



ՌԱԶՄԱԿԱՐԱԿԱՆ ԵՎ ԱԶԳԱՅԻՆ
ՀԵՏԱԶՈՏՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԻ ՀԱՅԿԱԿԱՆ ԿԵՆՏՐՈՆ
75 Երզնկյան փողոց
Երեւան 0033, Հայաստան

THE ARMENIAN CENTER FOR
NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
75 Yerznkian Street
Yerevan 0033, Armenia

October 12, 2009

**ACNIS DIRECTOR RICHARD GIRAGOSIAN
COMMENTS ON TURKISH-ARMENIAN PROTOCOLS
“HAYATSK” PRESS CLUB
YEREVAN**

I would like to focus on six main points regarding the recent signing of the Turkish-Armenian protocols:

1. Where are we?
2. What happened?
3. The reaction
4. Where are we going? What next?
5. What should we do?
6. Conclusion: Summary of key points of the protocols

I also want to note the asymmetry of power that defines this process and stress that the policy is not the problem, the process is the problem.

1. Where are we?

The games have begun. The protocols were signed and now the process moves from the protocols to the parliaments.

The challenge will be in the Turkish parliament, but not the Armenian parliament. And we should expect the Turkish side to delay the vote in their parliament until early next year mainly because once the protocols are ratified the border is to open within 60 days. But Turkey will likely wait until early next year, also to maximize their political power as the 95th anniversary of the Genocide approaches in April 2010.

Obviously, Turkey is very happy with the divisions that have emerged between Armenia and the diaspora, and within Armenia itself. For Turkey, this has weakened Armenia even without any concession by the Turkish side.

2. What happened?

The delay in the signing was interesting and revealed the Turkish strategy: to play games, and make new demands on Armenia at every opportunity. The delay was caused by the Turkish foreign minister's last-minute plan to make a speech after the signing ceremony, with a strong reference to Karabagh. This was a test of both Armenia, to see the response, and a test of the international community, to see what their response would be. That was also why Turkish Foreign Minister was smiling and Nalbandian was so serious.

But the Turkish test failed. The Armenians threatened to go home, and the Swiss and the US were very upset at the last-minute trick by the Turkish side, which they did not know about in advance. It was also interesting that only the Swiss and the US were upset and intervened, not the Europeans or even the Russians. The signing went ahead after Turkey backed down and agreed to not make a speech afterwards. But there was new pressure and anger directed at Turkey, as expectations are more on them.

3. The reaction

Yesterday, one day after the signing of the protocols, the Turkish side made new demands:

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute must be resolved to enable Turkey to take steps to normalize ties and for the deal to be approved by parliament-- "We want all conflicts to be resolved and we want all borders to be opened at the same time," Erdogan said. "(But) as long as Armenia does not withdraw from occupied territories in Azerbaijan, Turkey cannot take up a positive position." "If problems between Azerbaijan and Armenia are resolved the public would more easily accept Turkish-Armenian relations. Approval in the Turkish National Assembly would be so much easier," he said.

And Azerbaijan reacted strongly: The Azeri Foreign Ministry said Sunday that the agreement "clouds the spirit of brotherly relations" between Azerbaijan and Turkey. It said Turkey should not have re-established diplomatic ties with Armenia before the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh was settled. We should expect more strong statements, more demands and more aggressive attempts to test Armenia by both Turkey and Azerbaijan.

4. Where are we going? What next?

With the agreements signed, attention has turned to the 14 October soccer World Cup qualifier between Turkey and Armenia. Turkish President Abdullah Gul came to Armenia last year for the first game, but Armenian President Sarkisian has said he will not attend the return game in Turkey unless there is progress toward opening the border.

5. What should Armenia do?

Clearly, Armenia needs to adjust its diplomatic strategy to this Turkish diplomacy of threats, demands and tests of Armenian strength. Armenia needs to adopt a stronger and harder position to respond to this Turkish strategy.

For example, the Armenian president should make it clear that he will not go to Bursa on Wednesday if these games continue. The tactic worked before, when President Sarkisian threatened to not go to the soccer match if the border was not opened or if the Turkish side was not ready to open it. And perhaps the Armenian parliament should connect or tie its vote on the protocols to the actions of the Turkish parliament. If they delay, so will we. If they play games, so can we. And Armenia needs to clearly state that the burden is on Turkey only. Expectations are high but the challenge is for Turkey and the "opportunity" is for Turkey to lose.

Most importantly, it is clear that Turkey only respects strength, not weakness. It is time to be strong in the diplomatic struggle with Turkey. Maybe even a threat to adjust Armenian policy to say yes, if the Turkish side makes demands and preconditions, so will the Armenian side.

If Turkey makes a new and unacceptable demand for progress over Karabagh this is a deal-breaker. What about Cyprus? The Armenian side makes no such demand on Turkey.

6. Conclusion

In part reflecting the recognition of the asymmetry of power between the two sides, there is at least one fundamental flaw in the protocols: nowhere in the protocols is there any provision for punishment if one party violates the terms of the agreement. Nothing stops Turkey from closing its border again.

Richard Giragosian
ACNIS Director

October 12, 2009
Yerevan