

## IN PLACE OF A THOUSAND WORDS



## Struck by heat

A Bangladeshi child cries as mothers stand in a queue carrying their children to await treatment at a children's hospital in Dhaka, Bangladesh, yesterday. Hundreds of children have been affected by a heat wave that has been sweeping the country for over a week, according to news reports. (AP photo/ Pavel RAHMAN)

## Turkey's reckoning day should arrive, and faster...

İLHAN  
TANIR

tanir.ilhan@gmail.com

President Obama released the much-anticipated presidential statement on Armenian Remembrance Day on Friday, April 24th. Apparently the recent fast tracked diplomatic relations that started between Armenia and Turkey obligated Obama not to utter the word of "genocide" as he promised sturdily and without leaving any doubt that he would do in his presidential campaign. For my part, I have been also very curious to see how, for this time, Obama will be able to please the both sides, as the consensus became the twin word of his administration. Though Obama couldn't please both sides this time, neither did he attract much anger from either side. In short, Obama walked the fine line once more.

Obama reiterated in the statement what he had said in Ankara, that his "own view of what occurred in 1915, and [his] view of that history has not changed." It is a dubious approach. If one's view has not changed over an issue, why then the words. The answer, I believe, Obama did not want to be remembered as a spoiler of this historic moment of reconciliation for domestic gains. In the presidential statement, Obama asked both parties to come to a "reckoning with the past" because that "holds out the powerful promise of reconciliation." I cannot agree more with this part of the statement.

During the run up to this statement day in recent months, Turkish leadership sensed that a very dangerous phase waits for Turkish-U.S. relations and unless they change their course in Turkish-Armenian relations, it was going to be very damaging as well as embarrassing for them.

The Turkish leaders distinguished this time that an U.S. president was not bluffing. This time, the tragic events were going to be called what the Armenians think they should be called. And it is very possible that this truth had been told to the Turkish government officials behind closed doors.

After all, if the leader of the free world calls you a name, well... it would really look bad. Thus it seemed that the Turkish leaders decided to play the role of statesmanship this time. The Turkish foreign diplomats seemed sincere and serious to do something fundamental: Turkey was determined to overcome the populism and the rising chauvinism. Slowly, but nevertheless

surely, Turkey leaves the door ajar. The road map for the relationship is prepared and the parties are courageously setting aside the thorny issues for the time being.

In a way, it was a victory for Turkey as it proved that it could change. Turkey leaped forward in the style of statesmanship. But one wonders if this really could be called statesmanship? Is Turkey only capable of taking stern steps when somebody very important like Obama shows a big stick? If Turkey was able to start a dialog with Armenia, and was audacious enough to set aside the bristly matters, why has it not been done before?

The state of Armenia has done their part of disgrace in their history. Nobody can deny that. That part is theirs to figure out. They will come around and apologize as well, as some of the Armenian intellectuals did after the Turkish initiative for an apology to the Armenian people. The fading Ottoman Empire was like a wounded animal and in that time of madness, partly to defend itself did some things terribly wrong: it was an erroneous chapter that was filled with unjust behavior. We can still debate what it was and how it was. And we should debate while working on the history with historians.

Though, the intention should not be to bail Turkey out of the discussion.

By no means should this process of reckoning discourage and disappoint Turkish society. Turkey should not feel ghastrly about its history. On the contrary, the Turkish history has great heroes. Our past presents many more bright pages than dark ones. We had good soldiers, great victories, grandeur days and hundred years. Mustafa Kemal, the founder of the new Turkish Republic, for one, would cover a lot of that space. Let's cherish him and many more heroes without making them a taboo.

While talking about reckoning, I would even

suggest to go further. Why can't we also discuss some of the bad Sultans we had in the Ottoman times. Do our children or we have to live in a dream world to imagine we have a flawless past but terrible present? Isn't it true that many of the late Ottoman emperors weren't adequate enough to steer the empire. And the new Republic of Turkey was founded with a heroic uprising and did magnificent exertion to recover from its loss of men, women and infrastructures during World War I to catch up with other advanced peers. But the same young Republic acted with many narrow-minded policies for too long to offend some of its segments.

Why is it that we cannot admit some of this narrow-mindedness?

