

## TURKISH DENIAL OF ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

**Key words:** Genocide, Armenian Genocide, Denial, Arguments, Rejection, Justification, Distortion, Responsibility, Methods, Effectiveness, Consequences.

Denial is a form of lying, a deliberate distortion of the facts for the sake of some presumed advantage<sup>1</sup>. Denial is the last stage of the genocide, and it occurs during and following the perpetration of the act. In most cases, perpetrators generally attempt either to hide their genocidal actions or to deny them.

Despite the vast amount of evidence which proves the reality of the Armenian genocide—official archives, the reports of diplomats, eyewitness accounts, photographic evidence, and the testimony of survivors<sup>2</sup>—denial of the Armenian genocide by successive regimes in Turkey continues from 1915 to nowadays.

The Armenian case illuminates the basic processes and structures of denial, show the evolution of denial process. Conditionally, we can divide the Turkish denial of the Armenian genocide into four groups—*arguments, methods, effectiveness and consequences*, which, in turn, have their subgroups. In this article we will examine all four groups with their subgroups to show whole process and basic features of Turkish Denial.

**Arguments:** The Turkish arguments are elaborate and systematic and, though some of their surface details have changed over times, their basic structure remain the same. In general, the Turkish arguments based on three points—*rejection, justification and distortion* of the facts. Deborah Lipstadt, in her work on the Holocaust, speaks of the "Yes, but" mode of denial<sup>3</sup>: applied to the present case, Yes, Armenians died, but so did Turks. Yes,

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<sup>1</sup> Roger W Smith, Denial of The Armenian Genocide. In Genocide: A Critical Bibliographic Review, ed. Israel Charny, vol. 2, New York; Facts on File, pp. 65, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> Here we can cite only a few of the many works that document the Armenian genocide. Among the contemporary accounts, see: Leslie Davis, *The Slaughterhouse Province An American Diplomat's Report on the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1917* (New Rochelle, NY Aristide D Caratzas, Publisher, 1989); Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story* (Garden City, NY- Doubleday, Page; 1918); and Arnold J. Toynbee, ed , *The Treatment of the Armenians in Denial of the Armenian Genocide* 17 by guest on May 3, 2016 <http://hgs.oxfordjournals.org/> Downloaded from the Ottoman Empire: Documents Presented to Viscount Grey Falloodon, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (London- Hodder and Stoughton, 1916). The Armenian Genocide in the U.S. Archives, 1915-1918 (Alexandria, VA: Chadwyck-Healey Inc., 1990) provides 37,000 pages of documentation in microfiche. For recent studies, see three articles by Vahakn N. Dadrian, "The Secret Young-Turk Ittihadist Conference and the Decision for the World War I Genocide of the Armenians," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 7 2 (Fall 1993), pp 173-201; "The Documentation of the World War I Armenian Massacres in the Proceedings of the Turkish Military Tribunal," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 23:4 (November 1991), pp. 549-576; and "Documentation of the Armenian Genocide in Turkish Sources," in Israel W. Charny, ed , *Genocide A Critical Bibliographic Review* (London. Mansell Publishing, New York. Facts on File, 1991), Vol. 2, Ch. 4; Tessa Hofmann and Gerayer Koutcharian, "'Images that Horrify and Indict'. Pictorial Documents on the Persecution and Extermination of the Armenians from 1877 to 1922," *Armenian Review*, 45:1-2 (Spring/Summer 1992), pp. 53-184, Robert Melson, *Revolution and Genocide On the Origins of the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); and Donald E. Miller and Lorna Touryan Miller, *Survivors- An Oral History of the Armenian Genocide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). For an extensive bibliography on the Armenian genocide, see Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Armenian Holocaust A Bibliography Relating to the Deportations, Massacres, and Dispersion of the Armenian People, 1915-1923* (Cambridge, MA Armenian Heritage Press, 1980) On die availability of survivor testimony in the form of oral history, see Miller and Miller, pp. 212-213. Most of the oral histories are in Armenian and have not been translated, on the other hand, many survivor memoirs exist in English: among the more detailed are Abraham H. Hartunian, *Neither to Laugh nor to Weep: A Memoir of the Armenian Genocide* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968) and Ephraim K. Jernazian, *Judgement Unto Truth. Witnessing the Armenian Genocide* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> Deborah E Lipstadt, *Deniers, Relativists, and Pseudo-scholarship, Dimensions*, 1991, p. 7.

