians was, in turn, the most concrete indication that the rear had now become the front itself (Akçora, 2007). The government's first response was not wholesale relocation but the circular of 24 April 1915, ordering the closure of committee centres and the arrest of the organisations' leaders; the date now chosen as a day of commemoration is the date not of any act of mass violence, but of these arrests (Gürün, 2005; Lütem, 2009). Studies of military history concerning the fighting capacity of the Ottoman army confirm that in the spring of 1915 the government faced a genuine threat of insurrection in the eastern provinces, and that the relocation decision was taken within this military context (Erickson, 2011). The Law on Relocation and Resettlement of 27 May 1915 was the product of these conditions: the decision provided for the removal of the Armenian population of the war zones from the front line and its transfer to the southern provinces of the empire (Çiçek, 2005; Halaçoğlu, 2001). The essence of the Turkish thesis is that this decision was not a programme of extermination but a security measure resorted to under conditions of war; indeed, the greater part

of the Armenian population of cities behind the lines such as Istanbul and İzmir, together with a significant portion of Catholic and Protestant Armenians, was exempted from the relocation (Halaçoğlu, 2001).

Another body of documents sustaining the Turkish thesis consists of the regulations that accompanied the relocation process. The legislation enacted concerning the property left behind by those subjected to relocation provided for that property to be registered, for its value to be paid to its owners, and for it to be safeguarded in trust; the corruption and abuses that occurred in practice were themselves made the subject of investigation by the Ottoman authorities (Aytaç, 2012; Kardeş, 2008). The records found among Talât Pasha's private papers contain the official figures of the period concerning the number of persons subjected to relocation, and these figures offer an important means of control in comparing alleged casualty numbers with the demographic data (Bardakçı, 2008). As soon as the war ended, the return decree issued at the end of 1918 permitted those who had been relocated to return to their homes, and a distinct administrative effort was mounted for the resettlement of the returnees (H. Çelik, 2008). The measures taken for the protection of Armenian women and children left without kin can likewise be traced through the archival record (Atnur, 2005). Despite the utter destitution of wartime, the relief work carried out behind the lines by the Ottoman Red Crescent, without distinction of religion or ethnic origin, is among the documented examples of the period's humanitarian efforts (Akgün & Uluğtekin, 2002). According to the proponents of this thesis, it cannot be explained why a state harbouring an intent to exterminate would establish a payment mechanism for the liquidation of property, issue a return decree at the end of the war, and adopt protective measures for orphans; these regulations therefore constitute strong presumptions pointing to the absence of the element of intent (Halaçoğlu, 2001; Lewy, 2011). Furthermore, the fact that more than one thousand six hundred officials implicated in attacks, negligence, and corruption during the relocation were tried before courts martial, and that some among them were sentenced to death, is recorded as a circumstance difficult to reconcile with the claim of a central will to exterminate (Çiçek, 2005; Halaçoğlu, 2001).

An honest discussion must nevertheless acknowledge the existence and the weight of the opposing literature. Akçam (2008) argues, on the basis of Ottoman documents, that a central intent underlay the relocation process; the German diplomatic correspondence compiled by Lepsius and the collections of American official documents constitute the principal foundations of the circles defending the genocide thesis (Johannes Lepsius, 1919; United States official documents on the Armenian genocide, 1995). The works of Hovannisian, one of the most influential names in Armenian historiography, have likewise built the academic backbone of that narrative (Hovannisian, 1967, 1971). The mainstream names of the Turkish academy, for their part, object to that narrative at the level of documents and of method, arguing that the events are to be explained not by the concept of genocide but by the concepts of war, insurrection, and mutual slaughter (Göyünç, 2005; Karal & Aydoğan, 2010; Öke, 1986; Ortaylı, 2002). In the methodological dispute between these two literatures, the following criticisms deserve to be taken into account. Lewy (2011), in a study that passes the narratives of both sides through a critical sieve, argues that the existing documentary record does not suffice to prove a centrally directed plan of annihilation, and that the greater part of the deaths resulted from war, epidemic disease, starvation, and conditions of regional conflict. There is likewise great uncertainty concerning casualty figures: studies of Ottoman population statistics show that the figures for the Armenian population of the period vary from source to source by as much as a factor of two, and that claims of losses in the millions therefore cannot be demographically verified (Karpas, 2010). The forgery of certain documents occupying an important place in the evidentiary chain of the genocide thesis is today beyond dispute; the examinations of the Andonian documents are the well-known example (the findings of Orel and Yuca, as related in Lewy, 2011). The sole point on which the parties agree, then, is that a great human catastrophe occurred in 1915; the nature, causes, and responsible parties of that catastrophe remain in dispute.

The role of Entente propaganda during the war years is by now also well documented. Studies of the construction of the Morgenthau narrative show that the ambassador's memoirs were composed by professional pens and in line with the objectives of war propaganda, while the sources of the Blue Book — a product of the British war propaganda bureau — were in substantial part of an unverifiable character (Bayraktar, 2016). How the relocation decision was presented to the American public has been established through surveys of the contemporary press, which show that the reporting rested on a one-directional flow of information originating with missionaries and committees (Küçükvan, 2012). Nor is there a single voice within the American records themselves: the reports of Admiral Bristol, who served in the region for many years after the war, contain observations that openly contradict the Morgenthau narrative (Özdoğan, 2022). Sonyel (1990), in his study published in *Belleten*, demonstrated in turn that comparisons drawn with the Jewish Holocaust are methodologically unsound, the two events failing to correspond in historical context, in intent, and in execution. Research on the fluctuations of French public opinion regarding Türkiye during the years of the War of Independence likewise shows that publics take their positions not according to any fixed truth, but according to narratives shaped by interest and conjuncture

(Y. Akyüz, 2023). This picture strengthens the Turkish proposal that the question can be illuminated not by parliamentary resolutions, but only by a joint historical study grounded in documents.

The other face of the controversy, so often ignored, is the losses suffered by the Muslim population in the same period. McCarthy's (2024) demographic study establishes that between 1821 and 1922 millions of Ottoman Muslims perished through war, massacre, and expulsion in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Anatolia, and shows that in the interval 1914-1922 the loss of Muslim population in Eastern Anatolia reached extraordinary proportions. Third-party sources such as the Austro-Hungarian diplomatic correspondence also recorded the slaughter directed at the Turks of Eastern Anatolia in 1918 (Atnur, 2014). Even the literary testimony of the period bears the traces of this devastation; the memoirs of intellectuals who served on the eastern front convey to the present day, beyond the dry language of official documents, the human dimension of what was lived through (Aydemir, 1999). It is precisely at this point that the Erzurum-centred findings of this study contribute to the literature: the memoirs of Kâzım Karabekir, the testimony of Tverdohlebof — the Russian officer who served in occupied Erzurum — and the excavations conducted in the region establish the mass killings suffered by the Muslim population of Erzurum and its environs in the period 1918-1920 through three independent categories of sources that corroborate one another (Aslan, 2004; Karabekir, 1990; Tverdohlebof, 2007). The excavation findings at Ilıca, Alaca, Yeşilyayla, and Tımar accord with the oral testimonies and the military reports; documents of the period, such as the report submitted by the First Caucasian Army Corps to the American Harbord mission, complete the picture. What took place at Alaca has been recorded in detail both in local historical studies and in publications based on eyewitness accounts (Akbulut, 1989; Çiğdem, 2002; Gürcan, 1982).

Nor is the regional picture confined to the centre of Erzurum. The activities of the Russian occupation forces and the Armenian bands in and around Oltu, and the self-defence organisation of the population, can be followed in detail in the local sources (Demirel, 1998; Er, 1996; Haşımoğlu, 1959, 1960). The occupation and liberation of Tortum (Kardaş, 1964), the Armenian movements across the province of Erzurum in 1914-1918 (Demirel, 1996), the opening phase of the Russian occupation (Yüksel, 2006, 2010), the atrocities of 1918-1920 in and around Kars (Kırzioğlu, 1970), the compilations concerning Varto and the eastern provinces (Fırat, 1998), the struggle in Nakhchivan (Atnur, 2001), and the course — interwoven with massacres — of the attempted declaration of independence undertaken by Armenian forces in Erzurum in 1918 (Başak, 2022) are the mutually completing links of the same period. The population data of the province of Erzurum before and after the war render the scale of the devastation visible in numerical terms as well (Karataş, 2018; Taşkesenlioğlu, 2020). Compilations drawing jointly on Ottoman and Soviet documents, together with the collections of Russian diplomatic papers, corroborate the record of this period from multiple sides (Türközü, 2005). This accumulated evidence forms the concrete ground of the approach resting on the reality that the sufferings were mutual — the approach that Turkish diplomacy has in recent years expressed through the concept of just memory. That these losses remain almost wholly unknown to international public opinion is, however, a striking indicator of the imbalance in the politics of memory; and this imbalance lends a measure of justification to the assessments according to which the recognition campaigns rest not on knowledge but on organised propaganda power.

