

REACTIONS IN THE TURKISH PRESS

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The Armenian opening

By Yusuf Kanli, [Hurriyet](#), September 15, 2009

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What are they?

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What are they?

First of all Armenia has accepted for the first time ever the creation of a history commission that might feature historians from interested third parties in examining the genocide claims. That is, without saying so the Serge Sarkisian administration of Armenia has conceded from the "Genocide is a fact, there is no need to verify it through scientific research or to discuss it" position. Secondly, for the first time ever in the post-Soviet era, Armenia has agreed to recognize the joint border with Turkey as was defined in the Kars treaty, though there is no reference in the protocols to the Kars treaty. Such recognition by Armenia is no less than declaring it has no territorial claims from Turkey or it has turned a cold shoulder to diaspora's land claims from Turkey.

Because of those concessions Sarkisian is now having a tough ride with the Armenian opposition, while many Turkish diplomats who devoted a life to battle Armenian claims against Turkey are expressing with satisfaction appreciation for the Turkish "diplomatic victory" in Armenia relations.

Yet, the opposition parties are fuming over the protocols and delivering tough statements as if the ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, government has betrayed Turkey's national interests.

All the issues on the table in Turkish-Armenian negotiations, excluding one, are problems between the two countries. Recognition of the Kars treaty or the joint border defined by that treaty and Armenia declaring it has no territorial claims from Turkey, resolution of the genocide claims through studies of a joint historical commission, normalization of relations including establishment of diplomatic relations and opening of the border gates are the most prominent issues the Swiss-mediated silent diplomacy between Turkey and Armenia has been aiming to achieve. Of these

topics, only normalization of relations and opening of the border gates heading was not a purely bilateral subject as suspension of the plans to open a Turkish embassy in Yerevan and closure of the border were decided by Ankara as a reaction to the invasion and subsequent occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh, a predominantly Armenian dominated enclave in Azerbaijan, and several Azerbaijani-population regions around the mountainous enclave.

Indeed, without abandoning Azerbaijan and landing Turkish-Azerbaijani relations in an unprecedented crisis and risking his own political future very seriously no Turkish leader can open the border without a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh occupation or at least declaration of a withdrawal timetable by Armenia. Can Armenia undertake such a move now? What if, as was suggested earlier, Armenia withdraws from Nagorno-Karabakh and the Azeri regions around and Russian peacekeepers are deployed in the mountainous region? Even if with Azerbaijani demands Turkish troops join Russians as peacekeepers in the disputed territory, such a development might still be acceptable for Yerevan as an "interim formula." After all, were not Russian military elements together with Armenian troops in the occupation of the region?

Such a development may as well help Erdoğan escape "treason" accusation in the 2010 or 2011 early polls while convert him into a "national hero" in Azerbaijan as he would have secured "liberation" of occupied Azerbaijani land.

The outcome would serve to Turkish-Russian relations, as well as the U.S. interests in this geography. Furthermore, such a resolution would be a great contribution to Western energy security, and thus would be applauded by the EU, too.

Can Armenia declare a withdrawal timetable? That might make Erdoğan a hero, otherwise, he will find himself in some very serious reputation problems in domestic politics. Would he care? So far he proved that he has no such worries.