Armenians were killed, but they brought it upon themselves. Yes, the conflict took place, but it was a civil war within a global war. Likewise, Israel Charny has pointed to a "template of denial", the rules of which include: do not acknowledge that the genocide took place; transform it into other lands of events; portray the victims as the perpetrators; insist more victims were from the perpetrators group; and relativize the genocide in whatever way possible<sup>1</sup>.

The Turkish arguments of *Rejection* include-the large scale atrocities never took place, Turkey has no responsibility for the deaths of the Armenians, the term "genocide" is not applicable to the events of 1915-1923.

The first point of the rejection of the facts is to attempt to downgrade a significance of a genocide by *minimizing the statistics of the number of dead*<sup>2</sup>, by rejecting almost all of the evidence. Evidence that suggests Armenians were killed outright as a matter of policy or placed in conditions calculated to bring about their deaths is dismissed as hearsay, an example of wartime propaganda, the result of personal bias, or sheer fabrication<sup>3</sup>. That there was a systematic plan to destroy the Armenians is categorically denied on the same grounds. The argument about numbers is also an important element in Turkey's denial of genocide. By suggesting that Armenians and Turks died in roughly the same proportion to size of population (about 25%), it seeks to show that the Armenians could not have been singled out for destruction, otherwise the percentage of Armenian deaths would have been much higher<sup>4</sup>. By providing a low estimate of population, it lays the basis for the claim that Armenians were not the majority in eastern Turkey, thus denying there was an Armenian homeland and undermining as illegitimate any claim to self-determination.

The second point of the rejection is that Turkey *has no responsibility* for the deaths of Armenians. The Turkish argument is that the vast majority of the Armenians survived the war; moreover, most of those who died were the victims, not of the Turkish state, but rather of war, famine, disease, and the breakdown of social control, as were millions of Turks<sup>5</sup>. Additionally, responsibility is denied for the loss of Armenian lives on the grounds that the Turkish government and people were defending themselves against a group that had betrayed the nation through rebellion and acts of war, and had frequently committed massacres against Turks. In other words, Turkey has no responsibility for the genocide because of- circumstances were beyond Turkey's control; the acts of violence against Armenians were done by others; and the Turkish government and people acted in self-defense, and the victims are the Turks.

The third point of the rejection is that *the term "genocide"* can't be used in the Armenian case. As Charny said: "The most common way to attempt to refute charges of genocide is to argue for the inclusion of events of mass killings under the definitional rules of wars"<sup>6</sup>. By rejecting the applicability of the concept of genocide to the events of 1915-1923, Turkey denies in yet another way that genocide took place. Armenian lives were lost but not because of a strong state fully in control and bent on carrying out a final resolution of the Armenian question. Rather conditions throughout the empire were almost anarchical; there was to a large extent a breakdown of order and, this, along with war, famine, and disease accounts for most of the lives lost. Very few Armenians were actually killed and never systematically in pursuit of some premeditated plan. There was no plan to

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<sup>1</sup> Israel W. Charny, *The Psychology of Denial of Known Genocides*, in Charny, ed , *Genocide: A Critical Bibliographic Review*, vol. 2, London, 1991, pp. 13-15.

<sup>2</sup> See Israel W. Charny, *The Psychology of Denial of Known Genocides*, in Charny, ed , *Genocide: A Critical Bibliographic Review*, vol. 2, London, 1991, pp. 517-531.

<sup>3</sup> See Roger W Smith, *Denial of The Armenian Genocide*. pp. 66,

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 67.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 68.

<sup>6</sup> Israel W. Charny, *A Classification of Denials of the Holocaust and Other Genocides*, *The genocide studies reader*, ed. Samuel Totten, Paul R. Bartrop, New York, London, 2009, p. 529.

destroy Armenians, but only the wartime necessity of relocating them for the sake of military security<sup>1</sup>.

