

FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS SERIES-8

# TURKEY-ARMENIA RELATIONS: A VICIOUS CIRCLE

AYBARS GÖRGÜLÜ



TESEV  
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## Foreword

TESEV Foreign Policy Program publishes Foreign Policy Analysis Series in order to seek realistic answers by evaluating Turkey's foreign policy problems within a historical and analytical perspective, and to assist policy makers in their decision making processes. In the eighth book of the Series we discuss Turkey-Armenia relations.

Since Armenia declared its independence in 1991, Turkey's relations with this country have not been able to 'normalize'. By 'normalize' we primarily mean the establishment of diplomatic relations and the opening up of shared borders. But beyond this, we also have in mind making advances at every level in order to enable the peoples of the two countries to begin conducting a dialogue based on mutually accommodating and friendly terms.

The following report is meant to serve as both an account and an analysis of the steps taken to amend the three problems mentioned above. Further, it helps to summarize the effects of Turkey's problems with Armenia with regard to Turkey's European Union (EU) membership process and its regional policies, and puts forward some suggestions about what needs to be done in the near future.

TESEV's Foreign Policy Program began its studies on the Armenian question in 2006. Following the trip we made to Armenia in December of that year, we decided to carry on our study in order to draw the attention of the public and politicians towards normalizing relations between Turkey and Armenia. The report you are about to read is the outcome of those efforts.

The Turkish edition of this study was published in May 2008. The study aims to attract the attention of the public opinion and the decision-makers to the Turkish-Armenian relations which is deadlocked since seventeen years. Recently after the publication of the report, two crucial developments have happened in the region. First on bilateral relations, the Armenian President Sargsyan invited the Turkish President Gül to Armenia to watch the World cup qualifying football match. This invitation has triggered a new wave of rapprochement between the two countries. And secondly, the conflict between Russia and Georgia in August 2008 changed the political climate

in the South Caucasus region. In the light of these crucial developments, we have decided to add an author's note at the end of the English edition in order to present the latest events and their significance for Turkish-Armenian relations.

With this and other studies, TESEV aims to support the solution of Turkey's domestic and foreign policy problems, improve its regional and global relations, and contribute to Turkey's EU membership process. Hence, we believe that this report will be a significant contribution in that sense and will also help to promote future discussions on the topic of improving relations with Armenia.

We hereby would like to express our gratitude to Burcu Gültekin who made a great contribution with her ideas and support when we started our Armenia studies, and to Utku Kundakçı who was working with us then.

Furthermore, we are extremely grateful to TESEV's Board and High Advisory Board for always supporting us and to the Turkey Office of Friedrich-Ebert Foundation for making a direct contribution to the creation of this report.

**Mensur Akgün**

Foreign Policy Program Director

# Introduction

The relations established with the former Soviet Republics that became independent after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) point to the beginning of a new period in Turkey's foreign policy. This process, called new activism<sup>1</sup>, is closely related with the position Turkey has assumed in the changing world order.<sup>2</sup> Avoiding regional conflicts as long as there were no threats to its security, and following a deliberate and balanced foreign policy in the waning days of the Cold War, Turkey began to pursue a far more active foreign policy following the collapse of a bipolar world order.<sup>3</sup> Within this framework, Turkey attached further importance to the Caucasus and the Central Asian regions due to shared ethnic, cultural and historical ties. It therefore recognized the independence of Azerbaijan on 9 November 1991, which was one of the states founded within these regions, and on 16 December 1991, it subsequently forwarded recognition to the independence of all the former Soviet Republics without exception. At the same time, one should not forget that these developments in Turkey's foreign policy after the Cold War affected its relations with the wider world as well, namely with the European Union (EU) and the USA, as it did with several other Western international organizations.

Wishing to play an active role in the extensive transformation process in Central Asia and the Caucasus, Turkey was engaged in a very committed form of diplomacy with the states in these regions. The initial intention was establishing good relations with the Turkic Republics that lived under Soviet rule for decades, and then going onto creating a new zone of influence for itself. However, having been initiated on a romantic and idealized basis, this process could not have been as successful as was expected, since Turkey had little knowledge about the region and lacked the necessary financial resources that would meet the needs of these new states.

Suffering from great poverty during the period wherein they declared their independences, these regional states primarily expected financial support from

1 'New activism', which means getting involved in more activities through multilateral methods of cooperation, has become a frequently quoted term especially since 1995.

2 Alan Makovsky, 'The New Activism in Turkish Foreign Policy', *SAIS Review*, Volume 19, Issue 1 (Winter-Spring, 1999), p. 97.

3 F. Stephen Larrabee and Ian O. Lesser, *Turkish Policy in an Age of Uncertainty* (California: RAND, 2003), p. 4.



Turkey so as to get rid of a latent Russian influence, as well as to integrate with the international system. However, caught off its guard by this new situation, Turkey could neither deliver on the requested financial support, nor could these states (already struggling to relinquish themselves of Russia's influence) accept the 'big brother position' Turkey assumed for itself. As a consequence, Turkey was not able to implement an effective policy over the regions of Central Asia and the Caucasus in a period when the USSR had just disintegrated and Russia's influence over these regions had not yet intensified into what it is today.

At first Turkey implemented an effective foreign policy over all of the former Soviet Union, without discriminating between Central Asia and the Caucasus. Later, it put a greater emphasis on diplomacy towards the Caucasus and the Caspian Region since as an active foreign policy towards Central Asia did not bear the desired effects<sup>4</sup>. Particularly the policies formulated around the rich natural gas and oil reserves of the Caucasus and the Caspian Basin, and the role Turkey could play in the transportation of energy from these regions to the western markets were successful to a degree. This was made possible mostly because of a large-scale energy project in the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline, the foundations of which were laid in 1994, was put into operation in 2006.