An ambitious Turkey, which increasingly desires to live in peace with its neighbors, must take on some of the saddles that come with it. For example, shedding light on and discussing our own history, asking questions and admitting errors, with its dark and white pages, are remembrances of being a part of a great history and self-confidence. It is true that the major Western countries, minorities of the late Ottoman time and religious fanatics did their part to paralyze Ottoman society in the past.

But these historic realities should not confuse today's young Turkish society to see the whole western world as part of a grand conspiracy that wants to divide Turkey's mainland. Yes, the minorities, including Armenians, during the late Ottoman time left a bad taste in the mouth, especially when the Turkish land was being invaded. But that doesn't perplex the Turkish laws to neglect them and treat them as second-class citizens, even today.

And religious fanatics and madrasa system held us back too, maybe for centuries. This also shouldn't stop us thinking religion is a part of the modern society and modern people. And the devout Muslims, too, may wish Turkey to succeed. The people of Turkey must remember, "Life is full of trade-offs." It is true, if you are not ready for compromises, you might end up losing whatever you got!!

\* İlhan Tanir lives in Washington, D.C. and works for a private consulting firm as a research and project director. His blog is at: <http://ilhanitanir.blogspot.com/>

## Soft power

RIZA TÜRME

The "power" concept in politics is defined as having an influence over others and the ability to obtain what you want through co-optation and attraction. A state having military and economic power is known to be influential over the attitude of another state or some other states.

Harvard University Professor Joseph Nye pointed out a new type of power in the 1990s called "soft power." Soft power doesn't apply pressure methods of hard power. Soft power is formed by the culture of a society; the internal and external politics of a state based on moral values, human rights, democracy and state of law; and absorption of all these by a society and state. For this reason, that particular society and state may be attractive for others. And such a power of attraction allows a state to convince others and allows it to control others without applying hard power.

Soft power has gained importance through technological developments, globalization and the information age. Information and communication are transformed into a power source. So for a state it has become unavoidable to consider soft power while regulating internal and foreign policies. The system of values, human rights, democracy and state of law implementations shaping a society are the most important elements of soft power. If the culture of a society includes universal values, its having an influence over other states is more likely.

Culture and art are another source of soft power. France is one of the states that better knows this. The French culture, literature, philosophy, cuisine, wine and cheese are the key source of soft power, which is one of the most effective tools of French diplomacy.

Foreign politics is important in terms of the creation and use of soft power. Diplomacy is a soft power tool that states usually apply to influence public opinion. We saw a successful example of this during U.S. President Barack Obama's Turkey trip. Another country success-

ful in affecting public opinion is Norway. It is a small, remote European country with a population of 5 million and not an EU member. However, Norway successfully conveys a message to the world public opinion: "Norway is the peace force in the world." In the Middle East, in Sri Lanka and in Colombia, remarkable Norwegian efforts of mediation support this message.

Turkey tries to do the same. Plus its geopolitical situation is quite convenient for exerting similar efforts. However, Turkey, being different from Norway, makes this in a rather noisy way. Norway, on the other hand, conducts calm diplomacy and never takes the stage to say, "I am a broker." Turkey was successful in the Syrian-Israeli talks as a mediator. But the unexpected moves in Davos and the Rasmussen incident added value inside, though harmed the country's image outside. Soft power dislikes hard moves. Turkey faces a public opinion issue in Europe even if it is willing to become an EU member. The negative image of Turkey in Europe should be changed. So it is better to think thoroughly about the methods of improving soft power. Information communication is a key source of soft power. Visual or written information about a society or a state in media affect public opinion. But even the best marketing methods cannot sell a defected product.

Marketing a country where torture somehow cannot be prevented, human rights are restricted arbitrarily, illegal eavesdropping is at issue, the accused kept in prison for years, media is pressured, children's rights remain unprotected, and women are the victims of honor killing must have been really difficult. Turkey has authors, like Orhan Pamuk, or composers, like Fazıl Say, who add value to universal culture. These are very critical source of soft power. But unfortunately, Pamuk and Say are not enough to eliminate drawbacks of Turkey in the areas of democracy, human rights and the state of law.

\* Rıza Türmen is a columnist for daily Milliyet in which this piece appeared yesterday. It was translated into English by the Daily News staff.

