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Pragmatic Policies  
vs. Historical Constraints:  
Analyzing Armenia-  
Turkey Relations

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**Pragmatic Policies vs. Historical Constraints: Analyzing Armenia-Turkey Relations. *Caucasus Institute Research Papers, #1, January 2010.*** – Yerevan: Caucasus Institute, 2010. – 49 p.

The first issue of the CI Research Papers aims to identify the main parameters and trends of Armenia-Turkey relations. Rather than focus on recent years' developments, which have been frequently discussed elsewhere, the paper concentrates on the political, social, psychological and historical factors that impact the entire process, and reveals the logic of bilateral relations as they develop over time. The research paper is intended both for political scientists and a wider audience of readers interested in regional politics.

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# 1. Introduction

Armenian-Turkish rapprochement is ongoing and it is far from clear what its results could be. As the political process unfolds, efforts to understand it show certain trends. However, in Armenia and Turkey, the rapprochement is often analyzed by actors with a political motivation or agenda, so that the opinion of a specific actor concerning Armenian-Turkish rapprochement often says more about that actor than about the rapprochement. As to experts from other countries, they often have insufficient knowledge of the underlying issues.

This paper aims to fill the gap in understanding Armenian-Turkish relations with less focus on recent years' developments, which have been extensively reported and discussed, and more focus on factors that impact on the process as a whole, including political, social, psychological and historical factors and the frequently unobvious interplay between them.

The main goal of the paper is to identify the basic parameters and trends of Armenian-Turkish relations regardless of whether the rapprochement will actually lead to diplomatic normalization and opening of borders between Armenia and Turkey in short- or medium-term. The history of Armenian-Turkish relations is centuries long. Their present stage is perceived by external observers as absolutely unique just because the current

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political situation placed Armenian-Turkish rapprochement in the media spotlight and attracted the attention of leading world powers. However, in domestic perceptions in Armenia and Turkey, the rapprochement neatly fits into the centuries-long paradigm of mutual relations, extending even to the roles played by external actors, whether regional or international. In this paper, we will try to show that while historical and psychological inertia does indeed have significant impact on the unfolding of Armenian-Turkish rapprochement and its perception, the current stage is in fact unique by a whole range of parameters.

## **2. Armenian-Turkish Relations in 1991-2009**

### **2.1. Static Relations: December 1991 – May 2008**

The modern history of Armenian-Turkish relations started in 1991 with the disintegration of the USSR and the creation of independent Armenia. On December 16, 1991, Turkey recognized the newly formed independent Republic of Armenia. First contacts between public officials began in April 1992, when Turkey's Ambassador to Russia Volkan Vural visited Yerevan and met with President Ter-Petrosyan to discuss prospects for a bilateral agreement establishing good neighborly relations. Later that year, President Ter-Petrosyan attended the founding meeting of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), and Armenia became one of its founding members. In November 1992, when Azerbaijan blocked land communication to Armenia with the start of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, up to 100,000 tons of wheat was shipped to Armenia via Turkey; Turkey also began supplying electric energy to Armenia. Azerbaijan protested, and in December 1992 Turkey cut short the energy supply to Armenia. In April 1993, at the height of armed hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh, Turkey sealed its border with Armenia,

thus siding with Azerbaijan in the conflict.<sup>1</sup>

Ever since, Armenia and Turkey have not had any diplomatic ties, the borders have remained sealed, and trade between the two countries goes through third countries. Until the start of what later became known as “football diplomacy,” Turkey had been putting forward a number of preconditions for normalization of mutual ties with Armenia, which concerned the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, the recognition of mutual borders, and the activities of the Armenian Diaspora aimed at the international recognition of the Genocide.

However, apart from the Genocide which is the most sensitive issue for Turkey in the context of Armenian-Turkish relations, Turkey’s other preconditions did not have very high priority for the Turkish government or society. It can be said that by sealing its eastern border and having no diplomatic ties to its eastern neighbor, Turkey was making its regional policy with regard to Armenia (and the entire South Caucasus) dependent on the stance of another player, i.e. Azerbaijan.

As a result, Armenian-Turkish relations remained static for almost 15 years (1993 – 2008): Turkey sealed its border, thus placing Armenia in a semi-blockade and trying to use this as a means to pressurize Armenia into concessions on the Genocide recognition issue and on the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, whereas Armenia tried to put indirect pressure on Ankara via Brussels and Washington in order to induce it to change its stance and open the border. The only important exception from the overall trend was the Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission, active in 2001-2004; at that time,

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<sup>1</sup> Aybars Görgülü. “Turkey-Armenia Relations: An Eternal Deadlock?” *Caucasus Neighborhood: Turkey and the South Caucasus*. Yerevan: Caucasus Institute, 2008, p. 143-145.

some Turkish experts began to voice opinions about the need to open the border and normalize bilateral ties with Armenia.

Turkish-Armenian relations were also influenced by regional developments: by the deterioration of Turkish-American relations as a result of Turkey's refusal to allow U.S. troops an entrance into northern Iraq through its territory during the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, by negotiations between Ankara and Brussels on Turkey's EU accession, and by the ongoing rapprochement between Russia and Turkey.

This had been the general background of Armenian-Turkish relations until early in 2008 when a U-turn became possible due to a combination of external factors and the changed geopolitical context in the South Caucasus and in the entire region.

## **2.2. Acceleration: May 2008 – April 2009**

In February 2008, Serzh Sargsyan was elected Armenia's new president; one of the first congratulations on his election came from his Turkish counterpart Abdullah Gül and Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. With the change of leadership in Armenia, and with Turkish experts pointing increasingly often to the political meaninglessness of blockading Armenia, it became possible to start a new round of efforts to normalize bilateral relations. Of course, Yerevan and Ankara were unable to start from scratch because of the historical burden, the complexity of problems faced by both sides, the inertia of one-sided action and the profound mutual mistrust.

The initiative to start the rapprochement came from Armenia. In May 2008, at a meeting with activists of the Armenian Diaspora in Russia, President Sargsyan announced

that he was inviting President Gül to Yerevan to watch a football match between Armenia and Turkey on September 6. The invitation was made public in Moscow for a reason: it was meant to celebrate a change of Russia's policy with regard to Armenia-Turkey relations. Armenian leaders managed to convince the Kremlin that rapprochement between Yerevan and Ankara would not cause any detriment to Russian-Armenian relations in the military and political spheres. In fact, Russia didn't just refrain from interfering with the Armenian-Turkish dialogue but actually started promoting it. According to media reports, the prospect for normalization of Armenia-Turkey relations was one of the topics discussed during Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's visit to Turkey in June 2008, shortly after Sargsyan announced his invitation to Gül.

However, the rapprochement between Armenia and Turkey initiated by Yerevan (later nicknamed "football diplomacy") really sped up after the August 2008 Russia-Georgia confrontation. Known as the Five Day War, it started on August 8, 2008 and changed the entire regional context, creating a new status quo in the South Caucasus.<sup>2</sup> Turkey also tried to play a hand in the crisis, thereby securing a new place for itself in regional politics. It thus initially refused to allow U.S. warships to sail to the Georgian coast via Turkish Black Sea straits. It also advertized a change in its political priorities by coming up with an *ad hoc* regional initiative, the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform, first made public with Moscow's consent by Prime Minister Erdoğan during his visit to Moscow on August 12, 2008.