The international scene after the Armistice of Mudros displays in full clarity how the question was converted into an object of bargaining. Studies of the course of the armistice negotiations and of Britain's occupation policy establish that Armenian claims were handled at the Paris Peace Conference as one item within the great powers' calculations for the Near East (Cooper, 1976; Dyer, 1972). The investigations conducted in the region by the American Harbord mission reported to Washington that an Armenian state to be founded in Eastern Anatolia would lack any demographic and economic foundation; the mandate schemes faded before these realities. The map drawn on paper at Sèvres was rendered void by the military and diplomatic success of the National Struggle, and with the omission of any provision concerning the Armenian question at Lausanne, the matter was closed as far as international law is concerned (Budak, 2002). The most instructive experience of this process is Malta: with regard to the Ottoman statesmen deported to Malta after Mudros, the British authorities — despite their access to the Ottoman archives and to every intelligence resource in the capitals of the world — were unable to find evidence fit to sustain a prosecution, and the detainees were released in their entirety without trial (Gürkan, 2015). That the very state which first levelled the accusation abandoned the case for want of evidence, despite every resource at its disposal, shows that the verdict now sought through parliamentary resolutions had already collapsed before the law on that day.

France's experience in Cilicia is another scene of the same lesson. Among the advance elements of the French forces that occupied Adana and its environs after the armistice were units of the Légion d'Orient recruited from relocated Armenians; the conduct of these units towards the population of the region was one of the factors that ignited resistance to the occupation (Çaykiran, 2021; K. Çelik, 1999; Özçelik, 2003). What took place at Maraş,

Antep, and Adana led to the questioning of the occupation policy even within French public opinion; the process ended with France's withdrawal from the region under the Ankara Agreement of 1921 (Y. Akyüz, 2023). This experience is significant in two respects: first, it shows that Armenian armed units continued to be employed as an instrument of occupation even after the war; second, it shows that the price of this instrumentality was paid, once again, chiefly by the peoples of the region — by the Muslim and the Armenian population together. Indeed, the greater part of the Armenian population that had remained in the region in reliance upon the French forces was compelled to migrate together with them as they withdrew; the true worth of the great powers' promise of protection was demonstrated once more.

The same period also lays bare the historical depth of Turkish-Azerbaijani solidarity. The fraternal aid delivered by the Turks of Azerbaijan to the war victims of Anatolia during the First World War is an early demonstration that the bond between the two peoples was never a matter of rhetoric alone (Aslan, 2014). In the spring of 1918, after the mass killings inflicted upon the Muslim population of Baku and its environs by Dashnak-Bolshevik forces, the liberation of Baku by the Army of Islam of the Caucasus under the command of Nuri Pasha stands as the moment at which this solidarity was crowned on the military plane, and it received wide coverage both in the Ottoman press of the day and in the subsequent literature (Ak, 2019). The integral history of relations between the two countries in the period 1918-1920 sets out the diplomatic, military, and social dimensions of this solidarity (Kürkçüoğlu, 1994). The present-day common position of the two countries in response to genocide claims is therefore the product not of a conjunctural alliance, but of the structural affinity of two states that share the same historical experience and were exposed, in the same period, to violence issuing from the same source.

The legal layer is perhaps the soundest pillar of the Turkish-Azerbaijani thesis. Genocide is an international crime defined by the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of 1948, and the existence of this crime can be determined only by a competent court, upon proof of the perpetrators' special intent to destroy a group, in whole or in part, as such (United Nations, 1948). The principle of the non-retroactivity of criminal law bars the automatic application to the events of 1915 of a crime defined in 1948; moreover, no judgment of any competent court concerning the events of 1915 has been rendered to this day. Taken together, these two facts make plain that parliamentary resolutions are political, not legal, acts. Indeed, the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights, in the case of *Perinçek v. Switzerland*, acknowledged that the characterisation of the events of 1915 is a matter of dispute among historians and jurists, and held that contesting the description of these events as genocide falls within the scope of freedom of expression — that is, that it cannot be subjected to the same legal treatment as Holocaust denial (Perinçek/İsviçre, 2015). As binding case law demonstrating that the question cannot be placed on the same footing as events established by judicial decision, this ruling has furnished the Turkish thesis with an important foundation. That the proceedings of the courts martial convened in occupied Istanbul were conducted under political pressure and with the rights of the defence curtailed likewise renders the use of those proceedings as evidence today legally contestable (Lewy, 2011). One further point must be added: the acquittal in Berlin in 1921 of the assassin who murdered Talât Pasha — though the killing itself was established — after the courtroom had been converted into a stage of propaganda, is an early and cautionary example of law being sacrificed to politics; that acquittal all but prepared the ground of legitimacy for the wave of terror that would target Turkish diplomats in the decades to follow (Bardakçı, 2008; Çolak, 2020).

The manner in which the genocide discourse was carried onto the international agenda also merits attention. It is striking that the claims turned into a global campaign not in the decades immediately following 1915, but essentially after 1965, and above all from the 1970s onward. The darkest dimension of this period is the assassination campaign waged by ASALA and kindred organisations between 1973 and 1994 against Turkish diplomats and their families across the world; more than forty Turkish diplomats and members of their families lost their lives in these attacks (Şimşir, 2000). How Armenian terrorism used history as a weapon — and how the same history could serve as an antidote — was set out academically as early as the 1980s (McCarthy, 1984). The line of organisational continuity running from the Hunchaks and Dashnaks to ASALA has likewise been documented in detail in the literature (Karakoç, 2009). When the wave of terror provoked international reaction, the centre of gravity of the campaign was shifted from armed action to parliamentary lobbying; recognition resolutions were thereby converted into a commodity marketed by diaspora organisations as material for domestic politics in election seasons. The conviction widespread in Turkish public opinion is that behind this campaign stand not only the diaspora organisations but also states and intelligence circles seeking an instrument of pressure upon Türkiye; while this conviction cannot be fully verified by documents, the regular coincidence of the timing of recognition resolutions with political tensions involving Türkiye suggests that the perception is not without foundation. Theoretical studies of the habit of imperial policies of employing narratives of religion and history as strategic instruments likewise nourish the intellectual background of this perception (Macit, 2008).

Turning to the diplomatic layer, Türkiye's posture is seen to have evolved over time from a defensive silence into a rule-governed, multi-instrument counter-diplomacy. By the letter conveyed in 2005 by the then Prime Minister to the President of Armenia, the establishment of a joint historical commission composed of the historians and experts of the two countries, and the opening of all archives to that commission, was proposed; the Ottoman archives were in fact placed at the service of all researchers (Sarıay, 2006). Yerevan's failure to respond favourably to this proposal keeps alive to this day the question of which party shuns the ground of history. The Zurich Protocols of 2009, though they provided for the establishment of relations and the opening of the border, came to nothing owing to the continuation of the occupation of Karabakh, diaspora pressure, and the interpretive ruling of the Armenian Constitutional Court binding the protocols to the genocide narrative. The message published on 23 April 2014, conveying condolences to the grandchildren of the Ottoman Armenians who lost their lives in 1915, is likewise a continuation of this line; the text in question is not a statement of apology but a message of condolence and a call to dialogue grounded in the sharing of griefs and in the understanding of just memory (T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı, 2014). In one section of Turkish public opinion, assessments are voiced to the effect that such soft steps were deliberate tactical moves designed to neutralise diaspora radicalism and to draw Yerevan onto a realistic ground of negotiation — indeed, that they were conducted as part of a back-channel diplomacy indirectly connected with the objective of liberating the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. Since these assessments are not of a nature that can be verified by documents, they are recorded here merely as perceptions and expectations of public opinion; yet it is noteworthy that what subsequently took place on the ground after 2020 — the end of the occupation and the opening, thereafter, of the door to normalisation — ran in the same direction as these expectations.

