

**France's Sarkozy warns Turkey over 'genocide' denial**  
**Reuters**  
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YEREVAN, Oct 7 — President Nicolas Sarkozy warned Turkey today that it might soon become illegal in France to deny that the mass killing of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire in 1915 was genocide.

Sarkozy, in Armenia, his first stop on a visit to the Caucasus, called on Turkey to make a "gesture of reconciliation" and recognize the killings as genocide.

If it does not, he said, France "will consider it must go further to amend its legislation to penalise this denial".

Sarkozy warned the measures could be adopted in "a very brief" timeframe but said the comments were not an ultimatum.

The challenge by the president of France — which opposes Turkey's bid to join the European Union — drew an angry rebuttal from Ankara today.

Turkey's Foreign Minister said France should confront its colonial past before giving lessons to others. The French "do not have the right to teach Turkey a history lesson or call for Turkey to face its history," Ahmet Davutoglu told a news conference.

Armenia, backed by many historians and world parliaments, says some 1.5 million Armenians died during the upheaval that accompanied World War I, and calls it genocide.

Ankara rejects the term genocide and says large numbers of both Christian Armenians and Muslim Turks were killed.

Sarkozy courted some 50,000 Armenian diaspora votes in France and angered Turkey before his election in 2007 by backing legislation that would prosecute those who denied the deaths were genocide. The measure was rejected by the French lower house of parliament.

Sarkozy was also to visit energy-producing Azerbaijan and Georgia, a transit nation for Caspian Sea oil and gas headed for Europe, during his trip to the ex-Soviet states of the Caucasus.

He urged Armenia and Azerbaijan to resolve their dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh, a mainly Armenian-populated enclave in Azerbaijan, which led to war in the 1990s.

Armenian-backed separatists wrested Nagorno-Karabakh from Azeri control after the Soviet Union collapsed, in a conflict that killed 30,000 people and drove 1 million from their homes.

France, Russia and the United States have led years of international efforts to mediate a peace deal after a 1994 ceasefire.

Two Azeri soldiers and an Armenian were killed in a skirmish on the ceasefire line on Wednesday.

The conflict prompted Turkey to close its border with Armenia in 1993 in solidarity with Muslim ally Azerbaijan and its refusal to term the Ottoman Empire killings genocide is now the main obstacle to renewing diplomatic relations.

"The time has come to take the risk of peace," Sarkozy said at a meeting with Armenian President Serzh Sarksyan.

"Armenians, Azeris and Turks: You must choose this path. There is no other, it is the path of peace," he said.

Sarkozy's brief stop in Georgia later today was expected to evoke memories of his role mediating a ceasefire that ended its five-day war with Russia in 2008. — Reuters

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