Thus, Azerbaijan found a strong gateway for its exports apart from Russia. With the added bonus of reaching the European markets through a shorter route, it was able to strengthen its economy. Likewise, Georgia, which was struggling to adapt itself to the West, immediately gained greater economic freedom thanks to this project, and began to take steps towards a more democratic and stable political structure by relieving itself of Russian pressure. Within this context, the losing state of the region turned out to be Armenia, which was isolated due to the conflict with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh.

On 16 December 1991, Turkey recognized Armenia's independence along with all other former Soviet Republics after Azerbaijan. However, it continued to avoid establishing direct diplomatic relations with Armenia in the seventeen years since then, and has preferred to keep its land border closed. The fact that Turkey – a country making full membership negotiations with the EU and assuming active roles in the Balkans, the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, the Caucasus and the Middle East – has in spite of seventeen years not yet established full diplomatic relations with a neighboring state tells of an inconsistency with the declared strategy of active and positive foreign policy it adopted after the Cold War. As is frequently stated, the normalization process of Turkey-Armenia relations has now turned into a matter of domestic policy for both countries. The governments of the two countries have

4 Tareq Y. Ismael and Mustafa Aydın (eds.), *Turkey's Foreign Policy in the 21st Century: A Changing Role in World Politics* (Ashgate Pub.: New York, 2003), p. 146.

therefore abstained from making advances towards a comprehensive solution due to the constraints of domestic politics, and this has reduced the relations between the two communities into a vicious circle. After years of stalemate, normalizing the relations between the two countries without delay seems of vital importance to protect against the possibility of a second Cyprus case for Turkish foreign policy.

The aim of this report is to analyze the course of seventeen years of Turkey-Armenia relations, to identify the current problems, and to emphasize why a solution is necessary in light of the societal and diplomatic steps taken so far to normalize the relations. Hence, after depicting the short history of bilateral relations between Turkey and Armenia, this report will examine four existing primary disputes in detail: the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the problem of recognizing the borders, the genocide allegations, and the closed border. In the following chapters, after dwelling on the efforts of Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission (TARC), Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council (TABDC), local and non-governmental initiatives, it will include the exchange of letters between the Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan and Armenian President Kocharian, which was a diplomatic solution initiative. Discussing why a solution is necessary, the last chapter will evaluate the probable opportunities and outcomes that will be created if Turkey normalizes its relations with Armenia.

## I. Obstacles to Normalization of Relations

After the global change that occurred following the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR, Turkey considered having no common boundaries with Russia in the Caucasus as a strategic change. Rather than perceiving them as a regional group, Turkey's attitude towards the newly founded Caucasian states was to approach each one with a different vision. Within this framework, diplomatic relations were established with Azerbaijan and Georgia in 1992, and developments that could be deemed positive were achieved in the first contacts with Armenia.

In the first one of these contacts, Volkan Vural, the Turkish Ambassador to Moscow, visited Yerevan in April 1991. During the visit, Vural and the then Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrossian prepared a draft agreement on establishing good neighborly relations.<sup>5</sup> Following this visit, the then Turkish Vice Prime Minister Ekrem Pakdemirli received a high-level delegation from Armenia, and negotiations dwelled upon determining fields of cooperation between the two countries and developing trade relationships.

In addition to these contacts, Turkey invited Armenia to the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) as a founding member. Afterwards, Petrossian's presence at the BSEC summit meeting of the heads of state and government in Istanbul in 1992 was perceived as a proof of Armenia's willingness to improve relations with Turkey. Indeed, the fact that Petrossian removed the then Armenian Foreign Minister Raffi Hovanesian from office because of an anti-Turkish speech he made at the Istanbul meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Council of Europe reinforced the impression of an unfledged but nonetheless developing sense of accord between the two countries.

These developments in the autumn of 1991 and the spring of 1992 created a positive atmosphere, and expectations that Turkey and Armenia could establish good relations rose. By sending a diplomatic mission to Yerevan during this process, Turkey stressed that both countries would benefit from the improvement of economic and political relations. Additionally, the visiting mission drew attention to the importance of the role that a peaceful solution to Nagorno-Karabakh problem could play in the improvement of Turkey-Armenia relations.

5 Graham E. Fuller, 'Turkey's New Eastern Orientation', Fuller and Lesser (eds.), *Turkey's new Geopolitics: From the Balkans to Western China* (Boulder, CO, and Oxford: Westview Press, 1993), p. 77.

Turkey designated an ambassador to the diplomatic representative office in Yerevan, which was opened soon after the recognition of Armenia in the first months of 1992. However, it expected Armenia to sign a bilateral protocol including an article stipulating that Armenia had undoubtedly dropped its territorial demands on Turkey. However, failure to put this protocol into practice made establishing diplomatic relations impossible.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to these developments, the possibility that the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia could spread to Nakhchivan made Turkey anxious. Turkey considered the possibility of intervening in the conflict with its armed forces, and as a matter of fact, Turkish Armed Forces performed military exercises in May 1992 near the Armenian border. Besides, the then Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Çiller asserted that she could call the Turkish Grand National Assembly to adopt a war resolution, while the opposition leader Bülent Ecevit argued that it was necessary to carry out an air strike against Armenia.<sup>7</sup> In response to these occurrences, high-ranking commanders of the Russian army asserted that a Turkish military intervention could cause World War III.<sup>8</sup>

In spite of these unpleasant incidents, with the influence of the USA, Turkey made some attempts to establish good relations with Petrossian, who was a more moderate figure than the Dashnaks. Within this context, Turkey sold 100,000 tones of wheat to Armenia, weakening the embargo Azerbaijan imposed against the country.<sup>9</sup> In addition to this aid, Turkey agreed to supply electricity to Armenia from its own power network because of the energy shortage in this country. Nonetheless, as the skirmishes in Nagorno-Karabakh intensified, this approach to Armenia disturbed Azerbaijan.<sup>10</sup>

Further intensification of the armed conflicts between Azerbaijan and Armenia affected the relations between Turkey and Armenia negatively. During his visit to Baku, the then Vice Prime Minister Erdal İnönü had to announce that the power agreement would be canceled, but stressed that it would be possible to improve relations if the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh were to improve for the better. However, as Armenian troops launched a large-scale attack on 28 March 1993 and

6 Gareth Winrow, *Turkey and the Caucasus: Domestic Interests and Security Concerns* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2000), p.11.