The Azerbaijani dimension shows the face of the question that is turned not only to the past but to the present and the future. The two countries' understanding of one nation, two states was institutionalised at the level of alliance with the declaration signed on 15 June 2021 in a place of high symbolic value, Shusha; the parties formally proclaimed their will to coordinate in the fields of foreign policy, defence, and security, and the declaration also contained a common stance against the use of the 1915 claims against Türkiye (Şuşa Beyannamesi, 2021). The Karabakh War of autumn 2020 and the full sovereignty established in the region in 2023 reversed the asymmetry created by more than thirty years of occupation, thereby increasing the negotiating power of Baku and Ankara alike. Azerbaijan's politics of memory centred on the Khojaly massacre of 1992 is, in turn, the most visible example of the joint counter-narrative developed against a discourse of victimhood that some would keep as the monopoly of the Armenian side; the mass killing of civilians at Khojaly was reported by international human rights organisations that investigated on the ground immediately after the event (Human Rights Watch, 1992) and has been confirmed by impartial researchers (de Waal, 2003). That this massacre — which lives in living memory, whose perpetrators and victims are still alive — has found not a thousandth part of the international resonance of the 1915 narrative is in itself a datum concerning the selective nature of recognition politics. Türkiye and Azerbaijan have thus established a joint line of public diplomacy that does not confine itself to defence against recognition campaigns, but carries their own narratives of victimhood and legitimacy to international public opinion.

Russia's current posture is a further example confirming the instrumental nature of recognition politics. Although the State Duma adopted a recognition resolution in 1995 (Lütem, 2009), Moscow has at no period used this card as a stance of principle; it has used it as an instrument of pressure whose dosage is adjusted according to the state of its relations with Ankara and Yerevan. Current studies of Russia's South Caucasus policy show that Moscow inclines to preserve the region's zones of conflict as manageable tensions rather than to resolve them (Sapmaz, 2022; Serin, 2023). The cooling in Armenian-Russian relations after 2020, and Yerevan's turn towards a new search for balance between the West and the Türkiye-Azerbaijan axis, demonstrated to Armenian public opinion as well how the great power that had appeared as guardian of the historical narrative could withdraw its protection when its interests changed. This experience confirms — through what Armenia itself has lived — the view defended in this study, namely that recognition politics operates not for the benefit of the Armenian people, but for the account of the powers that use it as an instrument.

The general course of international recognition politics points the same way. The coincidence of the legislative initiatives in France with electoral calendars, and of the Congressional resolutions in the United States and the presidential statement of 2021 with periods of tension in relations with Türkiye, are the familiar examples (The White House, 2021). A far more striking example occurred recently: the recognition decision taken by the government of Israel in the summer of 2026 fell in a period in which that state stood at the centre of international criticism over its conduct in Gaza and in which its relations with Türkiye had become gravely strained; Ankara characterised the decision as a political move designed to overshadow the criticism directed at Israel's own actions and to corner Türkiye (Karar, 2026). That a state should adopt a recognition decision concerning events of a

century ago at the very moment when the human toll of its own military operations occupies the world's agenda is, in the reading widely accepted in Turkish public opinion, a matter of the politics of the day and not of history. The most remarkable aspect of this decision, however, is the response that came from Yerevan: the Prime Minister of Armenia, Pashinyan, declared that they saw no need to respond to the decision, and that remaining outside the process by which the question is used as a political weapon was in the interest of Armenia (İşçi Haber, 2026). Pashinyan had earlier preferred, for 1915, the expressions Great Catastrophe and massacre in place of genocide, and had said that the question of how and in what period the recognition agenda took shape needed to be examined — statements that met with a harsh reaction in the diaspora (Anadolu Ajansı, 2024). That an agenda from which the elected government of Armenia itself keeps its distance — against whose use as a weapon it openly protests — should continue to be embraced by third states lends powerful support to the finding that recognition politics belongs less to the benefit of the Armenian people than to the toolbox of actors seeking to exert pressure upon Türkiye. In Turkish public opinion, this picture has reinforced the conviction that the question has been conducted, from the beginning, in intimate connection with the regional calculations of the great powers, and that it performs the same function today.

The wave of normalisation experienced in the region in the same period has opened a window of opportunity for the resolution of the problem such as history rarely affords. On 8 August 2025 in Washington, with the participation of the President of Azerbaijan and the Prime Minister of Armenia, the text of a peace agreement was initialled; the parties resolved to apply jointly for the dissolution of the Minsk Group, which had frozen the Karabakh question, and the development of the Zangezur route, which will provide the connection to Nakhchivan, was envisaged (Stratejik Düşünce Enstitüsü, 2025). The Armenian government has announced that it aims at the complete opening of the borders with Türkiye and Azerbaijan and the re-establishment of transport links by 2030 (Haberler.com, 2026). Türkiye's conditioning of normalisation upon the achievement of a lasting peace with Azerbaijan is the practical counterpart of the coordination between the two countries' positions, and shows that the principle of joint action foreseen by the Shusha Declaration is in operation. These developments confirm the view defended in this study: when the 1915 controversy comes to the table on the ground of history and law, and when it is cleansed of instrumentalisation by third parties, the common interest of the peoples of the region — peace, trade, and cooperation — comes to the fore of its own accord. That Yerevan now openly names the economic cost of closed borders is the indirect admission that a politics leaning on the discourse of victimhood has cost Armenia more than it has gained her. Against this, the capacity of diaspora organisations and of certain external actors to sabotage normalisation still stands as a serious risk; the experience of the Zurich Protocols is a lesson of recent history showing how the internal and external mechanisms of sabotage operate.

From all of these assessments a number of policy conclusions follow. Foremost among the expectations voiced in Turkish public opinion are these: the unconditional opening to research of the archives of the Ottoman, Armenian, Russian, and relevant Western states, intelligence records included; the establishment of an international commission of inquiry and arbitration, independent of political pressure, in which the losses of all parties to the events — Armenian and Muslim alike — would be examined together; the inclusion within the scope of the same inquiry of the roles played by the great powers of the period in arming, directing, and inciting the Armenian organisations to insurrection; and the pursuit, before international law, of avenues of redress for the moral injury suffered by a nation upon which the brand of perpetrator of genocide has been unjustly pressed. It is difficult for the judicial component of these expectations in particular to find satisfaction in the short term, given the structure of the existing international judicial order and the weight of the great powers within it; the demand voiced in public opinion for an impartial and independent international tribunal is precisely the expression of that difficulty — of the distrust felt towards the existing mechanisms. Yet the demand at the core of these expectations — that the question be removed from parliaments and from the field of propaganda and carried onto a ground of documents, testimony, and law — has coincided with Türkiye's official proposal since 2005, and is, from the academic standpoint as well, the only defensible course. The *Perinçek v. Switzerland* jurisprudence has opened the legal door to this ground, and the pragmatic line of the Armenian government in recent years has indicated that this ground may, for the first time, become acceptable to both capitals.

Within this framework the main lines of the road map to be followed by Türkiye and Azerbaijan also become clear. The circulation of the archival publications internationally not only in Turkish but also in English, French, Russian, and Armenian; the opening of the State Archives collections to full-text digital access, with ease of use for foreign researchers; the systematic presentation of the approach of just memory to the publics of third countries through academic chairs, documentaries, and museology; the documentation of excavation sites such as Ilıca, Alaca, and Yeşilyayla to scientific standards and their carriage into international peer-reviewed publications; the keeping of the memory of the massacres of the recent period, Khojaly above all, on the international agenda in a manner independent of, yet connected with, the 1915 controversy; and the proposal, by Ankara and Baku

themselves, of institutional mechanisms such as a dialogue of historians that would release the process of normalisation from being held hostage to the controversy over history — these are the principal items of that road map. Nor should the bitter experience of the period of terror be forgotten; the memory of the martyred diplomats must be transmitted to the young generations and to world public opinion as the record of the methods through which the campaign has passed on its way to the present (Şimşir, 2000). In doing all of this, the tone must be inviting rather than accusatory — grounded in calling the other side to common ground rather than driving it into a corner — for this is also the shortest route to neutralising the campaign's most powerful weapon, the discourse of victimhood.

