

TURKEY-ARMENIA DIALOGUE SERIES:  
**BREAKING  
THE VICIOUS CIRCLE**  
TESEV-CAUCASUS INSTITUTE JOINT REPORT



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# Table of Contents

TESEV'S PREFACE, 5

INTRODUCTION, 7

I. THE IMPACT OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS ON TURKEY-ARMENIA RELATIONS, 9

A. The Five Day War in the South Caucasus, 9

B. Turkey's Caucasus Stability Platform Initiative, 10

II. DOMESTIC FACTORS AFFECTING TURKEY-ARMENIA RELATIONS, 12

A. Armenian Position, 12

B. Turkish Position, 13

III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, 15

BIBLIOGRAPHY, 17

ABOUT THE AUTHORS, 19



## TESEV's Preface

This report follows on from the dialogue series seminar, organized by the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) and the Caucasus Institute (CI), on Turkey-Armenia relations in November 2008. It summarizes and expands the findings of the seminar, which was designed to contribute to the debate regarding normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia.

Bilateral relations and regional dynamics had been quite animated during the year 2008. The Five Day War between Georgia and Russia triggered all interested parties in the region to start re-evaluating the status-quo in the Caucasus. The visit of Turkey's President Abdullah Gül to Yerevan signified momentum in Turkey-Armenia relations, as it was the first time any Turkish leader had been to Armenia. This was even more significant in that it took place soon after the Russia-Georgian hostility.

We, as TESEV, have been working on the Turkish-Armenian dialogue intensively in recent years. This seminar, organized jointly with the Caucasus Institute, is a part of the dialogue series. It discussed mutual relations in the light of regional developments with a diverse group of participants from Turkey, Armenia, Karabakh and EU countries. As summarized in this report, there is no doubt that the recent crisis had implications in the wider Caucasus, and that it will continue to. In this respect, it was a defining moment providing an opportunity to all of the included parties to revise their policies towards the region.

Another important outcome of the seminar reflected in this report was the importance of domestic politics in both countries, Turkey and Armenia. It came out as one of the strongest suggestions that this momentum is too valuable to waste. The civil society should continue to stay engaged as well, as the official contact between the state officials.

It is again underlined in the report that policies and expectations should be realistic. No individual is looking for a miracle; rather an established rapprochement. The report covering these matters includes a recommendations section which offers proposals for Turkey, Armenia and other international actors. Therefore, we believe this report should be taken into consideration by the governments of Turkey and Armenia and the included third parties, such as the EU.

Finally, we would like to thank all of the staff of the Caucasus Institute and TESEV Foreign Policy Program for their efforts in the organization of the seminar, and for their contributions to this publication. We would also like to extend our gratitude to the Turkey Office of Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Black Sea Trust Fund and TESEV High Advisory Board for their generous support in the realization of this event and report.

This report, like all the other publications of TESEV, represents only the views of the authors, not the collective views of TESEV.

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## Introduction

Armenia's declaration of independence on September 23, 1991 was the fulfillment of a long-standing aspiration for the Armenian people, who had for generations dreamed of attaining statehood.<sup>1</sup> Turkey's initial reaction towards Armenian independence was quite positive, and Ankara immediately recognized this new neighbouring country on December 16, 1991. However, diplomatic ties have never been established between the two states throughout the past seventeen years. Armenian political leaders and government officials have declared on all occasions that they do not have any preconditions to normalizing relations with Turkey.<sup>2</sup> Turkish authorities have also expressed their desire to normalize relations with Armenia, but they have raised some concerns as well, such as the peaceful resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict; recognition of the Turkish-Armenian border and the Treaty of Moscow; and putting an end to genocide campaigns.<sup>3</sup>

The concerns of the Turkish side should not be evaluated as 'official' preconditions to normalizing relations with Armenia; rather as recognized, acute problems that complicate Turkish-Armenian relations. These three issues are frequently used by the nationalist milieus in Turkey to legitimize the current deadlock between Turkey and Armenia. On the other hand, in the course of the latest rapprochement process between the two countries, the possibility that Turkey could abandon these 'preconditions' for good relations with Armenia was fervently discussed in both countries.<sup>4,5</sup> Among these issues, the frozen Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan seems the most serious problem. Up until now, Turkey has officially linked the normalization process of Turkish-Armenian relations to a possible peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Even though this has attracted some criticism, the fact that Azerbaijan is a kin state to Turkey legitimizes this policy in the eyes of the Turkish public.

