SERZH SARGSYAN'S RECENT CONTACTS WITH THE EUROPEAN PEOPLE'S PARTY

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On October 21, Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan took the rostrum at a congress of the European Peoples Party (EPP) in Madrid, Spain, which was presided over by EPP President Joseph Daul and also attended by presidents of the European Council and the European Commission, Donald Tusk and Jean-Claude Juncker.

In his speech, President Sargsyan, referring to the Council of the European Unions approval to open negotiations on a new, legally binding and overarching agreement with Armenia, said that Armenia-EU relations have reached a new milestone and the negotiations will elevate Armenia-EU relations. He also spoke about the democratization process in his country.

Sargsyan also said: Armenian nation highly values the EPP contribution to the adoption of the European Parliament resolution to condemn the Armenian Genocide, as well as the adoption of the resolution dedicated to the Armenian Genocide Centennial titled The Armenian Genocide and European Values by the EPP Political Assembly. They came to prove that the European Peoples Party, as the largest political group represented in the European Parliament and the force that advances the European identity and idea, notwithstanding the most diverse set of political considerations, is committed to the protection of the fundamental human rights.[1]

The next day, October 22, President Sargsyan and EPP President Joseph Daul came together in a separate meeting and discussed EU-Armenia relations and further development of cooperation with the EPP and current situation with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

In the meeting, President Sargsyan noted that he recalled with warmth Joseph Dauls visit to Armenia and participation in the events commemorating the Armenian Genocide by which according to Serzh Sargsyan, EPP President reaffirmed his and his partys commitment to universal human values on which European integration is based. President Serzh Sargsyan also thanked the EPP President and EPP representatives for the resolution The Armenian Genocide and European Values.[2]

The European Peoples Party

The EPP is a center-right and conservative European political party founded in 1976 by Christian democtratic parties. The EPP is the largest political organisation in Europe with 75 member-parties from 40 countries, the most heads of state and government (both, EU and non-EU), 14 European Commissioners (including the President Jean-Claude Juncker), and the largest Group in the European Parliament.[3] President of the European Council Donald Tusk is also a member of the EPP.

According to EPP statute, there are three kinds of membership: full members, associate members and observers. Full members are parties from EU member states. Associate members are parties from EU candidate countries and states belonging to the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). The remaining center-right parties are observer Member parties.

There are three Armenian parties which are aligned with the EPP: Republican Party of Armenia (President Serzh Sargsyan is its leader), the Rule of Law Party and the Heritage Party. All of them are observer members of the EPP.

On the other hand, currently there is no Turkish political party which is a member of the EPP. In 2005, The Justice and Development Party became an observer member but left the EPP in 2013 to join the Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists (AECR).

Armenias relations with the EPP and EPPs influence within the European Parliament

The EPP is the largest political group in the European Parliament. Therefore it wields considerable influence within the Parliaments decision-making. Furthermore, its members hold leadership positions in many of the Parliament's committees and delegations.

It is therefore not surprising that Armenia exerts every effort to maintain close relations with the EPP. As seen above, President Sargsyan attaches great importance to attend EPP meetings as the leader of the Republican Party of Armenia. In turn, EPP favors Armenia on many issues, especially on the Armenian genocide allegations and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

For instance, EU-Armenia Friendship Group and the Nagorno-Karabakh Group in the European Parliament are groups headed by EPP members. These group are known for being supporters of the Armenian genocide narrative and promoters of the so-called democratic republic in Nagorno-Karabakh.

