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## RSC BLOG

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### STAFF REFLECTION: THE COMMEMORATION OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE CENTENNIAL IN ISTANBUL

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Among the series of events conducted in different parts of the world, the commemoration of the Armenian Genocide Centennial was also marked in Istanbul, Turkey with the joint efforts of such organizations as European Grassroots Antiracist Movement (EGAM), DurDe Turkish platform and AGBU Europe. The series of events entitled “Let’s commemorate the Armenian Genocide in Turkey!” brought together young people from Armenia, Turkey and all over Europe. A US-based Armenian Project 2015 Movement also joined the commemoration events. Three RSC staff members, including Satenik Baghdasaryan, Anush Ghazaryan and Haykak Arshamyan represented the RSC in this event.

The delegation participated in workshops and meetings with representatives of civil society organizations, media and youth in Turkey, which were aimed as serving as a platform for sharing experiences and ideas, and also to find ways to unite the efforts for success in the common cause. More specifically, the members of the RSC delegation had meetings with the Hrant Dink Foundation, Human Rights Association (IHD), Anadolu Kultur, etc.

On April 24, the RSC delegation started the commemoration from demonstrations in front of the building where composer Komitas lived before the Armenian massacres and also in the Sultanahmet Square in front of the former central prison of Istanbul, where several hundred Istanbul-based Armenian writers, lawyers, political figures, parliament members, doctors, composers rounded up on April 24th and were detained before the mass exile and massacres.

The demonstration held in Sultanahmet was followed by a silent walk of remembrance to the Eminounu ferry dock station to depart for a gathering at the Haydarpasha train station where, on April 24, 1915, over 200 Armenian community leaders, including intellectuals and scientists, were deported from Istanbul to the concentration camps in Eskisehir, Ayas and Cankir located in the central Anatolian part of Turkey.

On the European side of Istanbul, in Kumkapi, another commemoration ceremony was organized by the Armenian Patriarchate, where surprisingly the Turkish government was officially represented by Turkey's EU minister Volkan Bozkir.

From Haydarpaşa, the crowd proceeded to the Şişli Armenian Cemetery to commemorate Sevag Şahin Balıkçı, who fell victim to an ethnic-hate murder on April 24, 2011, while on mandatory military duty in Batman, and to express our support to the Balıkçı family in their pursuit of justice.

The culmination of all the events was the commemoration in the late afternoon, when thousands of people gathered next to Taksim Square at the entrance of Istiklal Street. This commemoration event included a Wish Tree ceremony, (people from Turkey and abroad tied strips of fabric to a tree as homage to the victims and the survivors of the genocide) followed by a silent sitting vigil with pictures of Armenian intellectuals who were murdered a century ago in Turkey.

During their two hour sit-in, participants were joined by thousands of protestors, who held banners and signs urging the Turkish government to recognize the Armenian Genocide.

The Taksim event was impressive because of several factors. First of all there was a significant level of emotional support from both the Turkish and the European societies. Secondly, the work of the police during the commemoration event ensured a smooth implementation of the activities and the security of the protesters. Third, the speeches and Armenian music during the sitting made the event more touching.

To sum up, the commemoration of the centenary of Armenian Genocide in Istanbul showed that Armenians are not alone in demand of recognition. The shared values and joint efforts can be a key to the success to an issue which was a taboo in Turkey only 5-10 years before.

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