

FACTS AND COMMENTS

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1. THE MEETING OF MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Following their meeting in Reykjavik,¹ the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Turkey and Armenia met again on the occasion of the celebrations organized for the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization on June 25, 2002. They also met on September 16, 2002 during the meeting of the UN General Assembly.

It appears that at the Istanbul meeting mainly the Karabagh conflict was discussed. On the other hand Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, Vartan Oskanian, repeated the willingness of his country to initiate diplomatic relations with Turkey with no preconditions attached. The Turkish side listened but did

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not respond to that. There was no change in the policy of the two sides when they met in New York three months later.² The Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs stated, "despite the fact that these meetings have not given any tangible results, I believe that the fact of the dialogue itself is useful".³

As it is understood from these meetings, the main objective of the Armenian side is to secure the establishment of diplomatic relations and the opening of borders with Turkey while making no concessions in return. Because Turkey supports the view of

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¹ Ömer E. Lütem, 'Facts and Comments', *Review of Armenian Studies*, Volume 1, Number 1, 2002, pp. 25-27.

² *Turkish Probe*, June 30, 2002.

³ *Medimax*, October 18, 2002.

Azerbaijan, Armenia does not wish to see Turkey involved in the efforts to settle the Karabagh problem. However, aware that insisting on this issue will prevent them from drawing Turkey to the negotiating table, Armenia has decided to give precedence to bilateral relations and accept the discussion of the Karabagh issue as well. Armenia also hopes that once Turkey starts to play an active role in the solution of the Karabagh issue, it will distance itself from unconditionally supporting the views of Azerbaijan and adopt a more "balanced" policy.

Turkey considers that there can be no improvement in bilateral relations until the Karabagh conflict is resolved and therefore she gives priority not to the establishment of diplomatic relations. But the resolution of this conflict will eliminate only one of the obstacles that Turkish-Armenian relations face. Following this the remaining problems between Turkey and Armenia, such as the allegations of 'genocide', the inviolability of the Turkish-Armenian border and the reference in the Armenian Constitution to some of the eastern provinces of Turkey as "western Armenia" will have to be resolved and only then will it be possible to open the borders and establish diplomatic relations. It becomes obvious that this fact is at least partially understood by the Armenian Minister from his following statement: *"The establishment of diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey or complete re-opening of the border before the (Karabagh) conflict's final settlement is certainly not probable, but not impossible. I think the policy of small steps, which I believe will allow to achieve certain shifts in the relations with Turkey before the settlement of the conflict, is more real".*⁴

The differences of opinion on Karabagh issue and allegations of genocide once again surfaced during the UN General Assembly in September.

In his speech to the General Assembly Vilayet Guliyev, the Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan, directed harsh criticism towards Armenia for its stance on Karabagh. The Turkish Foreign Minister Gürel accused Armenia of not complying with the relevant UN resolutions on Karabagh and demanded that Armenian forces evacuate the occupied Azerbaijani territories. Gürel stated that the Karabagh conflict is an impediment to achieving political stability and economic development in the region. The Armenian Foreign

⁴ Medimax, October 18, 2002.

Minister Oskanian did answer the Azerbaijani statement but refrained from mentioning Turkey. He did, however, extend his appreciation to the governments and international organizations that had recognized the “genocide” and promised that Yerevan could cooperate with those states that were in the process of recognition. The Turkish delegation objected, stating that the events to which Oskanian was referring occupied a very short time span in the nine centuries of Turkish-Armenian co-habitation and that the allegation that there was a premeditated, planned and duly executed scheme to annihilate the Ottoman Armenian population remains unsubstantiated. Furthermore, the Turkish delegation demanded from Armenia not to participate in a smear campaign that propagated only one version of events in history.

2. MR. OSKANIAN'S CONFERENCES

It is of particular interest to dwell on some of the conferences of the Armenian Foreign Minister as these shed light on Armenian policy towards Turkey.

In a speech on Turkish–Armenian relations delivered at TESEV, a Turkish think tank, on June 26, 2002⁵ Oskanian stated that it was not up to him to evaluate the friendship of Turkey with Azerbaijan but that this friendship should not be used to isolate other countries (namely Armenia). He added that Turkey was not establishing relations with Armenia not only because of historic problems but that the problems of Armenia with Azerbaijan had taken Turkish-Armenian relations hostage.

