

**Remarks of  
Prime Minister Tigran Sargsian  
AmCham-TEPAV Forum  
February 12, 2010**

I would like to welcome everyone on behalf of the government and thank the organizers for putting on this dialogue on such an interesting topic. Madam Ambassador's remarks forced me to revise my today's speech as otherwise I would have been repeating her assertions. So I will try not to repeat them, but to draw your attention to some issues that the political authorities have prioritized. I would particularly like to call your attention to the very important political statement voiced by the President during his London trip; it once again emphasizes the will of the Armenian authorities to advance and regulate Armenian-Turkish relations. The message of the Armenian President once again proves that this is a well-thought move and that the Armenian authorities represented by the President have displayed the political will to overcome stereotypes existing in Armenia and Turkey, as well as to start new relations between our two countries.

I believe these relations should be viewed in three dimensions. The first would be to define what the authorities would have to do, the extent of their responsibilities; the second –how our societies perceive the existing situation, how they see the future of Armenia-Turkey relations; and the third pertains to the international angle, how the international community reacts to Armenia-Turkey normalization, as well as the extent to which the normalization of Armenia-Turkey relations would affect regional environment.

And so, the first dimension deals with the issue of responsibility of the political authorities. I want to draw your attention to the important statement that our President made on his way to London, as he was flying over Turkish airspace. Quote from the message addressed to the President of Turkey: "I think you will agree with me that authorities play the leading role in the process of overcoming stereotypes that Armenian and Turkish peoples have toward each other, as well as in the process of forming an atmosphere of mutual trust. Only through trust toward our work, through determination and adherence to principle will we be able to achieve results. The fact that we have succeeded in raising our bilateral relations to a level where the future establishment of natural relations between our countries has become more visible and tangible,

means that the moment has come to display determination to take another step ahead, bequeathing a stable and safe region to future generations."

I think this message once again proves the determination of the Armenian President concerning the issue; I am also very glad to see that our political stance is supported by the administration of the United States, Russia and the European Union. All of them encourage us to proceed in this direction. I want to assure you that this is a very well-thought move. I hope you will agree that our President has opened a new page in Armenian-Turkish relations, after which we will have to deal with reality. Henceforth, all of us will have to be conscious of this reality and, whether our opponents like it or not, of the establishment of high-level political relations; I believe, the President's message dismisses all doubts that this is not a political game, but our sincere aspiration to establish friendly relations with our neighboring countries.

The second important assertion of the political authorities voiced by the President reaffirms our stance that bilateral relations cannot be conditioned by relations with third countries and that bilateral relations should be built without preconditions. The fact that the Constitutional Court gave a positive assessment of the signed protocols finding no contradiction with our Constitution speaks to it, too. The President made a very important statement about sending the signed protocols to the National Assembly, thus reaffirming our preparedness for their ratification. Moreover, the President assured that, having a majority in the National Assembly, we are convinced that, Turkey ratifying the protocols, there will be no risk or impediment in Armenia connected with their ratification by the National Assembly.

The President's statement contains a third important assertion: ratification of the protocols and opening of the border with Turkey will contribute to the resolution of Armenia-Azerbaijan relations.

Dear colleagues, Armenia seems to have made all the necessary political moves, and I hope you will agree with me that now it is time for the presidents of our countries to display political will and move ahead by ratifying the protocols and opening the borders. At the same time we should agree with the assertion that political authorities have a much bigger role to play in this phase. A

lot depends on their behavior, because it serves as a signal both to our citizens, and to the international community as to how we see our future.

Let's dwell on the second dimension now to see how our society perceives the strategy of normalization of the Armenia-Turkey relations. It's no secret that we have faced resistance; we have seen forces among diaspora whose perception of the normalization of the Armenia-Turkey relations is different from ours. We deem it very natural due to our historical heritage - wounds and pain which are hard to overcome instantaneously. We must realize that this view is not artificial, but objective. There is a strong fear that this is not a normalization strategy of Armenia-Turkey relations, but an illusion, a dangerous one, which could lead our peoples to yet another disappointment and which would create an environment far from reality or our imagination. It is feared to be another trick aimed to relax our vigilance; the danger of it is our unpreparedness for new challenges, especially in light of Azerbaijan's militaristic rhetoric and current atmosphere in our neighboring Azerbaijan of fueling hatred toward Armenia and the Armenian people, as well as large volume financial expenditures of Azerbaijan in parallel to that militaristic rhetoric.

Naturally, this public concern is groundless. It means that we should not lose vigilance. It is extremely important for us what strategy the Turkish political authorities have adopted for the normalization of Armenia-Turkey relations, because it serves as signal to the public. This also explains our inability to wait too long. There has to be a reasonable time to receive response from our political counterparts as to how they see the normalization of Armenia-Turkey relations and if they are going to display political will to have these protocols ratified by the Turkish parliament. This proves relevance of the President's statement that a lot depends on the authorities as their behavior will be shaping public opinion.

We are given a history-making opportunity to lead our societies, because we are sure that this is the only right way. It is with public sentiment that the approach of business elite to Armenian-Turkish relations is formed. It is extremely important, what expectations the business entities have and based on these expectations they will be ready to make investment. It's not a secret that existing risks are always considered before a large-scale investment is made. These risks are

not only economic, but also political. It is not accidental our country rating, its solvency for all international organizations has an economic meaning, based on which we appear on the world financial map. These ratings include political risk factors, which are of significant importance to business entities. Why did I bring up this notion? Because I believe that irrespective of political developments, there should also be public perception, public progress, and the healthy elements of our countries should guide our societies and spread their viewpoints. And of course, we have a lot to do to support these forces. Otherwise, these forces might become minority, and our economic, as well as social and cultural relations will be unable to progress. There is also a second opinion in the social dimension, which implies that the societies themselves should influence the political authorities, and the societies should form such a climate in which political authorities would have no alternative but to ratify the protocols. I think, of course, that this is the right way to go, though a very time-consuming one.

I am confident that sooner or later Armenian-Turkish relations will improve, because closed borders between neighboring countries are absurd in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and political authorities will find themselves in an unenviable situation should they get left behind as the world progresses. Political authorities should lead us, and not just follow developments. That's why, bearing this in mind, we should simultaneously work both in the political field and in developing the relevant social environment, to assist politicians in terms of positive solutions.

The third dimension is the regional and international dimension, how the world perceives the situation. And in this respect we should note that Turkish and Armenian authorities have a unique opportunity, since it is very rare that all players in the global political arena have a similar approach. We must take advantage of this unique opportunity, so that in the future we wouldn't have to just learn a history lesson, read textbooks and be no better than when we started. We have a unique opportunity, and I think taking advantage of it is the right thing to do.

Dear colleagues, I want to greet our guest. As I was preparing for this meeting, I tried to look up TEPAV activities, research materials published by them, and I want to welcome Professor Sak to Armenia. I am confident that his speech as well as the debate that will take place in this room will be very helpful. We need such discussions and we are interested in promoting this kind of

direct bilateral contact between businesses. I am sure that this meeting will trigger development of economic thought in the Republic of Armenia as there are very interesting analytical materials published; there is an interesting debate as to what influence the border opening will have on our economic systems.

At the beginning of my speech I already mentioned that I agree with the statements of the US Ambassador in the Republic of Armenia. I agree with those statements from the economic standpoint. Given the existing fear that this could be destructive to our society, I think that these discussions will provide helpful materials and ideas to dismiss those doubts; I am confident that our economy will benefit from economic integration, Turkey's economy will benefit, and our two nations will benefit.

I want to greet one more time our Turkish colleagues to the Republic of Armenia. Welcome.