It would be appropriate to argue that Turkish-Armenian relations have gained momentum in the past couple of years. The restoration works and reopening of the ancient Akhtamar Church<sup>6</sup> in April 2007 were seen as a good-will gesture between Armenia and Turkey. The visit of Armenia's Deputy Culture Minister Gagik Gyurjyan with a delegation of officials, historians, and experts to Turkey for the opening ceremony was surely a positive step in the normalization process. This gesture was then followed by spontaneous public demonstrations in Turkey demanding 'truth and freedom' after the assassination of Hrant Dink, a journalist of Armenian origin. More than a hundred thousand protesters took to the streets shouting: "We are all Hrant Dink, we are all Armenians". This courageous motto demonstrated the desire of thousands of Turkish people to empathize with Armenians who have been generally depicted as the enemy who stabbed the Turks in the back. Even though nationalist milieus in Turkey have demonstrated their annoyance at the usage of the "we are all Armenians" slogan, this empathy with Hrant Dink was very much welcomed by the Armenians both in Armenia and in the diaspora.

Supported by these events, the turning point in Turkish-Armenian relations came with the Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan's public invitation to his Turkish counterpart, President Abdullah Gül, to attend a 2010 World Cup

1 Aybars Görgülü, "Turkey-Armenia Relations: An Eternal Deadlock?" *Caucasus Neighborhood: Turkey and the South*, Alexander Iskandaryan (ed.), Yerevan: Caucasus Institute, pp. 124 (March 2009)

2 "Armenia has no preconditions to normalize ties with Turkey." *International Herald Tribune Newspaper* (June 25, 2007) (<http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2007/06/25/europe/EU-GEN-Turkey-Armenia.php>)

3 Rachel Goshgarian, "Breaking the Stalemate: Turkish-Armenian Relations in the 21st Century", *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 4, (Winter 2005).

4 Stepan Grigoryan, "Could Turkey abandon preconditions for relations with Armenia?" *Radio Free Europe Website* (September 8, 2008) (<http://www.rferl.org/content/Turkey.Preconditions.Relations.With.Armenia/1197132.html>)

5 Mensur Akgün, "Does Azeri encumbrance on Turkish-Armenian relations has disappeared?" *Referans Newspaper*. (July 23, 2008) (<http://www.referansgazetesi.com/haber.aspx?HBR.KOD=102345&YZR.KOD=11>)

6 This ancient Armenian Church is situated on a small island in the Lake Van in Eastern Turkey

qualifying match between the Armenian and Turkish football teams hosted in Yerevan in September 2008. Even though President Gül's positive answer came only after a long consultation process, his trip to Armenia has raised expectations after decades devoid of official relations between the two countries.<sup>7</sup> President Sargsyan made the official invitation while he was meeting with the Armenian diaspora in Moscow. Many believed there was a reason why the invitation was made public in Moscow, and it is argued to have signified a change in Russia's policy with regard to Turkish-Armenian normalization. For the first time, Russia stopped interfering with the Turkish-Armenian dialogue and even tried to promote it. According to media reports, when Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov visited Turkey in June 2008, shortly after Sargsyan announced the invitation to President Gül, Turkish-Armenian normalization was on the agenda of Lavrov's meetings with Turkish officials.

Gül's short trip to Yerevan aroused hot debates in the Turkish press as well as in the Turkish political scene. A significant number of people were skeptical about the prospects of theoretically "awakening the sleeping beauty". However Gül's historical visit attracted attention to Turkish-Armenian relations, and the public in Turkey have since started to discuss the paralyzing aspects of bilateral relations, notably the genocide issue and the lack of diplomatic ties. The general impressions of Turkish journalists who visited Armenia with Gül were quite positive.<sup>8,9</sup> These first impression articles were followed by more detailed analyses on Armenia and the problems blocking Turkish-Armenian relations.<sup>10</sup> So, in a sense, through Gül's visit, Turks have discovered Armenia and Turkey's problems with this small neighboring country and were quite surprised not to have found a nation of people hating Turks and Turkey. Instead, they realized that they share a common history and culture with this humble and grieved society whose ancestors' homeland was also Anatolia for centuries long.

On the Armenian side, inviting the Turkish President to Armenia was also considered to be an appropriate and beneficial step.<sup>11</sup> This is not surprising if we take into consideration the fact that Armenia's political elites do not actively oppose the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations or the opening of the mutual border. There are of course ultra-nationalist actors in Armenia, like in Turkey, who oppose categorically the rapprochement process and express mistrust of Turkish policies. However the general atmosphere in Yerevan was quite positive during Gül's visit and Armenian officials demonstrated remarkable hospitality to their Turkish counterparts. In addition, several days before the football match, the Armenian Football Federation presented a new logo which no longer had on it the usual depiction of Mount Ararat. This action has been welcomed in Turkey and was considered as a gesture of good-will from the Armenian side.