He also claimed that Karabagh had never been a part of independent Azerbaijan, that the region was never controlled by Azerbaijan with the exception of the Soviet era and that the population of Karabagh had been separated from Azerbaijan in accordance with provisions of the Constitution.

Oskanian gave priority to the “embargo” issue and stated that Azerbaijan had convinced Turkey to implement an embargo against Armenia, that the two states believed that they could thus impose their own solution on Armenia but the Armenian economy did not collapse despite the embargo. He also stated that contrary to expectations, the Armenian economy was faring better than the

⁵ For the full text of the speech Press Release, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, June 26, 2002

other economies in the region, emphasizing that the GNP had grown by 9,6% last year and that they had achieved 10% growth in the first half of 2002.

On the issue of diplomatic relations, Oskanian restated the well-known Armenian thesis, saying that his country was willing to establish diplomatic relations with Turkey with no preconditions attached. However through indirect remarks he made clear that this would not mean that Armenia would abandon the claims of genocide.

A close study of the views of the Armenian Foreign Minister reveal that they contain some errors in judgment.

Turkish support for Azerbaijan against Armenia is based not only on ethnic and cultural similarities, but also on the fact that Armenia does not recognize the territorial integrity of Turkey and continuously works to secure international recognition of their allegations of genocide. In this context, the thesis that the problems of Armenia with Azerbaijan have taken hostage Turkish-Armenian relations reflects only a part of reality.

As the name implies, Karabagh⁶ has historically been Azerbaijani territory. No one but the Armenians disputes that legally this territory belongs to Azerbaijan. This fact was confirmed by the Council of Europe, European Union, Russia, USA and other countries during the "presidential elections" in Karabagh.⁷ On the other hand, the Karabagh conflict concerns also the regional stability. Lastly, due to a million refugees that resulted from hostilities the humanitarian dimension of this problem cannot be disregarded.

As the economic measures that Turkey has taken against Armenia consist of only closing down of border crossings, this cannot be considered to be a real embargo. On the other hand it is only natural that Azerbaijan should implement an embargo or similar measures against Armenia, a country with which it is at a war that has been temporarily halted by a cease-fire. However Armenia complains that it faces great injustice and works hard for the lifting of the "embargo". These efforts are intended to make believe that the economic measures taken by Turkey and Azerbaijan are putting Armenia in a very difficult position. But

⁶ Karabagh is a Turkish word (Karabağ) meaning "black wineryard"

⁷ See *Asbarez Online*, August 2, 2002; *Armenpress*, August 7, 2002; *Arminfo*, August 24, 2002

Oskanian said in İstanbul that these measures did not have an effect on the Armenian economy, on the contrary the Armenian economy was doing better than the other economies of the region. One should conclude in that case that the Armenian efforts to lift "embargo" are in fact an occasion to complain about Turkey and Azerbaijan in order to put them under pressure.

As to the Armenian willingness to establish diplomatic relations with Turkey, taking into account the policy of Armenia towards Turkey and Azerbaijan which one may easily describe as hostile, it is only natural that Turkey should seek the fulfillment of certain preconditions before establishing diplomatic relations. In fact, establishing diplomatic relations without preconditions with Armenia would mean tacit recognition of the occupation of Karabagh and other Azerbaijani territories, ignoring the fact that Armenia does not recognize the territorial integrity of Turkey and the inviolability of Turkish borders and accepting Armenia to continue accusing Turkey of genocide. The proof that Armenia will not desert its genocide claims even if diplomatic relations are established is found in the TESEV speech of Oskanian where he states that Armenia in this case is not willing to renounce its national memories or dismiss historical injustices it has suffered. In essence, it is not to the benefit of Turkey to establish diplomatic relations with Yerevan, as this will mean accepting all of Armenian demands while getting nothing in return.

As Turkey definitely refuses the claims of genocide, it is clear that there is no use for Armenia to follow a policy that is based on these claims. On the contrary, insisting on such a policy results only in aggravating of the conflict, which makes it even more difficult to achieve the stability that is so much needed in the entire Southern Caucasus region.

