

## David Phillips: U.S. Pressure 'Essential' For Turkish-Armenian Normalization

Stronger U.S. pressure on Turkey is essential for salvaging its fence-mending agreements with Armenia and the administration of President Barack Obama understands that, according to a renowned U.S. scholar who was actively involved in Turkish-Armenian reconciliation initiatives.

In an interview with RFE/RL on Thursday, David Phillips also criticized Ankara's linkage between the implementation of those agreements and a Nagorno-Karabakh settlement. He dismissed Turkish claims that a recent ruling by the Armenian Constitutional Court ran counter to key provisions of the Turkish-Armenian "protocols" signed in October.

Phillips, who coordinated the work of the U.S.-sponsored Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission (TARC) in 2001-2004, further said that Armenia should not rush to walk away from the deal. But he stressed that its ratification by the Turkish parliament can not be "an open-ended process."

"If these protocols fall apart and there is a diplomatic train wreck, it will have a serious adverse effect on U.S.-Turkish relations," he said. "And this comes at a time when the U.S. is seeking Turkey's cooperation on Iran, when Turkey is playing an increasingly important role in Afghanistan and during the wrap-up to redeployment from Iraq."

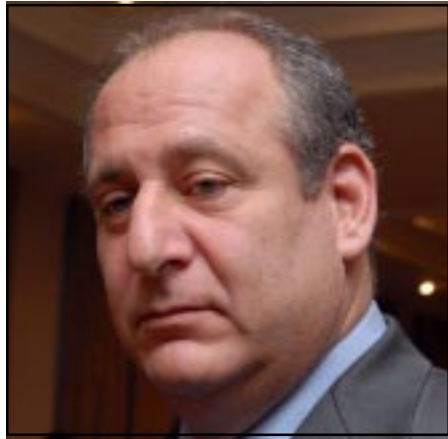
"The Obama administration knows full well that these protocols should go forward because it is in the interests of Turkey and Armenia. It is also in America's interests to keep the process moving forward so that U.S.-Turkish cooperation is in effect."

Analysts believe Washington will step up pressure on Ankara ahead of the April 24 annual commemoration of the Armenian Genocide. Obama avoided describing the massacres as genocide in an April 2009 statement, implicitly citing the need not to undermine the ongoing Turkish-Armenian rapprochement.

U.S. Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg discussed the issue with President Serzh Sarkisian and Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian during a one-day visit to Yerevan on Thursday.

Phillips, who currently runs a conflict resolution program at the American University in Washington, declined to speculate on just how strong that pressure will be. "But I do believe that unless the Obama administration presses the Turks at the highest level, the likelihood of the protocols being ratified in Ankara will decrease," he said.

Phillips described Steinberg's visit as a "clear indication that the Obama administration understands the importance of this matter and the need to raise the profile of its involvement." "And its efforts to use its leverage should intensify in the near future," he said. "The U.S. needs to be actively engaged in this process



if it is going to work."

U.S. officials have already made clear that they disagree with Ankara's highly negative reaction to the Armenian court ruling. Turkish leaders claim that the court thereby prejudged the findings of a Turkish-Armenian "subcommission" of history experts which the two governments have agreed to set up.

"There is nothing in the [relevant protocol] annex that says that the subcommission is going to be considering the veracity of the Armenian genocide," agreed Phillips. "If those questions are being raised, they are being raised as a way of deflecting the focus of discussions and creating conditions whereby Armenia is blamed for any breakdown of the process."

"If the Turks ever thought that signing the protocols would bring an end to international recognition efforts, they were wrong," he said. "They should have known that from the beginning and I'm quite sure that they do know that."

Commenting on Turkish leaders' repeated statements making protocol ratification conditional on the signing of a Karabakh agreement acceptable to Azerbaijan, Phillips said, "The protocols are very clear. There is no mention in the protocols themselves or in any of the annexes about Nagorno-Karabakh."

Phillips spoke to RFE/RL in Yerevan where he arrived earlier on Thursday to present the newly published Armenian translation of his 2005 book, "Unsilencing the Past," that gives a detailed account of TARC's largely confidential activities. The panel of Turkish and Armenian retired diplomats and prominent public figures was set up in 2001 at the U.S. State Department's initiative and with the tacit approval of the authorities in Ankara and Yerevan.

TARC repeatedly called for the unconditional establishment of diplomatic relations between the two states and opening of their border before being disbanded in 2004. It is also famous for commissioning a study on the events of 1915 from the New York-based International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ). In a report released in February 2003, ICTJ concluded that the Armenian massacres "include all of the elements of the crime of genocide" as defined by a 1948 United Nations convention.