7 *Ibid.*

8 Joseph R. Masih and Robert O. Krikorian, *Armenia: At the Crossroads* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999), p. 100.

9 Nazim Cafersoy, *Elçibey Dönemi Azerbaycan Dış Politikası* (The Foreign Policy of Azerbaijan during Elçibey Period) (Ankara: ASAM Publications, 2001), p. 129.

10 Akif Maharramazadeh, 'Türk Dış Politikasında Türkiye-Ermenistan İlişkileri ve Karabağ Sorunu' (Turkey-Armenia Relations and Karabakh Conflict in Turkish Foreign Policy), *Turkish Weekly* (14 February 2006), <http://www.turkishweekly.net/articles.php?id=105>".

seized the Kalbajar region of Azerbaijan, Turkey stopped grain transportation to Armenia and closed the land border between the two countries on 3 April 1993.<sup>11</sup>

While the border between the two countries remained completely closed, relations were not totally broken off. For instance, following the ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh, and owing to the diplomatic efforts of the USA, Turkey allowed usage of its airspace so to assist Armenia. Moreover, State Minister Mehmet Ali İrtemçelik made a courtesy visit with Turkish parliamentarians to Yerevan to attend the funeral of Armenian Prime Minister Vazgen Sargsian. During this visit, a talk was held with Armenian Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanyan. Another round of talks took place upon the funeral of the journalist Hrant Dink who was assassinated in January 2006 in front the office premises of the newspaper he had founded. The Armenian delegation headed by the Deputy Foreign Minister Arman Kirakosyan, who had come to Turkey to join the funeral of Hrant Dink, held some talks in Turkey.

In addition to all these contacts, the leaders, foreign ministers and high-level diplomats of the two countries met on different platforms several times during the last seventeen years, but achieved no improvements with regard to normalizing the relationship and establishing diplomatic relations. Furthermore, there have been contacts through individual and business channels, but the good relations established at this level have yielded no concrete steps in the normalization of Turkey-Armenia relations.

Consequently, the question of border recognition and the Nagorno-Karabakh problem seem to be the main obstacles hindering the normalization of relations. In addition to this there has been a rapid process during which the parliaments of third-party countries adopted genocide allegations. Since 2001, when the former Armenian President Robert Kocharian became president again, Armenia has supported and utilized these allegations as a dialog strategy, further hindering the normalization of relations. In order to be able to establish diplomatic relations between the two sides and to solve the closed border problem, it is crucial that the normalization process is freed from being entangled in these other intricate problems. Therefore, it may help us to further delve into the sources and instigators of these aforementioned matters (including the closed border problem) in further detail, as it may provide a better understanding of the current state of relations.

<sup>11</sup> Semih İdiz, 'Ermeniler Sınırın Açılmasını İstiyor' (Armenians Want the Border to Open), *Milliyet Newspaper* (15 February 2008), <http://sondakika.milliyet.com.tr/2008/02/>.

## 1. NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT

Nagorno-Karabakh is a region in the west of Azerbaijan, where Armenians constitute the majority.<sup>12</sup> In the 1980's, the efforts of the Armenians living in this region to unite with Armenia intensified, and consequently armed conflict broke out between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Although this skirmish ended with the ceasefire in 1994, Armenia still occupies twenty percent<sup>13</sup> of Azerbaijan's territories in spite of decisions made by international law and the United Nations General Assembly. This conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan adversely influenced Turkey-Armenia relations and eventually led to the closure of the common border between the two countries. In addition to the border problem, Turkey-Armenia relations get worsened when the latter stationed a large number of troops on the border of Nakhchivan. In August 1993, in retaliation to this incident and in an attempt to intimidate the Armenian troops near the Nakhchivan border, Turkish tanks ventured very near the Armenian town of Gyumri, which is close to the border. This action led to an intensification of tensions between the two countries. As stated before, the declaration made by a Russian general who was in Armenia at the time, asserting that World War III could break out if Turkish tanks passed into Armenian territories, is one indicator of how febrile the tensions had been on the border.<sup>14</sup>

With the purpose of solving the conflict in a peaceful way, the Minsk Group was founded within the body of Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in May 1992<sup>15</sup>, and the objectives of the peace conference were determined. This conference recognized Armenia and Azerbaijan as the parties of the conflict, and the Azeri and Armenian communities of Nagorno-Karabakh as the other parties related to the issue. The Minsk Group, which deputed its authority to the co-chairmanship of Russia, France and the USA, has still achieved no success regarding a peaceful solution to the problem. As the constitution which declared this region to be a 'sovereign and democratic state' was adopted via the referendum held in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2006, the Minsk process took a particularly severe blow.<sup>16</sup> Although the co-chairmen of the Minsk Group did not recognize the referendum, the political credibility of the group was significantly undermined in the eyes of the international community.

