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# Armenia, Turkey should open new page in relations - envoy.

Haykakan Zhamanak, Yerevan

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Turkish ambassador to Georgia Ertan Tezgor has called on Armenia to go forward with dialogue for the sake of new generations and open up new pages in the relations of the two nations. He said this in an interview with Armenian Haykakan Zhamanak paper while visiting Yerevan to attend the funeral of the late Armenian prime minister. The envoy praised the centuries-old peaceful coexistence of Turks and Armenians in the Ottoman empire. Tezgor is confident that new thinking, new ways and approaches should be devised for improving the general picture in the South Caucasus, and believes that dialogue between Armenia and Turkey will be fruitful. The following is the text of Anna Hakobyan report by Armenian newspaper Haykakan Zhamanak on 30 March entitled "We must open a new page in our relations" and subheaded "Turkish ambassador to Georgia Ertan Tezgor says"; subheadings have been inserted editorially:

[Correspondent] Mr ambassador, how logical is it that Turkey conditions its relations with Armenia through a second country, particularly Azerbaijan? Does it mean that Turkey will always see its relations with Armenia not bilaterally but through a third country?

Turkey keen on regional stability

[Tezgor] Since the first day of independence of the three South Caucasus republics, the Turkish foreign policy has considered the stability in this region very important. Turkey is greatly interested in the stability in the Caucasus as it is an important strategic region. Presently, as before, Turkey, which is also an important player in this region, works in favour of stability in this region. Since the beginning we tried to assist the stabilization of regional conflicts, be it Abkhaz, South Ossetian or other. We do it firstly for the prosperity and well being of the people living here. Let us remember that for centuries people have lived here in peace together, whether Christian or Muslim. However, as the region is important for other players too, we have always been participants in conflicts [as given]. We live in the 21st century now and we have to build a new way of living together. We have to be able to see the general picture. If all of us are able to see it, it will be easy to serve the prosperity of the people. Dialogue is the most important.

[Correspondent] Still, what can you say about the Armenian-Turkish bilateral relations?

[Tezgor] If we speak of the Armenian-Turkish bilateral relations, the general picture is important here too. We have to consider it and have to be able to find new ways and ideas. It is very important. In reality not only Turkey but also Armenia wants to have these relations. I know that [Azerbaijani] President Ilham Aliyev also sees this general picture, and Armenia also takes it into consideration. It is important to see things in a new way, to have a new approach. The most important is to reject the "win-win" situation. If we look at the past, the Armenian-Turkish coexistence together during the Ottoman empire can be a great example for us. At that time both Turks and Armenians had the same culture and religion as today, but we were able to respect each other's values. It is impossible to imagine how we managed to achieve it. Sometimes, I ask myself what happened after all these centuries and who is guilty, us, you or maybe others? We are yet to reveal what foreign interference there has been, as a result of which we have lost all that. Thus, today we have to learn from the past and create a new way of thinking

for the next generations. There were 24 Armenian ambassadors in Turkey during the Ottoman empire. During 1915 the ambassador was also Armenian. Of course, those were most terrible years for the region and the whole Europe. We have the lessons of history and have to do everything not to allow foreign interference again. We have to speak to each other and we do it. However, the dialogue must develop.

[Correspondent] I think there is no need to return to the 1915 and speculate on who is guilty and who is not. You say that we need to look to the future and create dialogue. In this connection, we should remember that the Armenian president has answered the known offer of the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The Armenian president, for his part, offered to create an Armenian-Turkish inter-governmental commission, which would take over all the issues, including the historic and old ones. The Turkish side has not answered this offer until now. What is the reason, and why is the offer unacceptable for you?

