

Turkey and Armenia Post-Protocols: Back to Square One?

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Beginning with a football game in Yerevan between the Turkish and Armenian teams on 6 September 2008, a high-level diplomatic normalization process between Turkey and Armenia came under the spotlight. Following intense diplomatic traffic, including the announcement in April 2009 that a roadmap had been agreed upon, the public release of two initialized protocols took place in August 2009: “Protocol on establishment of diplomatic relations” and “Protocol on development of mutual relations.” After six weeks of heated debate, the documents were signed by the two countries’ foreign ministers on 10 October 2009 in Zurich. Besides opening the border and establishing diplomatic relations, these protocols laid out plans to establish an intergovernmental bilateral commission with seven sub-commissions to “develop” relations - one being an “impartial scientific examination of the historical records and archives” (commonly referred to as the history sub-commission). While the disintegration of the process had already begun in the spring and summer months of 2009, the more explicit fizzle began after the signing ceremony.

This was not the first attempt to normalize relations (the term typically used to refer to the opening of the common border and the establishment of diplomatic relations) between Turkey and Armenia, but it was the initiative most in the public eye since Armenia’s independence in 1991. Not only were the

societies of the two countries enwrapped in heated debate about the process, but Washington, Brussels and Moscow were engaged, as were other interested parties such as the Armenian diaspora and the Azerbaijani public and government. Analyzing various dimensions of this attempt to normalization can therefore shed light on the contours of the challenges, as well as the incentives of the drivers and the spoilers. Developing this understanding can subsequently help build a more solid and realistic sense of how the existing divides between the peoples and the capitals might be bridged in the future.

Though people-to-people ties have been intensifying among various segments of both nations, the state of relations in general is still characterized by closed borders, the absence of diplomatic relations, as well as deep distrust and antagonism playing out at societal, political and international levels. The two main causes of this situation are the shared history of Turks and Armenians, in particular the events of 1915, and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. There are also related problems involving compensation expectations, and tensions related to the (non) recognition of the joint border. The protocol framework aimed to directly and indirectly address these interwoven problems.

Highlighting political expediency calculations for the Ankara leadership and the social

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outlook in Turkey more generally, this paper will assess the logic of the formulas sought by the protocols for overcoming differences on history, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and border recognition, examining why the process broke down. The paper will also attempt to stimulate thought about the various dimensions relevant to both sides, that need to be taken into account in future attempts to address these complex issues. The final section emphasizes the need for a deeper, more consistent and holistic long term reconciliation between the two nations, in a fashion that does not exclude Azerbaijan, to unlock the stalemate of the region, and unleash its cooperative potential.

Over the decades, the stripping of much of present-day Turkey of its Armenian communities has been taken up by the Turkish bureaucracy with denialist and defensive approaches, reflecting as such in public discourse and official publications. The response from segments of the active Armenian diaspora, has been indiscriminate anti-Turkish propaganda. A vicious cycle of mutual antagonism has become entrenched.

HISTORY – NOT GOING AWAY

The underlying problem between the two nations is the clashing narratives about the history of Armenians in the final years of the Ottoman-Turkish state during World War I. Wrapped up succinctly by the report of the International Center for Transitional Justice, there is “disagreement as to the magnitude and scope of these events, their context and intended effect, and the identities and affiliations of their perpetrators.”¹ Over the

decades, the stripping of much of present-day Turkey of its Armenian communities has been taken up by the Turkish bureaucracy with denialist and defensive approaches, reflecting as such in public discourse and official publications. The response from segments of the active Armenian diaspora, has been indiscriminate anti-Turkish propaganda. A vicious cycle of mutual antagonism has become entrenched.

The involvement of third party politicians, through genocide recognition resolutions that attempt to describe what happened in 1915 and reach legal conclusions, has contributed to the reduction of historical reflection to whether or not the word *genocide* applies, and the consequences thereof. This has created a cauldron of not only legal and historical dispute but also political and material interest, as well as international strategic power games, turning the word *genocide* into a litmus test of “patriotic credentials” for a sizeable proportion of Turks and Armenians.

The effort, in particular by organized hardline Armenian diaspora groups, to pressure Turkey into *recognition*, *restitution*, and *reparation* has been countered with significant resources as well as political and diplomatic capital by the Turkish state. This course of events has at times severely limited Turkey’s diplomatic manoeuvre space on other strategic questions, and hardened public opinion and political space in both countries. The fact that Barack Obama, elected as US president in November 2008, was known to support the term *genocide* to qualify the ethnic cleansing of Armenians in

¹ “The applicability of the United Nations convention on the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide to events which occurred

during the early twentieth century”, International Center for Transitional Justice report, February 2003, <http://www1.american.edu/cgp/TARC/ictj.htm>

Anatolia, increased the concern and pressure on Turkey. Meanwhile, partially as a factor of the intensification of official apologies for historical wrongs in Western democracies, and as a result of campaigns of Armenian diaspora lobbies, genocide recognition by parliaments of third countries had gained momentum in the 1990s and continued into the first decade of the 21st century.²

Lightening the burden of “genocide diplomacy” was one of the expectations of the Turkish side in venturing into normalization with Armenia in 2008. There was an assumption in Ankara – supposedly generated by US officials, that Washington would hold off with recognition, if Turkey normalized (or took serious steps in the direction of normalizing) relations with Armenia. Whether specified clearly as such by US authorities or not, the fact that this conditionality was widely believed in Ankara, became one of the driving forces for Turkey venturing into the protocol process.

“History” has been on the agenda of bilateral talks between Ankara and Yerevan for over 20 years. In 1991, when Ankara first started talks with Armenian counterparts to establish relations, an expectation that the Armenian diaspora end genocide-recognition campaigns was on its agenda. However, Yerevan clearly and consistently held that it was not the interlocutor of this issue. History as an agenda item somewhat faded out of state-to-state negotiation, especially as it became clear to Turkey that, indeed, Yerevan was not leading or controlling the diaspora on this issue, and that Levon Ter Petrosyan did not include

genocide recognition in Armenia’s foreign policy or its policy regarding the normalization of relations between the two countries.

However, when Robert Kocharian came to power as president in 1998 and raised the question of genocide recognition to the level of state policy – both as a weapon against Turkey and to stimulate diaspora support to his administration – “history” once again rose to the forefront of the official bilateral agenda.