On the whole, the Five Day War caused a reactivation or

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<sup>2</sup> For details, see Sergey Minasyan. "Military and Political Outcomes of the 'Five Day War'." *21 Vek*, №1 (9), 2009 (in Russian).

even a reanimation of Turkey's policies in the Caucasus. It was this war that stimulated Turkish leaders to make the political decision to accept Armenia's invitation for President Gül to visit Yerevan. Developments in August-September 2008 once again showed that the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh was purely instrumental for Ankara and considerably lower down the list of its priorities than the recognition of the Genocide or normalization with Armenia in the context of Turkey's ambitions for EU accession.

### **2.3. The Road Map and the Protocols:**

#### **April – October 2009**

After the Russia-Georgia war, President Gül's visit to Yerevan and the election of Barak Obama (who publicly acknowledged the 1915 Genocide of Armenians while still a senator), a new situation emerged in the region. With Turkey wanting to play a more active role, the odds were in favor of a breakthrough in Armenian-Turkish relations. Although secret Swiss-mediated negotiations had been ongoing for a few years, it was only in the early 2009 that they brought the first results.

On April 22, 2009 the Foreign Ministers of Armenia, Turkey and Switzerland issued a joint statement, according to which the two neighbors agreed on a "Road Map" of concrete steps towards normalization of bilateral relations without preconditions. The statement was welcomed by officials in Washington, Brussels and even in Moscow but led to the deepest ever crisis in Turkey-Azerbaijan relations. Baku's strong nervous reaction was apparently unexpected by Ankara, causing it to come up with excuses: Prime Minister Erdoğan thus made a speech at the Parliament of Azerbaijan in which he tied normalization with Armenia to the settlement of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

The announcement of the Road Map also triggered controversial reactions in Turkey, Armenia and Armenian Diaspora communities. It even caused one of Armenia's ruling parties, Dashnaktsutyun, to step out of the coalition in late April 2009.

In summer 2009, reacting to numerous statements made by Turkish public officials tying Armenian-Turkish rapprochement to the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenian leaders also toughened their stance. President Sargsyan declared that he would only attend the return leg of the World Cup qualifying game between Armenia and Turkey in October 2009 provided the border would be already opened or at least in the process of being so. On August 31, 2009, the Foreign Ministers of Armenia, Turkey and Switzerland pre-signed the texts of two Protocols on the establishment of diplomatic ties and the opening of mutual borders. Interestingly, this time Turkey probably learnt from its April 2009 experience and dispatched a group of its top diplomats to Azerbaijan in advance of the signing, in late August, to inform President Ilham Aliiev of the forthcoming publication of the Armenian-Turkish Protocols.

The publication of the Protocols and the ensuing public debate in Turkey, Armenia and Armenian Diaspora communities (which the President of Armenia visited in early October) revealed considerable opposition to the Protocols. Despite the widespread public antagonism, the governments of the two countries showed some political will and signed the Protocols on October 10, 2009 at the University of Zurich. Alongside the signatories – the Foreign Ministers of Armenia, Turkey and Switzerland – a number of top international officials were present at the ceremony, including the U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and the Foreign Ministers of Russia and several European states. However, the actual signing remained insecure until the very last moment, as the Foreign Minister

of Turkey had been planning to follow the signing with a speech the content of which would have been unacceptable for Armenia. His Armenian counterpart threatened to retaliate by making a speech containing statements concerning the Genocide. The signing ceremony was delayed by several hours and it was only through the mediation of the U.S. Secretary of State that the sides finally agreed to sign the Protocols without making any speeches.

As stipulated by the Protocols, they will only come into legal force following ratification by both countries' parliaments. At this as at every earlier stage, the rapprochement predictably faced very grave challenges. Turkey once again tried to tie normalization with Armenia to the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh despite the lack of any mention thereof in the Protocols. Though in public speeches only, this connection was made by Turkey's top public officials who said that Turkish parliament would not ratify the Protocols unless the settlement of the Karabakh issue moved forward.

Armenia reacted once again; this time, Armenia's President Sargsyan said in a December 2009 speech that should Turkey fail to ratify the Protocols "in a reasonable amount of time" and continue procrastinating, Armenia would revoke its signature under the Protocols. Meanwhile Armenia went ahead with preparing the Protocols for ratification and submitted them to the Constitutional Court, which reviewed the Protocols on January 12, 2010 and judged them to be in accord with the Constitution.



## 3. Constraints

### 3.1. Armenia: Domestic Stereotypes and Apprehensions

Since Armenia's independence, hardly any foreign policy issue (except the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh) has had such a resonance in Armenian society and Diaspora as the Armenian-Turkish rapprochement. Attitudes varied from strong disapproval to great optimism. In the public discourse, negative attitudes were more prominent: a considerable part of Armenian society (and an even greater one, of the Diaspora) and some segments of the political elite regarded the Protocols as "betrayal of national interests." Even the most moderate critics accused the Armenian government of making too many concessions to Turkey. Criticism mainly stemmed from entrenched negative stereotypes and mistrust of Turkey.

Up to 2008, two main factors affected attitudes to Turkey in Armenia. The first was the historical memory of the 1915 Genocide, made bitterer by Turkey's denial. The second factor was that Turkey had supported Azerbaijan in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and therefore sealed its border with Armenia. Both factors enhanced the already existing mistrust of Turkey and the Turks. With the borders sealed and almost no communication possible, an average citizen of Armenia perceived Turkey as a hostile country from the history schoolbooks: the Ottoman Empire of a

hundred years ago, not an actual neighbor. Suddenly, it became clear that Armenia-Turkey relations may have a future, with 3-million strong Armenia suddenly finding itself next to a 70-million strong country with a growing economy and a population that many Armenians perceive as hostile.

Swiss-mediated Armenian-Turkish talks were kept secret for quite a while. The publication of their first results caused agitation and shock in Armenian society; one of the ruling parties, Dashnaktsutyun, even left the coalition in protest against the rapprochement after Armenian and Turkish officials announced the Armenian-Turkish Road Map in April 2009. The Armenian-Turkish Protocols led to a new and even stronger wave of criticism in the media and amongst the general public. Meanwhile, the primary motives for the adverse public reaction were not directly related to the content of the Armenian-Turkish agreements.

The first and strongest motive was conservatism: over two decades, Armenians have become used to the regional political layout and are afraid of any changes.

The second motive was the overall lack of trust towards Turkey. Many people in Armenia suspected Turkey of being insincere in its negotiations with Armenia (a suspicion fortified by numerous contradictory statements made by Turkish leaders); there were widespread fears that the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh was included in the Armenian-Turkish agreements in some clandestine way. These fears were to some extent dispelled by Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan when he publicly stated during a visit to Washington that the Protocols contained no reference to Nagorno-Karabakh. He said the Turkish parliament would not ratify the Protocols unless some progress were made in negotiations over Nagorno-Karabakh but admitted the Protocols did not stipulate anything of the kind.

