

SENATE RESOLUTION RESHUFFLES POLITICAL CARDS IN ANKARA, YEREVAN AND BEYOND

Posted on October 27, 2009 by Keghart



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By Harut Sassounian, Publisher, The California Courier, 29 October 2009

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As expected, Davutoglu was severely criticized by the opposition parties in Parliament that reject the Protocols. The most unexpected attack, however, came from Selahattin Demirtas, head of the Kurdish faction (DTP) in Parliament, who took the government to task for distorting and denying the facts of "the Armenian massacres." Such a criticism has never been voiced before in the Turkish Parliament. Demirtas brazenly continued: "We believe that we now need to address an issue that has caused so much suffering to the Armenian people -- one of the key problems facing the Republic of Turkey. A hundred years ago, the Ittihad Party, with a policy of Islamizing and Turkifying the entire Anatolia, sought to eliminate the non-Muslims, particularly the Armenian people, from these lands through exile, expulsion, deportation and massacres."

Ignoring the insults hurled by members of the ruling party (AKP) and others, Demirtas condemned the government's policy of denial that had the aim of escaping the consequences of this "tragedy," prompting the creation of "a fake history." He noted that the persecutions and massacres of

Armenians were presented as if they never happened. "We need to speak about all of these things and correct the record," Demirtas concluded.

Immediately after addressing the Turkish Parliament, Davutoglu flew to Baku in order to quell the Azerbaijani uproar over the signing of the Protocols. Realizing the depth of their anger, Davutoglu was forced to make several outlandish declarations: "Azerbaijan's lands are sacred for us and their liberation is Turkey's utmost priority. We will not change our position even if the sky falls down to earth!" He also assured them that "if need be, 72 million Turks are ready to die in Azerbaijan!" Azerbaijan's leaders, however, were not too impressed with Davutoglu's highly inflated pronouncements. They continued to shut down mosques financed by Turkey, removed Turkey's flags from a monument for Turkish martyrs in Baku, and threatened to raise the price of gas sold to Turkey.

While Davutoglu had his hands full in Baku, a news flash from Washington came to reshuffle Ankara's political cards. A Resolution was introduced in the U.S. Senate that called for the reaffirmation of the Armenian Genocide. This unexpected development sent a powerful message not only to Turkey, but also to the leaders of Armenia, Russia, the European Union and the United States.

To their dismay, Turkish leaders discovered that the Protocols would not put an end to the pursuit of recognition and justice for the crime of genocide committed by their ancestors.

Turkey's Ambassador to Washington Nabi Sensoy was alarmed by this unexpected development and wasted no time in condemning the Senate Resolution during a Voice of America interview. He called the timing of the Resolution "regrettable" and "unfortunate," coming just one day after the introduction of the Protocols in the Turkish Parliament. The esteemed Ambassador failed to indicate, however, when would be a better time to introduce such a Resolution!

Turkey's leaders are now caught in the horns of a dilemma. If they rush to ratify the Protocols in order to prevent the House and Senate Resolutions from gaining political support, they would alienate their oil-rich Azerbaijani "brothers" for not having delivered on their promises on Karabagh. On the other hand, if Turkish leaders delay ratification until after April 24 -- waiting for Armenia to make concessions on Artsakh -- they would run the risk of having either the House or the Senate or both pass the Genocide Resolutions. Since 2010 is an election year for all House Members and a third of the Senate, members of Congress are usually more responsive to their constituents, raising the likelihood of the passage of the Genocide Resolutions. Furthermore, even if Pres. Obama has no intention of keeping his campaign promise on the Armenian Genocide, he would feel compelled to pressure the Turks to ratify the Protocols before April 24, with or without concessions from Armenia on Artsakh, in order to provide a face-saving cover for his next "Meds Yeghern" statement!

Therefore, if Armenia's leaders stand firm on their repeated public commitments not to make concessions on Artsakh linked to the Protocols, they would be in the driver's seat in terms of

controlling Ankara's next steps.

Pres. Sargsyan must also keep his solemn promise not to allow the Protocols to undermine Armenia's efforts for genocide recognition. A good start to demonstrate the Armenian President's resolve on this issue is to send a letter to the leadership of the House and the Senate, encouraging them to pass the pending Resolutions. It should be noted that the Turkish government has never hesitated to use its considerable political muscle to lobby against past Congressional Resolutions on the Armenian Genocide. Sending a simple letter of support to the U.S. Congress is the least Pres. Sargsyan could do!

The Armenian government's backing for the newly-introduced Senate Resolution would also send a message to Washington, Moscow and beyond that Armenia is not giving up on its historic rights, even though it is being pressured to make major concessions in other areas.

It is high time for Armenian leaders to reassess the nation's difficult predicament and take all necessary measures to avoid further missteps.

