



CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 3, 2009

CONTACTS: Tali Israeli (Pallone) 202-225-4671
Aaron Winters (Kirk) 202-225-4835

LAWMAKERS ISSUE STATEMENT ON NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS BETWEEN ARMENIA AND TURKEY

Armenian Caucus Co-Chairs Remain Concerned with Turkey's Cooperation

Washington, D.C. --- U.S. Reps. Frank Pallone Jr. (D-NJ) and Mark Steven Kirk (R-IL), Co-Chairmen of the Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues, released the following statement today regarding the recent development that Armenia and Turkey will renew their efforts to normalize relations.

Armenian and Turkish diplomats on Monday agreed upon two protocols, which establish the framework of talks aimed at a formal agreement on bilateral and diplomatic relations. A six-week deadline has been set for both the Turkish and Armenian governments to conclude consultations and for their respective parliaments to ratify the protocols. Once ratified, a two-month timetable has been set for the opening of the common border.

In addition, the protocols include a timetable for the establishment of an intergovernmental commission. The commission would provide an impartial scientific examination of the historical records and archives in order to define existing problems and formulate recommendations.

"As co-chairs of the Armenian Caucus, we support the aim of Monday's development between Armenia and Turkey to move toward normalizing relations. We believe it is essential that the two countries do so without preconditions and in a timely manner.

"While we are optimistic that efforts are being renewed to lift the Turkish blockade and establish relations between the two countries, we remain concerned with Turkey's willingness to cooperate in the matter.

"On July 30, along with 80 Members of Congress, we sent a letter to President Obama expressing our concern that the Turkish government will once again stall progress on these efforts. Only weeks after announcing the historical agreement to work towards normalization with Armenia, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan steered his country away from the negotiations by placing preconditions on normalization. Once again, we fear that Turkey will use the recent developments as an excuse to continue stall tactics, which prevent a truthful working relationship between the two nations.

"We are concerned with certain provisions of the protocols, which may include preconditions to opening the border between Armenia and Turkey. Normalization of relations should take place without preconditions. Any attempt to include a review of historical fact, such as the Armenian Genocide, or to include the ongoing Nagorno Karabakh peace process into these negotiations stands in direct opposition to the intent of these talks.

"We remain hopeful that Turkey, by lifting its illegal blockade, will open the door to normalized relations between Yerevan and Ankara, and a new era of Armenia-Turkey relations based on truth, justice, peace and cooperation. By coming to terms with the past and reconciling any current conflicts, Turkey and Armenia will help bring more stability to a volatile and strategic region of the world."