The third motive resulted from lack of perception. Armenian

society does not realize that Turkey's move to normalize relations with Armenia and open the border largely pursues political gains in its relationship with the EU and the USA. Armenians are generally not aware that Turkey is making concessions in the East with a view to gaining dividends in the West, and that Turkey is hoping to reimburse any political costs of concessions in its relationship with Armenia by improving its political image in Brussels and Washington.

The public perception of Russian-Turkish relations in Armenia is also permeated with stereotypes and phobias. The fact that Armenian-Turkish rapprochement coincided with a revitalization of Russian-Turkish relations raised some concerns amongst Armenian elites and society. Some actors voiced apprehensions that Russia and Turkey may agree on some regional projects behind Yerevan's back that could jeopardize Armenia's interests, quoting, as historical precedents, the 1920s Russian-Turkish agreements which were detrimental to Armenia, and the March 16, 1921 Moscow Treaty between Bolshevik Russia and Kemalist Turkey.

However, these and similar apprehensions do not take account of the new political context in the South Caucasus following the 2008 Russia-Georgia Five Day War. While Turkey's and Russia's tactics make them embrace joint initiatives in the South Caucasus, including those directed against Washington and some directed against Brussels, they remain "competing allies" in a strategic perspective. Both Russia and Turkey are wary of the other country strengthening its standing in the region, as "both countries have converging and conflicting interests in neighboring regions."<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, the normalization of Armenian-Turkish

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<sup>3</sup> Bülent Aras. "Turkey and the Russian Federation: An Emerging Multidimensional Partnership." *SETA Policy Brief*, N. 35, August 2009, p. 11.

relations is the unique project in the former USSR in which the interests of the United States, Russia and the EU coincide. Russia keeps insisting that Armenian-Turkish rapprochement be dealt with separately from the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh; Russia's Prime-Minister Putin reiterated this approach during his Moscow meeting with Prime-Minister Erdogan on January 13, 2010.

Yet another factor that affects the perception of Armenian-Turkish relations is political infantilism widespread in Armenian society which manifests as lack of faith in one's country and fear of playing grown-up "great games" in regional politics. In an extreme form, this attitude is manifest as a notion of an "international conspiracy" against Armenia, of which the current Armenian-Turkish rapprochement is supposedly a component. This vision, adhered to by some Armenian elite actors and members of the general public, is almost impossible to argue against using formal logic. Arguments brought forth by proponents of rapprochement (such as "since Azerbaijan, which is *de facto* at war with Armenia, resents it so much, the Armenian-Turkish rapprochement must be a good thing for Armenia") are not perceived as relevant. One of the reasons is possibly that relations with Turkey are traditionally perceived in Armenian society in emotional terms, not as an issue that can be realistically and critically assessed in terms of political expedience.

Although many public apprehensions may appear irrational, clearly the burden of historical legacies continues to affect Armenians' attitudes to relations with Turkey. This is only natural for a nation which had no statehood for centuries and was heavily traumatized as a result of the 1915 Genocide and heavy losses in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

However, despite some antagonism inside the society and the Diaspora, and public criticism by the media and the oppo-

sition, the Armenian government adheres to its preparedness to implement agreements with Turkey to “normalize relations and open borders without preconditions of any kind.” There are no survey data to corroborate this, but it appears that antagonism to rapprochement with Turkey exists chiefly amongst intellectuals, nationalistic groups, opposition actors, journalists and youth activists. Most probably, the majority of Armenia’s population is not opposed to rapprochement, as protest rallies in 2009 only brought together a few thousand people, which is not much for Armenia with its strong tradition of street protests. This makes Armenia very different from Turkey where some of the protest originated in the administration and ruling party as well as within opposition groups.

### **3.2. The Factor of the Armenian Diaspora**

The Armenian Diaspora plays a unique role in the development of modern Armenia and has significant impact on its political life.<sup>4</sup> Given its structure and *modus operandi*, the Diaspora has ways of influencing the political, social and economic life of Armenia varying from political advocacy in countries with large (or not so large) Armenian communities to money transfers from ordinary citizens and donations from large-scale benefactors that attain billions of U.S. dollars and constitute a significant part of the budgets of both Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. In the early 1990s, political parties which had existed in the Diaspora for over a century came to Armenia and became active there. These parties, of which Dashnaktsutyun is the most powerful, maintain ties with the

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<sup>4</sup> See Viktor Dyatlov, Eduard Melkonian. *Armenian Diaspora: Essays on Socio-cultural Typology*. Yerevan: Caucasus Institute, 2009 (in Russian).

Diaspora and have access to financial and political support and human resources from Armenian communities worldwide.

The majority of Diaspora Armenians are opposed to rapprochement with Turkey. The main reason is that Armenian Diaspora communities outside the former USSR, primarily those in Western countries, Lebanon and Syria, are the direct consequence of the massacres and deportations perpetrated in Turkey in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. These communities consist of direct descendants of Genocide survivors, so that the memory of the Genocide is central to their identity. As assimilation trends prevail in many Armenian Diaspora communities, with Armenian language, culture and religion losing their importance, the memory of the Genocide remains the pillar of Diaspora identity, making third- and even fourth-generation descendants of Genocide survivors extremely distrustful of Turkey.

Moreover, studies of the involvement of Diaspora communities in the political lives of their historical homeland (as in the case of Jewish, Irish, Polish, Sikh, Tamil and other Diasporas) have shown that Diaspora actors tend to be much more radical with regard to their homeland's foreign policy and ethnopolitical conflicts than people who actually live there.<sup>5</sup> Attitudes of the Armenian Diaspora to reconciliation with Turkey follow this trend, with Armenians abroad more motivated, consolidated and radical with regard to this issue than most people in Armenia.

The Diaspora factor is not just about Diaspora bodies and political parties using lobbying to influence the political stance of their home countries with regard to Armenia-Turkey

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<sup>5</sup> See C. Christine Fair. "Diaspora Involvement in Insurgencies: Insights from Khalistan and Tamil Eelam Movement." *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*. N. 11, 2005.

relations. The leverage of the Diaspora is not limited to lobbying; its political impact is quite significant, especially in U.S., Canada, France, Lebanon and some Latin American states, because Armenians in those countries form an important segment of the society and a significant body of voters. Their influence is strongest in countries whose governance system allows for strong involvement of societal groups in domestic and foreign policy decision-making (primarily in the United States and France). Armenian communities in France and the U.S. have been most successful in advocating international recognition of the 1915 Genocide, securing political and financial aid to Nagorno-Karabakh etc.

The publication of the Protocols caused an agitation in the Diaspora. In a move to advocate the position of Armenia with regard to rapprochement, President Sargsyan toured the world's largest Armenian communities, visiting Beirut, Paris, New York, Los Angeles and Rostov-on-Don. In many communities, the president got a very chilly welcome. Sargsyan's visit to Paris even led to public unrest; on October 3, 2009 French police had to use force to disperse French Armenians rallying against Armenia's rapprochement with Turkey. Large rallies were also held in Los Angeles and Beirut.