The first publicized expression of the idea of a history commission (to study archives and historical records) to be agreed on between Ankara and Yerevan, was proposed by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on 10 April 2005. The Armenian response (arguably not delivered explicitly as a response to Turkey’s offer), was that relations should first be normalized and borders opened, before history, as well as “other issues of mutual interest” could be taken up. Capturing the thinking of the Armenian government at the time, a wire from the US embassy in Yerevan, released by Wikileaks, explains that the perception in Yerevan is that Turkey’s offer of a history commission is a “stall tactic” and “the Turkish side is uninterested in serious dialogue with Armenia but hopes to create the impression of reaching out to Armenia as a tactic to relieve European pressure”.³ The wire continues: “The GOAM [Government of Armenia] certainly has no desire to help Turkey ‘off the hook’ in the court of European opinion, Armenia’s only real leverage in the Turkish

2 European Stability Initiative, “Armenia-Turkey: A Difficult Rapprochement”, subheading: “International Recognition”, http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=322&debate_ID=2&slide_ID=18

3 Origin: Embassy of Yerevan, Created: 08/11/2006, Released on 30 August 2011, Reference ID: 06YEREVAN1586 <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2006/11/06YEREVAN1586.html> (Though Wikileaks can be challenged as a credible reference, in this case it is selected merely because it is a strong articulation of the Yerevan position which this author has observed at numerous other platforms as well)

dispute - in the absence of serious Turkish intent to move toward normalization and open trade relations. So long as Armenians think that Turkey seeks only to distract, deflect and point-score off its Armenian neighbour, the government of Armenia is perfectly willing to respond in like manner.”⁴

Eventually, the 2009 protocols, initialled by both sides, foresaw a “sub-commission on the historical dimension to implement a dialogue with the aim to restore mutual confidence between the two nations, including an impartial scientific examination of the historical records and archives to define existing problems and formulate recommendations, in which Armenian, Turkish as well as Swiss and other international experts shall take part.”⁵

Besides possibly arming Ankara with an argument that Turkey was making leeway in discussing history openly and in conjunction with Armenian counterparts, there was arguably also a more benign and constructive intent on Ankara’s part in pushing for this pillar of the protocols: bringing about a more complete, nuanced spectrum in the study of the two nations’ history.

The perception in Turkey is that only anti-Turkish perspectives are revealed by many non-Turkish assessments of this era of Turkish history, while the role of external actors and the victimhood of Muslim Turkish communities are neglected. While in some localities the portrayal of the Ottoman Turkish state as the

only perpetrator might be relatively accurate, factoring in experiences in other localities and the context of the era can help bring out more complexities. The effort to bring in different layers of historical experiences need not be driven by an effort to justify the conduct of the Ottoman Turkish officials of the time. Instead, it can increase the understanding of the conflicting narratives, and expand the stakeholders in Turkey and Armenia for a broader understanding of Turkish-Armenian history. Accordingly, the history sub-commission may have been seen as a way to transform the debate of history. However the idea raised more questions than it settled: Who would the experts be? Who would designate them? What exactly would they be examining? What and how long would their mandate be? Would their findings or characterizations be binding to the two states?

Ambiguities fuelled fears and the debate about the history sub-commission was negative, particularly among Armenians. The Sarkisian administration was widely accused by Armenians of agreeing to a formulation that questioned the characterization of the 1915 events as *genocide*. From the mainstream Armenian perspective, the truth is known, thus examination can only be an instrument for denial.

Soon after the release of the documents, it had already become obvious that the history sub-commission had little chance of functioning, if for no other reason than because of its image. Historians who would have agreed to take part in the joint initiative, particularly on the Armenian side, risked being discredited and possibly even threatened.

Given the accusatory reception of the idea of a joint examination of history, Yerevan

4 Ibid.

5 Protocol on Development of Relations Between The Republic of Turkey and The Republic of Armenia, 31 August 2009, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/protocol-on-development-of-relations-between-the-republic-of-turkey-and-the-republic-of-armenia.en.mfa>

underlined that no change in its approach to genocide recognition would take place. This position was officiated by the verdict of the Armenia's Constitutional Court about the constitutionality of the protocols.⁶ While the court gave a positive verdict regarding constitutionality, it explained that the protocols cannot be interpreted or applied in the legislative process and application practice of the Republic of Armenia (RoA) as well as in the interstate relations in a way that would contradict the provisions of the Preamble to the RoA Constitution and the requirements of Paragraph 11 of the Declaration on Independence of Armenia, which confirms the "support of the republic for the international recognition of the Armenian Genocide."⁷

On the Turkish side, this revelation was one of the spoilers of the process.⁸ The message conveyed was that, a different way of dealing with history or positive developments regarding Karabakh should not be expected from Yerevan. Under these circumstances, the price of normalization was deemed too high for Ankara, in particular because of the consequences of countering Azerbaijan's interests. Subsequently, just as Armenia had expressed its unchanging position on the

genocide diplomacy front, Ankara underlined its unchanging position linking the implementation of the protocols to progress on the Nagorno-Karabakh front. (This point is covered in depth in the section entitled "The Nagorno-Karabakh problem - more than an enclave").

Post-protocol reflections about the prospects of joint history examination: Given the sensitivity of the issues at hand and the vested interests involved, the questions left open by the protocol made for drama-ridden debate. In retrospect, it is reasonable to ask whether any official initiative to jointly examine history is bound to fail, to assess the factors that should be considered if such a process is to be embarked upon again in the future, and to consider how else Turks and Armenians can move towards constructive debate and more mutual understanding on history.

One common question on this front is the nature of the Armenian counterpart to such an initiative - Yerevan or the diaspora. In the case of the latter, there is ambiguity around who or which institution represents the Armenian diaspora. As mentioned above, Kocharian's policies rendered Yerevan more of a natural counterpart, whereas under the presidency of Levon Ter Petrosyan, the Armenian state did not officially take on a position of campaigning for genocide recognition and thus there was less of a basis for the introduction of a history-related pitch between the administrations of Yerevan and Ankara.

The involvement of the Turkish state in such an initiative is also questioned. On one hand, the Turkish state is inevitably drawn in as the accused party from which recognition and compensation is demanded. On the other hand, arguments that the involvement of the

6 The decision of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Armenia on the case on determining the issue of conformity with the constitution of the republic of Armenia of the obligations stipulated by the protocols (...) between Armenia and Turkey signed in Zurich on 10 October 2009, 12 January 2010, <http://www.concourt.am/english/decisions/common/pdf/850.pdf>

7 Armenian Declaration of Independence, 23 August 1990, <http://www.gov.am/en/independence/>

8 On 18 January 2010, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the Armenian Constitutional Court decision "contains preconditions and restrictive provisions which impair the letter and spirit of the protocols."

The answer to other questions also needs to be built into the design of a prospective commission. For example, what would be the mandate of the commission or what questions would it be created to tackle? When would the commission's work end - at a pre-determined final date or when some goal is reached - and what is that goal, a verdict? And if so, of what? For the Armenian side to recognize the value of the pursuit, the mission would likely need to be spelled out in a way that is not meant to determine whether the 1915 events qualify as genocide or not.

Turkish state in setting a framework for a discussion about history reduces the credibility of such an initiative are also voiced. The latter position is largely based on the observation that official Turkish institutions have been instrumental in curbing the debate over the years. Court cases were opened against some of the intellectuals who most blatantly challenged official Turkish narratives about 1915 “for insulting the Turkish nation”. Incrementally, aided by legislative reforms in the early 2000s, significant improvement has been marked in terms of the plurality of the debate on this topic in Turkey.

