SARKOZY IS IN ARMENIA II

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Approximately a week after Sarkisians visit to France, President Sarkozy had conducted an official visit to Armenia on 6-7 October 2001. Whats interesting is that in an unusual way, a very short time has elapsed since the first visit. This shows that Sarkozy is in a rush or in other words, he wants to implement his Armenian policy as soon as possible. In his statements during his visit, Sarkozy addressed many issues with the friendship of France and Armenia being at the forefront. We will only dwell upon the Armenian question and his statements regarding his expectations from Turkey. We could summarize these as follows: First of all, Sarkozy believes that the Armenians have been subjected to genocide. He has described the denial of genocide and especially the collective denial (refers to Turkey here) as fatal. Furthermore, Sarkozy has emphasized the recognition of the Armenian genocide claims by Turkey. He has said that each country must revisit its history, face the crimes it has committed and accept the dark pages of its history and that this will not belittle it but on the opposite, will make it more honorable and display its significance. Moreover, he has said that this will be a great step towards the future and a gesture for peace and that without recognizing the pains suffered, no reconciliation could take place and Turkey, which is a great country, must also do this just as France and Germany have done. The third and most important point is that if Turkey continues to openly or implicitly deny the Armenian genocide allegations, France could consider amending the draft law which punishes denial (in other words, that the denial draft could be adopted in the Senate) and that on the opposite, if Turkey makes a gesture to recognize the genocide allegations, then no change will be made. However, he has gone further and said that France will display its stance (its decision) on this issue, based on what the Turkish statesmen will say, in a very brief time and that this period must be within his term of office. In short, the French President has called on Turkey to recognize the Armenian genocide allegations and has expressed that if not, then the denial draft will become a law and has given until April, when his term of office comes to an end, for Turkey to recognize the genocide allegations. Firstly we must note that until now, no president of any foreign country had urged Turkey to recognize the Armenian genocide allegations this openly and no one had especially conveyed a certain date for Turkey. From this aspect, Sarkozys behavior is at least not appropriate to the relations which must exist between two allies. However, it could be seen that the French President has no such concern and his primary aim is to influence his own country and the Armenian public opinion. In fact, articles have been published in both countries press regarding Sarkozy urging Turkey to recognize the genocide allegations and for mentioning a certain period.

As expected, Turkeys reactions towards the French Presidents statements have been harsh. In a declaration issued by the Foreign Ministry, it has been indicated that these statements have been observed with astonishment and deep regret, that the controversies between Turkey and Armenia have tried to be exploited for French domestic politics, and that such an inconsistent and imprudent handling of this serious matter that has human and moral dimensions is unfortunate. It has also been expressed that Turkey will continue its constructive approach on how to improve its relations with Armenia, overcome the controversy over the events of 1915 and reach a just memory and that what is expected from France is to make a positive contribution to this process and to adopt a responsible approach and discourse that would show care to avoid both damaging the multi-dimensional relationship between Turkey and France and offending the Turkish community in France. Meanwhile, we should indicate that while highly praising the Armenians during his statements, Sarkozy had no concern for taking into consideration the Turkish community and the Turks in France. On the other hand, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu said that these kinds of statements are political opportunism; that this type of opportunism arises whenever there are elections in Europe and that it could have a negative impact on the process between Turkey and Armenia continuing despite some disruptions. He has gone further on to say that there is no problem for Turkey to confront its history, but that mentalities who cannot confront their own histories and who have not intermingled with the societies they have ruled due to colonialism and who have seen them as a lower class, should confront their own histories and that those countries with a colonial past do not have the right to give a lesson to Turkey to confront its history and those suggesting Turkey to do so must first look at the mirror themselves. European Union Minister and Chief Negotiator Egemen Bağış has expressed that it would be more meaningful if Sarkozy worked on how his country could come out of the economic turbulence instead of assuming the role of historians and developed projects on the future of the EU and has described this situation as the exploitation of the nearing elections. On the other hand, in a speech delivered at his Partys Parliamentary Group Meeting, Prime Minister Erdoğan has said that the French President has given advices to Turkey, but that Sarkozy should listen to his own advice since he speaks differently in each country. Also, after indicating that such a political leadership cannot be pursued and that before everything else, politics requires honesty, he has said that Turkey is not a piece of cake. MHP Leader Devlet Bahçeli has also criticized Sarkozy, expressing that if he wants to see an example of genocide, he should look back at the history of his own country and that he will clearly see the atrocities committed in Algeria and will notice explicit or implicit massacres in North Africa. These reactions from Turkey have also been published within the French and Armenian press and has clearly displayed that Turkey has no intention to consider Sarkozys call for the recognition of the genocide allegations. We will continue tomorrow.

About the Author :

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