



CONGRES DES CANADIENS ARMÉNIENS • CONGRESS OF CANADIAN ARMENIANS

October 22, 2009

Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
Ottawa

Dear Prime Minister:

The accord which was signed by the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Turkey on October 10, 2009, and which consists of two specific protocols and an annex, is expected to be ratified by the parliaments of both countries. The Congress of Canadian Armenians supports this accord. It will hopefully lead to the resumption of normal diplomatic ties and the reopening of the shared border between the two countries. This will improve the national security of Armenia and the flow of trade for the landlocked country, and it will be seen as a responsible action by Turkey facilitating its entry into the European Union.

In a statement a few days ago, Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan linked the opening of the border to the resolution of the Nagorno Karabagh issue. This is unacceptable. The protocols of the accord do not mention the Nagorno Karabagh issue, and Armenia has been very clear that the normalizing of relations with Turkey cannot be linked to it. The people of Nagorno-Karabakh have a right to live freely, as expressed when they exercised their legitimate right to self-determination in a democratically held referendum. Our concern is that such statements by Turkish officials, made after the signing of the accord and presumably to placate Azerbaijan, could result in the accord gathering dust on the shelves of history.

Any accord with Turkey is of course an emotional step for many Armenians to accept. It is therefore not surprising that differing views have been expressed on the accord by some Armenians in Canada and in certain other parts of the diaspora. This public dialogue has unfortunately resulted in the spreading of some misconceptions about the accord (please see the two attachments to this letter).

The Government of Armenia still has a lot of hurdles to cross in the just implementation of what has been agreed to on paper. Turkish and Azeri threats continue with respect to the resolution of the Nagorno Karabagh issue. Armenians everywhere are fast closing ranks to support the Government of Armenia as it counters these threats.

We therefore ask that the Government of Canada strongly encourage the Government of Turkey to respect the commitments it undertook when it signed the protocols, and specifically to establish normal diplomatic ties and to open its border with Armenia unconditionally and without undue delay.

Normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey is an important and overdue step, but true and lasting conciliation requires the Government of Turkey to come to terms with history and recognize the Armenian Genocide. The Congress of Canadian Armenians and its participating organizations gratefully acknowledge and thank you for steadfastly supporting the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, and hope that in time you can persuade Turkey to also recognize it.

Respectfully,

CONGRESS OF CANADIAN ARMENIANS



Taro Alepian
Chairman

cc: Hon. Lawrence Cannon, Minister of Foreign Affairs
Hon. Jason Kenney, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism
Harold Albrecht MP, Chair of Canada-Armenia Parliamentary Friendship Group

Attachments

Attachment No.1

Some misconceptions about the accord signed by Armenia and Turkey

Misconception: The accord endangers the recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

This is not true. The accord does not address this issue in any way, and President Serzh Sargsyan of Armenia has clearly stated that: "No relations with Turkey can question the reality of the patricide and the genocide perpetrated against the Armenian nation". His government and Armenians and Armenian organizations worldwide will continue to work to achieve this recognition by Turkey, and to pursue any claims that arise as a result.

Some critics point to the clause in the accord that agrees to: "implement a dialogue on the historical dimension with the aim to restore mutual confidence between the two nations, including an impartial scientific examination of the historical records and archives to define existing problems and formulate recommendations." This is not a commission of historians to determine whether there was a genocide or not, as Turkey had asked for and which Armenia categorically rejected, but rather an intergovernmental bilateral forum for the representatives of the two countries to discuss any existing issues in a non-binding way.

Misconception: By agreeing to respect the existing border, Armenia has given up the right to claim back historical Armenian lands which are now in Turkey.

This is not true. The relevant clause in the accord states: "confirming the mutual recognition of the existing border between the two countries as defined by the relevant treaties of international law." The issue of the existing border between Armenia and Turkey can only be resolved through prevailing norms of international law, which is a self evident fact, and the accord does not go beyond that. It does not legally or otherwise give up the right to claim back historical Armenian lands which are now in Turkey, or to claim compensation for their loss.

Misconception: Armenia is abandoning Nagorno Karabagh by signing the accord.

This is not true. The accord does not in any way mention or relate to the resolution of the Nagorno Karabagh issue, which is an independent and separate process. Following the signing of the accord, Turkish officials have tried to placate Azerbaijan by making statements linking the opening of the common border between Turkey and Armenia to the resolution of the Nagorno Karabagh issue, but the Government of Armenia has flatly rejected this.

Attachment No.2

The role of the Armenian diaspora in the dialogue on the accord

There are two opposing statements that can be made about the role of the Armenian diaspora in the dialogue on the accord signed by Armenia and Turkey:

- "It is the people of Armenia, having been born and having lived there all their suffering lives and who will be most affected by the accord, who have the right to decide the issue."
- "We are all Armenians no matter where we were born and where we are living today, and we all have a say in regards to what happens to our motherland and to our rights with regard to the Armenian Genocide."

Irrespective of which of these statements one believes in, President Sargsyan of Armenia did consult with the leaders of the Armenian diaspora both before and during his recent tour of several countries, including a meeting in New York with the leaders of the Canadian Armenian community. Some in the diaspora expressed their opposition by organizing protest marches. Others strongly support the signing of the accord. Having got mixed signals from the diaspora, the President and his government did what they feel is right for Armenia and its people, while safeguarding the fundamental and historic rights of the Armenian people worldwide.