While there can be concerns about the involvement of official bodies in historical examination, having state institutions engaged as stakeholders can enable such work too. The backing of official institutions is important for example, to deter right-wing reactionism. The facilitation of access to archives can also be crucial. Whether a joint initiative for historical examination is mandated by the two capitals or not, they would have an important role to play in creating a climate conducive for voicing different views in their respective countries, and opening archives for all interested scholars.

If a bilateral and officially mandated initiative for joint history examination is to be embarked upon, it may need to be fleshed out more substantially before being opened to public debate. The tailoring of such an initiative would need to factor in that the widely-held Armenian assumption will be that the ultimate goal of the Turkish side is to challenge the applicability of the word *genocide*. Accordingly certain precautions could be taken to ensure a critical threshold of support from the Armenian side as well.

Possible parameters for setting up a commission were discussed in June 2012 at a roundtable in Istanbul bringing Turkish NGO representatives together with Gerard Libaridian, an Armenian American historian who served as senior adviser to President Levon Ter Petrosyan (1991-97). Libaridian underlined that officially sanctioned names will be driven to impose official versions of truth. The designation of commissioners, in other words who the commission would be composed of, would thus be the most critical step. Since politicization would spell the end of the recognition of legitimacy for the entire initiative, Libaridian suggested that one alternative would be for the states to give a mandate of designating commissioners to international authorities. By passing on the responsibility to internationally respected individuals whose moral integrity is universally recognized, official bodies could essentially remove themselves from the process.

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However it is not only the Armenian side that has underlying concerns about being manipulated by platforms of historical examination. Among the Turkish official and academic establishment, there is concern that the international community has a general tendency to be unfair to Turkey, and will push the limits of international law accordingly. Therefore, Armenian claims for financial or territorial compensation are an integral part of the debate about what happened between Turks and Armenians in 1915. While convincing arguments have been made that recognition as *genocide* does not “pave the way for compensation and restitution claims against the Turkish government,”⁹ the debate about these issues is largely drama and rumour-ridden.

The extent to which it is viable to expect any commission to settle disagreements on history should also be put into perspective. In 2002, the Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission (TARC) commissioned a legal analysis from the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), to evaluate whether the 1915 events fall under the scope of the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The

report concluded that the events do fit into the description of *genocide* but that:

The Genocide Convention contains no provision mandating its retroactive application. To the contrary the text strongly suggests that it was intended to impose prospective obligations only on the states party to it. Therefore, no legal, financial or territorial claim arising out of the Events could successfully be made against any individual or state under the Convention.¹⁰

The subsequent debate among Turks and Armenians demonstrated the limits of changing hearts and minds with a technical study. The finding was dismissed by both sides and ended up adding minimal value to the debate, changing few minds and hardly fostering more critical thinking or understanding on either side. This case sheds light on the need to adjust expectations with regard to prospective results of endeavours aiming at finding “the truth”. Besides facts and figures, prejudices, politics and judgment play a central role in shaping the state of affairs. The value of a prospective history commission would largely be determined by how it is used by politicians, historians, legal scholars and opinion leaders. As long as domestic and international players are not aligned constructively, it is not likely that any amount of findings will change paradigms in the respective societies. A more binding alternative could involve an international court, though arguably none have the mandate for such a case.¹¹ The issue of tribunal and

9 See “Genocide and restitution” analysis on the European Stability Initiative website, at: http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=322&debate_ID=2&slide_ID=14 Gerald Knaus and Piotr Zalewski, Red Herrings in the Turkish-Armenian Debate, 20 June 2009, <http://www.esiweb.org/rumeliobserver/2009/06/20/red-herrings-in-turkish-armenian-debate/>

10 David L. Phillips, *Unsilencing the Past: Track Two. Diplomacy and Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation*, New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005, pp 112-113.

11 A constructive debate on this issue was held at the Workshop on Turkish/Armenian Understanding and Reconciliation, Princeton University, 2009

arbitration alternatives are occasionally discussed in-depth among scholars and legal experts, however, the insights do not seem to usually reach decision makers or affect public debates.

Though it does not take the place of a joint initiative, the most recent development regarding history discourse has been an effort, championed by the Turkish Foreign Minister, to develop a new narrative, captured by the term “just memory”, and elaborated on in the final section of this article.

THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH PROBLEM - BEYOND AN ENCLAVE

The protracted conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh¹² is the original and single most decisive reason for the closed border between Turkey and Armenia. It was in the course of the Armenian-Azerbaijani war, when at the beginning of April 1993 Armenian forces moved into Kelbajar, lying in Azerbaijan proper beyond the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh enclave,¹³ that Ankara halted the ongoing talks to establish diplomatic relations with the newly independent Republic of Armenia, and sealed the land border.

At the time, Ankara was under pressure domestically to intervene in the war to prevent Azerbaijani defeats. Instead, Ankara called of talks to establish normal relations with

Yerevan. In a sense Ankara felt compelled to counterbalance both the perceived resignation among the international community and the dubious involvement of Russia. Over time, depriving Armenia of normal relations with Turkey also represented Turkey’s position of de-legitimizing the status quo between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and a leverage to supposedly incentivize Yerevan to reach a compromise solution with Baku.

A large majority of the Azeri refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) are from the districts occupied as a buffer zone or bargaining chip, lying beyond the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region which was once an autonomous *oblast* within the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. There is widespread expectation in Turkey that Armenia, with internationally guaranteed security measures, withdraw from territories around Karabakh, which will enable the return of displaced civilians.

To date the Armenian side has been categorically against including Turkey in attempts for the resolution of the Karabakh conflict. Turkey is accordingly not among the co-chairs of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, which mediates the resolution process of the Karabakh conflict. This principle also spills over into civil society dialogue programmes. To date, suggestions to include Turkish participants in second track reconciliation efforts between Armenian and Azerbaijani counterparts have been received negatively by Yerevan. The disconnect in the different tracks of discussions about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict exacerbate the weak understanding and frustration of the Turkish side about the dynamics at play in the Nagorno-Karabakh resolution process.

¹² Nagorno-Karabakh is occasionally referred to in this text as *Karabakh*.

¹³ First the Nagorno Karabakh enclave was taken over, then the corridor that would connect Nagorno Karabakh with Armenia, Lachin. Kelbajar was the first district within Azerbaijan proper (beyond the Karabakh enclave and the corridor connecting Armenia with Karabakh), that was occupied by Armenian forces. In 1993 Agdam, Fizuli, Jabrayil, Gubadli, and Zangilan followed.

The widespread Armenian reluctance about discussing the Karabakh factor with Turkish counterparts also extends to Turkish-Armenian civil society discussion platforms, where, reflection about this issue by Turkish participants is often regarded as being politically incorrect. Whereas, taking the issue out of the conversation does not wipe the issue out. Instead of avoiding the topic, in depth discussion of the various dimensions of the Karabakh issue could increase mutual understanding and allow for expectations on all sides to be set more realistically.

