



US congressional committee approves resolution on Armenian genocide

Fri, Mar 05 2010 09:57 CET | by Kent Klein | 432 Views | 2 Comments

A resolution calling the World War I -era killing of Armenians genocide has narrowly passed a key committee of the U.S. Congress. Turkey has responded by recalling its ambassador from Washington for consultations.

Over the objections of the Obama administration, the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee (Thursday) passed the nonbinding resolution by a vote of 23 to 22.

The legislation declares that the killing of Armenians during the Ottoman Empire was genocide.

Almost immediately, Turkey's government ordered its ambassador to the United States to return to Ankara for consultations.

U.S. President Barack Obama had made a campaign promise in 2008 to declare the killings genocide. But the U.S. has been working with Turkey and Armenia in their reconciliation efforts, which White House officials say have made progress. The administration urged the committee not to offend Turkey by passing the resolution.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told reporters in San Jose, Costa Rica (Thursday) passage of the resolution could disrupt that reconciliation process.

"Both President Obama and I have made clear, both last year and again this year, that we do not believe any action by the Congress is appropriate, and we oppose it," said Hillary Clinton.

Turkey and Armenia signed an agreement in October to normalize relations, but Turkey's Parliament has yet to ratify it. Shortly before the committee vote, White House press secretary Robert Gibbs said the administration prefers to work with the two countries toward reconciliation.

"Through some very tough diplomatic work by Secretary Clinton, we have made progress to the point at which we are on the cusp of normalization," said Gibbs. "The president believes that passage of these protocols in the Turkish parliament will make it that much easier."

Secretary Clinton spoke with the committee chairman, Democrat Howard Berman, on Wednesday and urged him to cancel the hearing or vote against the resolution.

Berman did neither. At Thursday's hearing, he said the U.S.-Turkish relationship would remain strong regardless of the outcome of the committee vote.

"I believe the Turks, however deep their dismay today, fundamentally agree that the U.S.-Turkish alliance is simply too important to get sidetracked by a nonbinding resolution passed by the House of Representatives," said Howard Berman.

Berman and other supporters of the resolution said the U.S. has a moral obligation to speak out against genocide, to prevent it from happening again.

Republican Congressman Dan Burton opposed the resolution, pointing out that a U.S. Air Force base in Turkey is vital to American military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Knowing that we may have to take some kind of military action down the road against maybe even Iran, we need to have as many friends in that part of the world as possible," said Dan Burton.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi has not said whether the genocide resolution will go to the full House of Representatives for a vote.

The Foreign Affairs Committee approved a similar genocide resolution in 2007. After intensive pressure from then-President George W. Bush, the measure was not brought to the House floor.

Armenians say the killings of as many as 1.5 million Armenians between 1915 and 1923 were the result of an orchestrated campaign by the Ottoman Turks.

Turkish officials strongly reject the genocide label. They say far fewer Armenians died and that they were killed in a civil war in which Turks also died.

Source: VOANews.com