Regardless of any new developments, the attitude of the Armenian Diaspora to Armenia's policy with regard to Turkey will certainly remain controversial and will continue to impact the rapprochement process.

### **3.3. Turkey: the "Sevres Syndrome" and the "Deep State"**

Turkey's political system has peculiarities in its functioning and structures that strongly affect the country's foreign policy. Turkish military have heavy presence in politics, sometimes leading

to military coups d'état, or threats thereof. Moreover, Turkey has what is known as a “deep state” phenomenon. This term is used to describe an informal cluster of social ties (or a social stratum, or caste) that exists within the country’s military, economic and religious elite, is prepared to accept responsibility for the fate of the country and perceives itself as the main safeguard of national security. In principle, some forms of “deep states” exist in many countries; in Turkey, the “deep state” (called *derin devlet* in Turkish) has a long tradition.

Since Turkey is a classical model of catch-up modernization, its “deep state” is linked to Turkey’s Westernization and modernization trends of the last 150 years at the least, starting from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century or even the Tanzimat. The notion of a “deep state” was manifest in the ideology of the Young Turks (activists of the *İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*, the Committee of Union and Progress), later transformed and adapted by the Kemalist regime. Experts point out that this type of ideology still exists in Turkey’s political culture in the form of ultra-nationalism, strong military involvement in politics, and justification of extra-judicial punishment of political opponents and members of ethnic or religious minorities by state bodies and secret services in the name of “protecting the motherland.”<sup>6</sup>

Today’s supporters of the Young Turks’ ideas are the main social base for recruitment into the “deep state,” and this affects foreign policy decision-making. The *idée fixe* shared by proponents of the “deep state” amongst politicians (both in the ruling party and in the opposition), army officers and public officials is the preservation of the status-quo inside

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<sup>6</sup> Serdar Kaya. “The Rise and Decline of the Turkish ‘Deep State’: The Ergenekon Case.” *Insight Turkey*. Vol. 11, N. 4, 2009, p. 102.

Turkey and all along its borders. In modern Turkey, the “deep state” phenomenon is enhanced by the fact that the whole country is permeated by secret services that play a special role in Turkey’s political system and ideology.

In terms of ideology, the approaches of “deep state” proponents naturally flow into what is known as *the Sèvres Syndrome*: a fear deeply rooted amongst the Turks that neighboring states and world powers are scheming to dissect their country and divide it between themselves. Even now, the perception of an external menace and fear of territorial loss is symbolized in Turkish domestic discourses by the 1920 Sèvres Treaty, imposed on Turkey by the victorious Allies and prescribing the division of the Ottoman Empire between neighboring countries and the Entente Powers. Although the Sèvres Treaty, signed by the Ottoman government and unrecognized by Kemalists, was never implemented, it continues to symbolize the threat of losing land and sovereignty – a threat still perceived as meaningful by the elite and population of the 70-million strong Turkish Republic.

Should relations with Armenia become normal, the psychological and physical divide between Turks and Armenians will disappear or at least decrease, and many Armenians will start moving about in Turkey; this cannot fail to make Turks better informed about the 1915 events. As many Kemalists and “deep state” proponents fear, this may deal a new blow to the already tottering ideological foundation of Kemalism.

### **3.4. Azerbaijan and the Instrumentalization of the Karabakh Factor by Turkey**

Ever since the 1994 cease-fire in Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan has hoped that its huge oil revenues would enable it to win the

arms race and take Nagorno-Karabakh back by force. It also expected that the economic blockade would compel Yerevan and Stepanakert to make unilateral concessions. The idea of “suffocating” Armenia’s economy by means of a double blockade — on the side of Turkey as well as Azerbaijan — has been the cornerstone of Azerbaijan’s strategy in the conflict, despite the fact that it failed to prove its efficiency over the years. Armenia’s economy was growing fast despite the blockades; for several years up to the start of the global economic recession in 2008, Armenia boasted two-digit economic growth.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, until recently Baku continued to bargain on the blockade as a means of settling the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

The situation remained static until the 2008 Russia-Georgia War that changed the political layout in the South Caucasus in general and with regard to the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh in particular. The breakthrough in Armenian-Turkish relations, which was to a large extent the consequence of the Russia-Georgia War, became a decisive factor in the new status quo with regard to Nagorno-Karabakh. Should the border to Turkey open, Armenia will get access to new communication routes, making Baku’s blockade strategy meaningless.

This was why Azerbaijan reacted to the Armenian-Turkish rapprochement, starting from April 2009, with panic and seemingly out of proportion. A series of crises in Turkey-Azerbaijan relations ensued, the worst in post-Soviet history. Indeed, in zero-sum-game and *realpolitik* logic, whatever strengthens Armenia automatically weakens Azerbaijan to the same extent. Armenia clearly wins by the opening of borders and normalization of bilateral ties with Turkey. This is the

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<sup>7</sup> For details, see: Sergey Minasyan. “Azerbaijan’s Karabakh Strategy: ‘Peripheral Action,’ Oil Resources and the Arms Race.” *21 Vek*, № 2, 2008 (in Russian).

logic used in Azerbaijan, which is only natural for a country frustrated by losing a war.

Originally, starting in late April 2009, Azerbaijan did not just sharply criticize Turkey's policy with regard to Armenia but even made a few gestures such as banning broadcasts in Turkish by its TV stations, threatening to stop selling gas to Turkey and expressing readiness to discuss the option to sell all its gas to Russia. President Aliev's visit to Moscow and his meeting with President Medvedev in mid-April 2009 were vivid illustrations of Baku's stance. However, bullying with the "Russian factor" failed to induce Turkey to review its policy with regard to Armenia, and Moscow did not agree to alter its approach to the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh in exchange for Azerbaijani gas.

This made Baku tone down its reaction by early May 2009, with its media publications and official statements expressing more moderate views. Baku probably realized that further deterioration of relations with Turkey would reduce Ankara's support to Baku, thus weakening Baku's stand in the international community and in negotiations over Nagorno-Karabakh. However, even subsequent friendly gestures exchanged by Baku and Ankara failed to obliterate the negative aftertaste in bilateral relations and societal perceptions. The crisis in Ankara-Baku relations did not just extend to the governments; the reaction of Azerbaijani society to Turkey's "treachery" was in fact more acute than that of the establishment. In Turkey, experts began to debate the issue whether the political interests of Baku and Ankara in fact coincide.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Diba Nigar Göksel. "Turkey and Azerbaijan: Passion, Principle, or Pragmatism?" *On Turkey, GMF Analysis*, June 4, 2009, <http://www.gmfus.org/onturkey/index.cfm>