12 Morten Anstorp Rosenkvist, 'Black Soil Oil and Ethnicity in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict', Centro Argentino de Estudios Internacionales Working Paper No: 07, MA Thesis (Oslo: 2005), p. 3

13 Yoko Hirose, 'Resolving Nagorno-Karabagh', *Azerbaijan International* (Spring 2001), [http://azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/g1\\_folder/g1\\_articles/g1\\_hirose.html](http://azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/g1_folder/g1_articles/g1_hirose.html).

14 Michael P. Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict: Causes and Implications* (London: Praeger, 1998).

15 The founders of OSCE Minsk Group: Turkey, Russia, the USA, France, Byelorussia, Germany, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Italy, Portugal, the Netherlands, Sweden and Finland.

16 'Yukarı Karabağ'da Referandum Kriz Yarattı' (The Referendum in Nagorno-Karabakh Caused Crisis), *Sabah Newspaper* (11 December 2006), <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2006/12/11/dun107.html>.

## A. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE PROBLEM CONCERNING AZERBAIJAN

Azerbaijan wants Turkey to go on with its current policy on the Armenian border, and argues that this attitude will force Armenia to take a step back in the Nagorno-Karabakh problem. Both the former Azerbaijani President Haydar Aliyev and Murtuz Alasgarov, Speaker of Azerbaijani Assembly, repeatedly expressed that any Turkish attempt to open the border would have an unfavorable effect on Turkish-Azeri relations. Moreover, in case Turkey opens the border, the option of reducing the revenues Turkey earns from the Baku-Ceyhan Pipeline strengthens Azerbaijan's hand and offers it the possibility of imposing pressure on Turkey regarding this matter.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, Azerbaijan's pressure policy on Turkey to declare Armenia a common enemy is part of this country's strategy to keep itself away from Russia. However, the validity of the Azerbaijani hypothesis that a closed Turkey-Armenia border will force Armenia to withdraw from Nagorno-Karabakh is questionable. Though fourteen years have passed since the ceasefire, the closed Turkey-Armenia border is undermining the normalization of relations, rather than forcing Armenia to retreat from Nagorno-Karabakh.

## B. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE PROBLEM CONCERNING ARMENIA

As a result of the war with Azerbaijan, Armenia won a territorial corridor to Nagorno-Karabakh. This was interpreted as the greatest military victory following the independence of the country. The Nagorno-Karabakh problem has considerably damaged relations between Armenia and Turkey, and this led Armenia to establish closer ties with Russia, the major political and military power in the region. Given this scenario, it is easy to understand why Turkey's support for Azerbaijan caused Armenians to feel besieged on both sides, thus paving the way for Armenia to sign the "Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance" with Russia.<sup>18</sup> According to this treaty, Armenia and Russia will assist each other in the event of a military conflict, and they might respond to an attack against any one of them collectively. Hence, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict induced Armenia to establish close relations with Russia in the military sense, and this was offset with Turkey's support of Azerbaijan.

Another significant consequence of the problem concerning Armenia is the increasing fervor of the nationalist movement in the country. Given the importance of Nagorno-Karabakh for Armenian nationalists, it comes as little surprise that the moderate politicians who defend a solution in the region are frequently slandered as 'traitors'

17 İdris Bal, 'Türkiye-Ermenistan İlişkileri' (Turkey-Armenia Relations), İdris Bal (ed.), *21. Yüzyılda Türk Dış Politikası* (Turkish Foreign Policy in the 21st Century) (Istanbul: Nobel Publications, 2004), pp. 407–408.

18 Hatem Cabbarlı, 'Ermenistan ve Rusya Arasında Gelişen Askeri İşbirliği' (Military cooperation between Armenia and Russia), *Azsam* (April 2006), <http://www.azsam.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=46>.

before any domestic election. At this point, it is necessary to point out the influence of Robert Kocharian (who was born in Nagorno-Karabakh and became the President in 1998) and the 'Karabakh clan' which is used to describe the oligarchs assembled around him in Armenian politics. This group, including Serzh Sargsyan, who won the last presidential election, seeks to exploit the deadlock in Nagorno-Karabakh to their own political advantage. The Karabakh clan, which is in close relations with Russia, struggles to maintain the status quo rather than to seek a solution, and thus further consolidates its own power.

### C. THE ATTITUDE OF TURKEY

By taking sides in a bilateral dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Turkey added a new element to its problems with Armenia. This can be interpreted as an Azeri encumbrance in a sense. With regard to the Nagorno-Karabakh problem, Turkey currently expects Armenia to obey international law and to stop occupying Azerbaijani territories. Accordingly, Turkey has closed its border with Armenia, but, as stated before, this policy has not yielded the desired results. On the contrary, Turkey's approach has stirred up the tenacious attitude of Armenia and impeded finding a solution to the problem. Moreover, Turkey's close relations with Azerbaijan have neutralized the previous attempts made by Turkish diplomacy both in the presence of the OSCE and during bilateral negotiations. So opening the common border between the two countries is likely to enable Turkey to increase its influence on Armenia and to play a more efficient role in the solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute. Finally, if the normalization of the relations with Armenia is one of the objectives of Turkish foreign policy, reaching that objective seems difficult as long as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains unsolved.

#### 'THE KOSOVO EXAMPLE'

The last significant development regarding the fate of Nagorno-Karabakh has been the effort to make an analogy with Kosovo, which declared independence on 17 February 2008. Nagorno-Karabakh declared its independence on 10 December 2006 through a referendum, however it was not recognized by the international community and not even by Armenia. Kosovo's declaration of independence and recognition by the USA and the leading members of the EU excited Armenians who want an independent Nagorno-Karabakh. Inasmuch as it is claimed to be an incident that will set an example for Armenians, it could be used as political capital by the strong Armenian lobby in Europe and America.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Semih İdiz, 'Bağımsız Kosova Türkiye İçin Hem İyi, Hem Kötü' (An Independent Kosovo is both Good and Bad for Turkey), *Milliyet Newspaper* (18 February 2008), <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2008/02/18/yazar/idiz.html>.