On 3 March 2015, the EPP adopted a resolution titled The Armenian Genocide and European Values condemning genocidal acts against the Armenian people by the Ottoman Empire and various regimes of Turkey in 1894-1923, dispossession of the homeland of the Armenians and the destruction of the Armenian heritage. The resolution invites Turkey to face history and recognize the reality of the Armenian Genocide and the dispossession of

the Armenians, to make redemption and make restitution to Armenians.[4]

Furthermore, the EPP, also in solidarity with the pronouncements of the Pope, contributed to the adoption of several resolutions and reports supporting the Armenian Genocide narrative in the European Parliament, namely the Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World in 2013, European Parliament resolution of 15 April 2015 on the centenary of the Armenian Genocide, and the Resolution of the European Parliament regarding the European Commission's 2014 Turkey Progress Report.[5]

Armenia, Turkey and the EU

Especially the first half of 2015 has seen an increase in subversive pronouncements against Turkey. Since this year is the centenary of the 1915 events, Armenians spent great efforts to increase the number of countries and international organizations recognizing their claims. Despite the fact that 1915 events cannot be legally and historically characterized as genocide, several European countries and the European Parliament chose to ignore this and used the Armenian narrative as a political tool to impose pressure on Turkey. The growing fear of Islamophobia also played into the hands of Christian democrats

Such biased and religion based actions as of parties such as the EPP do not help the settlement or resolution of the Turkish-Armenian controversy. They hardly contribute to the reconciliation between the Turks and the Armenians.

On the other hand, unfortunately these serve no purpose other than damaging Turkeys relations with EU. These actions arouses the idea that the Europe is against the Turkeys accession to the EU and damages Turkeys vision of Europe.

Furthermore, Europes efforts to establish close relations with Armenia despite its choice to align with Russia gives Armenia the freedom to play both the EU and Russia as well as the USA. EU also allows Armenia to get away with its occupation of Azerbaijani territories without having to deal with its consequences. This unprincipled double standard approach undermines the credibility and moral values of the EU.[6]

Turkey is not against the further development of ties between Armenia and the EU. Turkey would like Armenia to be free of its historical bondages and become close to the West. Such a development will help Armenia to establish closer ties with Turkey which could serve as a bridge between Armenia and Europe.

Turkey expects from the EU and all of its institutions to abandon its biased and one-sided attitude, to stop distorting history regarding the events of 1915 and to contribute in a positive manner to Turkey-EU and Turkey-Armenia relations. It expects from European countries to adopt a fair and unbiased approach to the events of 1915 and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict on the basis of international law.

The fact that several countries have recently backtracked from their negative stance against Turkey regarding the events of 1915 are positive developments. The recent

efforts by the governments of Austria and Luxembourg indicate that they attach importance to their relations with Turkey.[7] Furthermore, the recent momentum in relations between the EU and Turkey need nourishing for the future of Turkey-EU relations.

[1] http://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2015/10/21/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-takes-part-in-EPP-Congress/

[2] http://armenpress.am/eng/news/823005/president-serzh-sargsyan-and-epp%E2%80%99s-joseph-daul-touch-upon-current-stage-of-nagorno-karabakh-conflict.html

[3] http://www.epp.eu/about-us/history/

[4] For further details, see. Ömer Engin Lütem, The Resolution of the European Peoples Party, *AVIM*, http://www.avim.org.tr/yorumnotlarduyurular/en/THE-RESOLUTION-OF-THE-EUROPEAN-PEOPLE%E2%80%99S-PARTY---Omer-Engin-LUTEM/3939

[5] For detailed information, see. Ömer Engin Lütem, Olaylar ve Yorumlar, Ermeni Araştırmaları, issue 51 (2015), pp. 117-132

[6] Ali Murat Taşkent, EU to Start New Negotiations with Armenia on A New Agreement, *AVIM*, http://www.avim.org.tr/analiz/en/EU-TO-START-NEW-NEGOTIATIONS-WITH-ARMENIA-ON-A-NEW-AGREEMENT---Ali-Murat-TASKENT/4226

[7] Ömer Engin Lütem, Austria And Luxemburg: Efforts To Repair Relations, *AVIM*, http://www.avim.org.tr/yorumnotlarduyurular/en/AUSTRIA-AND-LUXEMBURG:-EFFORTS-TO-REPAIR-RELATIONS---Omer-Engin-LUTEM/4215

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