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# Israeli Parliament May Consider Armenian Genocide Recognition

By Gayane Abrahamyan  
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Amid a downturn in Turkish-Israeli relations, political support in Israel for a parliamentary vote on the recognition of Ottoman Turkey's 1915 slaughter of ethnic Armenians as genocide appears to be growing.

The Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee voted to put the question of genocide recognition up for debate a month before Israel's May 31 raid on a Gaza aid flotilla that left nine people dead. The fallout from the flotilla tragedy caused a spike in Turkish-Israeli tension. The parliamentary discussion on recognition - originally expected by the end of June, according to Israel's Ha'aretz newspaper -- has not yet been scheduled. [For background see EurasiaNet's archive].

A left-wing opposition party, Meretz-New Movement, which holds three seats in the Knesset, proposed the recognition measure. A 2008 attempt by Meretz to bring the issue to the floor died in committee due to opposition from the governing coalition.

Meretz MP Nitzan Horowitz claimed that support for genocide recognition this time has grown along with popular anger against Turkey over the commando raid and Ankara's denunciations of Israel.

Israel's governing parties "will make use of the issue to get even with Turkey for the flotilla incident," Horowitz predicted.

One MP from the government coalition party, Kadima, confirmed that the flotilla incident had prompted a change of mood toward Turkey among many pro-government legislators. "Actually, many members think that it was a genocide, but the problem is relations with Turkey," said MP Israel Hasson, referring to the 1915 slaughter. Hasson voted in April for parliament to consider recognizing the bloodshed as genocide. "Now the situation and attitude has changed," he said.

Hasson declined to name other coalition MPs who now favor genocide recognition, saying that the Knesset debate would show who has what opinion.

Horowitz, whose party has a long reputation for promoting human rights issues, does not see such support as entirely genuine. Parliamentary recognition, if it comes to pass, would be mainly politically motivated, Horowitz indicated. "It is obvious ... that they are not interested in rendering historic justice for Armenians," Horowitz said. "It is simply a means of harming the Turks."

Armenian Diaspora groups in Israel have actively promoted awareness of the 1915 slaughter; the Armenian National Committee of Jerusalem has lobbied heavily for a Knesset vote on recognition.

An analyst at Tel-Aviv's second largest daily newspaper, Ma'ariv, believes that the chances are slim the Knesset would actually vote for genocide recognition. "The Armenian genocide has always been recognized on a public level as a fact. However, to the authorities it has really been a difficult issue to accept, as . . . relations with Turkey have always been extremely important," commented Gail Ginatt.

Turkey in 1949 became the first majority Muslim country to recognize Israel's statehood. Its strong arms trade with the country has sparked ongoing criticism from Arab countries; the two countries posted \$2.5-billion worth of trade in goods and services for 2008.

By comparison, ties between Armenia and Israel seem tenuous. The Israeli ambassador to Armenia visits Yerevan just once a year and otherwise lives in Jerusalem, according to a representative of Armenia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Trade between the two countries is likewise minimal. Armenia sent \$10 million worth of diamonds to Israel in 2009 - comprising the bulk of Yerevan's exports to Israel.

Seventeen Israeli-financed companies work in Armenia's healthcare and diamond industries, according to the National Statistical Service.

At least in words, the Armenian government appears interested in expanding contacts. At a July 13 meeting with Israeli State Comptroller and Ombudsman Micha Lindenstrauss, Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan commented on "the importance of developing multifaceted Armenian-Israeli relations," according to a report distributed by the Mediamax news agency.

The Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs declined to comment to EurasiaNet.org about the genocide recognition measure pending before the Knesset.

Armenian analysts believe that Israel's existing ties with Turkey - strained though they may be - are likely to prove the deciding factor in any debate over genocide recognition. Turkey's strategic partnership with Azerbaijan is also a factor, many Armenian experts believe. "We should remember that Israel has good relations with Azerbaijan, and, besides that, their economic relations are strong," noted Artak Grigorian, an Israeli studies specialist and board member of the governing Republican Party of Armenia.

Azerbaijan supplies Israel with roughly 20 percent of its oil - the second-highest level after Russia, Azerbaijani news sites report. "The situation might make us think about upgrading our relations with Israel," Grigorian added.

Editor's note: Gayane Abrahamyan is a reporter for ArmeniaNow in Yerevan.

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