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# ANKARA : The Coming Storm With Washington

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Today's Zaman - 15/12/2008

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Last year, shortly after the US Congress decided at the last minute not to push forward with the Armenian genocide recognition I wrote in this column that this was a "pyrrhic victory" for Turkey. There was indeed no reason to celebrate.

Of course, I had no idea that the next US president would be a firm supporter of recognizing the genocide. Instead, my gloomy article had much more to do with the fact no one in Washington - except those with a vested financial or political interest to the Turkish government - believed Turkey's side of the story. Whether "the events of 1915" amounted to "genocide" was not even debated in America.

So why didn't the US Congress pass the resolution? Charles Krauthammer, a Washington columnist, summarized it best last year in his Washington Post column. With characteristic poignancy, he wrote: "There are three relevant questions concerning the Armenian genocide. (a) Did it happen? (b) Should the House of Representatives be expressing itself on this now? (c) Was House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's determination to bring this to a vote, knowing that it risked provoking Turkey into withdrawing crucial assistance to American soldiers in Iraq, a conscious or unconscious attempt to sabotage the US war effort?"

And here is how Krauthammer answered these questions: "(a) Yes, unequivocally. (b) No, unequivocally. (c) God only knows." He went on: "That between 1 million and 1.5 million Armenians were brutally and systematically massacred starting in 1915 in a deliberate genocidal campaign is a matter of simple historical record. If you really want to deepen and broaden awareness of that historical record, you should support the establishment of the Armenian Genocide Museum and Memorial in Washington. But to pass a declarative resolution in the House of Representatives in the middle of a war in which we are inordinately dependent on Turkey would be the height of irresponsibility."

Now do you understand why last year was a pyrrhic victory? The reason Ankara won the battle was because important newspapers such as The Washington Post and The New York Times picked up the "genocide" story and humiliated the House of Representatives with columns and editorials such as the one written by Krauthammer. Yet, this was not a sight any believer in Turkey's version enjoyed. Yes, these articles opposed the Armenian resolution. But none of them believed Turkey's version of history about "the events of 1915."

Turkey won an important battle but ended up losing the war. Just like Krauthammer's, most of these articles argued that what happened in 1915 was genocide. But Turkey was geo-strategically too important an ally to offend in the middle of mayhem in the Middle East. In other words, the opposition to the genocide resolution had nothing to do with the sudden discovery of new historical facts proving correct the Turkish version of history. The discussion was only about Turkey's geo-strategic importance and bad timing.

This year we will probably witness the same charade with more intensity. President-elect Barack Obama, Vice President-elect Joe Biden, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and, of course, a large majority of Congress are all in favour of Armenian genocide recognition. The first critical test will be the US president's annual letter

of April 24, which traditionally defines what happened to Ottoman Armenians as "massacres." Will this year's letter refer to "genocide"?

This first and very critical test in Turkish-American relations comes within the early months of the Obama administration. There are only four months between the inauguration in late January and April 24. And Obama's presidential agenda will be overloaded with the global financial crisis and all the very crucial foreign policy issues, ranging from Iraq to Afghanistan and Iran to a possible India-Pakistan war. Relations with Turkey will not be an urgent issue.

In such a busy agenda, it is also highly unlikely that the American media will pick up the story of a potential crisis with Turkey. This is why even a pyrrhic victory may not be in the cards this time. There is still a chance Obama will opt for realism in relations with Turkey. But this means he will have to break his campaign promises. Surely, this will not be a first for a politician. But what if Obama is really committed to "change"? Soon, perhaps too soon, we will know.

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