Finally, the limitations of this study must also be stated plainly. That the sources employed rest in substantial part on Ottoman and Turkish archival material requires that the conclusions reached be tested systematically against the material in the Armenian, Russian, and Western archives; the criticism directed at one-sided use of sources is a methodological caution as valid for this literature as for its opposite. That the assessments concerning the perceptions and expectations of public opinion rest on observation rather than on systematic field data is a further limitation; the measurement of these perceptions through comprehensive opinion research is a subject of study in its own right. Beyond this, the deeper examination of the dimension of discourse and the politics of memory through the approaches of identity, ontological security, and memory politics within the theories of international relations; the quantitative testing of which domestic and external political variables the recognition decisions correlate with; the replication of the document-testimony-excavation matching method applied in the Erzurum case for other regions such as Kars, Van, Bitlis, Erzincan, and Nakhchivan; and the tracking of the transformative effect of the normalisation process between Azerbaijan and Armenia upon the discourse of 1915 — all of these may be proposed as fruitful lines for future research. To the extent that this is done, the controversy will move out of the spiral of mutual accusation and into the domain of knowledge and law; and this will serve, above all, the common future of the peoples of the region, who have lived for a century in the shadow of this dispute.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study, the unstructured field research conducted was not incorporated into the body of the article but is instead presented below as Appendix 1; the discourse produced, the diplomacy conducted, and the policies constructed by Türkiye and Azerbaijan in response to the Armenian genocide claims have been examined as an integrated whole, and the historical roots of the question, its legal framework, its function in international politics, its propaganda dimension, and the ground of coordination between the two countries have been analysed in their mutual interconnection. The overall conclusion reached is the following: this question is not merely a historical controversy; it is a multi-layered field in which history, law, international relations, the politics of memory, and identity construction are interwoven. Over its lifespan of more than a century, both the content and the function of the question have changed; an issue that was born in the nineteenth century as a pretext for intervention turned into a campaign of accusation in the twentieth century, and in the twenty-first century into a knot that stands in the way of regional peace while at the same time showing signs of unravelling. Consequently, reading the position of Türkiye and Azerbaijan in this field through the lens of a single period or a single dimension remains incomplete; the discursive, diplomatic, and policy pillars must be assessed together and in their full historical depth. Below, the principal conclusions established by the study are set out in turn, followed by the recommendations that flow from them.

The first and most fundamental conclusion of the study is that the Armenian question, from its inception to the present day, cannot be considered independently of great-power rivalry. The question emerged as a component of the "Eastern Question," which concerned the partition of the Ottoman Empire; once Article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin of 1878 placed the implementation of reforms in the provinces inhabited by Armenians under the supervision of the Great Powers, the issue was removed from the sphere of Ottoman domestic affairs and converted into an instrument of international pressure (Baykal, 1988; Karal & Aydoğan, 2010; Öke, 1986; Uras, 2015). It is likewise well documented that British statesmen of the same era were working on schemes for the partition of Ottoman territory (Baykal, 1944). The literature has established that this process was driven far more by geopolitical calculation than by humanitarian concern, and that the Armenian element was employed by the Great Powers as an instrument of their own struggles for influence (Somakian, 1995; Tunçay, 2020). The strategic weight of Eastern Anatolia, and of Erzurum in particular, within Russia's drive towards the warm seas (Bolsover, 1966; Kurat, 1990), together with the manner in which Britain's Armenian policy shifted direction from one period to another according to its own imperial interests (Başak, 2008), stand among the principal proofs that the real owners of the question were not the Armenians but the Great Powers. The core of the Turkish thesis draws upon precisely this point: what took place in 1915 was not a state's decision to annihilate its own population, but a chain of catastrophes in which the insurrections incited by the Great Powers, the World War, and reciprocal slaughter were inextricably intertwined.

The second conclusion concerns the places of foundation, the methods, and the external connections of the armed Armenian committees. Of the organisations that aimed at the establishment of an independent Armenian state, the Armenakan was founded in Van in 1885, the Hunchak in Geneva in 1887, and the Dashnaktsutyun in 1890 in Tiflis, then under Russian rule; the first two kept their headquarters outside Ottoman territory, and all three embraced armed struggle and provoked successive disturbances in the eastern provinces (Karakoç, 2009; Uras, 2015). This sequence of actions—from the Kumkapı demonstration of 1890 to the Sasun uprisings (Görgen, 2020), from the shocks that the events of 1895–1896 inflicted upon provincial administration (Gullu, 2012) to the risings in and around Erzincan (Bırol, 2017)—has been documented in a four-volume series of Ottoman archival documents (Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü [BDAGM], 2008, 2009). The most striking corroboration of this picture, however, has come from the Armenian side itself: Hovhannes Katchaznuni, one of the founders of the Dashnak movement and the first Prime Minister of independent Armenia, wrote openly in the report he submitted to his party in 1923 that the formation of the volunteer units, the unconditional attachment to Russia, and the failure to seek avenues of accommodation with the Turks had each been a grave error (Kaçaznuni, 2005). This assessment, issuing from the pen of the leader of the movement itself, is an exceptional first-hand document confirming the Turkish thesis that the committees had become articulated into the strategies of foreign powers.

The third conclusion is that what occurred during the years of the First World War is too complex, and too reciprocal, to be contained within a one-sided narrative. With the outbreak of the war, Armenian volunteer units were formed within the ranks of the Russian army, and these units operated on the Caucasus front and in the occupied Ottoman territories (Çaykiran, 2021; Hasanlı, 2015). The existence of the volunteer units and their joint operations with the Russian army are facts acknowledged even by the leading figures of Armenian historiography (Hovannisian, 1967). The massacres perpetrated against the Muslim population in and around Erzurum under Russian occupation are established not only by Ottoman documents but also by the eyewitness testimony of the Russian officer Tverdohlebof himself (Tverdohlebof, 2007). What took place in Erzurum, Kars, and their environs in 1918–1920 has been set out in detail in studies that assess memoirs, official documents, and mass-grave excavations in combination (Aslan, 2004; Kırzioğlu, 1970). Viewed within a broader frame, the foundational demographic scholarship has shown that in the cycle of wars, insurrections, and migrations between 1821 and 1922 the Ottoman Muslim population suffered losses of life numbering in the millions, with millions more displaced (McCarthy, 2024; Özdemir et al., 2010). Yet the Muslim losses of the same period went almost entirely undiscussed before international public opinion; the suffering was reduced to a one-sided narrative of victimhood. The conclusion this study reaches is unequivocal: the one-sided victimhood narrative does not reflect historical reality; the suffering was mutual, and scholarly integrity requires that all losses be examined together.

The fourth conclusion concerns the nature of the relocation and resettlement (*tehcir*) measure. In Turkish historiography, the relocation is assessed as a temporary military security measure, adopted on the basis of the law of 27 May 1915 in an environment in which insurrections and collaboration with the enemy had intensified behind the front lines, for the purpose of protecting the army's lines of supply and the civilian population (Çiçek, 2005; Halaçoğlu, 2001). Among the grounds for this assessment are the scope of the decision and its exemptions—namely, the exclusion from relocation of the sick and the blind, of Catholic and Protestant Armenians, of soldiers' families, of officials in state service, and of various other groups; the detailed instructions concerning the provisioning, security, and resettlement of those relocated; and the fact that officials who committed crimes during the transports, as well as those who attacked the convoys, were tried and punished before courts-martial even while the war was still in progress (Çiçek, 2005; Halaçoğlu, 2001). The legislation on abandoned properties (*emval-i metruke*), directed at safeguarding the goods left behind and paying their value to their owners, is likewise, according to the Turkish thesis, the legal indication that the purpose was not annihilation but temporary displacement under wartime conditions (Aytaç, 2012; Kardeş, 2008). Indeed, the return decree issued at the end of the war regulated the return of the relocated to their homes and their resettlement (Çelik, 2008), and protective measures were taken for Armenian women and children left without guardians (Atnur, 2005). That a decision of extermination could coexist with such exemptions, trials, property-restitution arrangements, and a return decree is, according to the Turkish thesis, a logical impossibility.

The fifth conclusion relates to the controversy over casualty figures and demography. The foundational studies of Ottoman population statistics establish that the Armenian population of Anatolia before the war was not of a magnitude capable of sustaining the loss figures that have been claimed (Karpas, 2010; McCarthy, 2024). Notwithstanding this, the criticism that the figures for deaths during the relocation have been continually inflated over the decades is frequently voiced in Turkish public opinion and by specialists in the field; according to the widespread conviction of that public, this inflation of numbers is itself a sign that the claim was manufactured on political rather than scholarly ground. At the academic level the debate continues: there is a body of literature that

maintains the events were the product of a centrally directed policy of extermination (Akçam, 2008); against this, Lewy (2011), examining the documents and testimony of both sides together, concluded that the available evidence does not suffice to prove that the Ottoman government took such a decision, and that the greater part of the losses arose from epidemic disease, starvation, climatic conditions, and the attacks of armed bands. Given that railway transport was used on part of the deportation routes while other convoys proceeded on foot, and that losses varied enormously by time, route, and region, debates conducted over a single aggregate figure are in any event of limited scholarly value. The conclusion of this study on the point is as follows: the figures can be meaningfully discussed only region by region and period by period, through the combined use of population registers, transport ledgers, consular reports, and demographic method; every generalisation beyond this, in whichever direction it points, does no more than manufacture material for propaganda.