The most disturbing of all the arguments is the justification of the facts. Genocide is always justifiable from the perspective of the perpetrator; it is a means to an end, an instrument to solve a "problem"<sup>2</sup>. The basic thrust of the justification thesis is to defend the policy of genocide by regarding the policy as an acceptable solution to a political problem. The partisans of justification draw heavily on what is called the provocation theory. The logic of this argument says that Armenians engaged in behavior so threatening to Turkish society that the Ottoman government was compelled to take the comprehensive measures implemented during World War I. The justification of the facts is built on a contrastive juxtaposition of the Armenians and the Turks<sup>3</sup>: a) the Armenians constituted enemies within the state; b) they collaborated with foreign invaders; c) they sabotaged Ottoman military campaigns; d) they were revolutionaries preparing for the moment to revolt; e) the Armenians believed that World War I offered the opportunity to implement their separatist national program; f) therefore, they activated a campaign of terrorism meant to drive the Turks out of the areas the Armenians hoped to carve out as their national territory; g) the Turks were caught in a life and death struggle and had no recourse but to eradicate the Armenians in order to save their nation. The justification thesis, therefore, is constructed on the twin pillars of provocation and salvation. Curiously, it admits that the modern state of Turkey was created by liquidating the Armenian population<sup>4</sup>.

The last point in which the Turkish argument is based-is the distortion of the facts. This type of argument basically reverses the course of history and depicts the victims as the victimizers and builds denial on presumably reasonable arguments. It frequently draws on the comparative approach. They do not primarily deny the facts as much as they seek to explain them in a manner that disputes the case for genocide. They rely on these points: a) the casualty figure is always minimized by first questioning the size of the original Armenian population in the Ottoman Empire; b) the spread of epidemics which is common in war is said to have caused most of the deaths; c) starvation is attributed to "war-time shortages" which occur in every country; d) the deportations are always regarded as a relocation policy designed for the safety of the Armenians; e) or as a defensive policy intended to avoid the outbreak of communal hostility; f) all of the above cumulatively are presumed to demonstrate that there was no policy of genocide. The deaths were incidental to the events<sup>5</sup>.

So, we saw the basic types of arguments of Turkish denial, which hadn't been changed so much, after the time when Armenian genocide was taken place. Now, we will start to examine which *methods* Turkey use for proving denial of Armenian genocide.

**Methods:** Among the diversity of the methods which Turkey apply for denial, and which have varied over the decades, we will examine some of this.

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<sup>1</sup> See Roger W Smith, Denial of The Armenian Genocide. pp. 69.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 69.

<sup>3</sup> Rouben Adalian, The Armenian Genocide: revisionism and denial, in Michael N. Dobkowski and Isidor Walliman, ed., Genocide in Our Time: An Annotated Bibliography with analytical Introductions, p. 95, 1992.

<sup>4</sup> See Speros Vryonis, Jr., "Stanford J. Shaw's History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey. Volume I. A Critical Analysis," Balkan Studies 24: 1 (1983), also in offprint; for the second Shaw volume, Richard G. Hovannisian, "The Critics View: Beyond Revisionism," International Journal of Middle East Studies 9 (1978): 379-388, and "Rewriting History: Revisionism and Beyond in the Study of Armenian-Turkish Relations," Ararat: A Quarterly(Summer 1978): 2-10; also Norman Ravitch, "The Armenian Catastrophe: Of History, Murder & Sin," Encounter (December 1981 ): 69-84; Levon Marashlian, "Population Statistics on Ottoman Armenians in the Context of Turkish Historiography," Armenian Review 40:4 (1987): 1-59; K. B. Bardakjian, Hitler and the Armenian Genocide (Cambridge, MA: Zoryan Institute, 1985); Edward V. Gulbenkian, "The Poles and Armenians in Hitler's Political Thinking," ArmenianReview41:3 (1988): 1- 14; Vahakn N. Dadrian, "The Nairn-Andonian Documents on the World War I Destruction of Ottoman Armenians: The Anatomy of a Genocide," International Journal of Middle East Studies 18:3 (1986): 311-360.

