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**ARMENIAN GENOCIDE AND THE PHENOMENON OF
ARMENIAN DIASPORA**

(on lectures given at the University of Iceland)

On 23 January, 2015 in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Armenian Genocide, the Department of World History, Yerevan State University, and the Institute of History, University of Iceland, organized a lecture-discussion on the history of Armenian Genocide and diaspora. The lecture was delivered by PhD students of World History Department, Narek Mkrtchyan and Tigran Yepremyan. The lecture consisted of two parts: first, a lecture “*The Armenian Nation and Genocide*” was delivered by Narek Mkrtchyan which was followed by another lecture “*The Armenian Diaspora: from Expatriate Communities to Transnation*” by Tigran Yepremyan.

The lion’s share of lecture participants was academics and PhD students from the departments of Social Sciences and Humanities of the University of Iceland. Among the participants were prominent Icelandic historians e.g. the director of the Institute of History of the University of Iceland, Anna Agnarsdottir, historian and Iceland’s foreign policy expert Valur Ingimundarson etc., the scientific director of the Academy of Fine Arts of Iceland, Ingibjörg Þórarinsdóttir, who studied Armenology in Fresno under supervision of Dickran Kouymjian³⁷ was also invited

³⁷ Thank to Ingibjörg Þórarinsdóttir public radio of Iceland put a program about William Saroyan and the Armenian culture in 2002. In 2008, in commemoration of 100th anniversary of William Saroyan the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir’s Institute of Foreign Languages at the University of Iceland celebrated the centennial of Saroyan and the event was called “Armenian Culture Days.” The main speaker of this event was Dr. Dickran Kouymjian who was invited specially to Reykjavík. Some of Saroyan’s works

by the Institute of History of Iceland to participate in the meeting. In addition, one of the leading newspapers of Iceland “Morgunbladet” was invited to participate in the lecture. After the lecture, Narek Mkrtychyan gave an interview to “Morgunbladet” which was published on 2 February, 2015. The interview was two pages in length entitled with cynical comment of Adolf Hitler “*Who remembers Armenians?*”³⁸

The “Morgunbladet” article touches upon the issues of European civilizational characteristics of Armenian history i.e. especially the article focuses on the influences of Greco-Roman civilization on the Armenian culture and social life and cooperation between Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia and European Crusaders. Before speaking about annihilations of 1.5 million Armenians, the Icelandic newspaper wrote about the 1894 Armenian uprisings that were brutally suppressed by Turkish government. The deportations of Armenians organized by Turkish government were represented as a physical elimination of the people from their ancestral land. Moreover, the Icelandic newspaper defined the massacres of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire as a *crime against humanity* and criticized continuous policies of denial by the official Ankara. Discussing the position of the Republic of Armenia towards the issues of Genocide, the newspaper emphasized existing transformations in the Armenian political and academic discourses i.e. that are about transition from international recognition and condemnation to the issues of reparations.

Due to the interview by the former Member of Parliament, Mrs. Margrét Tryggvadóttir, the article in Icelandic newspaper on Armenian Genocide became much more interesting. It is noteworthy that Margrét Tryggvadóttir, as a member of parliament has submitted a proposal first in 2011 and then in 2012 calling for the government to officially acknowledge the genocide of Armenians committed by the Ottoman Empire in the early 20th century. The former parliamentarian, Mrs. Tryggvadóttir told the newspaper how initially the proposal to recognize Armenian Genocide was enthusiastically received by the head of committee of foreign affairs of Parliament, Arni Thor Sigurdsson and then, why the movement failed. She particularly pointed out that while she had received some support from a couple of local Armenians, her mail box started filled with different letters, including a 20-page stencil letter from the Turkish embassy which in turn gives solid reason to

had been translated by prominent Icelandic writers e.g. Nobel-prize winning author Halldor Kiljan Laxness and poet Gyrdur Eliasson in 1940s. In addition, two prominent Icelandic writers, Tomas Gudmundsson and Jonas Arnason, knew William Saroyan personally. See, **Thorisdóttir I.**, 2008.

³⁸ Sveinsson G. S., 2015, 26-27

assume that letters with similar content were also sent to other members of Parliament. Nevertheless, by emphasizing the importance of 100th anniversary of Armenian Genocide the Icelandic politician writes:

*"The issue [genocide of Armenians] has been forgotten and therefore it matters to be able to say, yes, this happened... There is reason now, on the centenary of the genocide, that Icelanders should use that occasion to recognize it"*³⁹

The lectures by young Armenian historians and interview with Narek Mkrtychyan have got broad spread within different Icelandic political circles and according to information from the author of the article Steffan Gunnar Sveinsson, the editors of Morgunbladed picked up the article and wrote a leader calling for the recognition of the genocide. It referenced the question Hitler asked *"Who remembers Armenians?"* and argued that by recognizing the Armenian genocide, it would be a unique opportunity by saying that Icelanders remember it.

³⁹ Sveinsson G. S., 2015, 27.