The sixth conclusion is the decisive role of wartime propaganda in implanting the claims in international public opinion. The method of compilation of the Blue Book—a product of the British war propaganda apparatus—the unverifiability of its sources, and its political purpose have been criticised in detail in the literature (Bayraktar, 2016). The reliability of the narrative of the American Ambassador Morgenthau has likewise been interrogated through comparison both with his own correspondence and with the reports of his successor, Admiral Bristol; it has been shown that Morgenthau's perception of the Turks was shaped by preconceptions and by the propaganda requirements of the day (Köse, 2012; Özdoğan, 2022). The manner in which the campaign in American public opinion was organised immediately after the relocation decision has also been examined (Küçükvan, 2012). The fate of this propaganda legacy before the law is the most instructive datum of the entire question: after the war, Britain held more than a hundred senior Ottoman officials on Malta with a view to trying them on charges relating to the Armenians; it combed its own archives, enjoyed every facility for seizing documents in occupied Istanbul, and requested evidence from the American government as well. Despite this entire search, no evidence capable of being brought before a court could be found, and the detainees were released in 1921 (Gürkan, 2015). Herein lies one of the strongest supports of the Turkish thesis in diplomatic parlance: even the most powerful, most willing, and best-placed pursuer of the accusation could not find evidence on which to bring a case; from that day to this, the claim has been kept alive not through the channel of law but through the channels of politics and propaganda.

At this point the prevailing conviction of Turkish public opinion must also be placed on record. According to the assessment voiced with force in that public sphere, the worldwide organisation of the genocide claims is no accident; the campaign has served the function of veiling the responsibilities of the Great Powers that took part in the partition of the Ottoman lands—of concealing the Muslim losses caused by the insurrections they incited and the occupations they supported—and of keeping Türkiye, as heir to the Ottoman state, under permanent pressure in the international arena. It is likewise widely held in that public opinion that the true architect of the claims is neither Armenia nor the Armenian community, but the powers that have throughout history sent that community into the field for their own calculations; and that a small state and a dispersed diaspora could not, unaided, have sustained a campaign of such global scale. While these assessments remain at the level of public opinion, serious findings also exist in the academic literature to the effect that the question has been used by various states as an instrument of foreign policy—that history has functioned, as it were, at once as poison and as antidote (Lütem, 2009; McCarthy, 1984; Sarıay, 2006). What can be stated with academic caution is this: there exists a parallelism, impossible to ignore, between the moments at which the claims have been placed on the agenda and the state of the relevant countries' relations with Türkiye at those moments; and that parallelism is in itself a subject worthy of research.

The seventh conclusion belongs to the field of law and constitutes the firmest ground of the entire debate. Genocide is a crime defined in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of 1948; the constitution of the crime depends upon proof of the specific intent to destroy a group, in whole or in part, as such, and that determination can be made only by a competent tribunal (United Nations, 1948). The International Court of Justice, in its judgment in the Bosnia case, sharpened this threshold further, emphasising that genocidal intent can be adjudged only where it is proved by fully conclusive evidence and is the only inference that can reasonably be drawn from the facts (International Court of Justice, 2007). With respect to the events of 1915 no such judicial determination exists; the Malta process recounted above demonstrates that the single serious attempt in that direction collapsed for want of evidence. The European Court of Human Rights, for its part, in the Grand Chamber judgment in *Perinçek v. Switzerland*, held that opinions on the legal characterisation of the events of 1915 are matters of open debate, that the statement that those events did not constitute genocide falls within the protection of freedom of expression, and it expressly distinguished that debate from facts established by judicial decision (*Perinçek v. Switzerland*, 2015). This chain of jurisprudence supports, in the very language of international adjudication, the Turkish thesis that recognition resolutions adopted by parliaments are political

rather than legal instruments, produce no legal consequence, and bind no one. Indeed, even the independent legal opinion prepared at the request of the Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission established in 2001 determined that the 1948 Convention cannot be applied retroactively and that no legal claim can be advanced on the basis of the events of 1915 (de Waal, 2015; Phillips, 2005). The annulment by the French Constitutional Council, as contrary to freedom of expression, of the statute criminalising denial of the genocide claim is a development along the same line (de Waal, 2015).

The eighth conclusion concerns the history and the character of the recognition campaigns. The process of formalising the claims through parliaments began in 1965; it gained its real momentum, however, between 1973 and 1984, with the assassination campaign waged by ASALA and kindred terrorist organisations against Turkish diplomats and their families (Karakoç, 2009; McCarthy, 1984). This period, in which dozens of Turkish diplomats and their relatives were martyred, was the turning point that moved Türkiye out of its long defensive posture and towards the development of active policy. In the decades that followed, numerous national parliaments adopted recognition resolutions; the justifications, timings, and domestic political contexts of these resolutions have been compiled with their documentation (Lütem, 2009). The symbolic apex of the process was the first-ever use of the word genocide by a President of the United States in the 24 April statement of 2021 (The White House, 2021). Ankara and Baku rejected that statement in the strongest terms; what is striking, however, is that the decision produced no legal consequence whatsoever, generated no lasting rupture in bilateral relations, and proved unable to halt the process of regional normalisation that began almost immediately afterwards. This demonstrates that the effect of recognition decisions remains largely at the symbolic level, and that even the states adopting them refrain from converting them into operative policy.

The ninth conclusion concerns the consistency of Türkiye's diplomatic line. In 2005 Türkiye formally proposed to Armenia the establishment of a joint historical commission composed of historians of the two countries and, where necessary, of third countries, together with the reciprocal opening of all archives; the proposal found no acceptance in Yerevan (Görgülü, 2008). The rapprochement that began with football diplomacy in 2008 continued in 2009 with the signature at Zurich of two protocols providing for the establishment of diplomatic relations, the opening of the border, and the creation of a sub-commission to examine the historical dimension (de Waal, 2015; Görgülü, 2008). The protocols could be ratified in neither country; the Armenian leadership withdrew the texts from parliament in 2015 and, on 1 March 2018, annulled them altogether (Hürriyet, 2018). Particularly noteworthy in this process is the vehemence with which the diaspora organisations opposed the historical-commission clause of the protocols; for a party confident of its claim has no rational ground to shrink from a joint examination based on the archives. Türkiye, for its part, chose in the same period not to harden its discourse but to develop a humane idiom: the message published on 23 April 2014 by the then Prime Minister is a text conveying condolences to the descendants of the Ottoman Armenians who lost their lives in the First World War, marked by an emphasis on shared pain and just memory (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014). It must be stressed with particular emphasis that this message was not an apology and contained not the slightest departure from the Turkish thesis; the text preserved intact the line rejecting the characterisation of genocide and reiterated the proposal for a joint historical commission. In Turkish public opinion and in circles close to the question, there exists a widespread assessment that declarations of this kind constituted a deliberate diplomatic manoeuvre, intended to soften the atmosphere, to separate Armenia from the most intransigent discourse of the diaspora, to ripen the ground for a settlement of the Karabakh question, and to draw the debate from the plane of accusation to the plane of documentation. Subsequent developments followed a course that vindicated this reading: the language of conciliation yielded not a single concession from Türkiye's theses; the regional balance, meanwhile, turned from 2020 onwards in favour of Türkiye and Azerbaijan, the occupation of Karabakh came to an end, and the very ground of the debate was transformed.