<sup>5</sup> See Rouben Adalian, The Armenian Genocide: revisionism and denial, p. 92.

Silence, diplomatic efforts, and political pressure were typical ways of dealing with the issue from the late 1920s until 1965, when the worldwide commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the 1915 genocide led to a different approach. Now a concerted effort was made to influence journalists, policy makers, and school officials by telling "the other side of the story": the telling consisted largely of reissuing the pamphlets of denial and justification that dated from the last years of World War I<sup>1</sup>. From the 1980s the Turkey's attempts were made to encourage foreign scholars to write a more favorable version of Turkish history, to create a "good" image of Turkey. In short Turkey wanted its narrative to be believed and legitimized<sup>2</sup>. By funding scholars and supporting to the establishment of "institutes", Turkey wants to further research on Turkish history and culture<sup>3</sup>. Particularly, to further denial of Armenian genocide and otherwise to improve Turkey's image in the West. Turkey understood the value of exposing students to their version of history. Such an effort would be facilitated by having work at hand by credentialed Western scholars presenting a version of history sympathetic to Turkey's official narrative<sup>4</sup>.

The next method, which Turkey uses with effectiveness within the Turkey, is the violation against the Armenian genocide recognition. The Turkish government is violating basic civil liberties, such as freedom of speech and association, of non-Turkish citizens, backing its demands in some instances with threats in order to silence those who would confront the reality of the Armenian genocide<sup>5</sup>. The Turkish people, who speak about Armenian genocide publicly are under the government pressure. The evidence of it is the article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code, which is being frequently used to prosecute human rights defenders, journalists and other members of civil society who peacefully express their dissenting opinion on historical or other issues<sup>6</sup>. Article 301 make illegal to insult Turkey, the Turkish nation, or Turkish government institutions.

This article includes crimes which, as the preamble makes clear, includes the assertion that the Ottoman Armenians suffered genocide<sup>7</sup>. Since this article became law, charges have been brought in more than 60 cases<sup>8</sup>, among which were cases where people convicted for their statements regarding the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire (Ferit Orhan Pamuk, Ragip Zarakolu and others).

Among the Turkish methods of denial can be listed the suppression of the name "Armenia" from official maps and the changing of the names of Armenian villages and towns in Asia Minor, which continued late into the 1950s. According to Professor Kouymjian, ninety per cent of the historical Armenian names have been modified<sup>9</sup>. Inscriptions in Armenian language continue to be removed from buildings and monuments. And this happened in contravention of articles 38 to 44 of the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923, which was intended to protect the rights of minorities, including the cultural rights of the Armenian minority<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> See Roger W Smith, Denial of The Armenian Genocide. p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> Marc Mamigonian, Scholarship, Manufacturing Doubt and Genocide Denial, The Armenian Weekly, 2013, p. 40.

<sup>3</sup> Roger W Smith, Eric Markusen, Robert Jay Lifton, Professional Ethics and the Denial of Armenian Genocide, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, vol. 9 N1, 1995, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> See Marc Mamigonian, Scholarship, Manufacturing Doubt and Genocide Denial, p. 39.

<sup>5</sup> See Roger W Smith, Denial of The Armenian Genocide. p. 70.

<sup>6</sup> See Alfred de Zayas, The Genocide Against The Armenians 1915-1923 And The Relevance of The 1948 Genocide Convention, p. 60.

<sup>7</sup> Bruce Clark, Turkey's Armenian Dilemma, BBC NEWS, Feb. 27, 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6386625>.

<sup>8</sup> Jahnisa Tate Loadholt, Turkey's Article 301: A Legitimate Tool for Maintaining Order or a Threat to Freedom of Expression, The Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law, Vol. 37, N. 1, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Dickran Kouymjian, "Destruction des monuments historiques arméniens, poursuite de la politique turque de genocide" in Tribunal Permanent des Peuples, le Crime de Silence, Flammarion, Paris, 1984, pp. 295

<sup>10</sup> Alfred de Zayas, The Genocide Against The Armenians 1915-1923 And The Relevance of The 1948 Genocide Convention, Lebanon, 2010, p. 59.

