PROTOCOLS TO BE SIGNED AND RATIFIED WITH POSSIBLE RESERVATIONS

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By Harut Sassounian Publisher, The California Courier, 8 October 2009

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Meanwhile, thousands of demonstrators had gathered outside the hotel waving placards, demanding Pres. Sargsyan's resignation, and chanting slogans that could be heard all the way inside the 8th floor conference room. A small plane could be seen hovering overhead, flying a large banner with the inscription -- "No to Protocols."

After the President's opening remarks, I was called upon to address the issues at hand. In welcoming the President to Los Angeles, I wondered why he had decided to consult with Diaspora Armenians, only after the negotiations with Turkey had been concluded and the Protocols already initialed. What was the purpose of this "consulting tour," when Armenia and Turkey were just days away from signing the Protocols in Switzerland? If the visit was intended to appease the Diaspora, why was it not done earlier, before most Armenians went into a frenzy, causing chaotic scenes in Paris where demonstrators were violently dragged off by the French police to allow the President to lay a wreath at the feet of the Gomidas Statue?
Tense confrontations do not lend themselves to calm and meaningful dialogue.

I also questioned the wisdom of trying to reconcile with Armenia's long-standing enemies, at a time when Armenians have great difficulty reconciling with each other. Rather than forming an Armenian-

Turkish commission, there is a greater need for an intra-Armenian task force to reach a common understanding of their political demands, and agree on a proper division of labor between the Armenian government and Diasporan communities.

I expressed the opinion that these Protocols were not only poorly negotiated, but also concluded under foreign pressure. Furthermore, contrary to the President's protestations, the Protocols include several Turkish preconditions, such as acceptance of Turkey's territorial integrity, and re-examination of the Genocide issue.

While the Armenian side has negotiated in good faith, Turkish leaders have kept repeating their rejectionist refrain -- as seen in Pres. Gul's recent statement in Nakhichevan -- that Turkey would not open its border with Armenia, until the Karabagh conflict is settled. What was the whole point of these negotiations and concessions, if Armenia's border with Turkey would remain closed?

Even if the Protocols are signed and ratified, and the border is opened, Armenia could still end up holding an empty bag, should Turkey, under some future pretext, close it down again. I asked Pres. Sargsyan if he would be prepared to add a reservation to the Protocols, stating that Armenia would nullify the agreement, should Turkey close the border again!

I also expressed my agreement with the President's concern -- stated during an interview with the Armenian Reporter -- that some of the provisions of the Protocols were bound to make the pursuit of the recognition of the Armenian Genocide even more challenging. I asked the President if it was wise to make the Armenian activists' already difficult task of confronting the powerful Turkish state even more difficult!

I concluded my remarks by urging the President not to rush into signing these flawed and detrimental Protocols. Why attempt to resolve through a single document, decades-long problems between Armenia and Turkey? A one-line document simply calling for the establishment of diplomatic relations and opening of the borders would have sufficed.
I pointed out that the President's acceptance of the Protocols, was forcing Armenians to pin their hopes on the possibility that Turkey itself would inadvertently end up safeguarding Armenia's interests by refusing to ratify the agreement for its own reasons.

In response to my remarks, Pres. Sargsyan expressed his willingness to accept my suggestion to add a reservation to the Protocols that would call for the repeal of the agreement, should Turkey ever decide to close the border, after opening it.

In the course of the three-hour-long meeting during which very few of the 29 speakers supported the Protocols, Pres. Sargsyan insisted that he would never accept the re-examination of the facts of

the Armenian Genocide by the historical sub-commission referred to in the Protocols. He stated that the main task of this sub-commission would be to discuss the steps necessary for the removal of the consequences of the Genocide. The President expected that the agreement would open new avenues to educate the Turkish public about the Armenian Genocide. He also categorically rejected the possibility of being pressured into making concessions on Artsakh!

Given Pres. Sargsyan's refusal to accept the re-examination of the Genocide and rejection of any concessions on Artsakh -- two key Turkish demands -- one wonders if members of the Turkish Parliament would ever agree to ratify these Protocols and open the border with Armenia!

Pres. Sargsyan concluded the lengthy session by acknowledging that he himself has concerns about some aspects of the Protocols that have not been fully assessed! He stated that the Protocols could close the door on future demands from Turkey and may cause difficulties in resolving the Artsakh conflict. Similar concerns were also expressed by Arkady Ghoukassian, the former President of Artsakh, who was accompanying Pres. Sargsyan.

Despite such misgivings, it was clear from the Pres. Sargsyan's overall remarks that he did not entertain any revisions of the Protocols, and seemed fully intent on seeing them signed and ratified, possibly after adding some reservations.