So it can be argued that Gül's visit was crucial in terms of triggering the establishment of new dialogue channels between the two countries. As a part of these new dialogue channels, in December 2008, more than two hundred Turkish intellectuals launched an internet signature campaign offering an apology to Armenians for the terrible events of 1915. This brave initiative and the reactions that took place afterwards have once more demonstrated that the 1915 events still remain taboo in Turkey, roughly one century later. And, it has also highlighted that the normalization process will help to both sides to discuss the realities of their history.

2008 marked a turning point in Turkish-Armenian relations, resulting from domestic reasons combined with the political will of both countries and the changing geopolitical layout in the South Caucasus and the wider region due to the August 2008 war between Russia and Georgia. This report aims to analyze the impact of these regional and domestic developments on Turkey-Armenia relations, and the final part of the study will be dedicated to the joint recommendations to decision makers both in Turkey and Armenia.

7 Aybars Görgülü, "Turkey – Armenia Relations: A Vicious Circle" TESEV Foreign Policy Analysis Series-8, Istanbul. (November 2008) pp.41

8 Hasan Cemal, "Gül and Sargsyan: We've made a good start" Milliyet Newspaper. (September 7, 2008) (<http://www.milliyet.com.tr/default.aspx?aType=YazarDetay&ArticleID=987800&AuthorID=63>)

9 Fehmi Koru, "While watching the historical match..." Yeni Şafak Newspaper. (September 7, 2008) (<http://yenisafak.com.tr/yazarlar/?t=07.09.2008&y=FehmiKoru>)

10 Gökçe Aytülü, "Two different Armenia between two mountains" Referans Newspaper. (November 11, 2008) (<http://www.referansgazetesi.com/haber.aspx?HBR.KOD=111651>)

11 Interview with Hayk Demoyan, "Inviting the Turkish President to Armenia was a correct step" Public Radio of Armenia. (September 3, 2008) <http://www.armradio.am/news/?part=pol&id=13340>

# I) The impact of regional developments on Turkey-Armenia relations

## A) THE FIVE DAY WAR IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

The Five Day War between Russia and Georgia in August 2008 overhauled the entire regional background and created a new status quo in the South Caucasus. The war led to the deportation of ethnic Georgians who had lived in villages and enclaves scattered throughout South Ossetia. After the war, the leadership of breakaway South Ossetia seized control of the entire territory of the former Soviet South Ossetian Autonomous District, including the region<sup>12</sup> that had been under Georgian control since 1992.<sup>13</sup> As a repercussion of the war, Abkhazian troops assisted by the Russian army also took full control of the former Soviet Autonomous Abkhazia, including the Kodori Gorge that had been under Georgian control in recent years. As a result, the two secessionist regions have become stronger and more capable of self-defense. Finally, on August 26, Russia recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and announced that it would station its military bases there. A document known as the Medvedev-Sarkozy agreement<sup>14</sup> effectively legitimized the situation, and the presence of Russian troops in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.<sup>15</sup>

By the start of autumn 2008, the outcomes of the war were clear.<sup>16</sup> Georgia was weakened by the war and did its best to compensate for its losses, often successfully, by attracting more Western aid. Azerbaijan was concerned about the way the results of this war would reflect on the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and on the safety of its oil pipelines. Meanwhile, Armenia was trying to devise ways it could benefit from current developments.

From a medium-term perspective, Russia certainly fortified its standing in the South Caucasus by invading the land of Georgia from Gori to Tbilisi, instead of just pushing out the Georgian troops out of South Ossetia<sup>17</sup>. However, in the long-term, its damaged reputation and aggressive image may become a stumbling block for Russia's presence in the former Soviet lands.

The role of the EU in the crisis was very vivid. The French Presidency was very quick to act when compared with the EU standards. The first step was to persuade the two parties to accept a ceasefire and to convince Russia for the withdrawal of the troops. The second priority for the EU was to think about Russia's other neighbors. Brussels was clearly looking for a niche in regional politics, and for ways to institutionalize its presence in the South Caucasus. The stationing of European observers in "buffer zones" around South Ossetia and Abkhazia was the first serious EU initiative to project its political (and to some extent military) potential to the region without the direct support of NATO or the U.S., although it continues to coordinate its stance on the South Caucasus with these actors. The accession of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia to the EU Eastern Partnership in mid-December 2008 logically followed

12 Called Akhalkgori or Leningori.

13 Russia vs. Georgia: The Fallout, International Crisis Group Europe Report N.195. (August 22, 2008). pp 4.

14 A plan for withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia brokered by French President Nicolas Sarkozy, then revised and signed again by Russia and the EU delegation.