The reality is that Turkey is today indirectly involved in the conflict and its resolution – both in the hearts and minds of involved parties, and in practical terms. The collective memory of their ancestors being massacred and deported from Anatolia by Turks, combined with the perception of Azeris being the same people as Turks, was arguably central to the Armenian mobilization against Azerbaijanis to fight over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. The fear of living with *Azeri Turks* without Moscow as a patron, and the sentiment of vengeance are widely perceived as having played a driving role in the spark and scale of the Nagorno-Karabakh war. This perception, based on observations of rhetoric and sentiment emanating from Armenian sources, has burdened Turkey with a sense of being party to the conflict. In a sense, the Armenian view of Turks and Azerbaijanis as “one and the same” created a self-fulfilling prophecy, drawing the two societies closer together. In addition, because hardline Armenian circles vocalize claims for land from Turkey and Azerbaijan alike in the conceptions of “greater Armenia”, segments of the Turkish right-wing presume that a fait accompli over Karabakh will unleash more force in Armenian demands for territory from Turkey.

To date the Turkey connection continues to infiltrate the conflict in multiple ways. When the prospect of the return of territories around Nagorno-Karabakh is discussed, the counterargument that can be heard on occasion is that for the Armenian psyche, having finally “won” territory is too important for national dignity to forsake. After centuries of loss and having not been compensated for lost land and lives, handing land back – particularly to the close cousin of the main inflictor of tragedy upon the Armenian nation, the Turks – is considered out of question. The lack of trust and feeling of being unable to live with the other in a pluralistic environment is also connected to the collective memories and related identity born from the crumbling years of the Ottoman Empire. Viewed from this perspective, the Azerbaijani’s are penalized for the wrongs of the Ottoman-Turkish Union and Progress party leaders. As an extension, Turkey is brought into the fold, with more burden than an ordinary third party would have. Expectations among the Turkish and Azerbaijani public for Ankara to support Baku’s positions have been influenced by these factors.

Though this connection of Turkey with the Karabakh war is an underlying facet of the picture, it is strategic calculus, more than moral burden, which motivates Ankara’s position today. Due to both domestic political dynamics and geostrategic interests, without progress in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, there is a considerable cost for Ankara normalizing its relations with Yerevan.

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relations, pointing out that this could ease the grip of Russia over Yerevan, moderate stereotypes in Armenia towards Turks and alleviate the international pressure on Turkey. However, these potential strategic benefits are abstract, not assured projections. Moreover, assuming they will materialize, they can only be expected to become effective over time.

In contrast, the potential negative implications of normalization with Armenia could politically sting Turkish authorities immediately – be it in domestic politics or as a backlash from Baku, which could affect energy prices or the interests of Turkish investors in Azerbaijan. Baku made it quite clear in the course of 2009-2010 that it would play hardball to ensure that Azerbaijan's positions and interests are not dismissed.

It is obvious that, even if its borders with Turkey are open, Russia will maintain a stronger grip, politically and economically, over Armenia for the foreseeable future. It is also apparent that Armenia cannot replace Azerbaijan in Turkey's aspirations to become a regional energy hub. For Turkey to gain ground vis-à-vis Russia in the Caucasus, Ankara would need to be able to maintain its close strategic partnership with Baku. An open border with Armenia would contribute to Turkey's regional

traction if Turkey could not only reach Armenia but also open up to Central Asia via Armenia (which would require at least a partial solution between the two South Caucasus countries and the subsequent opening of their border). Without a step forward in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, such as the return of territories around Nagorno-Karabakh, the land border between Armenia and Azerbaijan will remain closed, naturally curbing the potential economic and strategic gains for Turkey. Perhaps, the players involved in Turkey-Armenia normalization should have put more thought into ensuring that Baku's position at the negotiating table would not be affected, whether by securing a basic principle agreement for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in advance of Turkish-Armenian normalization, or by other international guarantees that addressed Baku's concerns.

When Ankara ventured into the protocol-based normalization process with Yerevan, a prediction prevailed among Turkish decision makers that Baku and Yerevan were close to resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, with the involvement of Moscow.¹⁴ Ankara supposedly intended for the two processes to move forward in parallel, assuming the Armenian leadership would take decisive steps for the resolution of the Karabakh conflict or for the return of some districts surrounding the enclave. While Nagorno-Karabakh was not mentioned explicitly in the protocols, particularly from spring 2009 onwards, in light of Azerbaijan's demand for clear pronouncement, Turkish official

¹⁴ Nigar Goksel and Gulshan Pashayeva, "The Interplay of the Approaches of Turkey, Russia and the United States to the Conflict over Nagorno Karabakh" SAM Review (Strategic Research Center under the President of Azerbaijan), Baku, February 2011.

representatives were vocal about the link, stressing that the protocols would only be ratified if progress were marked in the resolution of the Karabakh conflict.¹⁵

While the Turkish leadership was under pressure not to *betray* Azerbaijan, the Armenian leadership was under pressure not to concede to any discussion of Nagorno-Karabakh with Turkish counterparts. Rejecting the conversation meant that realities were swept under the rug. Virtually no consideration could be heard - from supporters or critics of the Yerevan administration - about what kind of step might help unlock the Nagorno-Karabakh stalemate to strike a win-win dynamic.

In the 1990s there were also diplomatic attempts initiated from the Armenian side to delink the processes; however the cost of fallout with Baku trumped the potential gains expected from normalization with Yerevan, both in terms of regional influence and domestic politics. For the foreseeable future, particularly given the heightened collaboration between Turkey and Azerbaijan, this stalemate is not likely to change.

It remains puzzling to date that the Turkish and Armenian sides continued voicing contradictory interpretations about the connection between the protocols' implementation and the Karabakh issue. How could the two capitals and the involved third parties such as Washington, not have foreseen the train wreck that would inevitably take place because of the discrepancy of positions? Or if they foresaw it, why did they proceed?

One possible reason is that both sides assumed the other would eventually have to give in. For example it is possible that Yerevan assumed Ankara would be under too much international pressure and would need to implement the protocols without conditions particularly after the high level signing ceremony was followed through with. As for Ankara, making normalization a more imminent prospect, and designing a strategy for how it would concretely play out, may have been considered a motivating exercise, that might engender a more positive stance in Armenia towards resolving the Karabakh conflict. If Ankara's scheme was that the Yerevan administration would be empowered by the prospect of an open border with Turkey, to proceed with the inevitable compromises for the Karabakh conflict to be resolved, it was a misguided calculation. The manoeuvre space of the Armenian leadership arguably narrowed on this front because of the harsh reaction among Armenians to Turkey's so-called pressure.

There have been contradictory assessments about how Turkey's position affects the prospects of Armenia and Azerbaijan reaching a solution in the Karabakh negotiations. While Armenian sources emphasize that Turkey's position enables Baku to take a hard-line position at the negotiation table, Baku sources have expressed that Armenia's stance became tougher and more maximalist when it considered that the Turkey border would be opened unconditionally. (Because the negotiations take place behind closed doors, it is hardly possible to verify one side or the other on these points.)

