

Erdogan's Adviser Bagis Sends Letter To U.S. Legislators

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ANKARA - Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's foreign policy adviser Egemen Bagis has sent a letter to members of the U.S. House of Representatives.

In his letter, Bagis stressed that good relations with the United States constituted as a basic principle of Turkey's foreign policy.

Noting that as allies and partners, Turkey and the United States had a long-standing and robust strategic cooperation on regional and global issues, Bagis wrote, "our cooperation is driven by our shared vision and by our joint interests, based on deep-rooted common values."

Bagis indicated, "given the current regional and global challenges, Turkish-US relations are more important than ever. Our relations are based on strong foundations and we are mutually determined against multi-dimensional threats."

The letter continues, "as Chairman of the Turkish-U.S. Inter-Parliamentary Friendship Caucus of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, it is my duty to uphold the strong ties between our countries. Similarly, it is my responsibility to act against threats that may hurt our relations, disrupt our friendly ties and that may unnecessarily enrage the Turkish public opinion against our good ally, the USA. It is with this sense of duty that I am addressing this letter to you on a matter which is of great sensitivity to the Turkish people and of importance to our relations."

"We understand some members of the U.S. Congress have submitted two similar draft resolutions. (H. Res. 316 introduced on June 14, 2005 and H. Res. 195 introduced on June 29, 2005) This has caused great disappointment and concern in Turkey. The draft resolutions as they stand contain misinformation, baseless allegations, and false accusations against my country," wrote Bagis in his letter.

-"TERRIBLE POLITICAL MISCALCULATIONS"

Bagis indicated, "it also misrepresents a controversial chapter of Turkish-Armenian relations at a time when our government, led by

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan is taking positive steps towards our neighbor Armenia. Tragic events of 1915 were triggered by a terrible political miscalculation of the Armenian citizens of the Ottoman Empire. Encouraged by the Czarist Russia's imperial policy of capturing Anatolia and reaching the warm waters of the Mediterranean, Ottoman Armenians allowed themselves to serve as the fifth column of Russia in Turkey. As a result they rebelled against the central government, triggered a civil war and paid a terrible price."

-BUSH ALSO SUPPORTS ERDOGAN'S PROPOSAL"

Bagis went on saying, "the events of 1915 cannot be labeled as 'genocide'. Primarily, such a liberal usage of this terrible word is an insult to Holocaust, which is the gravest crime against humanity. Turkey has always maintained that parliaments and other political fora are the most inappropriate venues to discuss and pass judgments on controversial historic periods. History is a discipline that should be left to the historians. In order to shed light on this controversial historic issue, the Turkish Government has opened all its archives to researchers. Furthermore, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has proposed the establishment of a study group of Turkish and Armenian historians to work study together on the events of 1915. The proposal not only covers the archives of Turkey and Armenia but also requires unbiased research in the archives of all relevant countries, including Russia. Then the plan is to share the conclusions with the international public. Prime Minister Erdogan's proposal was much appreciated and supported by President Bush."

"Genocide is the most vicious crime against humanity. Accusing a nation with genocide is a very serious act. Any such act comes with a responsibility to prove such an accusation and rest it on historical facts and international legality. We do not wish the U.S. Congress running a judgment based on one-sided allegations," stated Bagis.

-HISTORIANS SHOULD ANALYSE-

Bagis went on saying, "Turks and Armenians have lived in peace for over eight centuries in Anatolia. The Armenian community, dispersed throughout the Ottoman territories lived as loyal and, in certain aspects, as privileged citizens of the Ottoman Empire. They served as ministers, generals, ambassadors, governors, commercial envoys and in similar other capacities. They were not subject to discrimination in any shape or form."