In a speech delivered at Yale University on September 19, 2002, the Armenian Foreign Minister stated that the USA had been promising for four years to try to convince Turkey to take concrete steps towards cooperative relations with Armenia. He added that as the USA was aware of the unconditional readiness of Armenia to establish diplomatic relations with Turkey, Washington had tried for Turkey to at least start with gestures such as the reopening of railways or the opening of borders so as to allow trade, but that four years later no progress had been made. Oskanian said Yerevan was well aware of American efforts to convince Ankara. He also said that Washington could not risk applying too much

pressure for the fear of losing the vital Turkish support on a number of critical issues such as Iraq, Israel, and NATO and EU defense. However he did add that the current situation was in fact perceived in Armenia as an American bias or partiality towards Ankara.

The most interesting feature of this speech is that Armenia expects the USA to be active on convincing Turkey to take a step forward on matters Yerevan considers vital such as establishing diplomatic relations, the opening of borders and resumption of railway transportation while it does nothing serious for the realization of these goals itself and goes as far as blaming Washington of being partial when no progress is made.

In another conference on Caucasus security issues on October 30, Oskanian; "pointed out the non-constructive position of Turkey whose one-sided policy was only compounding the problem". According to Oskanian "although the Armenian side has tried to change this negative position of Turkey, no actual progress is being made for Turkey does not want to overcome its narrow ethnic problems and approach the issue from a geopolitical standpoint."⁸

These words are astonishing as all the problems in the southern Caucasus are emanating from Armenia. It is Armenia that has occupied Karabagh and other Azerbaijani territories. It is Armenia that supports the unrest in Georgia's Javakheti region. Armenia does not recognize the territorial integrity of Turkey and the inviolability of Turkish borders and voices accusations of genocide. Finally, the Russian Federation owns its presence in the southern Caucasus to Armenia. The Armenian habit to never search for the blame with themselves but always others constitutes a psychological barrier that is difficult to overcome when dealing with this country.

3. ARMENIAN DIASPORA ACTIVITIES AGAINST TURKEY

The activities of the Armenians of the diaspora against Turkey continue and aim mainly on achieving recognition of the 'genocide' claims in the parliaments of some states. On the other hand Armenians systematically oppose all initiatives -particularly in

⁸ Ayastani Anrapetutyun, October 31, 2002 (ANN/Groong November 2, 2002)

the USA- that may be of benefit to Turkey even if these do not concern any Armenian interests.

a. USA

As always, Armenian activities are at their strongest in the USA where the most powerful Armenian diaspora resides.

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A New "Genocide" Draft Resolution

New Jersey Senator Robert Toricelli (D) presented to the Senate at the end of July a draft resolution that envisaged the supporting of the 1948 Genocide Convention on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the signing of this document by the USA.

A paragraph of the draft resolution reads; "whereas the enactment of the Genocide Convention Implementation Act marked a principled stand by the USA against the crime of genocide and an important step toward ensuring that the lessons of the Holocaust, the Armenian Genocide, the genocides in Cambodia and Rwanda, among others, will be used to help prevent future genocides".⁹

Thus, unable to present a resolution on the alleged Armenian genocide, American Armenians had chosen to bring the issue to the Senate indirectly by hiding it behind the Holocaust. The draft had gathered 31 supporters as of late October and will be accepted if this number reaches 51.

Is there a chance for this resolution to be accepted? Considering the highly increased strategic value of Turkey to the USA following the attacks of September 11, 2001 and the likelihood of a military intervention to Iraq, it is difficult to believe that this resolution which will be met by the fierce reaction of Turkey will be accepted now. In line with this understanding, the Co-Chairman of the Armenian Caucus Frank Pallone told Armenian reporters in Yerevan on August 16 that the September 11 attacks

⁹ Armenian National Committee of America, Press Release, July 29, 2002.

had made things difficult for the resolution and that their opposition was claiming that bringing up the issue of the "Armenian genocide" would harm the war on terror. Pallone stated also that he did not agree with this but it would be very difficult to bring this matter up under the given circumstances.¹⁰

On the other hand it must be noted that ultimately the outcome of this draft will depend on the stance of the Jewish lobby. It would only be logical for the American Jews to oppose this draft, as they rightly believe that the Holocaust is unique and since the draft attempts to equate the Holocaust with the "Armenian genocide".

"Wexler Resolution" on the Accession of Turkey to the EU

Member of the House of Representatives Robert Wexler (D) proposed a draft resolution to assist the accession of Turkey to the EU. The operative paragraph reads as follows:

"Now, therefore, be it revolved that it is in the sense of the House of Representatives that;

1. The United States should continue to support the efforts of the Republic of Turkey to join the European Union,
2. The European Union should recognize Turkey's comprehensive political and economic reforms and set a date for the initiation of accession negotiations at the meeting of the European Council in Copenhagen to be held on December 12-13."

The Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), the Dashnak organization in the USA, immediately objected to this draft resolution. A letter sent by ANCA to the members of the House read: "The American people, through their representatives, should not be asked to confer their approval upon a military-led government that abuses the human rights of its citizens, restricts the religious freedom of its Christian minorities, denies Armenian Genocide, illegally blockades Armenia and continues to maintain a military occupation of Cyprus."¹¹

The Armenian Assembly of America, the opponent of ANCA which does however act parallel with ANCA when the issue is

¹⁰ Armenpress, August 16, 2002.

¹¹ Armenian National Committee of America, Press Release, October 30, 2002

Turkey, wrote in its statement on this issue "How can the USA morally support Turkey's accession to the EU without calling upon Turkey to acknowledge the Armenian Genocide, lift its blockade of Armenia and address its human rights record?"¹²

It's worth mentioning that the 125 member Armenian Caucus which brings together the Representatives and Senators of the Congress supporting Armenian issues was reduced to 114 members after the by-elections, signaling a relative weakening of the position of the Armenian Lobby in Congress.

The Draft Law Which Envisages Economic Benefits for Turkey

In order to assist Ankara economically the US government introduced to Congress a draft law that envisaged the lifting of all taxes on certain goods such as textiles and leather products imported from Turkey. The House of Representatives passed the draft.

Due to strong opposition of the Armenian lobby to this draft, Assistant Secretary of State Richard Armitage wrote a letter to the members of Senate promising to push for the reopening of the Turkish-Armenian border and the restoration of broader "economic, political and cultural links" between Turkey and Armenia.¹³

As can be seen, the Armenian lobby in the USA can even intervene in an issue that does not concern Armenians or Armenia directly, such as granting Turkey trade benefits. The lobby can even compel the Deputy Secretary of State to write a letter, in line with the demands of Armenia from Turkey.

b. Canada

The Canadian Senate, with the initiative of some of its members of Armenian decent adopted a resolution on the Armenian "genocide" on June 13, 2002. The operative paragraph of the resolution reads as follows;

"That this House calls on the Government of Canada: a) to recognize the genocide of the Armenians and to condemn any

¹² Armenian Assembly of America, Press Release, October 21, 2002

¹³ RFE/IRL, *Armenia Report*, October 10, 2002

attempt to deny or distort a historical truth as being anything less than a genocide, a crime against humanity and b) to designate the 24th of every year hereafter throughout Canada as a day of remembrance of the 1.5 million Armenians who fell victim to the first genocide of the 20th century.”¹⁴

This resolution, which was accepted with 39 votes in favor and none against, shows to which extent the influence of the Armenian community in Canada has grown over public opinion. It is difficult to understand the existence of this influence despite the murders of Turkish diplomats¹⁵ in Canada by Armenian terrorists. This can only be explained by a lack of effective opposition to the Armenian allegations that was considered as true over time. Another reason is that Turkish diplomats assassinations are forgotten as time passes.

This resolution does not place Canada amongst the states that recognize the alleged Armenian genocide. For this to happen the House of Commons must adopt a similar resolution and finally the government must implement it.

c. Wales

The National Assembly of Wales recognized the alleged Armenian genocide by a decision taken with 31 votes on October 30, 2002.¹⁶ This decision known as a Statement of Opinion reads as follows: “We recognize the Armenian genocide under Turkish Government in 1915. We call on Turkey to stop economic sanctions against the Republic of Armenia and call on British Government not to support Turkey’s application for EU membership.”¹⁷

It is understood that the different churches in Wales were the main driving force behind this decision.¹⁸

¹⁴ Armenian National Committee of Canada, Press Release, July 13, 2002

¹⁵ The attacks carried out by the Armenian terrorists in Canada and intending murder are listed below:
 - April 8, 1982, Ottawa, Turkish Trade Attaché Kani Güngör was seriously wounded,
 - August 27, 1982, Ottawa, Turkish Military Attaché Colonel Atilla Altıkat was murdered,
 - March 12, 1985, Ottawa, Canadian guard of the Turkish Embassy was murdered, Turkish Ambassador Çoşkun Kırcı was seriously wounded.

¹⁶ The Welsh Parliament has 60 deputies and 48 ballots were cast during the negotiation of this matter. ARCA News Agency, November 5, 2002.

¹⁷ ARCA News Agency, November 5, 2002.

¹⁸ Press Release, Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia, October 25, 2002 and Asbarez Online, October 22, 2002.

This decision will have no legal consequences for either Great Britain or Turkey. It is, however, a moral satisfaction for the Armenians and will constitute a precedent for efforts to obtain recognition for the "genocide" in the UK.

Neither British Parliament nor the government accepts Armenian claims of genocide. This was most recently proven by the British Minister Baroness Scotland in February 2001 when in a reply to a question in the House of Lords she answered that evidence showed that the events concerning the Armenians could not be classified as genocide as the term is clearly defined by the 1948 UN Genocide Convention. The British Embassy in Ankara confirmed this position in a press statement issued in July of the same year.¹⁹

British government attitude has resulted in caution on the Armenian side. Despite the fact that they have supporters like Baroness Cox in the Parliament, it appears that before applying to the Parliament Armenians would try to first have decisions taken in organizations that may be sympathetic to their cause such as trade unions, the Greater London Council, the British Council of Churches, the Liberal Party, etc.²⁰

d. Report on "Armenians in Turkey Today"

After Kocharian was elected President in 1998, the Forum of Armenian Associations in Europe was founded to bring together Armenian organizations in Europe and facilitate their cooperation. This organization has worked more on preventing the accession of Turkey to the EU than it has realized cooperation between Armenian organizations. One of the successes of the Forum which is usually engaged in lobbying activity was the adoption by the European Parliament of the South Caucasus Report which reflects the views of Armenians and came into existence by convincing the Swedish Rapporteur Per Garthon to the Armenian cause.

The sensitivity of the EU on minorities has led the Forum to follow a policy based on depicting the situation of the Armenian minority in Turkey as negative, thus intentionally causing Turkey to encounter some problems when it is dealing with the EU. As a

¹⁹ Ömer E. Lütem, 'Olaylar ve Yorumlar', *Ermeni Araştırmaları*, No. 2, Haziran-Temmuz-Ağustos 2001, pp. 25-27.

²⁰ *Asbarez Online*, October 22, 2002.

result the Forum has commissioned a report entitled "Armenians in Turkey Today- A Critical Assessment of the Situation of the Armenian Minority in the Turkish Republic." Tessa Hoffman, the author of the report, is known in Germany for her activities and writing against Turkey. She unconditionally supports Armenian views and has therefore been given an award by the Armenian Benevolent Foundation and the Yerevan University granted her with the academic title of Professor.²¹

The report includes a great number of allegations about the Armenians living in Turkey. Most of the allegations are untrue while some others are wildly exaggerated.²² The report claims that the Armenians living in Turkey face intense prejudice, suffer discriminatory legal and administrative measures as well as many restrictions and arbitrariness and that these measures aim to assimilate the Armenians or to force their migration. The report speaks of unreal events such as the confiscation of church property and even considers the fact that there are not a sufficient number of priests due to the measures taken by the government. It alleges that the authorities can and do paralyze the operations of schools at will.

In the detailed section under the heading "Recommendations"²³ - as if all the allegations were true - authorities are called upon to protect Armenians from threats and attacks as well as to put an end to the pilferage at religious foundations. The report demands that the Turkish press ceases discriminatory and offensive reporting and recognizes its responsibility to that end. The Turkish press is requested to refrain from criticizing those who do acknowledge the alleged genocide. Educating broad sections of Turkish society on the "genocide" and reviewing schoolbooks are among the recommendations. Furthermore it is stated that Turkish politicians must recognize their own responsibility for the protection of minorities. Finally, it is recommended that Turks who do recognize the alleged genocide should not be prosecuted. Finally the report demands that the EU takes the appropriate measures to support Turkish academics, publishers and journalists who critically reassess history, in other words those who recognize the Armenian genocide claims.

²¹ *Armenian in Turkey Today*, <http://www.armenianforum.org/site/english/eu-contact/docs-news/Armenian%20in%20Turkey%20MOD.pdf>, p. 2.

²² *Armenians in Turkey...*, pp. 9-45.

²³ *Armenians in Turkey...*, p. 7.

It is not clear on whom these recommendations are directed at. However bearing in minds the close relations of the Forum with the EU circles, it comes to mind that the EU is the actual addressee. As a significant portion of the members of the European Parliament are against Turkey becoming an EU member, it is likely that these recommendations could be at least partially incorporated into some resolutions of the European Parliament.