Despite the stalemate, there are steps underway or under consideration by Ankara, that can contribute to partially delivering the

¹⁵ Cory Welt, "To link or not to link – Turkey Armenia normalization and the Karabakh Conflict", *Caucasus International*, Spring 2012.

benefits of an open border. For example, BSEC has been developing a regional license system to facilitate road transport across the Black Sea region by providing multilateral licenses. This system enables a quota of Armenian goods and trucks to enter and transit through Turkey with BSEC permits. Initiatives related to railways, such as opening the Kars-Gyumri railway if a railway route between Nahchivan and Azerbaijan can also be opened.

BORDERS AND HOMELANDS

One of the issues that sparked controversy in Armenian debates about the protocol texts was the confirmation of “the mutual recognition of the existing border between the two countries as defined by the relevant treaties of international law.” The protocols did not mention the 1921 Kars and Moscow treaties, which define the current border and which commonly create irritation among Armenians.

Particularly among hard-line Armenians, discussions brought to the fore an intense concern about inhibiting Armenia from making territorial claims in the future. A widespread Armenian position, not limited to the Dashnak Party (Armenian Revolutionary Federation, ARF) and its affiliates abroad, is that Armenians lost their historic homeland through genocide and thus territorial compensation should be pursued.¹⁶ The border

is even referred to by some as the “de facto border”, in order to not attribute legitimacy to its current status.

Increased interaction between the two societies, and Turkish journalists’ traveling to Armenia more frequently, has led Armenian views on territorial issues to reflect more extensively in the Turkish press. Being exposed to calls for the enforcement of the 1920 Treaty of Sevres¹⁷ or arguments that this treaty can be enforced when the international climate is more conducive for the Armenian nation have sparked friction.¹⁸ Given an informed debate is not carried out in Turkey either, concerns hike upon reading revelations such as that of the Head of the International Secretariat of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, Giro Manoyan, explaining that “...the current borders with Turkey are not legal. Historically, Western Armenia [referring to East Anatolia] is ours ... Armenia and Turkey have never agreed on the current borders ... If Turkey continues using Western Armenia as it does now, it will have to pay for its use since 1915.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Besides being a staple element of the debate, the demand was internationally registered in 1975 with a memorandum to the UN submitted by the three main Armenian diaspora parties calling for “the return of Turkish-held Armenian territories to the Armenian people” and “moral, financial and territorial reparations.” Noah’s Dove Returns: Armenia, Turkey and the Debate on Genocide, 21 April 2009 <http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=156&document.ID=108>

¹⁷ The Treaty of Sevres, had it been ratified, would have granted a portion of Eastern Anatolia to an Armenian state

¹⁸ One example is the work of Ara Papian about the use of international law to reclaim territory from Turkey (his related publications can be found on the Website of his institution “Modus Vivendi”: <http://www.wilsonforarmenia.org/index.htm> Other cases that reflected in the Turkish press were the hearings that took place in the Armenian parliament in 2007, excerpts of which can be found on the website of the European Stability Initiative, at: <http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=322&debate.ID=2&slide.ID=17> For brief coverage in Turkish, see: “Ermeni Itirafı”, Milliyet, 21 December 2007, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2007/12/21/dunya/axduno1.html>

¹⁹ “Türkiye’den toprak ve tazminat isteyecekler”, Interview by Senay Yıldız in Aksam Newspaper, 9 March 2010, http://www.aksam.com.tr/2010/03/09/haber/dunya/3901/turkiye_den_toprak_ve_tazminat_isteyecekler.html

Judging from the public debate in political and media platforms as well as the polls released, this is not a marginal position. According to a survey conducted in 2005 by ACNIS (The Armenian Center for National and International Studies), in Armenia, 93.5% of Armenians state that Armenia should claim reparations from Turkey and 60.7% expect the return of territory, while 44.1% expect financial reparations.²⁰ When asked what the Armenian people will gain from the recognition of genocide, 73.5% chose the option, “the return of historical lands and their inhabitation by heirs of the victims.” The second most popular response was “triumph of historical justice” at 64%.²¹

Armenian discourse often reflects a suggestion that the Armenian Republic deserves to claim all land where Armenians lived or governed in history, regardless of which other people cohabitated that land or what has transpired on this land since. Possibly because providing views that contradict such assumptions is deemed unpatriotic, counterarguments to this thinking seem to rarely be publically voiced in the Armenian context. This deems it politically inexpedient for an Armenian politician to explicitly relinquish or renounce territorial ambitions. Discussion about deserving all lands that were once populated with Armenians (along with other peoples), disturbs

Though individual claims for reparations are not necessarily related to whether the word genocide applies or not, the widespread assumption that genocide recognition can enable territorial demands from Turkey, increases the stakes and makes it tougher for Turkish citizens to lower their defensive guard in assessing joint history.

Armenia’s neighbours – setting off defensive attempts in localities in Azerbaijan and Turkey to revise local histories in such a way that denies Armenian presence ever existed.

Though individual claims for reparations are not necessarily related to whether the word *genocide* applies or not,²² the widespread assumption that genocide recognition can enable territorial demands from Turkey, increases the stakes and makes it tougher for Turkish citizens to lower their defensive guard in assessing joint history.

Though borders and compensation debates have stirred up right wing nationalistic Turkish sentiment, they do not currently constitute a fundamental obstacle to official normalization. Ultimately, the Turkish side is aware that demands for large swathes of territory to be “added on” to Armenia cannot materialize, and individual compensation issues are not an agenda item on the bilateral agenda of Ankara and Yerevan. It has served the interests of the administrations in Turkey and Armenia, as well as both countries’ pro-reconciliation civil society segments, not to raise these issues or differences with high public profile.

20 ACNIS Roundtable on Public Opinion and the Armenian Genocide Richard Hovannisian Keynotes, 26 April 2005, <http://www.acnis.am/pr/genocide.htm>

21 “The Armenian Genocide: 90 Years and Waiting” Presentation of Public Opinion Poll Results (1900 citizens from Yerevan and all Armenia), Armenian Center for National and International Studies, April 2005. <http://www.acnis.am/pr/genocide/Socio13eng.pdf> (Because each respondent could select two options, the percentage can add up to more than 100.)

22 ESI report, “Noah’s Dove Returns. Armenia, Turkey and the Debate on Genocide”, 21 April 2009 http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=156&document_ID=108 (see section 4: The Fading Dream of Greater Armenia)

Nevertheless, common rhetoric among Armenians of “historic homeland” or “Western Armenia” (the latter referring to Eastern Anatolia), are widely perceived in Turkey to suggest irredentism. Given the maintenance of expectation for territorial compensation among Armenians and the fact that territorial challenges are received with heightened sensitivity in Turkey, tension is likely to persist at public level even if the issue is managed at the diplomatic level.

Responsible leadership by the political and intellectual elite on both sides will be needed to prevent provocations from setting the agenda in the related debates. Rather than concealing the differences or allowing drama-ridden exchanges to dominate, an informed and dispassionate debate about various forms of potential claims may better guard against potential flare-ups.

THE NEW STARTING POINT: SQUARE ONE?