The tenth conclusion is the decisive weight of the Azerbaijani axis. The bond between Türkiye and Azerbaijan is not new; the fraternal aid extended by the Turks of Azerbaijan to Anatolia during the First World War attests to the historical depth of the solidarity between the two peoples (Aslan, 2014). The principle of "one nation, two states" has translated into concrete coordination in the posture adopted towards the genocide claims as well. Armenia's occupation in the 1990s of Karabakh and the surrounding territories of Azerbaijan, the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis, and the killing of hundreds of civilians at Khojaly in 1992 (de Waal, 2013) constitute the principal grounds on which Azerbaijan has carried its own memory of victimhood onto the international agenda. Azerbaijan responds to recognition initiatives in third countries jointly and simultaneously with Türkiye; the common language rising from the two capitals in the face of 24 April statements is the most visible instance of this discursive coordination. The conclusion of the 2020 Karabakh War in Azerbaijan's victory, and Türkiye's open support throughout that process, raised the relationship to the level of alliance with the Shusha Declaration signed on 15 June 2021 (Shusha Declaration on Allied Relations between the Republic of Türkiye

and the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021). The liberation of Karabakh is a turning point not only in military terms but in the politics of memory, for it drained the ground of conflict on which the claims had fed: so long as the occupation continued, Armenia's discourse interlacing historical claims with territorial demands could stand; with the end of the occupation, the material foundation of that discourse collapsed.

The eleventh conclusion—and the most remarkable from a contemporary standpoint—is the transformation that has begun within Armenia's own official discourse. In 2024, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, speaking of the events of 1915, departed from the established formula and used the expressions "Great Calamity" (*Meds Yeghern*) and "massacre"; the choice provoked controversy in Armenia (*Anadolu Ajansı*, 2024). In January 2025, in an address to the Armenian community of Switzerland delivered in Zurich, he went considerably further, asking "How is it that in 1939 there was no agenda of an Armenian Genocide, and in 1950 such an agenda appeared?"—and stating that this history must be re-examined, and that it must be understood what happened, why it happened, and through whom this perception was constructed (*Serbestiyet*, 2025). That a Prime Minister of Armenia should question before his own public in what period, and by whose hands, the established narrative was placed on the agenda—and that he should do so in the teeth of diaspora reaction—is of historic significance, for it shows that the thesis Türkiye has defended for decades, namely that history should be left to scholarship and not to politics, has begun to find resonance in the counterpart country itself. In Turkish public opinion, these statements have been interpreted as the first voicing, by the counterpart itself, of the conviction that the claim was born not of Armenia's own experience but of an agenda constructed by external centres during the Cold War. Beneath this transformation lies the change in regional realities: on 8 August 2025 in Washington, under the auspices of the President of the United States, President Aliyev of Azerbaijan and Prime Minister Pashinyan initialled a peace agreement, consensus was reached on the operation of the Zangezur route, and the Yerevan government in effect removed recognition of the genocide claim from among the preconditions of normalisation (*NTV*, 2025). The debate over amending the historical references in the preamble of the Armenian constitution is on the agenda as part of the same transformation.

Türkiye-Armenia normalisation is likewise advancing on this ground through concrete steps. In the process that began with the appointment of special envoys at the end of 2021, reciprocal flights and confidence-building measures came into operation; scheduled Istanbul-Yerevan flights commenced on 11 March 2026 (*Cumhuriyet*, 2026); as of 11 May 2026 the bureaucratic obstacles to direct trade between the two countries were removed; and technical preparations accelerated for the opening of the land border and the revival of the Kars-Gyumri railway (*TRT Haber*, 2026). That Türkiye conducts this process without preconditions, and does not erect the historical controversy as an obstacle before normalisation, is itself an indication of the confidence it reposes in its own thesis: a country whose archives are open, which proposes a joint commission, and which develops trade and transport with its neighbour has nothing to hide—and it is this very posture that is being communicated to international public opinion.

The most instructive scene of this entire tableau, however, was played out in June 2026. The Israeli government, at a moment when tension with Türkiye arising from Gaza was escalating, adopted a decision recognising the events of 1915 as genocide; Ankara rejected the decision, stating that it had to do not with history but with the politics of the day, and that it was intended to overshadow the international criticism directed at Israel's actions in Gaza (*Karar*, 2026). What is truly striking, however, is the posture of Armenia, the party in whose name the claim is advanced: Prime Minister Pashinyan announced that they saw no need to respond to the decision, that they were opposed to the use of the concept of genocide as a political weapon—that is, to its instrumentalisation—and that abstaining from that debate was in Armenia's interest (*Karar*, 2026). That a claim which has stood at the centre of recognition campaigns for half a century should be disowned by Yerevan itself in the face of a fresh act of recognition is an occurrence of the rarest kind, and it confirms two conclusions at once. First, the Turkish thesis that recognition decisions are taken far less out of a search for historical truth than out of conjunctural political calculation became visible in this instance with almost laboratory clarity: the decision was adopted not because a new document had been found in the archives, but at a moment when relations with Türkiye had become strained. Second, it was seen that even the state which had placed the claim at the centre of its national identity could relegate it to the background when its own interests so required—thereby laying bare the political function underlying the claim's sacralised appearance. In Turkish public opinion, this development has been read as a contemporary confirmation of the conviction that the claims have from the beginning been wielded by third actors as an instrument of pressure and encirclement against Türkiye.

When all these conclusions are read together, it may be said that Türkiye and Azerbaijan have constructed, in the face of the genocide claims, a three-tiered, coherent, and steadily maturing model. On the plane of discourse, a framework resting on documents, archives, and the emphasis on shared suffering has been erected against the

language of accusation; the categorical rejection epitomised in the official formula "so-called genocide" has, from 2014 onwards, been balanced by the call for just memory and the idiom of condolence, so that domestic sensibility has been preserved while a constructive countenance has been presented abroad. On the plane of diplomacy, the debate has been drawn insistently to the table through the proposal for a joint historical commission, the Zurich Protocols, the condolence message, and finally the normalisation talks conducted without preconditions; and through measured yet resolute responses to states adopting recognition decisions, it has been demonstrated that such decisions are not without cost. On the plane of policy, the ground of conflict on which the claims fed has been drained step by step through the liberation of Karabakh, the Shusha Declaration, the opening of transport and trade arteries, and the projects of regional integration. The model has its fragile points as well, and it would be unrealistic to overlook them: the influence of diaspora organisations over third-country parliaments and media persists; recognition initiatives can return to the agenda in electoral seasons; and the fluctuations of Armenian domestic politics, the course of the constitutional debate, and the calculations of extra-regional powers in the South Caucasus generate uncertainty over the future of normalisation. The model is a structure that requires constant maintenance if the positions it has won are to be held.

The recommendations developed on the basis of these conclusions are as follows. First, the proposal for a joint historical commission, which Türkiye has kept on the table since 2005, should be updated and re-tabled within a broader and more ambitious framework. The commission should be composed not only of Turkish and Armenian historians but also of historians and jurists from the countries involved in the events of the period and from neutral countries; it should work with full access to the Ottoman, Russian, British, French, German, American, and Armenian archives; and its inquiry should not be confined to Armenian losses but should encompass the losses of the Muslim population and the role of all the actors of the period, including the Great Powers implicated in the events. The proposals voiced in Turkish public opinion—that such a body might convene under Türkiye's own hosting, and that its members might be selected from among the scholars of every country wishing to take part—may likewise be weighed within this framework; for the offer of hosting is a powerful message to international public opinion as to which party has confidence in its archives and in its thesis. Pashinyan's call for the re-examination of history has, for the first time in history, opened a genuine window of opportunity for this proposal to find a counterpart; that window should be seized before it closes.

Second, the legal ground of the controversy should be made the backbone of the communication strategy. The specific-intent and competent-tribunal requirements of the 1948 Convention, the evidentiary standard of the International Court of Justice in the Bosnia judgment, the collapse of the Malta process for want of evidence, and the *Perinçek* jurisprudence—these four links, each completing the others, furnish a framework sufficient to explain at every level that parliamentary resolutions are legally void. This framework should be carried systematically into the public opinion of the countries adopting recognition decisions, in their own languages, through academic publications, think-tank reports, and the media; and the independent legal opinions establishing that the 1948 Convention cannot operate retroactively and that no legal claim can arise from the events should likewise be deployed in that communication. Third, the research programmes devoted to documenting Muslim and Turkish losses should be strengthened and institutionalised. The method employed in and around Erzurum—combining archival documents, testimony, and mass-grave excavations—should be extended to other regions; oral-history records should be compiled without delay; the findings should be published in multiple languages, including English, French, Russian, and Armenian; and the archival documents, excavation reports, and population data should be gathered on a digital platform open to the free access of researchers. Against the publishing power of the opposing narrative, in operation for a century, the visibility of documentation-based scholarship can be raised only by this route.

