

**MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA**

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**PRESS, INFORMATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT**

Telephone: +37410. 544041 ext. 202

Fax: +37410. 565601

Email: [press@mfa.am](mailto:press@mfa.am)

[www.armeniaforeignministry.am](http://www.armeniaforeignministry.am)

## **Turkey Has Gone Back on its Word**

Armenia's Foreign minister says Ankara needs to prove its good intentions.

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By EDWARD NALBANDIAN

Last year on Oct. 10 in Zurich, after intensive negotiations, Armenia and Turkey reached agreement and the foreign ministers of the two countries signed the protocols on the establishment of diplomatic relations, opening of the border and development of bilateral relations.

The Armenian-Turkish relations were in a deadlock when President Serzh Sargsyan initiated the normalization process with Turkey. We in Armenia were guided by a vision of a future in which generations would live in peace and safety. This Armenian initiative met a positive response by the Turkish President and allowed us to make a confident investment in a durable rapprochement.

Our position was reflected in the well-known approach of normalization of relations without any preconditions. It was the bottom-line principle for starting the negotiations with Turkey. With this common understanding we started, conducted this process and came to the agreements. From the beginning of the process up until now this approach has been shared by the whole international community-starting from the Swiss mediators to the secretary-general of the U.N., the OSCE, the EU, the U.S., Russia, France and many other countries.

Unfortunately Turkey has backtracked from the agreements. Not only has it refrained from ratifying the protocols, but Ankara has returned to the language of preconditions that it had used before the beginning of the process.

It seems we speak in different languages. On the one hand, the Turkish leaders pretend that they always respect the principle of *pacta sunt servanda* (agreements must be kept), but on the other hand, they refrain from ratifying and implementing the agreements signed by themselves in Zurich. They claim they have no preconditions, that they simply demand that we fulfill this or that before they can proceed with the ratification. Does this mean they have no preconditions?

Turkey has attempted to link the Armenian-Turkish normalization process to the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. They say that they do not want to act as mediators in the Nagorno-Karabakh peace talks, but just negotiate between Armenians and Azerbaijanis to find a solution. Any Turkish attempts to interfere in the Karabakh process or to link the normalization of its relations with Armenia upon its own perception of progress in the Nagorno-Karabakh talks, harms both processes. This is a position that all major players involved in Armenia-Turkey normalization and Nagorno-Karabakh peace talks, the whole international community have emphasized several times. The international community speaks one language and the Turkish side speaks another one.

Turkey pretends that all problems in the region must have a "comprehensive solution" once and for all. This is a beautiful phrase, but how realistic is it? It is a mere rhetoric, all words and no performance.

Hypocritically Turkey also uses the normalization process as a smokescreen for baseless argument that the adoption of resolutions on the Armenian Genocide in various countries can damage the normalization process. Yet, from the beginning of the process we made clear both in our contacts with the Turkish partners as well as publicly that Armenia will never put under question the fact of the Armenian Genocide or the importance of its international recognition.

True reconciliation does not consist of forgetting the past or feeding younger generations tales of denial. Despite the fact that for 95 years Turkey has been continuously denying the Armenian Genocide, the Armenian side did not require its recognition by Turkey as a precondition for the normalization of the relations. Paradoxically it is Turkey that directly or indirectly has attempted to manipulate that issue, making it a precondition.

Armenia initiated that process and spared no effort to see it succeed. Under the circumstances when the Turkish side was pushing the whole process into a stalemate, Armenia was obliged to suspend its own ratification procedure, remaining in the normalization process, which was met with understanding and welcomed by world leaders.

The negotiations between Armenia and Turkey were finalized by the signature of the protocols. There is neither "silent diplomacy, nor "a second season" of Zurich, nor any new round of negotiations, according to the information often spread by the Turkish media these days. The only remaining step in this long lasting process is the ratification and implementation of the Armenian-Turkish protocols without further ado. Armenia will be ready to move forward if Turkey is again ready to go ahead with the normalization process without preconditions.

Today various world capitals recall that the ball is in the Turkish court, that Armenia has done its part and that Turkey should take the steps that it promised to take.