15 Press-Conference Sarkozy/ Medvedev. Permanent Mission of France at the United Nations in New York. (September 8, 2008) (<http://www.franceonu.org/spip.php?article2450>)

16 On the military outcomes of the Russia-Georgia war, see: Mikhail Barabanov, "The August War between Russia and Georgia." Moscow Defense Brief, No.3. (2008) Richard Giragosian, "Georgian Planning Flaws Led to Campaign Failure." Jane's Defense Weekly. (August 15, 2008)

17 Michael Emerson, "The Struggle for a Civilised Wider European Order." CEPS Working Document No. 307. (October 2008)

18 For expert evaluations and EC approaches to the Russia-Georgia war, see: Hans-Henning Schroder (eds.) "The Caucasus Crisis. International Perceptions and Policy Implications for Germany and Europe" German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), Research Paper N9, Berlin. (November 2008)

from the overall trend of increased institutional presence of the EU in the South Caucasus.<sup>18</sup> In addition this conflict proved to the EU splendidly that they need to develop a strategy to better engage with the region and reminded that Russia is not a state to be undermined.

Accordingly, during the EU Foreign Ministers' meeting of 10 November 2008, the decision to continue negotiations on a New EU-Russia Agreement was taken. The negotiations were launched at the EU-Russia summit in June in Khanty-Mansiisk and the first round of negotiations took place on 4 July 2008. On 1st of September the EU decided to suspend the talks with the outbreak of the conflict. The EU-Russia Summit that took place on the 14th of November in Nice ended with the result to improve relations and the EU's determination to stay engaged with Russia. It might be too early to say that all the clouds in the EU-Russia relations are dispersed but there is no doubt that the EU is working to put the relations on track after the August war.

Another major consequence of the Russia-Georgia war was the signing of the Moscow Declaration on the settlement of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh by the Presidents of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia on November 2, 2008.<sup>19</sup> The Declaration was initiated by Russia's President Medvedev, with the goal of neutralizing the negative effects that the Russia-Georgia war and Russia's recognition of the independence of Georgia's secessionist regions had had on Russia's image in the West. Russia wanted to be seen as a mediator and peace-maker in the South Caucasus. With regard to the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, the role of the Moscow Declaration was merely to set the post-war political reality down on paper, namely, the fact that the war in South Ossetia reduced the probability that warfare would resume in Nagorno-Karabakh in the short-term. Azerbaijan became increasingly aware of the Russian threat, and disappointed by Georgia's failure to win the war against its breakaway province. With oil prices going down since autumn 2008, Azerbaijan has also been concerned about its ability to continue building up its military potential at the same rate as before, and about the safety of oil pipelines running via Georgia.<sup>20</sup> The provisions of the Moscow Declaration were reiterated and updated in December 2008 in Helsinki at the 16<sup>th</sup> OSCE Ministerial Council, which made a statement on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict encouraging both sides to intensify negotiations in the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group.<sup>21</sup>

Turkey also tried to play its own hand during the war, first, by refusing permission to U.S. ships to sail to Georgia via Black Sea straits, and secondly, by proposing a new strategic platform for the South Caucasus.

The war and the changed regional balance served to accelerate the development of Turkish-Armenian relations and created new opportunities for normalization. For example, the war demonstrated the risks posed by reliance on transport and communication via Georgia, thus creating a new motive for Turkey to open the border with Armenia, in order to have an alternative route. When all communication and energy transportation projects via Georgia were suspended during the war, a number of Turkish officials, including Minister for Foreign Affairs Ali Babacan, mentioned that Armenia could become an alternative route for gas pipelines running to the West from the Caspian Sea, currently through Georgia.<sup>22</sup> So, on the whole, the war reactivated and redesigned Turkey's policy in the Caucasus.

## B) TURKEY'S CAUCASUS STABILITY PLATFORM INITIATIVE

The Caucasus Platform was presented by Prime Minister Erdoğan during his visit to Moscow on August 12, 2008. The platform was probably drafted before the war in South Ossetia, but the war presented an excellent background for its presentation. The suggested platform is quite similar to previous regional stability initiatives such as the 1990s Caucasus Home, or the Stability Pact project launched after 2000. Although the initiative has not been assessed as very realistic, in this case the process will be more important than the expected results.

