STATEMENTS BY THE ROMANIAN AMBASSADOR IN ARMENIA

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Analyst (2015-2017)

The remarks of Sorin Vasile, Romanian Ambassador in Armenia, during a lecture he gave at the American University of Armenia on November 19, 2014 drew negative reaction. This event which was brought up by an article in the website Civilnet.am by Guillaume de Chazournes[1], a French journalist living in Armenia, had wide coverage in the Armenian media.

The Ambassador was invited to discuss the Romania-Armenia relations and answer questions on the issue. During the lecture, his response to the question what is more important for Romania political and economic ties with Turkey or the moral imperative of recognizing the Armenian Genocide? drew negative reaction from the audience. According to news reports, the Ambassador, in his answer, used remarks that disturbed Armenians.

According to news reports, the Ambassador, in brief, said that the morality of recognizing the Armenian Genocide could differ according to different points of view and to talk about events which occurred in the beginning of the 20th century is difficult. He stated that the nature of this issue is relative and features moral, political, economic, geostrategic factors and it is difficult to determine who is right or who is wrong on the centenary of the Armenian Genocide. Apart from these, the Ambassador gave the example of Germany and France, and said that these two countries, which had fought each other in many wars, finally reconciled and that these processes take a long time. He also added that every country has its own truths. However, the Ambassadors remarks on Jews and homosexuals while talking about these unfortunately overshadowed the point of his speech.

These remarks were also criticized in the Jewish press alongside the Armenian press. The most comprehensive criticism came from Guillaume de Chazournes who made this incident public.[2] While considering the Ambassadors statements as disrespectful to homosexuals and the history of the Armenians and Jews, the French journalist claimed that the Armenian Genocide is a historical fact recognized by serious historians, that Turkey imposes political, economic and geopolitical pressures on countries to prevent them from recognizing the Armenian Genocide and that Romania, which has good relations with Turkey, could not dare to recognize the so-called genocide. The journalist also indicated that the French-German reconciliation happened thanks to the recognition

of mutual errors and atrocities, and he stated that the Ambassadors France-Germany example reminded the Turkish policy of forgetting the Armenian Genocide over time which, he says, is a Turkish propaganda.

It appears that Guillaume de Chazournes makes his criticisms with a subjective point of view. He presents the Armenian Genocide, an issue with no consensus on it, as an historical fact. The journalist, who claims that Turkey tries to live down the Armenian Genocide and imposes pressures on certain countries in this respect, mentions neither Turkeys proposal to establish a neutral historical commission in order to shed light on history nor Armenias rejection of this proposal. Turkeys policy is to prevent the acceptance of such allegations lacking objectivity as truth and uncover historical facts.

Immediately after the incident was made public, the Ambassador was recalled to Bucharest for consultations. Foreign Ministry of Romania, in a press release, condemned the Ambassadors statements that were anti-semitic[3] and homophobic in nature[4]. Following this, the Ambassador sent a letter to Civilnet.am and apologized from the Armenian people stating that his remarks were misunderstood.[5] Finally, the Ambassador resumed his duties in February 2015.[6]

[1] Guillaume de Chazournes,Morality according to the Romanian Ambassador, 03.12.2014, *Civilnet*, access date:23.02.2015, http://civilnet.am/2014/12/03/morality-according-to-the-romanian-ambassador/#.VOrfqHysV_B

[2] Ibid

[3] Romania will hold the chairmanship of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance in 2016.

[4] MAE: Romania's ambassador to Armenia, urgently recalled over anti-Semitic, homophobic remarks, 05.12.2014, *Romanian National News Agency*, access date:23.02.2015, http://www.agerpres.ro/english/2014/12/05/mae-romania-s-ambassador-to-armenia-urgently-recalled-over-anti-semitic-homophobic-remarks-17-44-34

[5] Romanian Ambassador Issues Apology to Armenian People, 05.12.2014, *Civilnet*, access date:23.02.2015, http://civilnet.am/2014/12/05/romanian-ambassador-issues-apology-to-armenian-people/#.VOr

[6] Romanian ambassador to Armenia back to office after recall period, 09.02.2015, http://www.tert.am/en/news/2015/02/09/sorin/1584528

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To cite this article: TAŞKENT, Ali Murat. 2026. "STATEMENTS BY THE ROMANIAN AMBASSADOR IN ARMENIA." Center For Eurasian Studies (AVİM), Commentary No.2015 / 23. February 26. Accessed November 10, 2026. https://mail.avim.org.tr/en/Yorum/STATEMENTS-BY-THE-ROMANIAN-AMBASSADOR-IN-ARMENIA

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