

Statement Of The AGBU Central Board Of Directors On The Occasion Of The Release Of The Recent Draft Of Protocols To Be Considered By Armenia And Turkey

On August 31, 2009 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, together with the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, jointly produced two documents of protocol concerning the establishment of diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey and the development of bilateral relations. These documents provide details on the initial steps to be taken for the normalization of relations, the establishment of consular representation, and the opening of the current border between the two countries.

This marks a significant moment in the history of relations between the Armenian and Turkish peoples. It presents major ramifications for both the government of the newly independent Republic of Armenia and the Armenian nation worldwide. The Armenian people in both the homeland and the Diaspora have followed these negotiations with great interest and concern.

We recognize the great geopolitical challenges faced by Armenia -- its concern for its national security, the need to improve its accessibility and communication links vital to its economic development, the desire to participate in regional programs of political and economic cooperation. All of these objectives motivate the Armenian government to be positive and sincere in its approach to these negotiations and to adopt a pragmatic policy with regard to Turkey. However, as practical as such a policy may be, it should not be implemented at the expense of the fundamental and historic rights of the Armenian people. We believe the official governmental authorities in Armenia are both the administrators of the state and the guardians of its future. Therefore, they must be guided by pan-national goals and aspirations in making these difficult and far-reaching decisions.

The documents establishing diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey touch directly or indirectly upon the enduring issues of the Armenian Genocide and our territorial demands. We understand the importance for the Republic of Armenia to have normal diplomatic relations with neighboring states, including Turkey. We also believe that justice for the sacred Armenian Case and the international recognition of the Armenian Genocide should transcend and not be sacrificed for any immediate diplomatic consideration.

The start of negotiations between Armenia and Turkey has been favorably encouraged by the international community. The sole opponent to this dialogue between Armenia and Turkey has been the country of Azerbaijan. For almost two decades, Turkey has joined with Azerbaijan in the blockade of Armenia due to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

In the past, Turkey has used the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as justification for its refusal to pursue a separate rapprochement with Armenia. This current effort to normalize relations between Armenia and Turkey should not be pre-conditioned by any terms of concession involving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The people of Nagorno-Karabakh have already clearly expressed their will to live freely through their exercise of the sacred right of peoples for self-determination.



This is a rare moment of opportunity for Turkey. It must show that it is ready to move forward in earnest. If it falters, hesitates or withdraws, it will expose itself to the reproach of the international major powers and those regional nations which are fostering this rapprochement between Armenia and Turkey.

As this bold diplomatic initiative moves toward normalized relations between the two countries, Turkey will find itself subjected to even greater international scrutiny. To justify its membership in the European Union, Turkey will be under pressure to fulfill its international commitments. It will become more exposed and accountable to world public opinion. It will be forced to adhere to principles of human rights and democratic rule and to cooperate with its neighboring countries.

We know the authorities in Armenia face a difficult path as they endeavor to build new relations with Turkey without imposed preconditions. We also believe the government of Armenia shares our serious concerns about the sincerity of Turkey, given its historic anti-Armenian policy that has continued to the present time. We commend their initiative and lend our support in their efforts to find a just and fair outcome in the building of good neighborly relations between Armenia and Turkey, while safeguarding the historic claims and rights of the Armenian People.

The Armenian General Benevolent Union has been steadfast in serving the Armenian people for more than a century. It has been a leading voice for the desires and aspirations of the Diaspora. AGBU unwaveringly adheres to its time-honored policy of supporting the homeland, safeguarding the rights of the Armenian nation, and promoting the historic and cultural legacy of our people.

On this occasion, we appeal to all Armenians to face the challenges of this historical moment, in collaboration with the government of the Republic of Armenia, with wisdom, national unity and the spirit of cooperation among our people.

Armenian General Benevolent Union
Central Board of Directors
September 10, 2009