The fact that the international community has, in general, reacted favorably to the independence of Kosovo has gone some ways towards violating certain convictions regarding the preservation of territorial integrity. This is compounded by the fact that, at this moment, it is not unforeseeable that Kosovo will serve as a model for the solution of similar problems elsewhere. By contrast, Russia, which has problems with its separatist regions, harshly opposes the independence of Kosovo, and this makes it difficult for Armenia to defend a similar solution for Nagorno-Karabakh. As a matter of fact, the Armenian authorities who first expressed that Kosovo could set an example for Nagorno-Karabakh have started to put emphasis on the thesis that the characteristics of Kosovo and Nagorno-Karabakh are different but they have analogies in terms of international law.<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, while Turkey recognized Kosovo quickly, Azerbaijan, worrying that it would set an example for Nagorno-Karabakh, declared that it would not recognize Kosovo's unilateral independence, which it described as 'contrary to international principles and illegal'.<sup>21</sup> Adding to Azerbaijan's refusal to grant recognition is the fact that the international community never recognized the elections held in Nagorno-Karabakh, thus presenting another obstacle to the thought of Nagorno-Karabakh becoming a second Kosovo. What is more, we must also pay heed to the frequently expressed view that the independence of Kosovo is a mere *sui generis* case in terms of law.<sup>22</sup>

The last aspect of the Kosovo example concerning Turkey is the analogy made between Kosovo and Cyprus. Though the Turkish side emphasizes that there are differences between Cyprus and Kosovo, some experts state that Ankara might use the Kosovo example as an alternative model for a solution in Cyprus.<sup>23</sup> The course of the negotiations between Dimitris Hristofyas, who became the president of Southern Cyprus by winning the elections held in February 2008, and the President of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Mehmet Ali Talat, will shape the progress made in this area.

In conclusion, the Nagorno-Karabakh problem is one of the main obstacles to the normalization of Turkey-Armenia relations. Even if other problems are solved, it seems hard for Turkey to take a step towards normalizing relations as long as there is no improvement in Azerbaijan-Armenia relations. Even though the peace process

20 Sabri Gürüzümcü, 'Kosova Sorunu Üzerine Algılamalar' (Perceptions about the Kosovo Problem), *Global Strategies Institute website* (12 April 2007), [http://www.globalstrateji.org/TUR/Icerik\\_Detay.ASP?Icerik=998](http://www.globalstrateji.org/TUR/Icerik_Detay.ASP?Icerik=998).

21 Erdal Şafak, 'Sui Generis', *Sabah Newspaper* (20 February 2008), <http://www.sabah.com.tr/2008/02/20/haber,F4A422C57C3D435F8396AE94B78FD40C.html>.

22 *Ibid.*

23 Erdal Şafak, 'Kosova ve Kıbrıs' (Kosovo and Cyprus), *Sabah Newspaper* (15 January 2008), <http://www.sabah.com.tr/arsiv/ars,yaz,08,100,100,12.html>.

between Azerbaijan and Armenia, which began in 1992, has been an ongoing process, it remains true that Azerbaijan will continue to factor in as a key element in Turkey's own relations with Armenia.<sup>24</sup>

## 2. THE QUESTION OF BORDER RECOGNITION

Another obstacle to the normalization of Turkey-Armenia relations is that, in spite of the principles regarding the immutability of borders that Armenia acknowledged within the framework of OSCE, this country does not want to make a clear commitment by declaring the recognition the 1921 treaties of Kars and Gyumri (the Treaty of Alexandropol), which define the border between the two countries. Mainly due to domestic political reasons and the fears of a nationalist reaction, the Armenian party does not want to seem as if it acknowledges these treaties that define the current Turkish-Armenian border. Armenia argues that there is no need for such a declaration since both countries have never rejected the aforementioned treaties. On the other hand, it is a well-known fact that, in 1991, the Armenian Parliament adopted a resolution stating that it refuses the validity of the Treaties of Kars and Gyumri.<sup>25</sup>

The fact that Armenians have carried the genocide allegations onto international platforms made the problem of border recognition more complicated and insoluble. Although Armenia requests that no connection be made between these two matters, some claim that Armenia might demand territories from Turkey within the scope of some alleged 'historical rights'. Within this context, if Turkey recognizes the genocide, whether Armenia will demand territories or not is a widely argued issue. However, given the current state of relations, Armenia has also accepted that the moment is inopportune for them to demand territories from a country that they regarded as a powerful enemy. Therefore, according to claims, Armenia has for the moment shelved the issue but might put the subject on the agenda if the regional and geopolitical balance should change some day.<sup>26</sup>

In recent years, Turkey has loudly expressed that recognition of the border is a precondition for the normalization of relations, and reflected the impression that it sees this matter as either a means for propaganda or as a potential bargaining chip to be used against their benefit. In fact, what Turkey should do instead of forcing Armenia to accept the immutability of borders, is to achieve some progress in the normalization of the relations by improving its relations with this country and

24 Gareth Winrow, *Turkey and the Caucasus: Domestic Interests and Security Concerns* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2000), p.12.

25 Ibid. p. 11.

26 Harut Sassounian, 'What Did Kocharian Actually Say About Demanding Territories from Turkey?', *California Courier Online* (21 July 2005).

showing its determination. After all, Turkey has the upper hand in this problem, and can easily solve it in the International Court of Justice.