By promoting the new platform with Moscow's approval, Turkey tried to play its own hand in the Caucasus, taking advantage of the potentially temporary but visible weakening of the U.S. position in the region after the Five Day War. While the EU reacted to the Turkish initiative in a generally positive way, Washington's first reaction was that

19 The full text of the Moscow Declaration: <http://www.reporter.am/go/article/2008-11-02-document-full-text-of-the-declaration-adopted-by-presidents-of-azerbaijan-armenia-and-russia-at-meiendorf-castle-near-moscow-on-november-2-2008>

20 Sergey Minasyan, "Military and Political Outcomes of the Five-Day War". 21st Century Journal, Yerevan, no 1 (9). (2009)

21 "OSCE 'revitalized' at Helsinki Ministerial Council, high-level talks on European security to continue". OSCE press-release. (December 5, 2008) (<http://www.osce.org/item/35566.html>)

22 Ali Babacan, "Armenia in the Turkish Scheme: an Alternative Route to Georgia for Transportation of Azerbaijani Oil" (September 8, 2008) ([www.regnum.ru](http://www.regnum.ru))

of surprise and even concern. Although Ankara later succeeded in alleviating Washington's concerns regarding the platform by affirming that it did not aspire to push the U.S. out of the region.<sup>23</sup>

Georgia's first reaction to Turkey's initiative was more than guarded. This was understandable: first, because the platform envisaged large-scale involvement of Russia which Georgia could not welcome given the recent war; and secondly, because Tbilisi was reluctant to participate in the process without being sure of the U.S. position and involvement.<sup>24</sup>

Although Baku eventually welcomed the platform, its first response, coming in mid-August, was also guarded, especially considering President Gül's plans to visit to Yerevan in September. Azerbaijan was seriously concerned that the Turkish initiative for shaping a new framework of regional cooperation could jeopardize Azerbaijan's long-term campaign to isolate Armenia. This campaign relied on the cooperation of Turkey and had been the cornerstone of Azerbaijan's policy in its confrontation with Yerevan and Stepanakert. Although the campaign failed to bring the expected results, and Armenia's economic growth has been remarkable in the last few years despite the closed borders with Azerbaijan and Turkey; Baku was not eager to join a stability platform with Armenia while there was little progress in the solution of the frozen Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. So President Gül's visit to Armenia provoked a negative reaction in Azerbaijan and led to disappointment towards Turkey.

Armenia was generally receptive to the Turkish proposal, most probably due to the rapprochement process that had started before the war in August. However, some actors in Armenia were concerned about risks potentially contained in Turkey's Caucasus Platform initiative. They argued that Russia and Turkey might launch new regional projects that could be harmful to Armenia; as proof, they quoted historical precedents such as the 1920s' Russian-Turkish agreements that were against Armenian interests, and the 1921 Moscow Agreement between Bolshevik Russia and Turkey.<sup>25</sup> However, the current political layout in the region is different from the 1920s, and Russia supports joint political initiatives in the South Caucasus. However, there are indications that Russia is concerned that Turkish-Armenian rapprochement, accelerated by successful bilateral negotiations, may create a favorable background for the reduction of Russia's military and political influence over Armenia.

Turkey's proposal also raised concerns about replacing the OSCE Minsk Group with a new negotiation format.<sup>26</sup> However, this apprehension was not sustained: in the Moscow Declaration signed in November by the Presidents of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia, the Minsk Group was reaffirmed as the format for negotiations on the peaceful resolution of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

The initiative has also been labeled as an idea that was long overdue.<sup>27</sup> The concept behind this argument was primarily the reluctance of international actors to contribute to the peaceful resolution processes of the frozen conflicts in the Caucasus, inherited from the Soviet Union. The Five Day War over South Ossetia has demonstrated that protracted conflicts can easily turn into military disputes, and thus there is a need for more structured and consistent international engagement in the South Caucasus. On the other hand, it is unknown whether Turkey's initiative is a good step towards that end or just a hollow proposal. If we take into consideration the fact that the suggested initiative's structure and aims are unclear, the second option gains ground. If the South Caucasus Security and Co-operation Platform will solely provide a security mechanism and neglect economic and political dimensions; the initiative can add little to the process of establishing an atmosphere of stability and prosperity in the Caucasus region.

As to whether the Turkish platform can serve to achieve its declared purpose, few people in the Caucasus believe this to be realistic. The Caucasus Platform is viewed as Ankara's political resource, intended for the short-term, in which the political initiative itself is much more important than its potential outcome. Nevertheless, both the Caucasus Platform and the Moscow Declaration create a favorable background for potential normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations.

23 Jean-Christophe Peuch. "Are Russia and Turkey trying to alter the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process format?" Eurasia Insight Website. (September 26, 2008)

24 Ibid.

25 "Russian-Turkish Rapprochement Always Made Trouble for Armenia" Regnum News Agency. (December 16, 2008) (<http://www.regnum.ru/news/1099952.html>).