Fourth, the coordination between Türkiye and Azerbaijan should be institutionalised. The mechanism of joint response, which has hitherto operated largely by reflex and case by case, should be furnished with a joint research and documentation centre, an early-warning system monitoring recognition initiatives in third countries in advance, and joint communication plans to be activated in moments of crisis. The platform of the Organization of Turkic States should be used more effectively, both for the enlargement of this solidarity and for the participation of member states' archival and academic capacities in joint work. Fifth, the gains of the normalisation process should be scrupulously protected and deepened. The present approach, which has removed the historical controversy from among the preconditions, is sound and should be maintained; the opening of the border crossings, the revival of the Kars-Gyumri railway, and the growth of trade are the most concrete instruments capable of repairing a relationship between two peoples that the claims have poisoned. Engaging the will within Armenia that defends the realist line despite diaspora pressure, and multiplying the cultural, academic, and economic contacts through which that line may find resonance at the level of the peoples, is in the long-term

interest of Türkiye and Azerbaijan alike. Nor should the diaspora be regarded as a monolithic bloc; channels of contact with its pro-dialogue elements should be kept open.

Finally, recommendations addressed to the academy may be enumerated. The comparative analysis, across periods, of the official discourses of Türkiye and Azerbaijan; process-tracing studies of the domestic and external political conditions under which recognition resolutions have been adopted in third-country parliaments; the quantitative testing of the link between recognition decisions and the state of the adopting countries' bilateral relations with Türkiye; the lobbying networks, financing structures, and media strategies of diaspora organisations; demographic loss studies to be conducted region by region and period by period; the depth and permanence of the transformation begun in Armenian discourse under Pashinyan; and, finally, the relationship of recognition decisions to current geopolitical tensions, as seen in the Israeli case—these are the fields of research that this study has opened and that await deeper cultivation. The road to a sound resolution of this controversy of more than a century runs neither through parliamentary rostrums nor through propaganda campaigns; it runs through the opening of the archives to their last folio, through the joint and honest examination of all losses, through the protection of law against politics, and through the consolidation of the peace now being built in the region. The integrated whole of discourse, diplomacy, and policy that Türkiye and Azerbaijan have constructed over the last quarter-century has shown that this road can be walked; at the point now reached, history is, for the first time, acquiring the possibility of ceasing to be an instrument of accusation and becoming a subject of joint inquiry.

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Appendix 1

As various centers of power have continuously employed allegations of an Armenian genocide in order to corner Turkey on international platforms, and as Turkey, in order to avoid tensions within the Western alliance system of which it is a part, has not merely confined itself to politely rejecting these developments but has, since the 2010s, adopted a discourse characterized by increasingly greater concessions in what it considers to be a just cause, unstructured conversations were conducted with people from all segments of society in order to reveal how the public actually views this issue.

Although thousands of individuals were interviewed during this sixteen-year period, I additionally present in this study the shared opinion on which 82 percent of my interlocutors agreed during the detailed interviews conducted primarily with 1,500 people:

The countries led by the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany, France, and Russia, which set the Ottoman Empire on a path toward disintegration based on the ethnic groups they supported and in accordance with their own interests, were unable to sufficiently persuade the Armenians, who had been among the most loyal members of the Ottoman Empire. For this reason, they established Armenian terrorist organizations with the support of the intelligence agencies of the five countries mentioned above, much like today's PKK terrorist organization.

When the events documented in the four-volume series published by the Ottoman State Archives are examined, it can be seen that, particularly during the First World War, the states fighting against the Ottoman Empire—especially Russia—together with their soldiers, massacred hundreds of thousands of Ottoman citizens in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia and in the Caucasus. In response, the Ottoman Empire arrested Armenian-origin writers, intellectuals, and leaders of organized groups who encouraged these acts of betrayal on 24 April 1915. In later years, this event was promoted and commemorated by Western countries and Russia as the so-called “Armenian Genocide.”

Russia and the Western powers, which trained, supported, and utilized Ottoman Armenians against the Ottoman Empire through their intelligence and military structures, subsequently sought to prevent themselves from being branded as perpetrators of massacres, war criminals, and actors guilty of crimes against humanity. To this end, they launched and disseminated on a global scale a campaign portraying the Ottoman Empire—which they had sought to destroy—as a “genocidal” state.

While the overwhelming majority of able-bodied men were fighting on the various fronts of the First World War or serving behind the lines, the defenseless, unarmed, hungry, and impoverished women, children, and elderly people of the Ottoman Empire were subjected to massacres by Armenian terrorist organizations and by the intelligence and killing apparatuses of the foreign powers supporting them. In order to conceal the crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide they had committed, these circles stigmatize the already-dissolved Ottoman Empire and, furthermore, use the so-called “genocide” allegation as a means of placing pressure on Turkey, one of its successors that possesses the potential to recover and once again become a major power.

The terrorist organizations created by Armenian separatist groups, which were directly supported in every respect by the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany (during the period before the First World War), and Russia in pursuit of independence, launched acts of terrorism unparalleled in the world in terms of their scale, massacres, and destruction. Their objective was to disrupt the peace, order, and harmony of the Ottoman Empire of which they were citizens and to drive the population out of the regions of Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia that they claimed as their own.

Which is more compelling: the accusations directed at a state that sought to relocate to Syria—far from the fronts of the First World War and particularly far from the Russian armies with which they were cooperating—those terrorist organizations and their supporters who aimed to divide the country and expel or, if necessary, kill millions of its citizens; or the fact that, instead of exterminating terrorist organizations and their supporters who threatened the nation and the state, it attempted to send them to more productive, warmer, and safer lands where they would not create problems?

Moreover, while all of these procedures were carried out through official and secure channels, the success rate of the relocation policy remained at only 21 percent. Those who escaped relocation, those protected by their Turkish neighbors, those who, with Turkish assistance, presented themselves as members of Turkish or Kurdish families, and those who moved to present-day Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Lebanon, and Syria as a result of the relocation are also later portrayed as victims of genocide.

Furthermore, if one considers some of the more exaggerated allegations, the registered Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire appears to be smaller than the number of Armenians claimed to have died during the relocation process.

The fact that Turkey and Azerbaijan have remained ineffective against the Western propaganda machine even in an issue in which they are considered so victimized and innocent is regarded with deep sorrow by almost all of the individuals interviewed.

Based on the average opinions of the individuals interviewed, there exists a widespread expectation within Turkish society that the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, and Armenia should be put on trial because

of what is regarded as one of the most insidious traps and genocides in human history; a process believed to have targeted defenseless women, children, and the elderly and to have been carried out against the Anatolian Turks. Likewise, based on the belief that the aforementioned powers exercise dominance over international courts, it is frequently argued that an independent international criminal court and an independent international court of law should be established in Turkey. It is further proposed that the judges of these courts should be selected from among judges of all countries willing to participate.

Within this framework, it is argued that both those responsible for what is believed to have been a genocide committed against the Anatolian Turks and the individuals, institutions, and organizations that have disseminated genocide accusations against the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish people should be brought to trial. In addition, there is a notable expectation that any individuals or groups believed to have supported or contributed to this process in any manner should also be held accountable before such courts.

If it were assumed that all of the massacres, uprisings, acts described as genocide, and the subsequent accusations that took place in the Ottoman lands had instead occurred, for example, in the United States, China, Russia, France, Germany, Japan, Canada, Italy, or the United Kingdom between 1946 and 1991, would those countries have granted the right to live to the individuals and groups they believed had inflicted such great suffering upon them? Likewise, if these events had occurred in the histories of those countries, how would they have operated their propaganda mechanisms? For example, the operations conducted by the United States in Afghanistan and Iraq, justified on the basis of the attacks against the Twin Towers in New York on 11 September 2001, have for years been the subject of millions of news reports, debates, and academic studies.

By contrast, questions are raised as to how the United States would have reacted if events such as repeated uprisings, mass massacres, the burning of entire population groups, the destruction of numerous neighborhoods in cities, the burning of thousands of villages, the killing of military units while they slept at night, and attacks against the women, children, and elderly of a country whose men were away at war—events claimed to have occurred not once or twice but dozens of times in Ottoman lands—had taken place on American soil.

On the basis of this approach, it is argued that the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, and Armenia, which are believed to have been directly connected with the genocide, should be tried before the proposed courts. It is further maintained that writers who defend the so-called genocide allegations, countries that have adopted these allegations in their parliaments, and individuals or groups that promote such narratives should likewise be brought before the courts.