Given this scenario, the best example for Turkey is its relations with Syria. For many years, Syria's claim towards Hatay has been one of the main factors to deteriorate the otherwise good standing the country enjoys with Turkey.<sup>27</sup> However, in parallel with the improving relations with this state, Turkey very forcefully asserted that Syria should waive its claims for Hatay, and consequently the border problem was off the agenda once and for all.<sup>28</sup> Correspondingly, improvements in the relations with Armenia will result in the dispelling of doubts about the recognition of the border. Nevertheless, it is an important fact that Turkey's determination will be ineffective as long as both countries achieve no visible improvement in their relations.

### 3. GENOCIDE ALLEGATIONS

Another problem that brings the Turkey-Armenia relations to a deadlock is the genocide allegations. One of the primary goals of Armenian foreign policy is the recognition of the genocide in the international arena, and that disturbs Turkey greatly. On the other hand, one should remember that the Armenian diaspora puts forth a great effort in order to push for the adoption of genocide allegations in third-party countries' parliaments in an attempt to give this issue an international character. Given that Armenia has very limited political and economic power in the international arena; it is a clear fact that the international extensions of the local diaspora in various countries and the Armenian diaspora in the USA are quite influential.

Having been adopted by the Armenian parliament, the declaration of independence of Armenia, dated 1992, stipulates that 'The Republic of Armenia stands in support of the task of achieving international recognition of the 1915 Genocide in Ottoman Turkey and Western Armenia.'<sup>29</sup> Causing heated arguments in the domestic politics of Armenia, this phrase received criticism from various groups for creating enemies in the foundation stage of the young republic, and was rarely put on the agenda until Petrossian, who was the leader of the Armenian National Movement and the first president of the Armenian state, left the office to Kocharian.<sup>30</sup>

After Kocharian was elected president in 2001, the genocide issue was put on the government agenda, and has become a communication strategy frequently

27 Daniel Pipes, 'Is the Hatay Problem Solved?' (10 January 2005), <http://www.danielpipes.org/blog/586>.

28 Please remember that there is a negotiation process over the border between Iraq and Iran, too.

29 Ruben Safrastyan, 'Armenian-Turkish Relations: From Interstate Dispute to Neighborliness' (Open Society Institute Publications: 2004), p. 8. The translation is quoted from the official website of the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (25 July 2008), <http://www.armeniaforeignministry.com/htmls/doi.html>.

30 *Ibid.*

31 Nicolas Tavitian and Burcu Gültekin, 'Les Relations Arméno-Turques: la Porte Close de l'Orient', *GRIP*

used by Armenia to compensate for the criticism it receives from the international community for its occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh. It has also been claimed that, through such allegations, Armenia is trying to keep Turkey from playing a role as a mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.<sup>31</sup>

Turkey's official position against genocide allegations is that the experiences in the past were a great tragedy and both parties suffered heavy casualties, but that it is impossible to define these incidents as genocide. The 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which is referred to within this context, was put into force in 1951 and does not have an explicit provision regarding retroactive applicability. The Armenian side claims that it is necessary to apply the Convention on Genocide retroactively since there is no statute of limitations for genocide crimes.<sup>32</sup>

According to the 1968 Convention on the Non-Applicability of Statutory Limitations to War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity, no statutory limitation can be applied to the crime of genocide as it is defined in the 1948 Convention on Genocide.<sup>33</sup> Even if Turkey is not a party to this second convention, the argument it upholds is based on the argument that the 1915 events cannot be defined as genocide in terms of Article II of the Convention on Genocide.

On the other hand, referring to the clause [c] of the Article II of the Convention on Genocide, Armenia claims that the events constituted genocide.<sup>34</sup> According to this clause, 'deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part' is within the scope of a genocide crime. Turkey asserts that the tragedy experienced corresponds with none of the circumstances stated in five clauses of Article II.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, Turkey asserts that the governing Ottoman class of that time did not intend to exterminate all Armenians living on the Ottoman territories at the time on the grounds of racial hatred.<sup>36</sup>

Another one of Turkey's approaches to the genocide allegations is formed around the notion that the adoption of the term genocide by the parliaments of various

*Reports* (Brussels: January 2003), pp. 5–6, [http://www.grip.org/pub/rapports/rgo3-1\\_armenie.pdf](http://www.grip.org/pub/rapports/rgo3-1_armenie.pdf).

32 Ayşe Hür, 'Sadece Hukuk Yaraları Sarabilir mi?' (Can Law Alone Heal the Wounds?), *Yeni Şafak Newspaper* (27 March 2007), <http://www.yenisafak.com.tr/yazdir/?t=25.07.2007&c=12&i=37302>.

33 Gündüz Aktan, 'Geriye dönük uygulanabilirlik' (Retroactive Applicability), *Radikal Newspaper* (10 May 2005), <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=152211&tarikh=10/05/2005>.

34 Gündüz Aktan, 'Hukukta Soykırım ve Ermeni Olayları' (Genocide and Events of 1915 in Law), *Popüler History Magazine* (July 2003).

35 Gündüz Aktan, 'Ermeni Meselesi, Bazı Noktalar' (The Armenian Issue, Some Aspects), *Radikal Newspaper* (12 March 2005), <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=146259>.