Turkish-Armenian dialogue should deepen

[Tezgor] First, the whole activity of writing letters shows the honest intend of the Turkish government to settle relations with Armenia. This is the reason why Prime Minister Erdogan sent the letter to President Kocharyan. An answer followed. A discussion began with these letters, which is dialogue. Concerning your question, there are always different approaches and opinions. However, we are still waiting for an answer that will allow the continuation of the process and give possibility to consider different suggestions. Thus, the door is still open. We hope that in the nearest future all issues will be discussed. Personally, I do not know at this moment in which direction there will be developments but we are waiting for an answer in order to continue the dialogue.

[Correspondent] Armenia has answered. What other answer do you need?

[Tezgor] Let us not make wordings. We are expecting in the least that this procedure is given a continuation, that it develops, and that we are able to discuss the differences between the proposals of the Turkish prime minister and the Armenian president. However, in reality we are waiting for an answer that will give an opportunity for the sides to unite and discuss everything freely.

[Correspondent] What step do you think Armenia should make in order for Turkey to consider it sufficient to create relations with Armenia, and what is Turkey ready to do for the same purpose?

Kars-Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi-Baku railway open for others

[Tezgor] I am not in a position to discuss such questions. You know that unfortunately I have arrived to Yerevan upon a sad event. My country and I have offered deep condolences to your country upon the death of the prime minister. My mission is within this event. However, as I already said, it is important that we see the general picture. We have to discuss all issues together.

[Correspondent] Mr ambassador, Turkey intends to build the Kars-Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi railway together with Azerbaijan and Georgia, which goes around Armenia. Millions of dollars are spent on this project, while there already is the Kars-Gyumri railway that does not work because the Armenian-Turkish border is closed. Does this not mean that Turkey pursues the policy of isolation?

[Tezgor] If you read carefully the Tbilisi declaration, which was signed by [Azerbaijani and Georgian] Presidents Aliyev and Saakashvili and Prime

Minister Erdogan, it says that the project is open to all countries. It is stated in the declaration clearly. The idea of the railway is not to isolate Armenia. We all live in this region together. If we begin to isolate one of the sides, how can we have stability in the region? It is important to have friendly relations with all countries in the region.

[Correspondent] In that case, what will be the reply of Turkey and Azerbaijan if Armenia states today that it wants to join the project?

[Tezgor] First, we have to make sure that there has been such a proposal. Afterwards, all the participants in the project must discuss and give their consent to it. If the declaration says it, the project is open. However, the issue must be discussed, as there are other issues that create conflict and take us away from the reality.

[Correspondent] Mr ambassador, Armenians freely travel to Turkey using the Yerevan-Istanbul flight, but they cannot do the same by road. Do you see a conflict of logic here?

[Tezgor] Yes. But let us begin from the fact that after the fall of the Soviet Union, a number of conflicting issues came forth. Regional issues have not yet been solved between the countries. I do not want to talk about concrete questions but I would like to say again that it is important for us to be able to see the general picture. Yes, certainly the logic is important. However, to reveal what is logical and what is not we have to take the general picture into consideration. We cannot consider only one point and find the logic out of it.

[Correspondent] Which is this general picture?

Time to look at the future

[Tezgor] It is time for us to be able to see and grasp the developments around us correctly. The policy of the European neighbourhood towards the three countries of the South Caucasus, the energy, the roads, the railways, new procedures in the world. Things change, and we have to be able to open a new page in our relations. Certainly we have to see the pages of the past that have already been written. But looking only at the past, we have not reached anything so far. We have had only a "lose-lose" instead of a "win-win". Thus, we have to take into consideration the developments around us and open a new page for us. For this we have to merely look at the future, to develop new ways of thinking and new approaches.

[Correspondent] You met Armenian Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanyan yesterday. Have you discussed bilateral political issues during the meeting? Have you brought a message from the Turkish government and are any developments or meetings expected in the future?

[Tezgor] First, I have to say that I have known Vardan Oskanyan since 1994, from meetings within the [OSCE] Minsk Group. Afterwards, we have met again in different international events. We have developed a friendly relationship. I arrived to participate in the funeral ceremony of the prime minister. Naturally, we met and exchanged ideas. However, it was not a political talk. We had a friendly conversation.

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