According to the individuals interviewed, there is a strong conviction that these circles should be prosecuted for concealing what is believed to have been a genocide committed against the Anatolian Turks, engaging in false propaganda, institutionalizing such allegations, spreading defamation, and carrying out other related activities.

In 1915, during one of the most intense phases of the First World War, the Ottoman Empire decided to relocate the active Armenian elements in Anatolia, together with their families, to the Syrian region, which was considered distant from Russian influence and where cooperation with Russia would be difficult. This decision was taken in response to Armenian terrorist formations that were believed to be acting in cooperation with enemy states fighting against the Ottoman Empire and that were alleged to have carried out serial massacres, uprisings, and various atrocities, particularly in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia, with the aim of protecting the people of Anatolia.

With regard to what occurred during this relocation process, the following points are expressed: Some Armenians who had not harmed their neighbors and who had maintained good relations with those around them were protected by their neighbors, and their Armenian identities were concealed so that they could remain where they were. It is also stated that the first-, second-, and third-degree relatives of approximately three hundred thousand armed Ottoman citizens of Armenian origin did not participate in the relocation and, indeed, did not even receive the relevant official notification from the state.

On the other hand, it is reported that some Armenian citizens who traveled on the relocation trains were subjected to reactions involving stones and sticks from certain Ottoman citizens of Kurdish origin at stations where the trains stopped for necessities. These reactions are said to have resulted from the pain caused by the widespread massacres allegedly inflicted upon Ottoman citizens identifying themselves as Kurdish by groups cooperating with the Russians. Nevertheless, it is argued that this was the extent of what occurred and that these events were subsequently interpreted in different ways over time.

According to this view, claims that initially suggested only a few thousand Armenian citizens had died during the relocation process gradually evolved into figures expressed in the tens of thousands, then the hundreds of thousands, and eventually the millions.

Most of the able-bodied men among the population reacting to the relocation were already serving on the fronts because of the First World War. It is stated that a significant portion of those who reacted consisted of women, children, and elderly people who had lost relatives.

It is argued that massacre and genocide narratives were constructed on the basis of a train journey and that these allegations have been denied by numerous Armenian prime ministers, officials, and scholars. Nevertheless, it is claimed that Armenian circles in Russia, France, the United States, and the United Kingdom have been directed

by the intelligence organizations of those countries and supported by their propaganda apparatuses. It is further alleged that an imaginary and fabricated “genocide” narrative was created in order to lay the groundwork for the Greater Middle East Project.

According to this assessment, because no concrete incident demonstrating that the Ottoman Empire systematically massacred its own citizens has been presented, an attempt has been made to construct a genocide narrative based on train journeys ranging between 200 and 700 kilometers and on isolated reactions that occurred at railway stations.

For example, while allegations have been raised that Israel carried out very intensive bombardments in Gaza between 7 October 2023 and 20 October 2025, it is argued that narratives of massacres and genocide far greater than the reactions shown at railway stations toward relocated Armenians have been produced.

When these two situations are compared, it is maintained that one can clearly see that a comprehensive campaign of lies and defamation was conducted against the Ottoman Empire and the Ottoman nation in order to create a suitable foundation for the Greater Israel Project, which is alleged to have taken shape in the 1890s, and, in connection with it, for the Greater Middle East Project.

It is further argued that all of these matters should become subjects of litigation before the proposed international criminal and legal courts.

One important point that should be taken into consideration in this regard is the following: Germany, which observed that the Ottoman Empire—whose eastern regions were gradually being occupied by Russia during the First World War—could be brought down from within as a result of Armenian massacres allegedly supported by Russia, the United Kingdom, and France, offered various recommendations as the Ottoman Empire’s strongest ally. These recommendations were intended to prevent Armenian citizens from falling into what is described as a trap established by terrorist organizations and by the United Kingdom, France, and Russia, which were alleged to have directed them.

Within this framework, it is claimed that Germany persuaded the Ottoman administration to send Armenian citizens to the Syrian region of the Ottoman geography and to conduct a more effective struggle against the remaining terrorists and gangs cooperating with the enemy.

According to this view, a significant change occurred after the relocation. Terrorist and gang organizations that had previously used Armenian homes as bases for attack and defense reportedly found it more difficult to secure collaborators after the relocation. As a result, the number of ordinary Ottoman citizens killed each day is said to have declined significantly.

Some experts whose opinions were consulted have stated that, had the relocation not been implemented, the Ottoman Empire would have collapsed in Anatolia and hundreds of thousands more Ottoman citizens could have been massacred. By contrast, it is asserted that during the approximately six months preceding the relocation, the number of Ottoman citizens being killed each day had been steadily increasing.

From this perspective, it is claimed that the number of Ottoman citizens who lost their lives after the relocation first fell to one-tenth of its previous level and, over time, to as little as one-fiftieth. Therefore, it is argued that those who oppose the relocation do not sufficiently take into account the people of Anatolia who might otherwise have faced collective destruction.

Frankly, it is stated that if one imagines such developments occurring in present-day America, it becomes easier to understand the nature of the trap into which the Ottoman Empire and the Ottoman nation are believed to have fallen. It is also frequently argued that the same trap is being set today, particularly against Turkey, Azerbaijan, and the Turkic world in general.

The history of the world between 1492 and 2025 is filled with examples of crimes against humanity and genocides committed by Western countries. It is alleged that these same circles carried out similar massacres in Ottoman Anatolia during the First World War and later, within the framework of the Greater Middle East Project, attempted to place responsibility for the crimes against humanity and genocides that they had both initiated and personally committed onto the shoulders of the Turkic world through various lies and slanders.

The fact that Israel has more frequently raised allegations of an “Armenian Genocide” in recent years, as well as assessments suggesting that it has sought to act in concert with Western plans directed against Turkey within the context of the Greater Middle East Project, are also considered within this framework. According to this perspective, it can be clearly seen that the real objective behind the so-called Armenian genocide allegations is the Greater Middle East Project.

Although it is stated that certain Armenian prime ministers, state officials, and intellectuals during the last three quarters of the twentieth century and the first quarter of the twenty-first century recognized what is described as this Zionist trap, it is alleged that they were nevertheless compelled, under various pressures, to accept the influence of deep forces directing the Armenian diaspora.

Most recently, it is stated that Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan also recognized the aforementioned scheme and, acting as resolutely as possible, personally questioned the allegations of an “Armenian genocide.” At the same time, he is said to have chosen the path of developing cooperation with Turkey and Azerbaijan.

It is further stated that Pashinyan has at times made sarcastic and critical remarks regarding Israel's discourse on the "Armenian genocide," and it is argued that this constitutes one example of how historical events may be interpreted in different ways.

It is believed that a similar process has begun to be implemented in the Cyprus issue as well. According to this assessment, Israel is pursuing activities through three different channels in order to increase its influence over Cyprus, which it is claimed to regard as being within its promised lands, within the framework of the Greater Middle East Project.

The first of these activities is said to involve the purchase of land and property on both sides of the island through different names. It is also stated that certain reactions to this issue, particularly within the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, have been reflected in media reports.

Secondly, it is alleged that lobbying networks operating on a global scale, together with major states acting alongside them, are being directed toward the relevant objectives.

Thirdly, it is claimed that the Greek Cypriot side is being influenced through disinformation activities and various provocations directed against the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and Turkey. In this way, by assuming the role of a "guardian angel," the territory of the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus is alleged to have been used in practice as an operational area for numerous activities and operations. Assessments suggesting that the region has been used as a safe area during tensions involving Iran, the United States, and Israel are also expressed within this context.

It is argued that, while Armenian leader Pashinyan has acted more cautiously on this issue, the Greek Cypriot side, in the context of Cyprus, has fallen directly into the center of the alleged trap.

It is further stated that important historical facts have been overlooked, including the protection historically afforded to Jewish peoples by Turks and Turkish states and the fact that the Republic of Turkey was among the countries that recognized the State of Israel without objecting to its establishment.

Within this framework, there are views suggesting that attempts by certain Zionist circles to use allegations of an "Armenian genocide" in pursuit of objectives aimed at weakening or dividing Turkey should also be criticized by Jewish communities throughout the world.

Otherwise, it is argued that if the circles that historically expelled or marginalized Jewish communities in various periods were to adopt similar attitudes again in the future, the support that Turkey provided in the past might not necessarily continue in the same manner.

For this reason, it is stated that these developments contain important lessons for world Jewry and that historical relations should be evaluated on the basis of mutual trust.