It is, however, obvious that although the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh has been formally excluded from the general format of Armenian-Turkish rapprochement, Ankara's position in this conflict can hardly be expected to change in the foreseeable future, and the conflict is certain to remain on Turkey's foreign policy agenda and in the domestic policy discourse. The framework signed in Switzerland was heavily criticized by Turkish opposition forces, and Turkish officials started making statements linking rapprochement with Armenia to the settlement of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. Neither the statement concerning the Road Map nor the Protocols mention Nagorno-Karabakh, yet Turkish leaders regularly affirm that the link exists. For example, Turkey's Prime Minister Erdogan made some strong statements concerning the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh during his visit to Azerbaijan in May 2009. According to Turkish expert Bülent Aras, "the attempts for normalization with Armenia triggered a nationalist Azeri response and this response found support in Turkey in a form of allegation that the Turkish government is selling out Azerbaijan. Preventing this kind of negative input should be on the agenda in relation to Turkey's increasing activism in regional policy."<sup>9</sup>

However, it is not only foreign policy that compels Ankara to take a pro-Azerbaijani stand on the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. Turkey is also using the Azerbaijani factor in its policy with regard to Armenia in order to distract attention from an issue which is much more sensitive for Turkish society and elites: the 1915 Genocide of Armenians in Ottoman Turkey. However, as long as the borders remain sealed and diplomatic ties with Yerevan have not been estab-

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<sup>9</sup> Bülent Aras. "Davutoğlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy." *SETA Policy Brief*, No 32, May, 2009, p. 15.

lished, linking rapprochement to the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh heavily restricts Ankara's ability to implement its policies in the South Caucasus. As Turkish expert Aybars Görgülü points out, "the lack of diplomatic ties between Turkey and Armenia jeopardizes Turkey's efforts to become a regional leader and also its attempts at mediation for the region's protracted conflicts. The Nagorno-Karabakh dispute is a good example in that sense. Turkey's involvement in this conflict as a party rather than a mediator and its unconditional support for Azerbaijan motivated by factors both strategic – oil-rich Azerbaijan's importance for Turkey – and domestic – Azerbaijan's status as a kin-state to Turkey – has limited Turkey's potential role as a mediator."<sup>10</sup>

Turkey is trying to handle its problems by regularly assuring Azerbaijan that rapprochement with Armenia will be to some degree dependent on the settlement of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan's best advantage. However, this pushes the whole process into a deadlock. An analogy would be for Armenia to make normalization with Turkey dependent on the resolution of the Cyprus conflict. The problem is not just that Azerbaijan is another country but that this approach rules out successfully normalization. Had Armenia been prepared to make concessions over Nagorno-Karabakh in order to improve relations with Turkey, this would have been done years ago. Progress in Karabakh settlement is certainly badly needed but its format is very different from that of Armenian-Turkish relations, and tying the two together means sacrificing realistic prospects to vague ones.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Aybars Görgülü. "Towards a Turkish-Armenian Rapprochement?" *Insight Turkey*, vol. 11, No 2, 2009, p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> For details, see: Alexander Iskandaryan. "Armenian-Turkish Rapprochement: Timing Matters." *Insight Turkey*, vol. 11, N. 3, 2009.

Even after the signing of Protocols in Zurich, Ankara is left in a predicament: it is impossible to gratify both Armenia and Azerbaijan as whatever is acceptable for one is unacceptable for the other. This moves Turkey back into the position of Azerbaijan's hostage in the region and prevents it from becoming an independent player in relations with Armenia as long as each step towards normalization with Armenia leads to a new crisis in its relations with Azerbaijan. This was exactly what happened after the Protocols were signed and President Sargsyan returned a visit to Turkey for the October 14 football match. Baku reacted by taking down Turkish flags that hung in front of Turkish company offices and by the monument to Ottoman soldiers killed during a siege of the city in 1918.

Although throughout 2009, Azerbaijan and Turkey made mutually reconciling statements after every tension in their bilateral relations caused by the Armenian-Turkish rapprochement, the "one nation, two states" concept that had been the motto of Turkey-Azerbaijan relations since the early 1990s was now perceptibly failing.

Meanwhile the zero-sum game is by no means the only model that can work in the Armenia-Azerbaijan-Turkey triangle. Azerbaijan cannot jeopardize its relationship with Turkey because this would leave it less room for maneuver in its relations with Russia, potentially causing undesirable consequences, including those for the Karabakh issue. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Baku-Erzurum communication and fuel transportation projects that took so long to prepare and implement cannot be stopped overnight; they make Azerbaijan and Turkey mutually dependent. Most importantly, the opening of the Armenian-Turkish border could mitigate the overall situation in the region and eventually benefit all the regional players in a 21<sup>st</sup>-century rather than a 19<sup>th</sup>-century spirit. After all,

Azerbaijan does sustain good neighborly relations with Russia which has a military base in Armenia, is allied to Armenia in the Collective Security Treaty Organization and gives it military assistance.

Some hurt feelings on Azerbaijan's part will be inevitable but they are already there as a result of "football diplomacy" and the potential failure of Baku's plans to suffocate Armenia by means of a double blockade. However, Azerbaijan cannot risk to damage its relations with Turkey.



## 4. Context

### 4.1. The Genocide as a Factor

The issue of the Genocide is very sensitive for Armenians in Armenia and in the Diaspora; for moral reasons, neither are prepared to discuss whether the Genocide did take place.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, starting in the late 1990s Armenia began to implement a policy in which Genocide recognition claims became an unconventional weapon used for exerting political pressure on Ankara.<sup>13</sup> The way Turkey used the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh as a resource for pressurizing Armenia, Yerevan made the Genocide instrumental for its policy. Given Yerevan's limited leverage over Ankara, Armenia is actively using Turkey's sensitivity in the Genocide issue. Every time Turkey brings up the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh as a precondition for normalizing relations with Armenia, the latter toughens its stand on Genocide recognition, with the pressure exert-

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<sup>12</sup> See: Alexander Iskandarian. "Cog`rafyanın Birleřtirip Tarihin Ayırdıg` İki Ülke: Ermenistan ve Türkiye." *Ermenisorunu tartıřılırken... /"Armenien und die Türkei: Geographisch verbunden – durch die Geschichte getrennt."* *Wenn Man Die Armenierfrage Diskutiert...* Istanbul: Heinrich Böll Stiftung Derneđi, Mart 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Ruben Safrastyan. "The Recognition of the Genocide in Armenia's Foreign Policy: Multi-Level Analysis." *21<sup>st</sup> Century Journal* (Russian Edition). Yerevan. No 1, 2005, p. 3.

ed by the Diaspora on Western governments becoming a resource for pushing Ankara towards concessions in the reconciliation process. After his visit to Washington in early December 2009, Prime Minister Erdoğan made a public statement tying Armenian-Turkish normalization to the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, and Turkish media reported Barack Obama as telling Erdoğan that unless Turkey ratifies the Protocols and opens its border with Armenia, the Congress will be very likely to pass a resolution recognizing the Genocide by April 24, 2010 (the day when Armenians worldwide commemorate the Genocide).

