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# Turkey, Armenia Should Aim Low, Armenian Think Tank

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Turkish Daily News - 6/8/2008

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In the event of an eventual meeting between the Turkish and Armenian presidents many disputes are likely to be played as a zero-sum game, according to an Armenian think tank. From genocide claims supported by Armenia to the Nagorno-Karabakh occupation and non-recognition of Turkish borders, neither side is expected to budge on much.

"It is apparent that Turkey brings forth several preconditions for normalizing relations with Armenia, and these preconditions include the withdrawal of Armenian troops from Mountainous (Nagorno) Karabagh and Armenia's rejection of the policy of genocide recognition. But it is clear that Armenia cannot meet these preconditions," said Syuzanna Barseghyan, research coordinator at the Armenian Center for National and International Studies, or ACNIS, responding to questions by the Turkish Daily News yesterday.

"This results in Armenia's formal view that mutual relations with Turkey must be established without any preconditions," she underlined.

Turkey sealed its border with Armenia after the latter occupied the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan in 1993. Ankara has no diplomatic ties with Yerevan, although it was one of the first to recognize the ex-Soviet state's independence.

An invitation in July from Armenian President Serge Sarkisian to President Abdullah Gul to visit Yerevan led to predictions of a new period for relations between the two countries. "Armenia's newly elected president Serge Sarkisian's invitation has caused broad discussions also in Armenia," Barseghyan maintained. The Turkish side has not responded to Sarkisian's invitation to watch the World Cup 2010 qualifying game between Turkey and Armenia, which will kick off Sept. 6 in Yerevan.

"But considering the fact that Armenia still is under the post-election crisis which followed this year's presidential elections and that this situation influences the foreign policy of Armenia's leadership, it is fairly difficult to predict how beneficial this invitation will be for bettering Armenian-Turkish relations and to know Sarkisian's true motives behind this invitation," she asserted.

Sarkisian also wrote in an article published by the Wall Street Journal on July 9 that Armenia is ready to engage in "a new phase of dialogue with the government and people of Turkey." Reports suggest that Turkish and Armenian diplomats are working on the subject.

Reconciliation difficult at grassroots level

Public opinion surveys carried out by ACNIS on a wide spectrum of the Armenian population suggest that one major task of a "new phase of dialogue" would have to involve changing perceptions on the Armenian side of the border.

ACNIS's public opinion survey in 2005, "The Armenian Genocide: 90 Years and Waiting," asked whether "the Armenian and Turkish peoples [can] ever be reconciled."

Only 23.8 percent of the respondent Armenian citizens answered "yes" and 33.1 percent said "no," while 43.1 percent found it difficult to answer.

It does not get any better with the very basic question of establishing relations. "A large majority, 76 percent, believed relations with Turkey must be established, but without forgetting the past - or the recognition of the genocide, while the other group was completely against the establishment of any relations," underlined Barseghyan.

She depicted current Armenian-Turkish relations as emotional rather than rational. "The problem seems irresolvable. A meeting between the presidents of the two countries or the discussions to that effect at the very least makes the examining of potential resources for partnership become an order of the day," she said, noting, however, that those resources remain undetected.

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