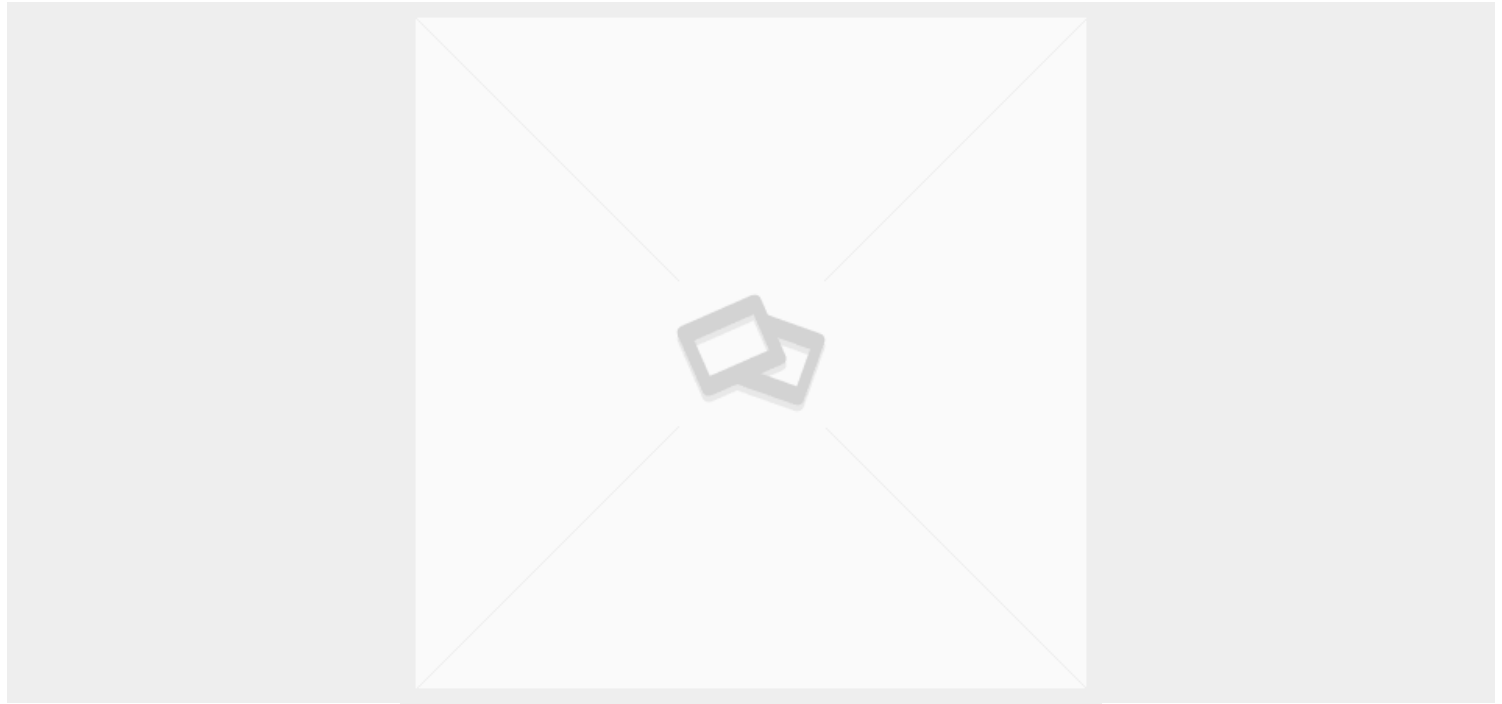


# A TURNING POINT: ARMENIAN OFFICIALS TAKE THE BOLD STEPS

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By Dikran Abrahamian BA, MD, Ontario, Canada, 13 November 2008

*This essay was written following the Georgian crisis and "rapprochement" between Armenia and Turkey. Due its relevance to most recent events it's brought back to the attention of Keghart.com's readers.*

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Turkey appeared to have the upper hand following the Georgian crisis and it took advantage of Russia's interests in the Caucasus. It pressed Armenia to make concessions both with respect to establishing a joint commission of historians and relinquishing the lands surrounding Karabakh as a security zone. In return Turkey promised to open the borders with Armenia. After much speculation of what Armenia would or would not agree to, highest officials seem to have taken the bold step of explicitly announcing what are negotiable and what are not. Armenia's president Serzh Sargsyan and his Minister of Foreign Affairs Eduard Nalbandian have assured the Armenian people the commission will not be established. In the previous update of Keghart.com the respective announcements were posted at the end of the items: [A Letter to a Friend – Why the Silence and Inactivity?](#) and [Nalbandian: "Genocide" resolutions Not a Remedy.](#)

Not too long ago, barely a week, it appeared that the Armenian authorities were on the verge of being forced to drastically soften their stand towards Turkey, compared to previous Armenian administrations. However, following the election of the new president of the USA there seems to be a new lifeline. It's hard not to speculate that Barack Obama's election has shifted the balance in favor of Armenia. It's no longer possible to make the argument that opening the borders is contingent on establishing a commission of historians, as the new president's perception of the Genocide is not a political opinion but a historical fact. Turkey knows this all too well. Whether the new administration recognizes the Genocide or not is an independent matter that forces within the congress will decide down the road.

Another factor that may have played a role in this "conversion" is the critical appraisal of previous ambiguous announcements made by the same officials. People in Armenia and the Diaspora made it clear that the proposed commission was not acceptable - to put it mildly. Furthermore, giving in to Turkey's insistence on ceding land before opening the borders was akin to capitulation.

Turkey may retaliate by making the usual threats that are well known. Israel may make its case of why Turkey is a crucial ally, and the Jewish lobby will try to influence the foreign policy of USA. There is no doubt about these matters. What's important, however, at this juncture, the dynamics has changed and Armenia should maintain its most recent course, and make use of all resources available to drive home its arguments in all international venues available at its disposal.

Whether Karabakh's legal right to be a participant in the Minsk negotiations remains moot. Similarly, which international principle will be honored in future negotiations is not clear. Is it the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan or the right to self-determination of Karabakh that will predominate? The former is more likely, based on remarks made by the co-chairs of the Minsk group. What

level of self-determination will then Karabakh get? In any event Armenia should not rush to a resolution until the new administration in USA is ushered in. Meanwhile time is running short for Turkey to impose its will at whim. Even if individual players in the future administration may not be so sympathetic to the cause of Karabakh or Armenia, all indications are that the future commander-in-chief will not be totally insensitive.

Between now and the inauguration of the new president of USA, and possibly through April 2009, Armenia and its only dedicated ally - the Diaspora - have a window of opportunity that should not be lost. Without being forgetful and neglectful of the socio-economic ills in Armenia, all organizations and parties should re-evaluate the present circumstances, draw the pertinent conclusions and support the authorities of Armenia with respect to Turkey and its machinations. Regretfully, the authorities in Armenia should be kept on a short leash so that they don't flip-flop and change course again.

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