DISTURBING, NEW REVELATIONS ON BORDER OPENING

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By Ara Khachatourian, posted in Asbarez, 30 March 2009

The verbal back-and-forth on an imminent agreement between Armenia and Turkey continued Monday with the Turkish press reporting that Turkey and Armenia had agreed on a roadmap to establish diplomatic ties and open the border, with the sides reportedly contemplating the timing of the announcement and some asserting that the announcement should come next week before President Barack Obama's visit to Turkey.

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Some media reports also attributed an announcement about the border opening after Obama's visit to Armenia's Foreign Minister Eduard Nalbandian. The Armenian Foreign Ministry only denied that Nalbandian ever made such an announcement.

But what of the other revelations blanketing the Turkish press Monday?

“Turkey and Armenia are readying to sign a protocol that marks commitment by both sides to establish diplomatic relations and set up committees on issues ranging from border management, customs, history and more. Having achieved a satisfying deal which includes setting up a history committee to discuss 1915 events, on which Yerevan dragged its feet for a long time, the remaining dilemma for Ankara is the proper timing of the announcement,” reported the Hurriyet Daily News.

“The draft protocol will set the framework for transition to full diplomatic relations possibly starting with low-key representations in Ankara and Yerevan or accreditation of ambassadors from other neighboring capitals. Simultaneously Turkey will come up with a road map for a solution in Nagorno-Karabakh. The modalities of the new border regime will be determined upon the work by the border committee while as part of a show of good will immediate measures would be taken for a gradual opening. Diplomatic recognition will be supported by social and economic projects with coordination of the Turkish Armenian Business Development Council, or TABDC,” added Hurriyet.

Several key issues were “revealed” including the troubling assertion that Armenia has agreed to the formation of a commission of historians to address the Armenian Genocide and Turkey's alleged role in drafting a “road map” to Karabakh peace.

While this could be yet another sensationalist attempt by Turkey to create an illusion that all systems are go for Turkish-Armenian detente on the eve of the Obama visit in an effort to derail the

Genocide recognition issue, but the question of the veracity of Turkish claims that Armenia has agreed to the formation of the commission remains un-refuted by the Nalbandian apparatus.

On several occasions, Nalbandian and President Serzh Sarkisian have reiterated that Armenia was in favor of establishing diplomatic ties and opening of borders without any preconditions. Last week, Nalbandian said that the issue of the Armenian Genocide is not up for discussion during the ongoing negotiations to normalize relations between Armenia and Turkey, when asked by a reporter to clarify Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan's announcement that the sides were, in fact, discussing the Genocide issue.

"I don't want to believe that the Turkish Foreign Minister can make such a statement, because the Armenian Genocide issue has not been discussed with the Turkish side," asserted Nalbandian.

We do not want to believe it either. Any agreement on establishment of a commission to address the veracity of the Genocide or a leading role for Turkey in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution process are unacceptable and will jeopardize Armenia's national interests and security.

Next week Obama will be in Istanbul to attend a United Nations Summit on Civilizations. We learned Monday, through the Turkish press, that Nalbandian will also attend that event, leading the Turkish press to speculate that the setting would be ripe to announce the so-called border agreement.

To end the confusion and to further articulate Armenia's national interests, Nalbandian should make clear and thorough announcements, because one-off responses to reporters' inquiries and one sentence denials by a spokesperson on this crucial matter of pan-national importance are not enough as we enter what appears to be an historic time for our nation.

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