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Armenian-Turkish Protocols Will Be Ratified

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In June 2008 President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan took the initiative and proposed President of Turkey Abdullah Gül to visit Yerevan. President Gül's visit to Yerevan on 6 September 2008 was the first visit of a Turkish leader to Armenia. The formal pretext for the visit was attending the football match between the national teams for the World Cup qualifiers. Afterwards, the events have been unfolding fast. Already on 23 April 2009 Armenia and Turkey, with Swiss mediation, adopted the so-called "roadmap" that provided for opening of the border without preconditions; in fact, Armenia abandoned its active involvement in the process of recognition of the 1915 Armenian genocide in the Ottoman Empire, and Turkey abandoned the demand for immediate withdrawal of Armenian troops from five regions of Azerbaijan bordering Nagorno-Karabakh. By the end of summer two protocols were made public – one concerning establishment of diplomatic relations, the other concerning development of bilateral relations. Ultimately, the protocols were signed by ministers of foreign affairs of Armenia and Turkey on 10 October 2009.

The protocols met mixed reactions and were criticised by political opposition and expert community in both countries. In Armenia, the dispute and criticism were caused, mainly, by the issue of recognition of the border between Armenia and Turkey (that border had been drawn on the basis of the Treaty of Kars signed by Turkey, on one side, and Soviet republic of Transcaucasus region, on the other side, in 1921; by the Treaty of Kars Armenia gave up a large part of its territory including the Mount Ararat) and because of agreement to establish a commission of historians, which is perceived in Armenia and in the Armenian diaspora as questioning the very fact of genocide. In Armenia, as well as in the diaspora communities around the globe huge protest actions took place. Turkish political opposition, in its turn, considers the protocols inadequate as they do not mention Turkey's demands concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. Thus, separation of Armenian-Turkish relation issues from Armenian-Azerbaijani relations has been criticised by the Turkish political opposition and may become an obstacle for prompt ratification of the protocols in Turkey. Presently, it is planned to begin the ratification process by Armenian and Turkish parliaments. Of course, there is a serious risk that the protocols would not withstand a scrutiny by the Turkish parliament or the ratification process may be postponed because of the unsolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It is known that Turkey hopes to see some progress in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution process soon. However, it seems that the ratification process will be concluded successfully, because the Armenian-Turkish rapprochement has been caused by objective reasons and Turkey is interested in it as much as Armenia. Turkey recognises the new challenges and threats that emerged after the 2008 Russo-Georgian war and understands the importance of peace and cooperation in the South Caucasus. It was not accidental that immediately after the Russo-Georgian war Turkey proposed creation of the so-called South Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform. At the same time, Turkey admitted the need to consider Russia's regional interests and accepted Moscow's proposal for the South Stream pipeline construction project. Besides, if Turkey settles its relations with Armenia, another obstacle for its EU membership will be removed. Therefore, though Turkey has been backing Azerbaijan on

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the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, that will not hamper ratification of the protocols. It should also be considered that the present state of affairs in Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution process suits Russia and the United States.

It is also important that presently there is a consensus on the Armenian-Turkish rapprochement among important regional actors – USA, EU and Russia. For USA and EU Armenian-Turkish reconciliation is important as it may secure the functioning of all regional projects in transport and communication spheres. If Turkey steps back from reconciliation with Armenia, United States may even adopt a resolution about recognition of the 1915 Armenian genocide. Besides, for USA it is important to provide Armenia with an opportunity to choose between the West and Russia more freely. It is rather surprising that Russia has also welcomed the process of normalisation of Armenian-Turkish relations. But the issue is that opening of the border between Armenia and Turkey would lessen Armenia's dependence on communication via Georgia, and that suits the Kremlin's interests. Moreover, Armenian railways and electric plants belong to Russian companies, which would get an access to Turkey's market.

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