26 Trilateral (Armenia, Turkey and Azerbaijan) or quadrilateral (Armenia, Turkey, Azerbaijan Russia).

27 Dennis Sammut, "Turkey's new diplomatic confidence signifies changing role as a regional power" Today's Zaman Newspaper. (September 15, 2008)

## II) Domestic factors affecting Turkey-Armenia Relations

### A) ARMENIAN POSITION:

In February 2008, a new president was elected in Armenia. The Turkish President Gül and Prime-Minister Erdoğan were amongst the first leaders of foreign states to congratulate President Sargsyan on his election. In addition, it was also disclosed that the latest round of secret negotiations between Turkey and Armenia had been underway for more than a year. Combined with the change of leadership in Armenia, this created an opportunity to begin a new round of normalization efforts. Of course, neither Yerevan nor Ankara could start from scratch, being burdened by historical legacies, inertia and lack of trust, but it is also clear that the closed Turkish-Armenian border and the lack of diplomatic relations have not produced the expected results and probably never will.<sup>28</sup> So the election of Sargsyan was crucial in terms opening a new page in Turkish-Armenian relations.

In accordance with the constructive atmosphere between Turkey and Armenia, Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan invited Turkish President Abdullah Gül to watch the World Cup qualifying football match between the national teams of the two countries. This invitation received good reactions in Armenia due to the fact that Armenia's political elites do not actively oppose the normalization of Turkish- Armenian relations or the opening of the mutual border. Of course, there are ultra-nationalist actors in Armenia who express their mistrust of Turkish policies due to historical legacies; however the majority of officials, activists and commentators speak in favor of opening the border and the normalization of relations.

The actors and groups who oppose the opening of the border justify their position by the need to protect domestic production against a potential inflow of cheap Turkish goods, or by the risks of becoming too heavily dependent on export routes via Turkey. Proponents of normalization, however, include businesspeople who hope to export their products via Turkey and thus save costs due to low transportation tariffs. On the whole, this is mainly an economic discourse which has very little to do with historical or political disputes.

Armenia's political elites are generally aware of the benefits of being on good terms with one's neighbors. Even political leaders (and their supporters) who are mistrustful of Turkey do not usually oppose the opening of the borders or normalization per se. The official Armenian position of normalizing relations without any preconditions has remained unchanged throughout the rule of Armenia's three presidents.

On the other hand, contrary to the official discourse, the Armenian public is less receptive to the normalization process due to the perceived link between Turkey and the genocide of Armenians under the Ottoman Empire. It is clear that memories of the genocide continue to dominate Armenian identity, and it is included in history schoolbooks, combined with huge quantities of documents, publications and archive materials. The day of the genocide is an official day of mourning and the media regularly produce broadcasts and publications about the issue. In addition, there exist a significant number people in Armenian society who are descendents of genocide survivors, and family stories are handed down to children and grandchildren. On the whole, there is consensus within Armenian society that the 1915 events were genocide, so discussing or questioning the occurrence of the genocide is impossible within society as well as amongst scholars. Armenian historians and academicians consider the genocide issue as an established fact, and any attempt to start questioning the genocide is regarded as sacrilege. In brief, anyone who actually tries to question the reality of the genocide issue in Armenia will not be regarded as a traitor, but rather as a lunatic.<sup>29</sup> As such, the memory of the genocide tragedy holds an important place in the Armenian value system, and is actually one of the pillars of Armenian national unity.

<sup>28</sup> Aybars Görgülü, "Turkey – Armenia Relations: A Vicious Circle" TESEV Foreign Policy Analysis Series-8, Istanbul. (November 2008) pp.11

<sup>29</sup> For more details see: "Armenien und die Türkei: Geographisch verbunden – durch die Geschichte getrennt." Wenn Man die Armenienfrage diskutiert... Istanbul: Heinrich Böll Stiftung. (2006)

Despite the tension and problems, some dialogue channels have been established between the two communities in the last couple of years with the efforts of non-governmental actors. For example, Armenia and Turkey have agreements on student exchange and cooperation between universities. Music and dance groups often arrange visits between the countries. There are also large numbers of Armenian labor migrants working in Turkey. In recent years, with the help of the Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council, Armenians from Armenia and the diaspora have made pilgrimages to sites of worship in Turkey. All of these indicate that there are developments in other spheres than high politics; however, changes are slow, chiefly due to the fact that the border is sealed. For most Armenians, Turkish society is *terra incognita*; and given the geographical proximity, this lack of contact only serves to further promote stereotypes and keep hostile legacies alive. The image of Turkey in Armenia remains that of the Ottoman Empire, of a tragic story from the history schoolbook, not a place several miles away.

Given the position of the Armenian leadership concerning normalization, there is a general feeling amongst the elites and society that it is now Turkey's turn to make the next step toward rapprochement. The fact that Turkey does not recognize the genocide is perceived as a sign of hostility not directly linked to history. The issue of genocide, however, has become heavily politicized and to some extent held hostage to the set of problems in Armenia-Azerbaijan-Turkey relations.<sup>30</sup> General normalization of political relations between Turkey and Armenia (i.e. the opening of the border, the establishment of diplomatic relations) may serve to mitigate the overall situation and lead to efforts at finding mutually acceptable solutions.