The last method in the denial of Armenian genocide, which we want to discuss, is by recognizing the Holocaust. In recent years Turkey has made special efforts to recognize the Jewish Holocaust and show compassion for its victims. By acknowledging the Holocaust, Turkey wants to prevent recognition of the fact that what was done to the Jews and what was done to the Armenians belong to a common category: genocide. It is especially important for Turkey to stifle this awareness among Jews because for victims of Nazism to state publicly that Armenians and Jews alike have been subjected to genocide carries a kind of moral persuasiveness non-victims may lack, a power to authenticate the common victimage<sup>1</sup>.

After the examining the arguments and methods of Turkish denial, it is important to see which effectiveness it has.

**Effectiveness:** Turkey's denial of genocide has been generally effective, both psychologically and politically. It has allowed Turkey to maintain a favorable self-image, fend off demands for acknowledgment, reparations, and land, and to gain support for its position from other governments, especially that of the United States. It has also allowed Turkey to sow confusion and doubt among journalists, policy makers, and the general public. Denial as reinterpretation and justification has become part of Turkish culture. Any internal challenge to the official version of the genocide is unlikely<sup>2</sup>.

There is another reason that the Turkish denial of genocide has been effective: other governments have aided and abetted Turkey in rewriting history, stifling where they could any knowledge of the genocide, in pursuit of what they have taken to be their national interests. To take only one example: from 1920 to the present the United States government has helped sustain the Turkish denial of genocide although there are thousands of documents in the records of the State Department and the National Archives that attest to the Armenian genocide. In fact, it was the American ambassador, Henry Morgenthau, who persistently urged the Young Turk government to stop the deportations and the slaughter<sup>3</sup>. Politics, however, deals not so much with truth as with perceived interests; where matters of security, access to basic resources, or profits are concerned, recognition of past events, even the horrible and prolonged destruction of a people, will be suppressed or deliberately overlooked by government. In the years after World War I American interests in Turkey involved oil, trade, and missionary activity<sup>4</sup>. Today they include military security in Europe and the Middle East, the gathering of strategic intelligence, Turkey's internal stability, and trade.

**Consequences:** Such a long denial process couldn't but have its consequences. No wonder, that denial is the last stage of genocide. Long lasted impunity brings to the new crimes. Denial of the Armenian genocide, violence against the recognition of the Armenian genocide, impunity of perpetrators of the crime, irresponsibility of the genocidal state these all are the reasons of continuing of the crime. The most obvious evidence of the Armenian genocide denial consequences, which bring to the continuity of the crime of genocide-are the Jewish Holocaust, and the Hitler's words: "Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?<sup>5</sup>".

Denial of the Armenian genocide is the cause of the huge Armenian diaspora. The great amount of Armenians of diaspora lost their homes, their homeland, their property and had to live in other countries. They are almost called "people without homeland".

The continuation of the violence and barbarity against Armenian cultural heritage in Turkey is also, the consequence of the genocide denial. Such acts were intended to

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<sup>1</sup> See Roger W Smith, Denial of The Armenian Genocide. p. 71.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. pp. 71-72.

<sup>3</sup> Henry Morgenthau, Ambassador Morgenthau's Story, Doubleday, New York 1918.

<sup>4</sup> Housepian Dobkin, Marjorie, What genocide? What holocaust? News from Turkey, 1915-1923: a case study. In Charny, 1984, pp. 100-112.

<sup>5</sup> Kevork B. Bardakjian, Hitler and the Armenians, Cambridge, MA, 1985.

perpetuate and secure the work of genocide by destroying memory—the historical proof of the presence of thirty centuries of Armenians in Asia Minor. Their churches and monasteries were burned by arson and destroyed by explosion. In all, 1036 churches or monasteries were destroyed<sup>1</sup>. The Khtzkonk monastery (11th century) was destroyed by dynamite after the Second World War. The Cathedral of Urfa was converted into a museum. The building of the Church of Christ Saviour at Ani was cut in two. The Church of Ordou was transformed into a prison and the inscriptions in Armenian were erased. The Armenian inscriptions were removed from the Central School in Constantinople<sup>2</sup>. Besides the deliberate destruction, the Turkish Government has contributed to the decay and destruction of Armenian buildings by denying building permits needed to carry out repairs<sup>3</sup>.