Turkish policy-makers are, of course, aware that ratification of the Protocols will not cause Armenia and especially the Diaspora to stop advocating recognition of the Genocide. Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoğlu once told Turkish journalists he did not believe the Armenians would ever renounce Genocide claims. The opening of borders and normalization of relations can slow the process down but not stop it, since it is from the Diaspora and not from the Armenian government that this initiative originates. Campaigns for international recognition of the Genocide began before modern Armenia was created; the European Parliament passed its Resolution on the Genocide back in 1987 when no one could so much as imagine that Armenia would become an independent state four years later.

The Diaspora will continue to lobby for Genocide recognition, and Armenia will continue to use this as a lever (its efficiency openly admitted by Turkish experts and officials) until Armenia and Turkey normalize relations. Turkey will continue to invest considerable resources into trying to offset the activities of the Armenian Diaspora rather than focus on its own foreign policy agenda. According to Osman Bengur, a

Turkish-American expert and former Congress nominee, “By some accounts, approximately 70 percent of the Turkish Embassy’s time in Washington is spent trying to persuade leading Americans to support the Turkish position on the Armenian question.”<sup>14</sup> While trying to prevent Genocide recognition, Turkey has to face strong Armenian organizations in the U.S. which represent a segment of American voters and taxpayers, making Ankara’s task extremely difficult. The situation in other countries with large Armenian Diasporas, especially France, is very similar.

#### **4.2. Domestic Liberalization in Turkey, Pro-European Trends and the Role of the International Community**

In late 2008–early 2009, a unique situation arose where Western policies with regard to Turkey are concerned. With the election of President Obama, some Turkish experts consider the U.S. to have the most pro-Armenian administration in history, with Joe Biden as Vice President and Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State.<sup>15</sup> With new obstacles to its EU accession and new domestic efforts to review its foreign policy priorities, Turkey has become more vulnerable to pressure from Western states, especially the U.S., in matters of normalizing relations with Armenia.

Meanwhile, profound societal change is underway in Turkey, reflecting a crisis of Kemalist politics and national

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<sup>14</sup> Osman Bengur. “Turkey’s Image and the Armenian Question.” *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, vol. 8, N. 1, p. 45.

<sup>15</sup> For details, see: “The Obama Presidency: A View from Turkey.” *SETA Policy Brief*, N.29, January 2009; Tarik Oguzlu. “The Hilary Clinton Impact on Turkish-American Relations.” *SETA Policy Brief*, N.30, January 2009; Omer Taspinar. “Obama’s Turkey Policy: Bringing Credibility to ‘Strategic Partnership.’” *Insight Turkey*, vol.11, N.1, 2009.

ideology. Growing pro-European trends, mostly in Istanbul and Western Turkey, combined with overall liberalization, have affected the perception of the Armenian question by Turkish elites and general public. In Turkey's pro-European circles, normalization with Armenia began to be perceived as one of the symbols of democratic and liberal change in Turkish society and governance. In fact, support for Turkey-Armenia rapprochement somehow merged with pro-European trends, becoming part of the domestic discourse in various spheres of Turkey's social, political and cultural life.

Unsettled relations with Yerevan expose Turkey to pressure from leading world players such as the U.S. and the EU. Some actors in Brussels and Washington use the Armenian question as a tool for pressurizing Ankara in a range of issues from EU membership to the status of Iraq's Kurdish-populated Northern provinces. This is a growing concern for Turkish political elite and society. According to a joint report written by Armenian, Turkish and European experts, "A growing number of Turks have realised that their country's international position on the Armenian question has only generated tension with important allies, while utterly failing to persuade them... So long as Turkey's political leaders and opinion makers continue to stoke fears of loss of territory and reparations Turkey will continue to respond defensively. By continuing to treat every mention of the 'g-word' as attack on national honour, Turkey's foreign policy has become hostage to events beyond its control, particularly when dealing with the Caucasus."<sup>16</sup>

Turkey's relations with Armenia have in fact become part of its relations with the West. In terms of civilization and pol-

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<sup>16</sup> *Noah's Dove Returns. Armenia, Turkey and the Debate on Genocide*. European Stability Initiative, Berlin – Istanbul – Yerevan, 21 April 2009, p. 22.

itics, Armenia is an extension of the Western world, and Armenian-Turkish relations are a component of Ankara's relations with Brussels and Washington with the Russian factor also coming into the picture. External players, especially the U.S., are in many cases both the subject and the object of the "Armenian factor" in U.S. policies with regard to Turkey. While Armenia and Armenian Diaspora employ their advocacy resources in the United States and Western Europe in order to exert pressure on Turkey, Washington and Brussels also use the issue of the 1915 Genocide and the need to open Armenian-Turkish borders as means for criticizing and containing Ankara when the need arises (for example, in issues such as Turkey's accession to the EU or policies in the Middle East).

The Turkish domestic dimension is also important with regard to the Genocide issue. The murder of Armenian-Turkish journalist Hrant Dink, the murders of Christian missionaries in Trabzon and Malatya and the Ergenekon Case all point to the existence of entrenched nationalistic, anti-Armenian and anti-Western sentiment in Turkish society.<sup>17</sup> The current state of affairs has been under criticism from moderate political actors and part of Turkey's civil society and elite. Acute problems experienced by the Armenian minority in Turkey, combined with the historical legacy, make some Turkish public activists and officials call for a change of Ankara's policy towards Armenia.

In other words, the growing discourse about the past and present of the Armenian minority in Turkey is affecting the political perception of Armenian-Turkish interstate relations and is creating a more favorable background for rapproche-

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<sup>17</sup> Kudret Bülbül, Bekir Berat Özipek, İbrahim Kalın. "Turkish Perceptions of the West." *Insight Turkey*, vol. 10, No 1, 2008, p. 130.

ment. Unthinkable just a few years ago, it is now a fact that a segment of Turkish civil society is urging Turkish authorities to accelerate normalization with Armenia and even to stop tying it to the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

### **4.3. Economic and Communication Stimuli**

The consequences of the 2008 Russia-Georgia War served to accelerate rapprochement between Yerevan and Ankara. The war exposed the vulnerability of communication routes via Georgia, creating a new incentive for Turkey to open its border with Armenia in order to build alternative communication (and potentially also energy transportation) routes in the South Caucasus. When all communication and energy transportation via Georgia was disrupted during the war, a number of Turkish experts and public officials, including even Foreign Minister Ali Babajan, expressed the view that Armenia could potentially become an alternative terrain for a gas pipeline from the Caspian to the West, since transit via Georgia has become insecure as a result of the Russian intervention.<sup>18</sup>

Since the Five-Day War, Armenia has had to face new regional challenges. Ironically, the post-war strengthening of Russia's positions and influence in the South Caucasus also served to increase the distance between Russia and Armenia. First of all, the war interrupted land communication between the two countries, including the transportation of supplies to the Russian base deployed in Armenia. Russia's right to use the transit route via Georgian territory for transporting sup-

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<sup>18</sup> "In the Turkish scheme, Armenia is an alternative to Georgia for transportation of Azerbaijani oil: Ali Babajan." *Regnum*, 08.09.2008 <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1052099.html> (in Russian).

plies to Russian troops in Armenia was stipulated by the 2005 agreements between Moscow and Tbilisi under which Russia withdrew its military bases from the territory of Georgia. Obviously, Russian military transit via Georgia has become impossible after the war and will not resume in the foreseeable future. Non-military transit from Russia to Armenia via Georgian territory is also problematic.