## B) TURKISH POSITION:

The lack of diplomatic ties between Turkey and Armenia cripples the normalization process of bilateral relations as well mutual perceptions in both countries. The inexistence of sufficient dialogue channels mingled with the burden of historical legacies has created a mutual mistrust among the two societies, and the alienating rhetoric pumped by official history-telling in both sides nurture hostilities. This lack of contact and not knowing the other make it hard to develop empathy for the other side's pains.

For most Turks, the 1915 events were mutual killings, and Ottoman officials of that time had to deport Armenians as a security precaution under the circumstances of World War I. Some Turks even argue that it was actually the Armenians who committed genocide against Ottoman subjects of the time living in Eastern Turkey. This contrast between the collective memories of both sides complicates the efforts of rapprochement. Accordingly, Armenians blame Turks for denying the historical fact of the genocide and use the expression of 'denial' as a principal accusation against Turks on different occasions. In response to these accusations, Turks put up a defensive wall, and refuse to acknowledge the reasons why they are so systematically and persistently blamed for committing genocide. The primary reason behind this is that the official history in Turkey ignores the 1915 events and holds only the Armenians responsible for crimes committed at that time.

On the other hand, it should be noted that Turkey's official position regarding the genocide issue has changed in the last couple of years. The tragedy of 1915 events and the damage that it has created on both societies are implicitly recognized by Turkey. The official argument is based on the Article 2 of the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and holds that genocide is a crime committed by individuals and can only be determined by the courts upon historical evidence irrespective of the Convention's irrevocability retroactively. Turkey is expecting a reciprocation from the Armenian side for the formation of an historians commission in order to collect relevant data and determine if possible the nature of incidences.

It is apparent that finding a consensus on an issue where each side has a totally opposing stance is extremely difficult. In the near future, it seems impossible for either party to change their attitude towards the genocide issue. But what is actually urgent in Turkish-Armenian relations is normalizing relations by establishing dialogue channels, rather than finding a consensus on such intricate issues. In this context, the latest "I'm sorry" campaign of a group of Turkish intellectuals offering personal apologies to the Armenian people for the great tragedy of 1915 is a significant step.

In December 2008, two hundred Turkish intellectuals launched an internet signature campaign for an apology to Armenians for the 1915 massacres. The brief statement was as follows:<sup>31</sup>

30 Ruben Safrastyan. "The Recognition of the Genocide in Armenia's Foreign Policy: Multi-Level Analysis". 21st Century Journal, Yerevan, no 1. p.3 (2005)

31 For more information please visit: <http://www.ozurdiliyoruz.com/foreign.aspx>

“My conscience does not accept the insensitivity shown to, and the denial of, the Great Catastrophe that the Armenians were subjected to in 1915. I reject this injustice and for my share, I empathize with the feelings and pain of my Armenian brothers and sisters. I apologize to them.”

The campaign elicited a wide international response and triggered a hot debate in Turkey. Prime Minister Erdoğan harshly criticized the intellectuals who organized the initiative. President Gül’s reaction was rather neutral in comparison with Erdoğan, but he has stated that the campaign risks affecting the rapprochement process negatively. He mentioned that the campaign is a proof of freedom of expression in Turkey; however he also asserted that this did not mean that he is backing it.<sup>32</sup> In parallel to these declarations, the mainstream media in Turkey did not take the campaign seriously, and affirmed that the timing could not have been worse.<sup>33</sup>

Even though an Armenian academician in Australia has initiated an apology campaign in reply, neither this nor the Turkish intellectuals’ initiative has been welcomed by the Armenian diaspora. The European Armenian Federation labeled the movement as a populist action, stating that *mass crimes cannot be apologized for by populist initiatives*.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, the apology campaign generated both positive and negative reactions within Armenia. Some circles welcomed the initiative as a good first step, while others criticized it by arguing that the apology was issued by individual Turks, not by the Turkish state.<sup>35</sup> In brief, it can be argued that the campaign was successful in terms of bringing the 1915 events, which is a taboo issue in Turkey, to the attention of the Turkish public opinion and hence contributed to the rapprochement process in Turkish-Armenian relations.

The normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations will surely be a long process. The establishment of diplomatic relations and the opening of the closed border are necessary steps towards this end; however the real difficulty is to normalize the mutual perceptions in both sides, shaped by the bad memories of the past. In this perspective, the opening of the border might launch a confidence building process in both sides. Due to deeply embedded fears, both Turkey and Armenia have essentially tried to protect the common border separating the two countries. Turkey has suspected Armenia of having territorial claims and not respecting Turkey’s territorial integrity; and Armenia was afraid of a Turkish offensive. So, the opening of the border and its recognition will increase the sense of security on both sides. The perception of a potential threat stemming from the border will vanish with emerging trade ties and human interactions, and intense cross-border contacts will contribute to the stability of the Turkish-Armenian border, and security in both countries.