The scale of destruction of the Armenian cultural heritage has been so widespread and systematic over the decades, that these few examples should not show the whole process of it.

After examining the whole process of Turkish denial we want to bring some suggestions, how we can struggle against genocide denials to prevent further continuity of the crime.

**Suggestions:** Consolidation of international community on the issue of denial of genocides. Clear legal differentiation between freedom of speech and public insemination of hatred. Consistent work of academics and professionals with the governments and legislative bodies of their countries, at state level, to recognize the Armenian genocide and criminalize its denial. Public awareness of the issue of denial of genocides by different educational methods. The denial of genocides be included in the punishable acts of Genocide Convention.

**In conclusion:** The “capacity of a nation to transcend its past depends upon its willingness to remember it conscientiously, report it truthfully, and criticize it publicly”<sup>4</sup>.

The process of truth is under way, but much remains to be done: scholars, journalists, and teachers, in particular, have vital work ahead of them. The process of truth is a matter of answering the denials and justifications that Turkey has relied upon for over a hundred years. We should call a spade a spade. There are no genuine and fake genocides, Genocide is the most cruel crime against humanity and no matter against what nation the crime was committed. There are not superior nations in the world, all nations are equal. We can't recognize one genocide and reject another. Turkey will continue to deny that the genocide took place and will continue to justify it. But the world will know and this can lay the basis for solidarity with the Armenian people. And as Auguste Comte, the founder of the discipline of sociology almost two centuries ago would say, it is necessary to fully understand post genocides in order to be able to predict future genocides, and it is necessary to be able to predict future genocides in order to be able to prevent them. And we add-it is necessary to condemn post genocides in order to be able to prevent future genocides.

**Լիլիթ Հայրապետյան, Հայոց Զեղասպանության թուրքական ժխտողականությունը:** Սույն հոդվածում ուսումնասիրվում է Հայոց ցեղասպանության ժխտողականության հարցը Թուրքիայի հանրապետության կողմից: Քննարկվում են այն հիմնական փաստարկները և մեթոդները, որոնք կիրառվում են Թուրքիայի կողմից ցեղասպանությունը ժխտելու համար, ուսումնասիրվում է ժխտողական քաղաքականության արդյունավետությունը, ազդեցության թիրախային ոլորտները, պատճառած հետևանքները:

<sup>1</sup> See Alfred de Zayas, *The Genocide Against The Armenians 1915-1923 And The Relevance of The 1948 Genocide Convention*, pp. 57-58.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher J. Walker, *Armenia and Karabagh*, Minority Rights Group, London, 1991, pp. 38-39.

<sup>4</sup> Vigen Guroian, *Collective responsibility and official excuse making; the case of the Turkish genocide of the Armenians*. In Hovannisian, 1986, pp. 135-152.

Հողվածի վերջում մի շարք առաջարկություններ են արվում ժխտողական քաղաքականության դեմ պայքարելու և ցեղասպանության հանցագործության կանխարգելման դեմ ուղղված գործողությունների վերաբերյալ:

**Բանալի բառեր.** Հայոց ցեղասպանություն, Թուրքիա, ժխտողականություն, փաստարկներ, մերժում, խեղաթուրում, արդարացում, հետևանքներ:

**Лилит Айрапетян, Отрицание Геноцида Армян Турцией.** В статье обсуждается вопрос отрицания Геноцида армян со стороны Турции, какие аргументы и методы использует Турция для отрицания геноцида, какая эффективность она имеет и какие последствия вызывает эта политика.

В конце статьи представлены некоторые рекомендации о том, как можно бороться против политики отрицания геноцида и препятствовать его дальнейшего совершения.

**Ключевые слова.** Геноцид армян, отрицание, Турция, аргументы, методы, оправдание, эффективность, последствия.