PRESIDENT OBAMA'S 24 APRIL STATEMENT - Ömer Engin LÜTEM

Ömer Engin LÜTEM

Since Bill Clinton, US Presidents issue a statement each year on 24 April regarding the Armenian Remembrance Day and in order not to offend Turkey, they do not characterize the 1915 events as genocide, but instead use some other words which carried a similar meaning. Barack Obama, while he ran as presidential candidate, upon the requests of the Armenians, had expressed both written and orally that if elected he would use the term genocide. It was presumed that he would indeed act in such a manner after he was elected as President. However, he found himself in a difficult position when it was explained to him how sensitive Turkey is to the use of this term and he found the solution to this issue by using the words Meds Yeghern in his 24 April statements, which means great tragedy in Armenian and is also used with regard to the 1915 events. This term has been used again this year in his 24 April statement. Moreover, by referring to the 1915 events as one of the worse atrocities of the 20th century and unspeakable suffering and by putting forth 1.5 million Armenians were brutally massacred, the President alludes genocide without labeling it. This also gives him the opportunity to state that his view of that historical event has not changed and therefore, tries to show that there is no difference between Obama as Presidential Candidate and Obama as President. By expressing in his statement that a full, frank and just acknowledgment of the facts is in all of our interests and that moving forward with the future cannot be done without reckoning with the facts of the past, Obama implies that Turkey should recognize the Armenian genocide allegations. He also declares that some Turks who have already done this have been applauded. At the end of his statement, by exaggeratingly praising the US Armenians, President Obama tries to gain their votes during elections. Although President Obamas statement this year, just as in the previous years, is delivered in a moderate language, in essence it reflects the views of Armenians. However, this has not pleased most of the Armenians and especially the Dashnaks at all, hooked so much on the term genocide, and US Chairman Ken Hachikian of the organization accused President Obama using a harsh language for surrendering to Turkey and not keeping his promise to the Armenians. On the other hand, it has been observed within the Turkish press that President Obamas choice of words, i.e. not using the term genocide, has been met with pleasure. However, the press release of the Turkish Foreign Ministry on this statement carries a complete opposite characteristic. In this statement, it has been expressed that the Presidents statement reflects only the Armenian views, distorts the historical facts and therefore it is regarded as problematic and is deeply regretted. Furthermore, it has put forth that the Presidents statement is issued upon domestic political considerations,

renders the normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia difficult, damages Turkish-American relations and that the US should encourage the Armenian side to be more realistic and conciliatory. In conclusion, while the US Presidents 24 April statement this year, just as in the previous years, attempts to please both sides, it has failed in doing so and on the complete opposite, has caused quite strong reactions to develop.

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