ARMENIA: HINT OF TERRITORIAL CONCESSIONS TO AZERBAIJAN SPARKS CONTROVERSY

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Armenia's foreign minister suggested the country could hand over certain territories around the disputed Nagorno Karabakh to Azerbaijan as part of a hypothetical peace deal, sparking controversy among Armenians.

The widespread outrage underscores the disconnect between hardened public perceptions of the conflict and diplomatic proposals that have long been the subject of negotiations in the effort to resolve it.

Foreign Minister Eduard Nalbandian made the remarks on September 18 at the Armenia-Diaspora conference in Yerevan. During the question and answer session he was asked about Armenian territorial withdrawals outlined in what is known as the Madrid Principles worked out by international negotiators.

http://www.eurasianet.org/node/85211

As far as the return of territories, we are talking about those territories that [if returned] would not threaten the security of Karabakh, nor the [conflicts] resolution, Nalbandian was quoted as saying. I cannot add any other details, or negotiations might fail.

The question was most likely spurred by the outgoing interim United States negotiator for Karabakh Richard Hoaglands comments on the Madrid Principles made last month.

There can be no settlement without respect for Azerbaijans sovereignty, and the recognition that its sovereignty over these territories must be restored, Hoagland said.

That statement was widely criticized in Armenian American media as excessively pro-Azerbaijani.

The Madrid Principles are not final but broadly call for the withdrawal of Armenian forces from five former Azerbaijani districts south and east of Nagorno Karabakh and special modalities for two other districts sandwiched between Nagorno Karabakh and Armenia, linked with the determination of Nagorno Karabakhs status and workings of other security arrangements.

Most Karabakh watchers will be hard-pressed to remember when in recent years have negotiations not failed between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The last vague document the two sides agreed to was in November 2008, at a time when both countries were still in a particularly intimidated state after Russia's military rout of Georgia. The focus in talks since then has been on preventing an escalation in violence rather than on any actual peace agreement.

Nalbandians deputy Shavarsh Kocharian rushed in to express surprise by the brouhaha. Nalbandian wasnt giving anything away, Kocharian assured, insisting that if anything Nalbandian had added two conditions to what has been a long-standing provision in the negotiations.

Some in Azerbaijan, meanwhile, crowed over the statement. Perhaps, Yerevan has finally realized that it is necessary to move towards peace and this is the only chance to avoid a war which Armenia has obviously lost, wrote commentator Elmira Tariverdiyeva.

Nalbandians comments and the subsequent reaction recalled a controversy around Armenias previous foreign minister, Vartan Oskanian, in 2001. Oskanian was lambasted then for calling the former Azerbaijani districts around Nagorno Karabakh occupied. Incidentally, Kocharian then an opposition member of parliament – was one of those who criticized Oskanian at the time.

In 2001, as now, Armenian press accounts saw the comments as evidence of a scheming government testing the waters for a possible sell-out of Armenian territory. As a result, no Armenian politician has used the term occupied territories since.

Kaynak/Source: