
More Balls Going Into The Goalpost Of The Armenian Diplomacy

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According to Dr. Armen Ayvazyan, Director of Ararat Center for Strategic Research, the first stage of Armenia-Turkey dialogue proceeded in unequal conditions, with the Turkish side taking the upper hand. But we may see Turkey scoring many more goals into the goalpost of the Armenian diplomacy, so that, in Ayvazyan's words, soon we may be talking of a hockey rather than a football game. In an interview with Armen Ayvazyan, we present his answers to a range of questions on the Armenian-Turkish issues.

- Almost a month has passed since the Turkish President's visit and the famous soccer match. However, over that period and to this moment we have been up against a constant flood of information against the Armenian interests by the Turkish-Azeri propaganda machine. Do you think this is a result of our weak diplomacy, or is the aforementioned united propaganda machine just too strong for us?

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- Turkey and Azerbaijan have always had a united stand on these issues.

Since 1991 Turkey has been leading the efforts of in developing and implementing anti-Armenia and anti-Armenian policies. We fail to perceive this, and many people among us repeatedly reiterate the misconception that Turkish policy on Armenia is dominated by, or even held hostage to Azeri interests. Nothing of that sort! Both Turkey and Azerbaijan have it on their agenda to destroy Armenia. Our political authorities have consistently ignored this agenda ever since 1991; they won't acknowledge and give it due political assessment. And without proper assessment of the full extent of this threat, our policy towards Turkey becomes irrational, abnormal, resulting in dire mistakes. A single fact: Armenia agrees to Turkey's proposal to to facilitate an Armenia-Azerbaijan settlement. Following this, the president of the country says that those who object to such assistance are not normal. Let's analyze this.

Thus, we have two allied nations that have a clear agenda of strangling Armenia economically, diplomatically, militarily, and by means of information warfare. In this situation, one of the stranglers says, "Let me help the two of you to get along well." Armenia thanks in return, saying "Carry on strangling me, I don't notice it." And, she agrees to a three-partite meeting, in which Turkey plays the role of a facilitator. (They say "facilitator, not a mediator", but it's hard to tell the difference between the two.) This is a glaring example of Armenia's "normal" foreign policy, which cannot withstand to a critique. By calling the expert opinions "abnormal", the Administration is trying to take the debate out of the realm of logic, and using its administrative authority corner serious debates, replacing them with Western clichés like "football diplomacy", "thaw" and "rapprochement in Armenian-Turkish relations" and so on. The fact is that there are no Armenian-Turkish relations per se; we face the Armenian-Turkish conflict. The Turkish policy is either not assessed and analysed at all, or receives a profoundly inaccurate evaluation. Take this recent example, for a comparison: this is how the Israeli President Simon Peres, in his 24 September speech at UN, retaliated to the Iranian president Ahmdinejad, who happened, once or twice, to question and deny half-heartedly the Jewish Holocaust: "Their despicable denial of the Holocaust is a mockery of indisputable evidence, a cynical offense to survivors of the horror." [1] Peres continued with a list of sharp and offensive remarks on Iran's policy

and leadership, who he fairly considers an enemy. While our administration takes a friendly stand toward hostile Turkey's entire anti-Armenian policies, which threaten the very existence of Armenia and the Armenian people: It invites the Armenian Genocide denier Abdula Gul to Armenia, meanwhile urging our people to respect the enemy flag and national anthem. The terminology alone used by Armenia's high ranking politicians and statesmen is a clear indication that Armenia's Turkish policy has adopted, with one to one match, US State Department's positions, which in no way reflect the interests of Armenia and the Armenian people. In other words, the Armenian foreign policy views Turkey through Washington's glasses."

- One of the abnormal policies, that you have mentioned, is the constantly trumpeted idea in Armenia that the Armenian-Turkish border should be opened, creating the impression that it is Armenia that has closed that border!

- Of course such an impression will be created, due to the complete lack of analyses, in our society, of the deep complexities of the Turkish-Armenian conflict. Actually, and paradoxically, Turkophile propaganda was carried instead, as a number of our national symbols were distorted: Mt Ararat was removed from our coat of arms on footballers shirts, the floodlights were turned off in Tsitsernakaberd Genocide Memorial during the football match and, most puzzlingly, the incomprehensible call to stand up while the Turkish national anthem was being played! But who said this is a requirement! And why should any Armenian respect the anthem of a country whose policy towards Armenia and the Armenians is hostile, aggressive and offensive - denying the Genocide, blockade, encouragement of, and assistance to Azerbaijan in the latter's preparations to resume war, trampling on Armenian pride and dignity in the international arena, distortion and smearing of Armenian history and culture ... ! Whereas to this day Jewish people generally avoid buying German-made products; for instance, hardly any Jew will drive a "Mercedes". They remember what Germany has done to them, even though that country has accepted its responsibility and given billions of dollars in retribution, through which they've been able to develop the Israeli economy. Despite that, the Jews value their national dignity above and beyond these. And that's because the Jews realise that national dignity is an essential state-building factor. By compromising on that you cede your identity, you weaken your resistance propensity and your strategic memory, you fail to orient yourself in the current situation, you make elementary mistakes, and, of course, you get punished with new massacres. Unfortunately, this chain of events has repeatedly struck our people in the past. But now that we have statehood, repeating the same mistake is just unacceptable.

In that case what did that misguided policy gain (for the Armenian people) and what did Turkey gain?

The people didn't gain anything. This is a problem of statehood. Armenia gained nothing, except for a few words of praise from a couple of American and European diplomats. Instead, the process of international recognition of the Armenian Genocide is now under the threat of being torpedoed. The expressed agreement of Armenia's president to the creation of a commission of historians is not only a blow against the recognition process, but it could also cast doubt in the minds of third parties as to the validity of the fact of the crime. The Turkish Foreign Minister has already explicitly stated that third countries have no right to discuss this question anymore since Turkey and Armenia have found common ground! This while Erdogan's spokesman on party matters, Egemen Bagis, declared that, Turkey will never accept the Armenian assertions, that Turks have already examined over a million documents which, supposedly, show that there was no genocide, and that actually it may become clear that it were the Armenians who massacred the Turks! Erdogan's spokesman made this statement at the European Economic Forum held in Krynica, Poland, on 10-13 September. Therefore Turkey is already reaping the benefits of this new situation while Armenia has gained nothing.

-Currently the view is being circulated that the opening of the border will benefit Armenia (more than it can cause harm). Do you share this approach, and how well-founded is this view?

- The Armenian-Turkish conflict has many other layers, ignoring which may have even worse consequences. Even if the two countries establish diplomatic relations and the Turkish blockade is lifted, the problem still will not be resolved. Turkey will continue its hostile politics through other means - namely economic, propaganda and cultural infiltration, renewed opportunities for triggering demographic movements (unfavourable to Armenia), and through other means. As far as the economy is concerned, the local producers will certainly suffer from border opening as the imported goods will be much cheaper, and secondly, opening of the border will serve as a tool in the hands of Turkey to exert all sorts of pressures on Armenia. In fact, the three preconditions that Turkey has put forward on Armenia are only preliminary preconditions! As we know in the past 15 years various other preconditions have also been raised, among others, taking the "Meghri corridor" out of Armenia's control, destroying the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) bases allegedly stationed in Armenia, and other demands. This is tried and tested old politics, and not just Turkish politics. One often hears these days that 'we are weak and have no options'. But if one makes concessions on life and death issues, one might as well dig one's grave! If it's one's life that's threatened, and the big powers tell you to make concessions, you shouldn't heed as you reduce your chances of self-defence and resistance, without getting any serious security guarantees. Meanwhile, we have already started making concessions.

- Mr Ayvazyan, not long ago our National Assembly approved the country's National Security Strategy. Does that document adequately serve our foreign policy, especially as it relates to the disentanglement of Armenian-Turkish relations?

OA- In that document the Armenian-Turkish conflict has not been defined, its limits obscured, and most importantly the Armenian Question has been ignored, as far as its core fundamental parameter - the territorial aspect - is concerned. Before opening up to Turkey, Armenia must get decisive security guarantees from Turkey. What is at issue is not the lifting of the blockade, but termination by Turkey of its hostile policies against Armenia and Armenians. Whereas such an impression is created today as though we have no confidence-building problem, that we trust the Turks and desire to start everything from a "blank page". But who can tell whether Turkey will change its hostile policy after opening the border? No they won't but will set off an ideological, economic and cultural invasion. It is us that need confidence building mechanisms not the Turks! We pose no threat to the Turks, they pose a threat to us. Both economically and demographically, we are just about the size of a Turkish vilayet, and can be easily absorbed, especially if we turn a blind eye on the Armenian-Turkish conflict and are preparing to give up our national dignity and identity. I've stressed many times before, that it should be us, Armenia, that puts forward preconditions and not Turkey. Those preconditions are the very security guarantees. We must demand proofs from Turkey that it is abandoning its hostile policy towards us. Meanwhile, today Turkey's worldwide anti-Armenian propaganda includes very strong/powerful ideological elements, about which we don't speak in Armenia.

Today our government thinks that it conducts pragmatic politics. But pragmatism takes into account the goals, ideology, and strategic thinking of the opposite side. Our policy doesn't take these into account; they see neither Turkey's objectives, nor their underlying strategy and ideology.

- Do our statesmen take any interest in the concerns you express in your public pronouncements, say, any phone calls inviting you to sit down with them to discuss these issues?

- This question is of critical importance. Armenia's foreign policy, since 1991, has been under profound and disorienting influence of foreign, especially American and European strategies. As far as national security is concerned, there is practically no interaction or contacts with our own home-grown national thought, which is ignored and left unnoticed. Today we harvest the bitter fruits of that influence. Armenia's foreign policy today is so far from its national foundations - particularly in regards to conceptualising the territorial nature of the Armenian question - that it has lost the ability to see the enemy and its political objectives, which weakness is pregnant with extreme consequences for Armenia.