As outlined in the sections above, on the three main issues, the expectations in the two nations were very disparate, and the language of the protocols was ambiguous in order to accommodate contrary interpretations. The negotiations had not solved the disputed points but had concealed them with carefully chosen words.

The first visible disintegration of the process took place during the signing ceremony of the protocols, in October 2009 when Armenian Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian objected to the statements Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoğlu planned to make, which would have clarified Turkey’s interpretation of the protocols. The so-called ceremony, attended at foreign minister level by Moscow,

Washington, and Paris, was “saved” by the decision that no statements be made.

The next step that broke the process down was the decision of the Armenian Constitutional Court, which received the protocols in November 2009 to evaluate their compliance with the constitution. On 12 January 2010, a positive ruling was released, affirming compliance. However, as also mentioned in the first section of this article, the ruling also stated that the protocols “cannot be interpreted...in a way that would contradict the provisions of the preamble to the Republic of Armenian constitution and the requirements of Paragraph 11 of the [1990] Declaration of Independence of Armenia.”²³ The explicitly mentioned 11th paragraph of the Declaration reads: “the Republic of Armenia stands in support of the task of achieving international recognition of the 1915 genocide in Ottoman Turkey and Western Armenia.” There were also inferences making it clear that Yerevan rejected any Nagorno-Karabakh related obligation, such as: “The mutual obligations being undertaken (...) are exclusively of a bilateral interstate nature, and cannot concern, or by various references be attributed to, any third party or the relations with such third party of the signatories of such Protocols.”

On 18 January 2010, the Turkish foreign ministry response was as follows: “... this decision contains preconditions and restrictive

²³ The decision of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Armenia on the case on determining the issue of conformity with the constitution of the republic of Armenia of the obligations stipulated by the protocols (...) between Armenia and Turkey signed in Zurich on 10 October 2009, 12 January 2010, <http://www.concourt.am/english/decisions/common/pdf/850.pdf>

provisions which impair the letter and spirit of the Protocols. The said decision undermines the very reason for negotiating these Protocols as well as their fundamental objective. This approach cannot be accepted on our part.”

Since, the process has been frozen.

A commonly posed question is whether the two sides are closer to reconciliation and normalization as a result of the protocol-process, or farther apart.

In that the nature of the challenges and the position of a range of players are now better understood, the process delivered gains. There is a reality check on both sides, as well as in Washington and other third parties, about what is viable and how much political capital is required from Ankara and Yerevan to make concessions on the various issues at hand.²⁴

However, the new starting point is tougher - in terms of mutual confidence and decision makers’ room for manoeuvre, for reasons both related and unrelated to the unsuccessful attempt to normalize relations.

Perhaps most importantly, the already fragile trust between the two countries’

bureaucracies and societies was shaken as a result of the normalization initiative. Ankara was perceived in Armenia to be leading Yerevan on, showcasing an initiative but with no real intention to carry the process to fruition. Meanwhile, debates among Armenians disheartened Turkish observers, many of whom had never been aware of the widespread drive in Armenia for international

Ankara was perceived in Armenia to be leading Yerevan on, showcasing an initiative but with no real intention to carry the process to fruition. Meanwhile, debates among Armenians disheartened Turkish observers, many of whom had never been aware of the widespread drive in Armenia for international genocide recognition and expectations for compensation.

genocide recognition and expectations for compensation.²⁵

After a period of fallout, Baku and Ankara have strengthened their position of solidarity. Both consider their strategic clout to be increasing due to regional developments, and are charting their strategic course on the basis of their bilateral partnership. Besides TANAP (the Trans-Anatolian gas pipeline), Baku is investing in downstream projects in Turkey - including refining and petrochemical facilities, with SOCAR having announced that its investments in Turkey from 2012 to 2017 will amount to 17 billion dollars.²⁶ The two countries have also joined forces more systematically in their lobbying activities abroad. Ankara and Baku calculate that as

25 A misleading perception had been fostered in Turkey over the years, that it is the diaspora, and not the “neighbour Armenians”, who are intent on pursuing such ends. While this distinction was made more by liberal pro-reconciliation segments, arguably with the good intention of shielding Armenia’s Armenians and Turkey-Armenia relations from the antagonism stirred in Turkey by “anti-Turkish propaganda” seen in international platforms, it actually both created unrealistic expectations among Turks, and has been perceived by Armenians as sinister effort to divide their nation. It has also led to misleading generalizations among Turkish nationals about the diaspora, which is very diverse, with various segments being positively engaged in bilateral processes.

26 John Roberts, “The Southern Corridor – BTC’s Gas Legacy”, Turkish Policy Quarterly, Summer 2012, www.turkishpolicy.com.

24 Nigar Göksel, “Turkish Policy Towards The Caucasus: A Balance Sheet of the Balancing Act”, EDAM Black Sea Discussion Paper Series 2011/1, November 2011, http://edam.org.tr/eng/document/Black_Sea_Paper_Series1.pdf

long as they stand together, the time will work in their favour *vis-à-vis* Armenia. Meanwhile, the Nagorno-Karabakh stalemate is more entrenched than ever and expectations for a breakthrough on this front have dimmed.

Compared to 2008-10, the current domestic political context in Turkey, as well as Ankara's foreign policy engagements, provides a less conducive environment to attempt normalization with Armenia. Domestically, the Kurdish issue drains political capital and provokes nationalism. The changes in the Arab world are dominating the regional agenda. And Turkey's liberal intellectuals - who are traditionally the most supportive of progressive steps on issues related to Armenians - are relatively marginalized by the current political dynamics of AKP's power consolidation. Finally, the approaching presidential elections in 2014, in which for the first time the Turkish president will be elected by popular vote, affects political expediency calculations. As Prime Minister Erdoğan is thought to aspire to this position, in the lead-up to these elections, he may be less likely to take a politically exploitable step such as normalizing relations with Yerevan with the prevailing current stalemate over Karabakh.

The political calendar is not conducive in Yerevan either - with the upcoming presidential elections in 2013 and 2015 right around the

corner. The cost of compromise on the Armenian side would arguably also be too high at this fragile juncture.

The 2009-2010 protocol process and debate reflected incompatibility in Ankara and Yerevan's positions as well as unbridgeable public expectations. As of autumn 2012, these have not fundamentally changed, while the conjuncture is even less conducive for an ambitious political step towards normalization on either side. However, it is possible and important to proceed with efforts of bilateral reconciliation to start changing some of the domestic paradigms and emotional barriers. Unless this investment is made consistently and systematically, hostilities and misinterpretation of the other will inhibit rational debate and threaten any prospective normalization process.

Investing in the creation of a more stable base of understanding between the societies should not be seen as a secondary effort. If reconciliation is neglected, even if one day an official agreement for normal relations between the two states is reached, it will be fragile, subject to disintegration in the case of provocation. In fact, just as borders can open and diplomatic relations be established - so can such steps be reversed.

