

On March 2, 2010 the CSIS Turkey Project hosted a delegation from the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA). The parliamentary delegation led by the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee Murat Mercan of the Justice and Development Party (JDP) also included Şaban Dişli and Abdullah Çalışkan of the JDP, Şükrü Elekdağ of the Republican People's Party (RPP) and Mithat Melen of the Nationalist Action Party (NAP). Their remarks focused on the importance of Turkish-American relations and the implications of the upcoming resolution in the House Foreign Affairs Committee seeking to declare the events of 1915 to be a 'genocide.'

Murat Mercan gave an extensive review of Ankara's close cooperation with Washington on regional and strategic issues. He described Turkey's new regional foreign policy which seeks peaceful cooperation with all of its neighbors, including those in the Caucasus. Mercan said that the three most important issues in the present dialogue between Turkey and Armenia were: the normalization of diplomatic relations; the opening of the common border and the resolution of the dispute over how to describe the events of 1915. Mercan claimed that the normalization protocols signed by Turkey and Armenia in October 2009 provided the means to a solution of this issue with a joint historical commission made up of scholars representing both Turkey and Armenia. He said that the two countries should re-dedicate themselves to this "subcommittee on history" with the intention of "reaching a common understanding on those issues." Mercan said that it was unfortunate that the House Foreign Affairs Committee had decided to take up a non-binding resolution on the matter as this was going to be "very detrimental to the [normalization] process."

Şükrü Elekdağ argued that discussion of the Genocide Resolution in Congress was "against the interests of the US, Turkey and Armenia" and only served the interest of "radical" Armenian organizations. He noted that unlike previous American presidents, President Barack Obama and his administration had not so far lobbied against the resolution. In his view, this could only be explained as an attempt by the Obama administration to pressure the TGNA to ratify the protocols with Armenia. Elekdağ emphasized that it is impossible for the TGNA to ratify the protocols without a prior rapprochement between Armenia and Azerbaijan. He quoted Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's speech at the Azerbaijani Parliament in which he stated that the border between Turkey and Armenia was closed because of the occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh by Armenians and that it could not be reopened until that dispute was resolved. In conclusion, Elekdağ stated that rather than taking what he characterized as "coercive persuasion methods" against Turkey, the Obama administration should instead lobby against the resolution in order to preserve the Turkish-American bilateral relationship.

Mithat Melen recounted the history of his own family in Van in Southeastern Turkey which had been forced to relocate because of the events of World War I. However, he said that it was important not to dwell on past sufferings. He said that the primary motivation behind the resolution was to appease local constituencies in the US and votes gained by such a resolution were not worth the damage to the US-Turkish relationship. He emphasized that US-Turkish relations were particularly important now because of the role that Turkey was playing in many important issues the US faces in the region, including Iraq, Afghanistan and energy security. He also noted the ongoing contacts between Turkey and Armenia and between Turks and Armenians, especially in commerce.