36 Ayşe Hür, 'Aktan, Schabas ve Çeviri Manevraları' (Aktan, Schabas and Translation Maneuvers), *Radikal Two* (11 Mart 2007), <http://www.radikal.com.tr/ek.haber.php?ek=r2&haberno=6824>.

countries is not binding in terms of international law. Although this claim is valid in terms of law, what Turkey probably overlooks in assuming such a position is that this issue becomes a *reality* in public opinion in the states adopting the genocide allegations. The best example for this is France. While it was possible to read articles on how to name the 1915 events in influential political newspapers such as *Le Monde*, *Le Monde Diplomatique* and *Le Figaro* until the French Parliament recognized the Armenian genocide in 2001, it is hard to find such articles now after the decision of the parliament. In a sense, the French public has reached a consensus in labeling the 1915 events as genocide. Therefore, one should not evaluate the adoption of genocide allegations by national parliaments just in terms of law. Although recognition of genocide by third countries' parliaments does not have legal implications, by creating a serious public opinion in the countries that recognize genocide, these decisions undermine Turkey's arguments. Besides, 'bills regarding criminalizing the denial of genocide', which were rejected by the French Senate but adopted in Switzerland, are examples implicating that this problem gradually acquires a binding legal dimension.

Genocide allegations play a role in directing the course of Turkey-EU relations as well. For instance, the European Parliament (EP) recognized the Armenian genocide on 18 June 1987. Thereupon, it requested that the European Commission accept the recognition of this genocide by Turkey as a precondition for EU membership. Nevertheless, the EP explicitly expressed that one could never expect the Republic of Turkey to be found responsible for an event carried out by the Ottoman Empire, and so give legal or monetary reparations. The EP's standing towards the Armenian question has changed in recent years and the EP appreciated the Turkish Government's call for establishing a joint commission to investigate the details pertaining to the genocide allegations. While accepting that recognizing the Armenian genocide is not one of the Copenhagen criteria, the EP argues that Turkey should face its past.

The European Commission (EC) approaches the issue differently and clearly expresses that genocide allegations have nothing to do with Turkey's EU membership process. The most up-to-date example of EC's approach to the Armenian question is the attitude taken by Olli Rehn while the French Parliament was voting the bill 'criminalizing rejection of Armenian genocide'. Olli Rehn stated that the said bill could damage Turkey-EU relations and warned the French parliamentarians to think once more before using their votes in favor of such a bill.<sup>37</sup>

Attitudes of EU member states towards the genocide matter vary from country to country. 12 of the 27 EU member states have adopted resolutions recognizing the

37 'Soykırı Tasarısı Kabul Edildi' (Genocide Bill Adopted), NTVMSNBC (14 October 2006), <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/news/387775.asp>.

Armenian genocide in their parliaments.<sup>38</sup> Leading states such as Germany, France, Italy and Holland that shape the EU policies are included in this list, and that obviously shows how the EU member states regard the genocide issue. In addition, some heads of state, such as French President Nicolas Sarkozy, utter on all occasions that it is not possible for Turkey to enter the EU without recognizing the genocide.

The USA is one of the countries where the Armenian diaspora is strongest and this country will elect its new president in November 2008. Every year in April, arguments over the recognition of the Armenian genocide by the Congress re-enter the agenda. The Democrats won the majority in the House of Representatives in the elections held in November 2006, and Nancy Pelosi, who is renowned for her views supporting the Armenian allegations, was elected Speaker of the House of Representatives. This has brought a new dimension to the recognition of the Armenian genocide in the USA. Finally, the presidential candidate for the Democrat Party, Barack Obama, has announced that he will recognize the Armenian allegations. Moreover, the Armenian National Committee of America announced that it will support Obama, who has promised to pass the genocide bill through the Congress.<sup>39</sup>

If not explicitly, Turkey has always expected Armenia to drop the genocide allegations as a precondition of normalizing the relations until recently. In April 2005, Turkey proposed establishing a Joint Historical Commission to investigate the allegations and reach a conclusion, and repeated this proposal several times subsequently. So far, the two parties have not reached an agreement on this proposal, which was the main subject of the letter exchange between Erdoğan and Kocharian.

#### 4. THE QUESTION OF CLOSED BORDERS

As it is stated in the first part of this study, opening the border and establishing diplomatic relations have now turned into matters of domestic politics for both countries. Before making positive advances towards the other side, the governments of both countries formulate policies by considering the potential reactions of the domestic opposition. Therefore, no visible improvement has been achieved in the past seventeen years. This section will briefly look into the issue of the closed border, and the fourth section will discuss in detail the probable effects of opening the border on Armenia, Turkey and the Caucasus region and how this may reflect upon Turkey's relations with the EU.

38 States which adopted the genocide: France, Germany, Italy, Holland, Poland, Cyprus, Lithuania, Sweden, Slovakia, Belgium, Greece, Austria.

39 Temel İskit, 'Ermeni Sorunu: Böyle Gider mi?' (Does the Armenian Question Continue in this Way?), *Taraf Newspaper* (5 February 2008).

As the battle between the Armenian and Azerbaijani troops intensified in March 1993, Turkey sealed its border gate Doğu Kapı, closing the land border with Armenia. After this political move, the Armenian diaspora has taken great measures to convince the international community that this Turkish action was a form of economic embargo. However, experts have claimed that the closure of the border by Turkey was not an economic embargo and it was impossible to prevent this move within the scope of international law.<sup>40</sup>

The closed border between Turkey and Armenia has had negative effects on both sides. The Armenian economy, which was struggling with the financial implications of the war with Azerbaijan and the hardships of being a new state, has been recovering in recent years. In addition to a 13% increase in GDP, Armenian participation in the World Trade Organization in 2003 is one of the factors that triggered this development.<sup>41</sup> Although the developments in the sectors of tourism and industry are promising, due to the border problems with Azerbaijan and Turkey, landlocked Armenia's territorial connection to the outer world is only provided through the very expensive Iranian and Georgian routes. Moreover, Armenia is disturbed by the attitudes of these countries towards Armenian transporters.

