

Politics

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NEWS LINE

US congressmen to introduce Armenian genocide bill

RAGIP SOYLU - WASHINGTON, D.C.

» FOUR members of Congress in the U.S. last week invited their colleagues to become an original co-sponsor of the Armenian Genocide Recognition Resolution, which accuses the Ottoman Empire of committing genocide in 1915 and asking President Barack Obama to pressure the Turkish government to resolve the issue.

A letter addressed to U.S. congressmen, penned by Robert J. Dold (Republican from Illinois), David Valado (Republican from California), Adam B. Schiff (Democrat from California) and Frank Pallone (Democrat from New Jersey), claims that the Ottoman Empire killed 1.5 million Armenians between April 24, 1915 and 1923. "Forty-two U.S. states have recognized the Armenian Genocide, as have 11 of our NATO allies. On this special year, it is time for the United States government to officially join with those voices standing against this genocide denial. We can help bring closure to this longstanding moral issue that continues to impact U.S. interests," the letter read.

Representatives declared that they would be introducing the resolution next Tuesday, Feb. 24 and the same language as in House Resolution 227 from the 113th Congress would be used.

House Resolution 227, which last year became obsolete, urged President Obama to work toward durable Armenian-Turkish relations based upon Turkey's full acknowledgment of the facts and ongoing consequences of the "Armenian Genocide."

The draft resolution also cites President Obama's statements before entering office, saying he held the conviction that the Armenian genocide is not an allegation but rather a widely documented fact supported by historical evidence.

Parts of the Turkish-American community was quick to show their grievances about the initiative.

Ali Çınar, a Turkish-American community leader and also the president of the Washington-based think tank Global Policy Institute, invited his followers to pressure congressmen by calling the offices of representatives and emailing them to make them stop pursuing the official recognition of genocide.

Sources refute Gülenist claim that Gallipoli events canceled

» PRESIDENTIAL and Prime Ministry sources have denied allegations that were reported Sunday in Today's Zaman, a daily affiliated with the Gülen Movement, that the Gallipoli commemorations set to take place on April 24 have been canceled due to low anticipated participation from the countries invited.

Today's Zaman, a daily known for its articles opposed to the ruling party and for being linked to the Gülen Movement, which allegedly orchestrated the Dec. 17 and Dec. 25 operation in an apparent attempt to topple the government, reported on Sunday that the Gallipoli commemorations were canceled due to low participation, citing an anonymous official from the government. However, sources from both the Presidency and Prime Ministry have refuted the claims that the commemorations have been canceled, refraining from offering further details over how many and which countries will participate in the Gallipoli centennial commemoration.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu sent letters to 102 countries inviting the leaders of states to attend the commemoration ceremonies in Turkey marking the 100th anniversary of the World War I Battle of Gallipoli this year on April 23 and April 24. The invitation letters were also sent to U.S. President Barack Obama and Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan. **ISTANBUL / DAILY SABAH**

AZERI ENVOY BAGHIROV:

Liberation of our lands from Armenian invasion top priority



PHOTO BY ONUR MERT BENDER

In his interview with Daily Sabah, Azeri ambassador to Turkey Faig Nusrat Baghirov criticized the international community for its inactivity toward implementing U.N. resolutions on the Khojaly massacre and the invasion of Azeri lands by Armenia

ALI ÜNAL - ANKARA

» RELATIONS between Azerbaijan and Turkey, which have similar histories, are described by the expression "two states, one nation." The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which started between Azerbaijan and Armenia in 1992, is the top-most priority of Azerbaijani foreign policy, as well as one of Turkey's, with the aim of achieving regional stability. Daily Sabah spoke with Azerbaijani ambassador Faig Nusrat Baghirov regarding recent developments in the Nagorno-Karabakh region and the future of Azerbaijani-Turkish relations.

■ The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is one of the most prominent topics in Azerbaijani foreign policy. Could you tell us the historical background of this dispute?

I would like to emphasize that solving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is one of the most important goals of Azerbaijan's foreign policy. Armenia invaded one-fifth of Azerbaijani land, and the liberation of this land, thus our territorial integrity, is of top priority.

If we are to look at the core of this issue, it can be traced back to two years before the dissolution of the Soviet Union to 1988. The main reason behind this issue is that the Armenian administration of the time, with the support of the Soviet Union, aspired to confiscate Nagorno-Karabakh and the land surrounding it, and the issue started with border transgression. On the day of Feb. 26, 1992 in Khojaly, 613 people were brutally massacred, including children, women and the elderly. In the time until 1994, one-fifth of Azerbaijani land was invaded and more than 1 million Azerbaijanis were sent into exile. The important part is all of these events transpired right in front of the eyes of the world and they have chosen to just disregard them.

■ This week is the anniversary of one of the most vicious massacres that contemporary history has witnessed - the Khojaly Massacre. What happened in Khojaly during the Nagorno-Karabakh War?

This year is the 23rd anniversary of the Khojaly genocide, and a memorial service will be held along with events. On the night between Feb. 25 and Feb. 26, 1992, 613 people were brutally killed in Khojaly, just because they were Azerbaijanis. What happened in Khojaly can be described as genocide according to the definition set by the international community. It is important to highlight

this fact again. This genocide happened right in front of the whole world. These are all documented, and there are witnesses still alive. The international community has still not reacted to this genocide. There are resolutions regarding the Azerbaijan-Armenia dispute. There are four U.N. Security Council resolutions that state Armenia is the occupier and should withdraw from Azerbaijani lands. These resolutions are U.N. Security Council Resolution 822 adopted on April 30, 1993, Resolution 853 adopted on July 29, 1993, Resolution 874 adopted on Oct. 14, 1993 and Resolution 884 adopted on Nov. 12, 1993. However, none of these were put into action.