## Post April 24 football diplomacy

TIGRAN MKRCHYAN

Armenians and Turks in Armenia, Turkey and throughout the world had for several months anticipated how the U.S. President Obama would evaluate the events of 1915. His use of the Armenian terminology for the events of 1915, "Mets Yeghern" (Great Calamity), was less direct than President Reagan's April 22, 1981, proclamation message and a step further than George Bush's use of this term in English only in his 2003 and 2005 April 24 statements.

In the past several months, since Sargsyan's election as Armenian president and Abdullah Gül's cordial congratulation followed by similar correspondence between the prime ministers and foreign affairs ministers of both countries and the football diplomacy talks, people in both countries looked forward to where those negotiations would lead. The process of the talks was not always smooth and without hurdles. Armenians were interested in the ultimate result of border opening and normalization of relations without any preconditions, including any mentioning of the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement as a precondition. The Turkish side being interested in normalization of relations was nevertheless often raising the Karabakh issue settlement as a precondition for establishing diplomatic relations and opening borders between Armenia and Turkey, which have been closed since 1993. Even though Armenian President Sargsyan and Foreign Minister Nalbandian mentioned that the Karabakh topic was not part of the negotiations, Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan did not refrain from clarifying his government's stance on this issue.

The Turkish mentioning of Karabakh could well have re-emerged after the Turkish side failed to gain assurances from the Obama administration whether it would label the events of 1915 as Armenian genocide or the Congress would go forward with another genocide resolution. The April 22 joint statement between the Armenian, Turkish and Swiss foreign affairs ministries stated that the sides had agreed on a "comprehensive framework for the normalization of their bilateral relations in a mutually satisfactory manner. A road map has been identified." Many in Armenia and the diaspora, including the Armenian coalition government partner Armenian Revolutionary Federation, or ARF, taken by surprise, feel that this statement must have forestalled the US president from his campaign promise to the American Armenians. ARF decided to quit the coalition government disagreeing with messianic statement by its erstwhile partner in the coalition Arthur Baghdasaryan, Secretary of the Armenian National

Security Council that "everything the Armenian government does is right." On the other hand, the Armenian president thinks this statement made "the issue of the Genocide more intensively covered topic throughout the world than ever." He added that "establishment of relations with the Turks does not hinder the process of the international recognition of the Genocide." The second biggest coalition party Prosperous Armenia hinted that it would quit the coalition would there emerge any precondition from Turkey in the talks. Thus, a big divide has emerged among the Armenians on this matter.

International recognition of genocide means its endorsement in legislative and executive branches of foreign governments or international organizations. Turkey put immense pressure on the U.S. and spent great efforts to stop the head of the U.S. government from using the G-word. The Armenian government, looking forward to full normalization of relations without preconditions, helped Turkey this time. It unequivocally granted Obama a full pretext to avoid his campaign pledge. But it is not for nothing. Serzh Sargsyan specified the time-frame of the negotiations. The October 2009 football return match between the Armenian and Turkish national teams is the deadline for the talks. A failure to sign a deal and have the relations fully normalized will result in Armenia's withdrawal from the process.

In the upcoming months, talks are likely to continue and the Armenians expect that the Turkish side would not let them down by delaying the full normalization under Azerbaijani pressure. Even in the short run would any Turkish tough statement (including any on Karabakh issue) come from Ankara the internal political crisis might have irrevocable turn and the negotiations process could well be aborted. Another impending question for the both sides is the Armenian genocide policies. Armenia has stated and reiterated several times that the international recognition of the Armenian genocide is a foreign political issue. As it was clear, Turkey did everything possible to stop that happening in the U.S. now. For the future, it is unclear and must be clarified in the negotiations: How would Turkey and Armenia proceed with their genocide policies once borders are established? Another long-standing question is what concretely the Armenian government anticipates from genocide recognition policies beyond the moral dimensions? These are issues in need of immediate clarification for the sake of avoiding future diplomatic scandals of global dimensions.

Tigran Mkrtchyan is a Yerevan-based analyst for European Stability Initiative, or ESI. The views expressed here are the writer's own and cannot be attributed to the Daily News.

## Correction

The Mor Gabriel Monastery in the city of Mardin, which is home to much of Turkey's Syriac community, was founded in 397 A.D. A story in Monday's newspaper quoted a parliamentarian who misspoke on the age of the monastery. The Daily News regrets the error.

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