32 Yavuz Baydar & Fuat Uğur, “Gül says apology campaign hurts Armenia reconciliation bid.” Today’s Zaman Newspaper. (January 2, 2009) (<http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=162971> )

33 Ertuğrul Özkök, “I feel at ease, he’s in” Hurriyet Newspaper. (December 15, 2008) (<http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/10584438.asp?yazarid=10&gid=61>)

34 A populist initiative, Bianet Web Site (<http://bianet.org/english/print/112323>)

35 Harut Sassounian, “Turks’ Apology for Armenian Genocide: Good First Step, but not Good Enough.” The Huffington Post Website. (December 18, 2008) ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/harut-sassounian/turks-apology-for-armenia\\_b\\_151959.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/harut-sassounian/turks-apology-for-armenia_b_151959.html))

## III) Conclusions & Recommendations

As outlined in the previous chapter, Turkey-Armenia relations are moving towards a new era. The regional dynamics, as well, have been changing, especially after the Five Day War between Russia and Georgia. Although the actual conflict was between Russia and Georgia, it had repercussions for the wider Caucasus region, Turkey, the EU, the USA, and all other interested parties. It would not be fulsome to argue that these moments were defining. What has been happening since last summer will affect the region and all included parties for at least the next two decades. Although the damage is done and it might be too late to recover the costs of the Five Day War, now is the time for all parties to re-think their bilateral relations and regional strategies.

One of the most important outcomes of steps made in 2008 was that Armenian-Turkish relations have become disentangled from the knot of problems connected with the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

If all parties act in a constructive manner, the world does not need a miracle to see timeless peace in the wider Caucasus region. For this to actualize however, certain actors should fulfill certain pre-conditions.

As for Turkey and Armenia, this is an excellent atmosphere in which to move forward and normalize relations, which should not be wasted.

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

#### FOR TURKEY AND ARMENIA:

1. Turkey has strong leverage over the South Caucasus. Until recently, Turkey's regional policy only covered Azerbaijan and Georgia; however, now that Ankara intends to increase its presence in the South Caucasus, it will need to incorporate Armenia via dialogue, open borders and active communication routes.
2. The sealed border and absence of diplomatic ties with Armenia leaves Turkey vulnerable to external pressures from the US and the EU. Besides this, closing the border has not proved successful politically, but is instead harming both countries economically.
3. Opening the border will promote security, stability and openness, and serve as a new incentive to European integration of both Turkey and Armenia.
4. The Moscow Declaration signed by the Presidents of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia and the subsequent OSCE Helsinki document were important efforts towards compromise. Steps should be taken to follow up this initiative in order to find a peaceful solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.
5. For a long time Turkish-Armenian relations were bound to progress in the Nagorno- Karabakh conflict. In 2008 Turkey seems to have softened its policy on this, which is considered a positive step. It is essential that the relations between Turkey and Armenia are released from any pre-condition that involves third parties.
6. Keeping the issue of relations to other countries separate from the Armenian-Turkish dialogue both at societal level and in state politics.
7. Turkey and Armenia should put historic emotions aside, at least for a while, in order not to harm the normalization process. The genocide issue should be kept separate from political negotiations.

8. Developing economic relations between Turkey and Armenia would have benefits both economically and at the societal level.
9. Alternatives routes from Turkey to Central Asia via Armenia should be considered.
10. It should not be understated that progress at societal and cultural level is as important as improving relations at the state level.
11. Increasing the scope of expert and public debates on various aspects of bilateral relations and of the historical past, with strong involvement of the civil societies of Armenia and Turkey would help the rapprochement process.
12. The Governments of both Turkey and Armenia should be supportive of civil society initiatives aimed at increasing interaction, building awareness and normalizing relations.

**FOR OTHER INTERNATIONAL ACTORS:**

13. Russia is not obstructing, and is even supporting the process. It is important that Russia stays supportive of the process between Turkey and Armenia.
14. Initiatives taken by any party should be inclusive of all regional actors.
15. The EU should not miss this historic opportunity to better engage itself with the Caucasus region.
16. The EU should be aware that the continuation of Turkey's full membership process has a positive impact on Turkey-Armenia relations.
17. Armenia should stay engaged with the EU, especially in the framework of such EU programs as ENP and Eastern Partnership.
18. The US and EU should continue to be supportive of Turkey-Armenia rapprochement and ensure that their engagement in the region serves to create a stable political atmosphere in the Armenian-Turkish dialogue.

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