The Armenian Patriarchate in Turkey made public a declaration concerning this report²⁴ and reflected the real conditions of the Armenians living in Turkey. This declaration, which could be considered as a denial of the Hoffman report, protests the allegations of assimilation, pressure and ill treatment of the Armenian population in Turkey and reiterates the loyalty of Turkish Armenians to their country.

4. FORTHCOMING PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN ARMENIA

Presidential elections in Armenia will be held on February 19, 2003. A number of Armenian politicians including President Kocharian have declared themselves to be candidate. Among them are the leader of the Armenian Peoples Party Stepan Demirjian, leader of the National Unity Party Artashes Geghamian and leader of the National Democratic Union Party Vazgen Manukian.

Although the 19 opposition parties have formed an alliance to nominate a single candidate to face Kocharian, they have been unable to agree on a person. The strongest contender for the office of president is Kocharian. Due to the high number of candidates it is likely that Kocharian will not be able to receive sufficient votes in the first round and could only be elected in the second.

Kocharian's strength in these elections does not come from his successes during his presidency but rather from the relative weakness of his competitors. As we will go into details below, it is difficult to claim that Armenia has registered serious progress under the leadership of Kocharian in the last five years.

Armenia's greatest problem is economic. The weakness of the economy leads to unemployment, poverty and migration. The first years of the Kocharian era were marked by economic stagnation

²⁴ *Lraper Church Bulletin*, October 16, 2002.

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yet there is a substantial growth in GDP during the last two years. This growth is only due to the increase of the export of cut diamonds and some metals and the construction of a road financed by the American businessman of Armenian origin Kirk Kerkorian's Lincy Foundation.²⁵ As the growth concerns to very few sectors of

the economy it did little to increase overall wages or decrease unemployment.

A longstanding source of complaint in Armenia is the corruption. A public opinion poll organized recently by the Armenian branch of the Regional Development Center/Transparency International with the support of the British government and the USAID and OSCE Yerevan Offices asked "how has the level of corruption changed during the last five years?". 47% of the respondents think the level of corruption has grown while 25% believed that it has not changed.²⁶ It is clear that the Armenian people's complaints about corruption are continuing at an increasing trend.

It is not possible to say that the current government is more liberal regarding rights and freedoms than the government of Ter-Petrosian. Particularly, at times attempts are made to bring the media under pressure. A few recent examples include the bomb attack on journalist Mark Gregorian²⁷ and the prevention of distribution of the paper Avarot.²⁸

In addition to efforts of the Minsk Group to resolve the Karabagh conflict, approximately 20 meetings were held between Aliev and Kocharian but no progress was made. This constitutes a failure for Kocharian. On the other hand Kocharian tried to use allegations of genocide as a tool to drive Turkey towards a kind of neutrality in the Karabagh issue, yet this tactic failed as Turkey continued to support Azerbaijan and even backfired as the

²⁵ *La Lettre de l'UGAB*, November 2, 2002.

²⁶ *Aykakan Zhamanak*, November 2, 2002.

²⁷ *RFE/RL Armenia Report*, October 29, 2002.

²⁸ *RFE/RL Armenia Report*, October 31, 2002.

borders between the two countries remain closed and the establishment of diplomatic relations is not on the agenda.

During the Kocharian era Armenia continued to pursue a policy directed at establishing good relations with both Russia and Western countries, USA specifically. However as it failed to properly balance the two parties, the Russian Federation further strengthened its leading position in Armenian foreign policy and the country became totally dependent on Russia in the field of defense, not only through the Russian military bases on Armenian territory but also for the procurement of weapons. Russia also became indispensable in the economic field due to its large share in Armenian foreign trade. Furthermore, a number of Armenian companies that could not pay their debts were handed over to Russia for the payment of accumulated debts. Russia continued to be the supplier of fuel for the Metzamor nuclear reactor that is still the main energy source in Armenia.

The biggest handicap for Kocharian during the upcoming elections will be the continued suspicion that he was involved in October 27, 1999 slaying of his political opponents. In this attack Speaker of Parliament Demirjian and Prime Minister Sarkisian were murdered with some other deputies while the parliament was in session. Although the ongoing interrogation of the accused has yielded no information pointing at Kocharian, the fact that he was the only person to benefit from the murders causes continued suspicion.

