TURKISH OFFICIALS ADMIT TO PLAYING GAMES WITH PROTOCOLS

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By Harut Sassounian, Publisher, The California Courier, 19 November 2009

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Throughout the long months of negotiations, I repeatedly warned that Turkish officials were not sincere in their announced intention of opening the border with Armenia and establishing diplomatic relations. By acting as if they were seeking reconciliation with Armenia, Turkish leaders simply wanted to prevent further acknowledgment of the Armenian Genocide by third countries, extract maximum concessions from Armenia on Artsakh (Karabagh), and block future territorial demands from Turkey.

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Turkey first dragged out the negotiations until right before April 24 to preclude Pres. Obama from keeping his promise on recognizing the Armenian Genocide. The Protocols were finally signed on October 10, to ensure that Pres. Sargsyan does go to Turkey to attend the soccer match between the national teams of the two countries.
Meanwhile, Turkey's leaders were repeatedly announcing that they would not open the border and their Parliament would not ratify the Protocols until Armenia returned Artsakh to Azerbaijan -- even though there is no such requirement in the signed documents. More than a month has now passed since the signing of the Protocols in Zurich, but there are no signs that the Turkish Parliament would ratify them anytime soon.

Just before signing the Protocols, Turkey's President Abdullah Gul and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu traveled to Azerbaijan to pledge once again that they had no intention of opening the border with Armenia until Artsakh was returned to Azerbaijan.

As if these outrageous pre-conditions were not sufficient to shake Armenians' confidence in the Protocols, Turkish officials made no attempt to hide their deceptive designs.

The October 5th issue of the Turkish newspaper Hurriyet quoted Foreign Ministry officials in Ankara as stating: "The formation of a joint history commission and re-opening the border are included in the documents. However, they can be put into effect only after a solution is found to the Karabakh issue.

Without a solution to the Karabakh conflict, these protocols cannot be transferred to Parliament. Even then, Parliament would not adopt it. So, relax."

To convince the Azerbaijanis that Turkey had no plans to ratify the Protocols, Turkish Foreign Ministry officials boasted about their success in deceiving Europeans on another agreement: "Turkey had to sign a protocol with the European Union on the Cyprus issue. What happened? Did Turkey open its seaports and airports to Cypriot vessels and airplanes, after four years?"

We now have solid evidence that these Turkish officials were not making an idle boast when they indicated that signing an agreement means nothing to them. In the Oct. 25 issue of "Today's Zaman," commentator Ercan Yavuz cited dozens of examples of agreements signed by Turkey, but not ratified, after the passage of many years! At present, there are 146 agreements with 95 countries, including Argentina, Azerbaijan, Libya, Slovenia, Sweden, and Syria, awaiting the approval of the Parliament's Foreign Affairs Commission. The oldest -- an agreement signed 26 years ago between Iraq and Turkey -- is still pending ratification by the Turkish Parliament. Many other important agreements have been signed since 2004, but still not ratified!

Given the Turkish record of not taking seriously commitments made on behalf of their country, it should not come as a surprise to anyone that the Turkish Parliament would not ratify the Armenia-Turkey Protocols anytime soon. Of course, by not ratifying the Protocols, Turkey would be breaking its written pledge of August 31, to ratify the Protocols in a "timely" manner.

Interestingly, Armenia's Foreign Minster Edward Nalbandian, in a recent interview with Reuters, asked: "Why sign the Protocols, if they are not going to be ratified?" The answer is obvious: The Turkish government is interested in creating a positive image for itself in front of the international community by appearing to want "good neighborly relations" with Armenia, without actually taking any concrete steps to do so.

Armenia's officials are sadly mistaken if they believe that Turkey would come under intense international pressure, should it not ratify the protocols. Time and again, Turkey has proven its immunity from pressures applied by other countries, including the United States, as was the case on the eve of the Iraq war when Turkey refused to allow U.S. Troops to cross its borders to enter Iraq.

If pressured from outside, Turkish leaders would simply blame Armenia, by pointing out that it has not made any concessions on Artsakh, thereby making it impossible for the Turkish Parliament to ratify the Protocols.

Armenian officials have repeatedly stated that the Artsakh negotiations are unrelated to the Protocols and that the Armenian Parliament would not ratify the Protocols before Turkey, adding that they would scrap the agreement, if Turkey failed to act in a "timely" manner.

It remains to be seen whether Armenia would keep its pledge of not making any territorial concessions on Artsakh; and should Turkey refuse to ratify the Protocols after the lapse of several

months, would Armenia's leaders have the courage to declare the signed Protocols null and void?