RECONCILIATION VERSUS MONOPOLIZATION OF VICTIMHOOD

Decades of the Turkish official policy of downplaying the tragedy of 1915, treating the issue as taboo, curtailing the debate with legal measures and moral pressure and denying Armenian cultural heritage in Anatolia have established a vicious cycle of antagonism, distrust and racism. However, throughout the course of the maturation of its democracy, and

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particularly since 2000, significant change in this pattern has been marked in Turkey. Though it has been a fitful process, the debate about the joint history of Armenians and Turks is now much more diverse and free. Improvements have taken place in teaching history, restoration of cultural heritage, and the return of properties confiscated from religious minorities, albeit with inadequacies. These positive developments have taken place within a wider scope of crackdown against ultranationalist networks and democratic reforms, in particular regarding minorities.

The transformation is still incomplete, and contradictions in political discourse and action can be observed. In fact, it is not that ethnocentric discourse, racist and politically incorrect statements, or extremist violence does not take place. It does. However, such action sparks vigorous reaction from the critical, liberal and progressive sections of society, often leading to official calibration or amelioration. There has been a growing front in society that is mobilized against human rights abuses and to ensure denigration of any minority or marginalized group is effectively addressed by the state bodies.

The assassination of Hrant Dink made it clear that a very disturbing facet of ultra-nationalism still exists in Turkey; however the aftermath also depicted the growing counterforce. While presumptuous, patronizing and self-righteous rhetoric does surface, there is also a vocal counterforce – such as the “apology campaign” in 2008 initiated by Turkish intellectuals, rejecting the denial of the pain the Ottoman Armenians were subjected to in 1915, and objecting to the “insensitivity” and “injustice” with which their plight has been treated.

The path to this point of diversity in the debate was opened by courageous intellectuals who

dared challenge official narratives particularly from the 1980s onwards, when such challenges could have led to prison sentences, social ostracizing, as well as effecting employment and political opportunities. It was not a struggle limited to the Armenian issue but a principled stance that extended to the defence of other people who were persecuted – including Kurdish activists, leftist dissidents, Islamists, the Greek Orthodox minority, critics of the military and victims of discrimination related to gender or sexual orientation.

This is not to say Turkey is smoothly on the right path. The political instinct of prohibiting challenges of the “sacrosanct” still exists. And the critical mass to firmly entrench a liberal democratic political culture has not been reached. Moreover, the effects of the ongoing fusion of political Islam with nationalism on Turkish history narratives and critical thought dynamics is yet unknown. The course will depend not only on domestic political dynamics but also dynamics such as relations with the EU and with Turkey’s neighbours, including Armenia.

Though Turkey needs to continue on its path of facing past wrongs and reconciling with Armenians, progress to this end will be curbed if the substance of bilateral exchange or of historical examination is limited to accusing Ankara or singling out Turks as a race.

Justified or not, the logic of meeting in the middle was present in Ankara’s thinking about its initiative with Armenia in 2009. A similar pursuit can be observed among pro-reconciliation opinion leaders in Turkey (with the exception of the most liberal segments, who do not carry a reciprocity approach, but are less able to appeal to the wider public). This requires that not only Turkey but also Armenia try to adopt new paradigms about

For all the (justified) uproar in reaction to racist discourse when it occurs in Turkey, there is more or less silence when hate speech targeting Turks or Turkey echoes in Armenia or the Armenian diaspora. Simply put, such observations curb the appetite for moving beyond the “us versus them” paradigms - and the reconciliation efforts remain limited to a liberal intellectual slither of the society.

their respective “others,” and developing a vision of living together in pluralism.

Increased interaction with Armenian counterparts has driven home a growing perception that Armenians demand the **monopoly of victimhood** and would rather preserve national self-righteousness than develop a critical outlook that might contest some national myths.

Many Turkish citizens have learned different facets of the clashes experienced during the Armenian liberation struggle and between 1915 and 1918. That these collective memories are systematically left out of Armenian narratives exacerbates the reciprocal ethnocentric defensiveness.

Added to this is the commonly expressed Turkish observation that, for all the effort spent on explaining the ills of the so-called security measures of the Young Turks in 1915, there is none to go around questioning the Armenian security measure to ethnically cleanse Azerbaijanis or to publically condemn past Armenian terror acts against Turkish diplomats. For all the (justified) uproar in reaction to racist discourse when it occurs in Turkey, there is more or less silence when hate speech targeting Turks or Turkey echoes in Armenia or the Armenian diaspora. Simply put, such observations curb the appetite for moving beyond the “us versus them” paradigms - and

the reconciliation efforts remain limited to a liberal intellectual slither of the society.

It is for these reasons that the concept of “just memory” has been proliferating among a segment of the Turkish political and intellectual elite. According to the just memory approach, as explained by Davutoğlu, the Armenian experience needs to be listened to, acknowledged and empathized with. However, a one-sided collective memory should not be imposed. The experiences of other peoples should also be taken into consideration, and this requires an understanding of the context, such as the ethnic cleansing and forced deportation of Muslims from the Balkans and the North Caucasus in the early 20th century, and the communal clashes in the Empire which led to paranoia about Christian minorities in the years leading up to 1915.

Cynically viewed, Davutoğlu’s approach is at best too little and too late, at worst, a sinister plot to get through with 2015 with minimal damage, justify 1915, or equate the victimhood of Turks and Armenians, or Armenians and Azerbaijanis. However, in the Turkish context, as a position of a foreign minister, Davutoğlu’s approach is a brave step that can be instrumentalized to constructive ends. It may very well be the only way for a wider spectrum of Turkish citizens to confront past persecutions with more empathy, and to gradually break reciprocal stereotypes. Recognizing multiple dimensions of the tragedies on many fronts of World War I in the Ottoman Empire, and including these in the historical narratives, does not necessarily negate the applicability of the word *genocide*, nor does it equate the tragedy of Turks and Armenians.

One of the obstacles in front of learning has been that, to date, Turks and Armenians

generally stop listening to each other when they hear a dimension of historical analysis that does not fit into their own storyline. Such a disjoint exists among Turkish nationals themselves too - liberal Turks speak their mind in conferences and publications friendly to their perspectives, but often remain relatively disconnected from those of opposing conviction. The segregation of discussions is not conducive to moving forward and creating a stronger base of mutual understanding. It is in environments where people are listened to without their truths being interpreted as insults that their thoughts can evolve. As painful as it may be, there is no other way to break the cycle of denial, taboo and self-censorship.

An effort to more holistically understand how communal violence spread or how disparate collective memories were formed can bring the two sides together, and reconcile the gaps in their truths. Otherwise the only interpretation of history can be that Turks are evil, and Azerbaijanis deserved to be driven from their homes – which does not leave much room for reconciliation.

The fact that 2015 - the 100th anniversary of the events that began to unfold in 1915 in the Ottoman Empire - is nearing, inevitably makes it harder for Armenians to respond positively to the calls for developing just memory. There is a widespread concern about aiding Ankara's use of the fact that it is making progress as an argument against international genocide recognition initiatives.