Russian military transit to Armenia via Azerbaijan, Iran or Turkey is not out of the question yet it involves political complications and restrictions at an even higher level. At the moment, most supplies are carried to the Russian military base in Armenia by air. It is a unique situation in the framework of the unresolved conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, taking into account that land communication between Armenia and Azerbaijan was cut off by Baku back in 1990. Whatever new solutions are found, it is a fact that the Five-Day War moved Russia further away from Armenia, both literally and figuratively speaking. This could not fail to affect Yerevan's bilateral relations with Tbilisi and Ankara.

Now that it has lost Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the mid-term perspective at the least, Georgia has nothing left to lose or to concede in territorial terms. Therefore, since August 2008 the Georgian society and political elites have strongly resented any political developments that can in any way affect the country's regional standing. For example, it is obvious that the settlement of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, or any positive dynamics therein, would lessen the regional importance of Georgia, depriving it of the economic and political benefits that normally reach Tbilisi for as long as its two neighbors in the South Caucasus are in a state of conflict. Many people in Georgia are concerned that even a tiny change of the general background in the conflict over Nagorno-

Karabakh could undermine Georgia's exclusive regional status. As Georgian experts point out, there is also a feeling in Georgia that should Armenian-Turkish rapprochement lead to unblocking of borders and communications between Armenia and Turkey, this would cause Tbilisi to lose its privileged position in regional transit and economic projects. According to Georgian political scientist Gia Nodia, "For the South Caucasus and Georgia in particular, the Turkish-Armenian reconciliation, if it takes place, will constitute a genuine and important change. Some analysts consider Georgia a potential loser from this development." However, Nodia also points out that the opening of the Armenian-Turkish border would serve to reduce Russian military and political presence in Armenia and in the entire South Caucasus, which would be beneficial for Georgia.<sup>19</sup>

Social and economic stimuli are also important. Ever since the 350-km long Turkish-Armenian border was sealed back in 1993, the only direct connection between Armenia and Turkey has been by air. The Istanbul-Yerevan passenger flight was opened in 1996 but goods from the two countries (chiefly Turkish imports into Armenia) are mostly shipped by land via Georgia. According to Kaan Soyak, the Head of the Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council, the trade turnover between Armenia and Turkey reaches at least 100-120 million dollars per annum. According to research done by the U.S. Embassy to Armenia, Turkey is Armenia's seventh largest trade partner. Due to the lack of official ties, either Russia or Georgia is marked as the destination on Turkish goods intended for Armenia; alternately, businesses deal via companies registered

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<sup>19</sup> Gia Nodia. "How Much Has the World Changed? Implications for Georgia's Policies." *CIPDD Policy Review*, April 2009, p. 9.

in other countries, chiefly Switzerland, and Turkey is not marked on the goods as the place of manufacture.

Should the border open and communication routes begin to function, the trade turnover can rise drastically. Local officials from the struggling Eastern parts of Turkey have on many occasions expressed their enthusiasm about the potential opening of the border and beginning of trade and cooperation with Armenian businesses. Poverty levels in the regions of Turkey that border on Armenia are several times higher than in better developed Western Turkey to say nothing of Istanbul. Local residents are looking forward to an open border with Armenia that they hope can give them a chance to improve their economic plight.

In Armenia, some businesspeople have voiced fears that open borders may leave Armenian producers unable to compete against cheap imports from Turkey and make Armenian trade too dependent on the Turkish route. However, most experts believe the economic benefits of the opening of borders will outmatch any potential damages. Business actors who welcome the opening hope to export their products to international markets at much smaller costs than presently.

#### **4.4. Turkey's New Role and Asymmetric Perceptions**

Since the end of the Cold War and the demise of the bipolar world order in the early 1990s, Turkey has been looking for a new niche in regional politics. On one hand, Ankara lost its importance in the Larger Near East as soon as it stopped playing the part of a major anti-Communist beachhead of the NATO and the U.S. On the other hand, the demise of the USSR offered Turkey new opportunities to become involved in the post-Soviet space, especially where energy projects were

concerned. However, in recent years Turkey has been increasingly burdened by pressing policy issues, both outside its borders (the Cyprus problem and the Kurdish issue in Iraq) and inside the country (the Kurdish problem, developments around the 20<sup>th</sup>-century genocides of Armenians and Greeks, and the current situation of Christian minorities in Turkey).

When the Justice and Development Party (AKP, *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) ascended to power in Turkey, it pledged to quickly resolve all those pending issues. Domestically, it made some steps towards liberalizing policies with regard to the Kurdish problem, and started reviewing attitudes with regard to Turkish citizens of Armenian descent. In foreign policy, Turkey started making efforts to normalize relations with all its neighbors. The new foreign policy doctrine, elaborated and promoted by Turkey's Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, has become known as "zero problems with neighbors." Indeed, in recent years Turkey has succeeded in improving relations with some of its neighbors – Syria, Iran and to some extent also Greece. However, three very acute issues remain unresolved: those of Cyprus and of the Kurdish and Armenian minorities in Turkey. Of these, the Cyprus problem and the Kurdish issue are the most sensitive for Turkish society. Neither of the two lends itself to resolution in the short-term; they will continue to hinder Turkey's domestic development and prevent it from fully implementing its new foreign policy doctrine. The extreme complexity of the Kurdish problem was once again exposed when Prime Minister Erdoğan's "Kurdish initiative" was cut short or at least strongly deterred by a ban imposed by Turkey's Constitutional Court on the activity of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party. The intricacy of the Cyprus problem is in many ways similar. On one hand, those two unresolved problems make Turkey more vulnerable

to external pressures in the Armenian question. On the other hand, Turkey-Armenia normalization can potentially become the only success story in Turkish foreign policy in the last few years and thus serve to improve Turkey's staggering international image.

Turkey-Armenia relations are also affected by the fact that perceptions of these relations in Armenia and Turkey are quite asymmetric. Whereas relations with Turkey are a national security issue from the perspective of Armenia and Armenian Diaspora, for Turkey the Armenian question is potentially an issue of historical liability that affects its international image and relations with its main allies in the West. The fact that relations with Armenia are a headache for 70-million-strong Turkey while for Armenia they are an issue of prime importance makes Armenia more consolidated and focused in its attitude to rapprochement with Turkey. Turkey matters more to Armenia than Armenia does to Turkey. Yet Ankara can afford to make more progress in its relations with Yerevan in order to receive major political dividends at international level. By showing that it can be an unbiased and open partner – a country that settles its relations with its neighbors and is open to compromises and constructive dialogue on the most controversial issues – Turkey can hope to improve its image in the Muslim world as well as in Europe and the US. A new constructive image will be conducive to Turkey's Soft Power, especially bearing in mind the new discourse that has recently become popular in Turkish society and the new role that Turkey hopes to play in the management of regional conflicts should it succeed in becoming perceived as a neutral neighbor.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Hakan Altınay. "Turkey's Soft Power: An Unpolished Gem or an Elusive Mirage?" *Insight Turkey*, vol. 10, No 2, 2008, p.56.