Twenty-two or 23 years have passed since these resolutions were issued and unfortunately, they are still not implemented. To put the aforementioned resolutions into action, Armenia should be pressured by the international community. But on the contrary, Turkey and Azerbaijan are put under pressure wrongfully. As the anniversary of the so-called Armenian genocide approaches, many international institutions are publishing various human rights reports on Turkey and Azerbaijan, but none of them talk about over 1 million Azerbaijanis who are unable to live in their own land.

■ Despite all the international appeals, Armenia continues to occupy 20 percent of Azerbaijani land. What are the recent developments on this issue?

They tried to conceal the massacre at Khojaly and prevented this from being announced. However, in the past 12 years, Azerbaijan has worked hard to reverse this situation and made concerted efforts to document what happened in Khojaly as genocide. Azerbaijan has brought forward this issue on many international platforms and provided the international community with the testimonies of witnesses, photos and other related materials. Many countries recognize it as genocide. The event is documented, and witnesses are still alive. As long as the criminals who committed this horrible crime are not punished, Azerbaijan will continue to bring this issue up.

■ Thousands of people died during the Nagorno-Karabakh War, and more than 1 million Azerbaijanis had to leave their homes. Has Azerbaijan fully recovered from these wounds?

Azerbaijan will recover when all of those people's land is liberated. However, as Azerbaijan's president said, Azer-

baijan will always preserve its territorial integrity and sovereignty. No one will ever doubt that. Azerbaijan is a strong country and we will not allow any kind of project to be imposed on us. Azerbaijan is getting stronger by the day in politics, economy and military. Therefore, Azerbaijan will do whatever it can to liberate its land from occupation.

While the Azerbaijani government provided housing for displaced Azerbaijanis, it is not the same as living on their own land.

■ While there has been an ongoing and fragile cease-fire between Azerbaijan and Armenia for 20 years, we have witnessed an increase in border clashes, especially in 2014. Is there a possibility for a new Armenian-Azerbaijani war?

Sometimes it is said that this issue is a suspended one, but it is not true. Unless the issues are solved, it cannot be called suspended and these kinds of issues are prone to become reignited. To solve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, an international organization, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group was established. The chairs of the group are the U.S., Russia and France. With their participation, the resolution process has continued for 21 years. However, it still has not been concluded due to Armenia's non-constructive behavior. Armenia does not want the resolution to happen because Armenia still craves land, and it shows the same attitude toward Turkey as well. The Armenian president, while appealing to the youth, said: "We took the Upper Karabakh. Mount Ararat will be your doing." This shows that they are the ones who do not want this issue to be solved.

What happened in 2014 further shows Armenia's unwillingness in the resolution process. Firstly, a meeting was held in Sochi in 2014 with the initiative of Russia, then the one with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry presiding and another one with the French President François Hollande in France. All of these meetings failed due to Armenia's provocative actions. Armenia intentionally did this to put the blame on Azerbaijan. The border clash of yesterday is the result of Armenia's provocative actions.

■ How would Azerbaijan react to possible cooperation between Turkey and Armenia, before Armenia withdraws from the occupied territories?

The Turkish president and prime minister along with the minister of foreign affairs have said that coopera-

tion was not possible without the withdrawal of Armenia. Everyone expects a move from Turkey, however the genocide and invasion are Armenia's doings. Who committed genocide in Khojaly in 1992, has committed the so-called genocide of 1915. They disregard a genocide committed just 23 years ago that has living witnesses, while there is not any evidence of the so-called genocide of 1915.

I do not think cooperation between Armenia and Turkey is possible because as Azerbaijan becomes prosperous, so does Turkey, and as Turkey consolidates its power, so does Azerbaijan.

■ The TANAP project that is going to transport Azerbaijani natural gas to Turkey and Europe is still under construction. How important is this project for Azerbaijan?

Azerbaijan is a country rich with oil and natural gas. For the first time, in 1850 the oil industry began in Baku. Extraction of oil from the sea for the first time again was realized in Azerbaijan. However, in 1994, Azerbaijan also started to produce natural gas. As a result of wise council between Azerbaijan and Turkey, the TANAP project was decided upon in 2012. This project was signed by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who was prime minister at the time. According to this project, Azerbaijan will sell its own natural gas through Turkey, and Turkey will keep some of the natural gas. Therefore, Turkey will be the leader of a large-scale energy project. With this project Turkey and Azerbaijan will become the countries that provide energy security to Europe - 80 percent of the pipes will be produced by Turkish corporations, and the construction will also be undertaken by Turkish corporations.

■ The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad project will be opened for service this year upon its completion. How do you evaluate this project's impact on the economies of both countries?

This will be the first transportation project after the energy projects. The railroad should open for service this year and test drives have been completed. The means of transportation between Turkey and Azerbaijan is usually achieved overland, which costs more than by railroad. With this project, roads to Beijing, and thus Asia, will be accessible. Also, in the same way, through Turkey via the Marmaray, access to Europe will be available. This will create opportunities both for passengers and business people. This is a project realized through strategic partnership.

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