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THE ARMENIAN QUESTION AFTER THE HOLIDAYS III

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Has President Kocharyan Rejected the Proposal of a Commission of Historians and President Sarkisian Accepted It? Armenias Lragir, a newspaper having a Dashnak tendency, put forth on 25 August 2011, based on a WikiLeaks document, that President Kocharyan rejected Prime Minister Erdoğans proposal in 2005 to set up a Commission of Historians while President Sarkisian accepted the same proposal in 2008. This meant that President Kocharyan rejected discussing the issue of genocide with Turkey, while President Sarkisian accepted it. According to extreme nationalist Armenian circles, since discussing the genocide truth was some kind of a betrayal, President Sarkisian was put in a difficult situation. The Spokesman of the Presidency, Armen Arzumyan, in an unusual manner, sent a letter to the Lragir newspaper in which he rejected the statements that Sarkisian accepted an issue which Kocharyan had rejected and wanted this mistake to be corrected. During the signing of the Turkey-Armenia Protocols in October 2009, the Dashnak Party had withdrawn from coalition. In the following period, it was observed that relations between the Dashnaks and Sarkisian and the Republican Party of which he headed had deteriorated. Meanwhile, hostility towards Sarkisian within the section of the Diaspora who supported the Dashnaks increased so much that the West American Central Committee of the Dashnak Party issued a declaration expressing that it would not attend the reception to be held on honor of Sarkisian who was to come to Los Angeles for the ceremonies for Armenias independence. The declaration said we cannot honor a president who is ready to hand over the territories of NKR and who has led Armenia along the humiliating and defeatist path for normalization of relations with Turkey. Then, a petition was opened to signature to forbid President Sarkisians entrance into the US. We should note that even the Dashnak Party in Armenia has opposed this declaration which also displays the degree of how extreme the Diaspora Armenians could be. Behind these events lie the Presidential elections to be held in Armenia one and a half years later. The Turkey-Armenia Protocols, which President Sarkisian had strongly defended in the beginning, not reaching any result, had highly worn out the President. Moreover, the economic crisis which had affected many countries worldwide had also negatively affected Armenia. In this situation, unless there is a change in the conditions, it is likely that Sarkisian could lose the presidential elections. That is why the presidential elections became so important and whether former President Kocharyan in particular would become a candidate or not started being discussed. It could be understood that by alleging that Sarkisian has accepted the proposal for a Commission of Historians which Kocharyan had rejected, the Dashnaks want to weaken Sarkisian and support the possible

candidacy of Kocharyan. Has Sarkisian really accepted what Kocharyan had rejected? By sending a letter to President Kocharyan on 13 April 2005, Prime Minister Erdoğan had written we invite your country to join us in forming a group comprised of historians and other specialists of our two countries to investigate the developments and events related to the 1915 period by researching all the archives of not only Turkey and Armenia but all relevant third countries and report their findings to the international community. In his response to this letter on 25 April, President Kocharyan had not directly replied to the proposal of investigating the developments and events related to 1915 and had given primacy to Turkey-Armenia relations by suggesting the establishment of normal relations between the two countries without preconditions. Furthermore, he has said that within that context, an intergovernmental commission may be formed to discuss any and all outstanding issues between our two nations with the aim of resolving them and coming to an understanding. The conclusion drawn from this is that although President Kocharyan has not accepted Prime Minister Erdoğans proposal in its complete form, he also has not entirely rejected it. Prime Minister Erdoğans proposal is only for historical events to be investigated. However, President Kocharyan has suggested for all suspended problems between the two countries to be discussed and surely, historical events or in other words the genocide allegations also exist among them. On the other hand, shortly after being elected as president, President Sarkisian has said that historical events could also be discussed with Turkey and in response to the objections raised by the Dashnaks and other extremists, he has expressed that these kinds of discussions cannot change the truth of genocide. After it became clear that Turkey would not ratify the Protocols unless positive developments take place towards the resolution of the Karabakh conflict, rumors that the Sub-Commission on the Historical Dimension existing within the second Protocol will not address the genocide allegations have increased and eventually in an interview given to the German Der Spiegel Journal in April 2010, President Sarkisian has gone as far as stating that the creation of a Historical Commission would make sense only if Turkey finally confesses its guilt. Whether he truly believes this or not is another matter. Tomorrow: The US Congress and the Appointment of Ambassadors

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