As mentioned above, despite these failures Kocharian continues to be the strongest candidate for the office of president. The main reason for this is that there is no single and powerful opponent facing him. Kocharian is further strengthened by the support of the Republican party, which is headed by Prime Minister Andranik Markarian. It should be noted that this party won the recent municipal elections. Finally the Dashnak party has recently declared that it will support Kocharian.²⁹ One of the reasons for the support of this party is the effort of Kocharian to gain international recognition for the alleged genocide.

Yet it would not be correct to already say that Kocharian will be victorious in the presidential elections. There are still about two

²⁹ *Asbarez Online*, November 25, 2002.

months until the elections and that is a long time in volatile Armenian domestic politics.

5. REACTIONS OF ARMENIA REGARDING THE NEW TURKISH GOVERNMENT

For some time Armenian officials avoided reacting to the Justice and Development Party victory in the parliamentary elections in Turkey. Only ten days after the elections and upon the insistence of journalists did Foreign Minister Oskanian say, "I believe we shall have to wait and see what kind of policy towards Armenia and the region in general the Turkish government will adopt".³⁰

Politicians however were not shy to speak their opinion. Member of the Dashnak party and Deputy Chairman of the Armenian Parliamentary Commission on Foreign Affairs Armen Rustamian said that there would be no serious change in Turkish foreign policy towards Armenia with the new Islamic government. He also stated that the outgoing Turkish government had organized meetings of the two countries' Foreign Ministers with the real intention of veiling their negative attitude towards Armenia, that the actual goal of Ankara was to divert the attention of the international community from the issue of recognizing the genocide of the Armenians and that Ankara aimed at strengthening its influence in the southern Caucasus. Rustamian, added that the new government would follow the policies of the previous one. He also attributed an aggressive character to Islam by saying "the victory of the pro-Islamic forces in the election revealed the true system of values in Turkey, which is based on a traditionally aggressive ideology".³¹

The Chairman of the Armenian Parliamentary Commission on Foreign Affairs Hovhanness Hovhannissian said that Armenia should reconsider its foreign policy and what had happened in Turkey was a cause for serious concern.³²

Artashes Gaghamian, presidential candidate and leader of the National Unity Party said that the new government would attach

³⁰ *Azg Daily*, November 15, 2002.

³¹ *Arminfo*, November 5, 2002.

³² *A1 + TV 7*, November 7, 2002.

The Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Yaşar Yakış indicated during an interview that the new government will be in favor of improving relations with Armenia and that it will take the initiative to that end.

importance to economic cooperation with Azerbaijan and Georgia and try to bolster this with a military pact, something, he said, that would not be in the interest of Armenia and Karabagh.³³

The Parliamentary majority leader Galust Sahakian kept his remarks brief and simply said: "Turkey is Turkey - be it under secular or Islamic rule".³⁴

It is evident that Armenian politicians have a negative attitude towards the new Turkish government. We observe, however, that this attitude is not the conclusion of a research on what the Armenia policy of the new government may be, but rather reflects the traditional hostility for Turkey.

The Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Yaşar Yakış indicated during an interview that the new government will be in favor of improving relations with Armenia and that it will take the initiative to that end.³⁵

President Kocharian himself during an interview he gave on November 22, 2002 while he was in Prague to attend the NATO Summit mapped out the policy of Armenia towards the new Turkish government. Kocharian said, "Armenia is ready to establish diplomatic relations with Turkey and open borders, to expand trade without any preconditions... Improvement of Turkish-Armenian relations should not be contingent of opposition with Azerbaijan over Nagorno Karabagh...Armenia is open for discussion with the new government of Turkey for all questions related to possible development of bilateral relations".³⁶

It is understood from the above statement that Armenia will continue to follow its previous policy with the new Turkish government: i.e., to establish diplomatic relations and secure the opening of borders without making any change in its own position.

³³ Azg (Turkish), November 8, 2002

³⁴ A1 + TV 7, November 7, 2002.

³⁵ *Turkish Daily News*, November 6, 2002.

³⁶ *Armenpress News Agency*, November 25, 2002.

However, it is not in the interest of Turkey to establish diplomatic relations and open the borders before Armenia recognizes the eastern borders of Turkey, ceases to support allegations of genocide and solves the Karabagh conflict. Any negotiations that do not take this fact into account are unlikely to yield tangible results.