While Armenian participation in the more pluralist conversation of 1915 might be unlikely, an intense dialogue can and should nevertheless take place in Turkey. Indeed among Turkish citizens there is such a wide range of disparate and polarized views about

1915 that a domestic debate can practically simulate a bilateral exchange – and serve to open minds and develop empathy. Therefore, with or without protocols, and with or without coordinating with Armenian counterparts, the aims of the foreseen history sub-commission can be contributed to by more sustained, and officially encouraged open debate in Turkey.

While there will inevitably be efforts to misuse the “just memory” approach, it is also up to the mainstream political elite and intellectuals in Turkey to ensure its net value is positive. Using this opening provided by Davutoğlu to expand the debate across Anatolia can sow seeds for a broader, deeper discussion of 1915. A litmus test of the initiative will be how other politicians from the ruling party adapt their discourse, not to Western audiences or big-city intellectuals, but to the Anatolian masses. Daily political discourse used across the country should reflect responsibility, respecting divergent memories, encouraging open minds, advocating pluralism in debates, accordingly re-conceptualizing identity and national honour concepts, and scaling down the patronizing, populist approaches to the history of these lands.

The magnitude of the loss of 1915 shook the Armenian nation fundamentally - in terms of not only human loss but also the sense of homeland. This tragedy is central to Armenian identity and politics today. Moreover, the accommodation of space within Armenian debates for more layers of truth is relatively narrow, and democratic political culture relatively weak. It is primarily Turkey that needs to be taking forward steps in historical reconciliation, to break the cycle of demonization. However, as Turks take the lead in self-reflection for regional reconciliation, effort among Armenians to move beyond ethnocentrism must follow. An effort to

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address ethnocentric identity conceptions within the Armenian community will not only add momentum to Turkish-Armenian reconciliation, but also build much-needed confidence among Azerbaijanis.

A paradigm change is also needed in Azerbaijan, which however will inevitably be the last link in the chain. Azerbaijani's pain and humiliation is the most recent, it has been given the least attention internationally and the society's political and intellectual maturation dictate less restraint when it comes to mass generated pressure to regain losses through battle. The common practice among Turkish liberal intellectuals of "othering" Azerbaijanis is self-defeating, bringing about backlash, not only from Azerbaijan but also within Turkish society.²⁷ The radicalization of Azerbaijan is a threat posed by the knot of regional stalemate. A sustainable solution between Turks and Armenians can hardly be expected if Azerbaijanis are left out of the fold, with a sense of victimhood and vengeance. In terms of stigmatization and glorification of characters who have committed crime in the name of national honour or ethnic nationalist causes, the cycle is perpetuated.

It was morally and politically unacceptable for Ramil Seferov - the Azerbaijani army lieutenant

who murdered his sleeping Armenian colleague with an axe at a NATO Partnership for Peace exercise in Hungary in 2004, and who was extradited to Azerbaijan at the end of Summer 2012 - to be pardoned and publically welcomed in Baku. The precedent this incident sets is highly worrisome, as is the appearance of a general consensus within Azerbaijan about this decision. Accordingly, there is outrage among not only Azerbaijan's foes but also its friends, and tension in the region has climbed to an all time high. However, a deeper soul-searching is also in order.

Whether justified or not, the reality is that if 2015 turns into a climax of Turkey-bashing, if pressures building in Azerbaijan are neglected, and if Armenians are not convinced that their collective memories are sincerely acknowledged and addressed, the sense of injustice and drive to punish the other will simply increase on all sides.

CONCLUSION

A normalization process characterized by ambiguity has been tested, and this strategy increased distrust on all sides. Next time a normalization scheme is prepared, more clarity and communication as to how it is foreseen to play out may be more expedient. Including a joint history examination into a normalization protocol significantly complicates the picture - and it may be expedient to substantiate the parameters of such a sub-commission, if indeed the protocols at hand are eventually going to be pursued. Given the Karabakh dimension is the main stumbling block in moving ahead with the protocols, rejuvenating the process may require a more conducive environment to emerge on this front.

For the next couple of years, there is reason to expect a relatively hardened position towards

27 Nigar Göksel, *The Caucasus Triangle and Taksim Square*, GMF on Turkey Series, 13 April 2012, http://www.gmfus.org/wp-content/files_mf/goksel_caucasustriangle_apr12.pdf

normalization from Ankara and Yerevan. In Turkey's case, upcoming presidential elections and heightened self-confidence in Ankara's regional geo-strategic position, as well as reconsolidated alignment with Baku, play a role in this picture. From Yerevan's perspective, the nearing of 2015 as well as the election cycle constitute disincentives. Meanwhile, Baku is losing patience with the status quo in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

However, a more intense focus on Turkey's facing its historical wrongs can be expected, both due to domestic political trends of questioning the track record of ethnic nationalism and international pressure towards commemoration of 1915. The time is opportune to focus on reconciliation, rather than normalization. Reconciliation will enable normalization to proceed more smoothly when the strategic constellation is more conducive.

For reconciliation to be sustained, there are a few points of caution to be considered. While positive steps and glimpses of a refreshed historical narrative can be observed in Turkey, there is a risk that these will not be systematically spread and substantiated. For Turkey to pursue reconciliation effectively, there is a need for both political will and a truly pluralistic environment where differences and criticism are not merely tolerated, but also respected, and taken into account. Partial efforts that are geared at the approval of a Western audience will do more harm than benefit for developing confidence and goodwill on the Armenian side. On the other hand, there needs to also be positive responses from the Armenian side to genuine efforts of soul-searching by Turkish counterparts. Critical intellectuals and political leadership in Armenia also have a crucial role to play. Positive change will inevitably be in the form of a dialectic between the two countries, and the

two nations. If met only with cynicism, self-righteousness and maximalist goals from Armenian counterparts, any Turkish self-reflection will likely fizzle without reaching a critical threshold of society.

In the meantime, dismissing Azerbaijan in efforts to reach closure between Turks and Armenians is counterproductive. With the Karabakh war, Azerbaijan became an essential part of the picture, both due to geostrategic realities, and the intertwined nature of sentiments mobilized on all three sides. Therefore, it is worth exploring ways to integrate Azerbaijanis into the fold of reconciliation and second-track dialogue.

Western imposition of "solutions" such as attempts to criminalize arguments against the qualification of 1915 as *genocide* or coercing Ankara to open its land border with Armenia backfire, bring about a more divisive reality on the ground. When Turkey is threatened by genocide recognition to take positive steps, the Turkish concentration becomes showcasing change - which ultimately hikes tensions. Hypothetically, even border opening can be temporary if not resting on sound foundations. Rather than encouraging short term or superficial solutions, Western involvement in this issue should be tailored in a fashion mindful to the complexities at hand.

Bringing in experiences from post-conflict reconciliation in Europe and the discussion of the role of European powers in the context of World War I can help, as can ensuring European debates today invite these nations to continue integrating with Europe and adopting today's European socio-political standards, to ensure that they do not remain stuck in the nationalist paradigms and discourses that trace their origins to 19th and 20th century Europe.



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