By opening its border in the East, Turkey can count on dividends in the West, primarily in its dialogue with the EU, whereas Armenia will benefit in terms of security and communication, and get new opportunities for development.<sup>21</sup> Potential benefits for the two countries thus lie in very different spheres, affecting the perception of normalization by societies and politicians.

#### **4.5. Foreign Policy Stimuli for Armenia**

Starting from the mid-1990s, since the ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Armenian leadership has been making it clear that Armenia is ready to build its foreign policy and engage in regional and global integration regardless of the situation in the conflict, despite all the political and economic costs that this entails. Given the current *status quo* in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, one cannot expect a settlement of relations with Azerbaijan in the short-term or even in the medium-term. Accordingly, Armenia has to reconcile with this prospect, and avoid pegging its relations with other countries of the region, international organizations or leading world powers on the Karabakh factor. Armenia proceeds on the assumption that improved conditions for regional integration and the creation of an environment conducive to mutual trust will one day pave the way for rapprochement with Azerbaijan. It also sees the ongoing rapprochement between Armenia and Turkey as a step in this direction.

The Five-Day War considerably reduced military risks in the zone of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh by demon-

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<sup>21</sup> Aybars Görgülü, Sabiha Senyuçel Gundogar, Alexander Iskandaryan and Sergey Minasyan. "Turkey-Armenia Dialogue Series: Breaking the Vicious Circle." *TESEV – Caucasus Institute Joint Report*, Jstanbul, April 2009, pp.13-16.

strating the inefficiency of violent unilateral attempts at resolution. It also served to solidify the *status quo* in the zone of conflict for years to come, and ruled out prospects for settlement in the short-term.

The political environment of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh has also been developing in a direction which is favorable for Armenia, because the double blockade of Armenia has been one of the main components of Azerbaijan's policy in its confrontation with Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, whereas the opening of the Armenia-Turkey border can potentially nullify the effect of the blockade. Armenia's active participation in the Armenian-Turkish rapprochement, with Moscow's tacit consent and the hearty approval of the USA and the EU, has been beneficial for Armenia's image and weight in the region. One can even say that the Turkish initiative enabled Armenia to break out of the narrow limits of the South Caucasus political environment and secure an independent niche in the Great Game by relying on the indirect resources of the EU, the USA and Russia in its negotiations with Turkey. All this serves to enhance Armenia's motivation to achieve reconciliation with Turkey.



# 5. Prospects

## 5.1. Ratification Prospects

The Armenian-Turkish Protocols are the result of many compromises achieved during lengthy negotiations. It would be naïve to expect them to fully correspond to the interests of both countries as some sort of middle ground had to be found in an effort to reconcile the two nations. The path to ratification and implementation may also prove thorny.

At the time of writing in early 2010, the regional and international circumstances remain conducive to Armenian-Turkish rapprochement. Not only do the U.S. and the EU support this project but Russia's attitude has also become more favorable as a result of the Five-Day War. However, domestic procrastination can create serious impediments to rapprochement in both countries. Lack of progress visibly frustrates stakeholders in Turkey and Armenia, including political actors and the wide public, and makes them gradually lose faith in the process. There is growing insecurity and mistrust on both sides of the border; there are also rising doubts that a clear normalization plan actually exists and that there is room for compromise between Armenia and Turkey. This sentiment leads to speculations and creates domestic problems for public officials in both countries. With one of the two countries trying to tie the ratification to additional parameters not

stipulated by the Protocols, the other may start coming up with new preconditions, leading the whole process into a deadlock.

In Armenia, lack of progress in the rapprochement reactivates historical phobias, leading to rejection of the rapprochement by the society and further aggravating the apprehensions existing in Armenian Diaspora communities worldwide. Similar issues arise in Turkey, especially with the ruling party and its Prime Minister losing popularity, with approaching parliamentary elections and growing criticism of the Armenian-Turkish rapprochement by opposition groups.

Should ratification be postponed, stalling the rapprochement, frustration can overwhelm the process and make its continuation extremely difficult. As a result, the situation in Armenian-Turkish relations may end up worse than it had been prior to the start of “football diplomacy,” especially in view of the approaching Genocide commemoration day. However, the continuation of Armenian-Turkish rapprochement is still on the two governments’ list of priorities, and there is still a chance that the Protocols may be ratified in the short-term.

## **5.2. Potential Problems**

At the time of writing in January 2010, there is still some probability that the Protocols may be ratified and the border opened. Although one can find fault with the text of the Protocols, it is crucial that the Protocols prescribe a procedure for normalizing bilateral relations and opening borders. They are, in fact, a “road map.” However, one cannot rule out that even in the event that parliaments do ratify the Protocols, their implementation would be delayed and hampered by various technical challenges, consciously or unconsciously brought forward by either of the two sides.

It is important to bear in mind that the opening of borders will not eliminate or even mitigate existing problems: although the problems will certainly transform, they will also very probably escalate. Open borders will allow hundreds of thousands of people to visit the neighboring country about which they know absolutely nothing. Armenians will get the chance to visit those regions of Turkey that form a part of Armenian history and in which the ancestors of many contemporary Armenians were born and lived. Armenian tourists will certainly be appalled by the sad state of Armenian historical heritage in those regions. Amongst the Turks, visitors from Armenia may evoke memories of the Genocide. On one hand, this may provoke a negative reaction from some people. On the other, this may expose the already existing discourse about “crypto-Armenians,” i.e. Turkish citizens having some form of Armenian identity who are direct descendants of those Armenians who adopted Turkish identities during the Genocide and thus avoided deportation. Moreover, according to some data, up to a third of the population of the Turkish regions that border on Armenia are Azeri, i.e. people having some aspects of Azerbaijani identity.

All of this put together will probably lead to a surge of intolerance and nationalism immediately after the opening of borders. With the border crossable, nationalist ideologies will no longer rely solely on historical references but also on everyday problems and conflicts that do not happen now simply because the two nations do not interact.

# About the authors

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# About the Caucasus Institute

The Caucasus Institute (CI) is one of the leading think-tanks and educational centers in Armenia and the entire region. It implements research in the areas of political science, social sciences and media studies with regard to the Southern and Northern Caucasus. The CI also engages in regional studies on a wider scope.

Founded in Yerevan in 2002, the CI has a reputation of a neutral platform for non-politicized debate of acute issues of the region's political and social development. Based on its research, the CI conducts expert consultations, roundtable discussions and conferences. CI produces publications in various formats, including Caucasus Yearbooks which sum up various aspects of politics, social life and economics in the Southern and Northern Caucasus every year.

The CI is special in that it combines research and debates with close links to the news media. CI actively engages the media in order to inform the region's societies and political elites of the results of research done at CI. Its wide public outreach enables CI to influence the public opinion as well as professional discourses, and to propose recommendations to political decision-makers.