
Analysis: Where Is The Hillary Of Zurich?

By Aris Ghazinyan

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Clinton and FM Nalbandyan have many steps before them to reach goals set in Zurich.

United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's visit to Yerevan has, no doubt, been an extraordinary event, if only for the rarity of such occasions. It has been 18 years since any US official of her rank came here.

Clinton's visit was heralded by two strong statements: A G8 statement of the presidents of the USA, France and Russia said Armenia and Azerbaijan have to "take the next step and complete the work" on the main principles of the settlement of the protracted Karabakh conflict in order to begin drafting a peace agreement. The other statement came immediately after Clinton's visit, this time by OSCE Minsk group co-chairs and with a similar content.

Clinton's visit at this stage is not accidental. If she came 18 months ago, when she just became Secretary of State the visit would have been of a different character. Back then, the new Secretary of State was not well informed in the issues of Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. "The Karabakh conflict could be settled within the coming two months," she said.

By this visit in the region Clinton had considerably enhanced her knowledge of the situation, at least she is not speaking about settling the issues in two months any more.

Over the past two years, the Armenian-Turkish relations have seen unprecedented developments and the Secretary of State indeed played a big part in it. For the first time protocols on principles of establishing bilateral diplomatic relations between Yerevan and Ankara were signed.

Clinton did not hide her excitement when discussing the prospects of the Armenian-Turkish relations, despite Turkey's position which conditions the establishment of diplomatic relations by the Karabakh issue. Armenia, on the contrary, never connected the two issues.

Last October in Zurich the US Secretary of State - one of the main sponsors of the signed protocols - stood proudly behind Armenian and Turkish Foreign Ministers Nalbandyan and Davutoglu.

It seemed then that nothing could hamper the victorious march of the protocols. As repeatedly stated by the US State Department representatives, including the Secretary of State herself, both before and after the protocols were signed, the ratification of the protocols had to be done without preconditions within a reasonable timeframe. A historically new stage was supposed to have started in Armenian-Turkish relations.

Ankara simply ignored all reasonable timeframes and insisted on preconditions, contrary to the Zurich agreement.

Ankara not only effectively killed the protocol process, but was able to halt the process of passing the Genocide Resolution at the US Congress. Cleverly, the Turks got Clinton's help in the latter, as she stated that the State Department believed that the passing of the resolution would be untimely because it could hamper the ratification of the protocols.

The protocols appear dead, and no one outside Armenian lobby groups has heard of the Genocide resolution since.

And now, having failed to secure Yerevan-Ankara peace, the Secretary of State came to help Yerevan and Baku take a decisive step in reconciling the fundamental principles of settlement of the Karabakh problem, which imply the withdrawal of the Armenian troops.

The main principle in the first stage of settlement envisages the withdrawal of Armenian troops from the territories surrounding Nagorno Karabakh. It is stated that it has to be concurrent with the other "fundamental principles of settlement", such as "the opening of communications", "determination of Nagorno Karabakh's interim status", "implementation of peacemaking activities", "return of refugees and displaced people", and others.

In any case - and this is key - the responsibility of a first definite step has been imposed on Armenia.

If Clinton sincerely wants to help the final settlement of the issue, she has to start from a different point - for example, renew her Zurich pledges and make Ankara respect its commitment and go on with the establishment of diplomatic relations without preconditions, which would contribute to the establishment of a more constructive atmosphere in the region, and hence, would facilitate the development of a peace treaty.

If Clinton is counting on gaining people's trust in Yerevan and Stepanakert, the disgraceful 'veto' of the White House put on the possibility of passing the Genocide resolution by the US Congress has to be overridden too.

It is particularly important that Clinton fulfill her guarantee to see the protocols through, as relations with Turkey will become the main domestic political issue in Armenia, in case the "fundamental principles" come into force.

But if Armenians were expecting believable assurances to be announced during her 18 hours in Yerevan, they were disappointed by Clinton. It wouldn't be the first time.