The letter continued, "towards the end of the 19th century, the 'Great Powers' of the time began regarding the Armenians as an important tool of manipulation against the Ottomans. Their aim was to accelerate the destruction of the Ottoman Empire. These powers promised the Armenians a state in Eastern Anatolia where paradoxically the Armenian citizens were only a minority. As a result of the provocations of 'Great Powers', various Armenian bands began to organize from the 1880s and onwards. These armed militia staged rebellions in various provinces and launched an ethnic cleansing campaign. They were trying to force mass immigration of the local population and to alter the demographic structure these regions. Their methods were massacres and harassment of the Turks and other Muslims. The start of World War I and the entry of the Ottoman state into the War against the Allied Powers was seen as a great opportunity by the extremist Armenians. They revolted and collaborated with the invading Russian army and other foreign forces. As a fifth column of the Russian occupation, Armenian bandits attacked the Ottoman troops and disrupted the supply routes. Under these circumstances, the Ottoman government informed the Armenian Patriarch, Armenian Members of Parliament and other prominent Armenians that if these activities were to continue, the government would have to take defensive measures. Armenian activities, however, continued unabated. In the face of these enormous internal and external threats, the Ottoman Government, in May 1915 resorted to a defensive internal security measure, which any country facing a similar situation would take. Again, the Ottoman government was facing an armed rebellion by its own citizens who happened to be members of a certain ethnic group and they were collaborating with a foreign belligerent. The Ottoman government adopted the Relocation Law to transfer its Armenian citizens living in the war zone to the southern territories of the Empire. The Armenian citizens had been informed well in advance about this decision and their transfer started after necessary preparations. Meanwhile, Armenian citizens living outside the war zone were excluded from this resettlement process. Thus, some 200,000 Armenian citizens living in Istanbul, Edirne, Kutahya, Aydin and Izmir were not affected. The law in question envisaged every precaution to ensure the security of the Armenian citizens during the transfer, first and foremost, the safety of their lives and protection of their assets. The Ottoman central government instructed the local authorities to take the necessary security and other measures for the orderly relocation of the Armenian citizens."

"Relevant documents about these circulars are available in the Ottoman

archives. Despite these measures, war conditions, and local ethnic animosities prompted attacks against the Armenian convoys during the transfer process. Due to the limitations of the ongoing World War I, lack of food supplies and other relief material, as well as harsh climate and epidemics took their toll on the population. The relocation was suspended in November 1915. In early 1916 it was brought to an end. After the war the Ottoman Government issued a decree, allowing the previously relocated Armenian citizens return to their places of origin. According to a report prepared by the Armenian Patriarchate, -and this document is in the U.S. archives- 644,900 Armenians returned to their places of origin, as a result. In the meantime, some 1,390 people were tried in Ottoman courts for attacking the Armenian convoys and for related criminal acts. Many were convicted, some with death penalty. At this point, we need to ask: If the Ottoman government had intended to annihilate its Armenian citizens, why would it prosecute civilians and officials for mistreatment of Armenian convoys and why would it later allow the Armenians to return to their towns?"

"According to 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide only a competent tribunal can determine whether genocide is committed or not. As underlined by the same Convention, the tribunal in charge is either the tribunal of the State in the territories of which the act was committed or an international penal tribunal as may have jurisdiction with respect to those Contracting Parties which have accepted its jurisdiction. 1948 UN Convention does not grant any competence to national or international parliaments for the recognition or affirmation of the crime of genocide. Since so far Armenian genocide claims have never been ascertained in any competent court ruling it would be highly erroneous to talk about an international recognition of the so-called Armenian genocide. Again, the above-mentioned attributions to the UN documents are a poor attempt to add some air of legitimacy to the unfounded, biased and one-sided allegations. Again, if a tragedy took place in Eastern Anatolia in 1915, it was due to a tragic political miscalculation by a certain ethnic group against the central government. The result was a civil war which should be analyzed by historians and not by legislators," wrote Bagis.

Bagis added, "I hope my letter will create another opportunity for you to reexamine the content of the draft resolution H.Res. 316 from a wider perspective. That perspective is the Turkish-US relations. The adoption of these resolutions would not facilitate our efforts to improve Turkish-Armenian relations since the Armenian Government

and Diaspora will feel further encouraged in pursuing the policy of making political gains on this disputed period of history."