But the report also said, to the

## Greeting Or Irony

By Hakob Badalyan

The Turkish foreign minister Ahmed Davutoglu responded to Serzh Sarkisian's air address directed to Abdullah Gul. During a joint press conference with the Serbian and Bosnian foreign ministers, as Haberturk reports, in answer to a reporter's question Davutoglu said, "When crossing the airspace of another country, it is accepted to issue such messages. All the leaders do that. In this case, Mr. Sarkisian addressed his positive message".

If the Armenian government tried to present Serzh Sarkisian's step as a regular "initiative", the Turks seem to hint that the air address is an ordinary thing which do all country leaders. Say when the Swedish prime minister flies to Spain, he has to do something on the plane. Being a leader of a country, he cannot play on the computer, so the best occupation is to deliver addresses.

Proceeding from Davutoglu's response, we may presume that Abdullah Gul will answer Serzh Sarkisian's message only when he crosses the Armenian airspace. Though, country leaders have many other versions of delivering addresses and Abdullah Gul is possible to use one of them. But the point is that usually Gul answers Serzh Sarkisian very late or after a war. At least, in 2008, when the Turkish president, hearing about the invitation to watch football, started thinking about

it only after the Russian-Georgian war and at the very last moment he voiced his decision.

This of course does not mean that a new war is needed for Gul to answer. Overall, after 2008, much has changed in our region and in the world in general. For example, the Armenian national football team this time is going to meet the Russian and not the Turkish national team while the latter is going to play against the Azerbaijani national team. Serzh Sarkisian will come back from London, probably again passing through the airspace of Turkey. It is worth to deliver another address to Abdullah Gul to see what Davutoglu will say then. He will not be able to present this skillful and notable diplomatic step as an ordinary one saying as if all presidents do it. So, there is a brilliant opportunity to surprise Davutoglu and Gul which is not to be lost.

And in general, addresses are to be turned into a strong diplomatic weapon. The point is that wherever flights are made from Armenia, they always pass through the airspace of Turkey. All the Armenian officials, starting from the president and ending with the head of a commune of the far Syunik region would be nice to deliver addresses to their Turkish partners each time they fly over Turkey. They had better overwhelm the Turkish government with addresses for the latter to get bored with them and to open the border.

## Sarkisian Urges Turkey to Honor the Protocols

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"greetings to you and the people of neighboring Turkey."

On Wednesday, Sarkisian said that he has decided to formally submit Armenia's normalization agreements with Turkey to the Armenian parliament for ratification despite what he called Turkish efforts to distort their essence.

Speaking during a visit to London, Sarkisian also brushed aside Ankara's highly negative reaction to a controversial ruling on the two "protocols" that was handed down by Armenia's Constitutional Court last month.

"After this meeting at Chatham House I intend to instruct my personnel to send these documents to Armenia's National Assembly for starting the ratification process," he said in a speech at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, a renowned London-based think-tank also known as Chatham House.

dismay of nationalist groups in Armenia and its worldwide Diaspora, that the Armenians can not use the convention for demanding material or other compensation from Turkey. Former U.S. President George W. Bush repeatedly cited the ICTJ study in his April 24 statements.

Phillips hailed the study as a potential blueprint for Turkish-Armenian reconciliation. "The full benefit of that finding has yet to be fully

"I reaffirm that as the political leader of the [Armenian] parliamentary majority, I exclude a failure by Armenia's parliament to ratify the protocols in case of their ratification by Turkey without preconditions in accordance with our understandings," he said.

Turkey's leaders claim that Armenia itself set such preconditions with its Constitutional Court's interpretation of the protocols' implications. They have singled out the court's conclusion that the deal can not stop Yerevan from seeking greater international recognition of the Armenian genocide.

"It's only the Turks that are trying to find something in it," scoffed Sarkisian "Nobody else, no other involved party, sees anything strange in that decision."

Sarkisian also suggested that Ankara is simply looking for an excuse to avoid normalizing relations with Yerevan before a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

understood and materialized," he said.

Phillips also credited TARC with laying the groundwork for the unprecedented thaw in Turkish-Armenian relations that began shortly after Sarkisian took office in April 2008. "The rapprochement that's underway today would never have occurred in this time frame if TARC hadn't existed," he said. "All of TARC's recommendations are now being put into effect."