Although the effects of the closed border on Turkey are quite limited in comparison to its effects on Armenia, Turkey is also affected negatively by this situation. As Üstün Ergüder<sup>42</sup> puts forward, the underdevelopment in the province of Kars is the best example of this.<sup>43</sup> Also, according to the socio-economic development classification list of the Turkish State Planning Organization, the provinces of Muş and Ağrı are two of Turkey's least developed regions.<sup>44</sup> Hence, opening the Armenian border is likely to contribute to the development of Eastern Turkey by increasing the border trade in the region.

On the other hand, while the international community generally blames Turkey for not making advances in the matter of opening the border, in Armenia too there are groups (notably Dashnak Party) which firmly oppose a re-opening of the border.<sup>45</sup> These groups argue that diplomatic relations should not be established with Turkey unless it recognizes the genocide, and criticize the Armenian state authorities for announcing that Armenia is ready to normalize its relations with Turkey unconditionally.

40 Sedat Laçiner, 'Turkey's EU Membership and the Armenian Question', *The Journal of Turkish Weekly* (13 December 2004), <http://www.turkishweekly.net/comments.php?id=61>.

41 'Armenia: Internal Instability Ahead', International Crisis Group Report, N°158 (18 October 2004), p. 18.

42 Üstün Ergüder is the director of Istanbul Policy Center and one of the founders of TARC.

43 Interview with Üstün Ergüder, Tuzla-Istanbul (25 December 2007).

44 *Ibid.*

45 Sedat Laçiner, 'Ermenistan Sınır Kapsısını Açmanın Maliyeti' (The Cost of Opening the Armenian Border Gate), *The Journal of Turkish Weekly* (5 October 2005).

According to these opposing groups, as long as Turkey does not alter its approach to the Armenian question, any improvement in the relations should be regarded as a betrayal to the case.<sup>46</sup> However, it is an indisputable fact that opening the border is a more urgent issue for the people of Armenia than it is for the Turkish people. Armenia, whose population reduces each day because of emigration<sup>47</sup>, is far from being a center of attraction for its young population. According to a report prepared by International Crisis Group in 2004, 55% of the Armenian population lives below the poverty line, and the average monthly income per capita is around 80 US Dollars. Given that an educated and qualified labor force is necessary for economic development, it seems essential for Armenia to find a solution to its shrinking population, which has decreased from 3.2 million in 1989 to 2 million today. An open border with Turkey will undoubtedly allow the country to turn its face to the West and help the young population look towards the future with greater hope. Therefore, the first condition for Armenia to get rid of a closed ‘island economy’ depends upon the opening of the land border with Turkey.

46 Ibid.

47 Sedat Laçiner, ‘Ermenistan Dış Politikasını Belirleyen Temel Faktörler’ (Basic Factors Shaping the Armenian Foreign Policy), *The Journal of Turkish Weekly* (31 December 2004).



## II. Attempts to Find Solution

### 1. ATTEMPTS MADE BY CIVIL SOCIETY

After the closure of the border and the breakdown in official connections, various non-governmental organizations have mobilized their expertise in attempting to fill the dialogue gap between the two societies. Efforts led by non-governmental organizations and business entities from both countries have therefore tried to demonstrate the results of a constantly closed border. In an attempt to improve mutual dialogue, academicians from both countries tried to introduce student exchange and cultural studies programs. In addition, in the areas most affected by the closed border, local authorities and businessmen have made attempts to change the current situation, and endeavored to influence the national decision mechanisms in opening the border.

Apart from the aforementioned attempts of civil society, Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission (TARC) founded by civilians with the implicit approval of the governments of both countries aiming to contribute to the normalization of relations, has taken on a significant and difficult task with regard to Turkey-Armenia relations.

#### A. TURKISH-ARMENIAN RECONCILIATION COMMISSION (TARC)

The most important attempt made through track-two diplomacy was TARC, the establishment of which was announced on 9 July 2001. During its earlier phase, the commission started its activities with four Turkish representatives and six Armenian representatives in Vienna.<sup>48</sup> The Commission, which was founded with the approval of the Turkish and Armenian governments, received the support of the US Department of State. As such, an American diplomat named David Phillips became the moderator of the Commission. Although in a very diffuse sense the TARC can be viewed as a civil society initiative, one should note the official sanctioning it received upon inception, giving it the political strength that it enjoyed.

<sup>48</sup> TARC was founded with the participation of Gündüz Aktan, Alexander Arzoumanian, Üstün Ergüder, Sadi Ergüvenç, David Hovhannissian, Van Krikorian, Andranik Migranian, Özdem Sanberk, İlter Türkmen and Vamik Volkan. After Aktan, Ergüvenç, and Sanberk quit in 2003, Emin Mahir Balcıoğlu, Ahmet Evin, Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, Sule Kut and İlter Turan joined the commission.

Principally aimed at improving Turkey-Armenia relations, this commission was founded to investigate the issues causing the conflict and to formulate strategies that may help to overcome them. Although the commission was primarily aimed at opening the Turkey-Armenia border, which was a crucial step for establishing diplomatic relations, arguments on genocide overshadowed other issues.<sup>49</sup> The Turkish side offered the suggestion that historians, archivists and psychologists make a joint study, but the Armenian representatives rejected the proposal by asserting that there was no doubt that the 1915 events were genocide and that the international community accepted that fact.<sup>50</sup> At this point, in order to resolve the dispute, the parties fell back upon the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), which is a New York based, esteemed non-governmental organization, requesting a legally non-binding opinion about the applicability of the Convention on Genocide to the events which occurred during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

ICTJ published the said report on 4 February 2003. According to this report, retroactive applicability of the Convention on Genocide is impossible in terms of international law. Hence, Armenia does not have the right to demand territories or monetary reparations from Turkey. On the other hand, the report stated that the events would concord with the definition of genocide if the retroactive applicability of the Convention was possible.<sup>51</sup> In addition, the evolution of the concept of genocide within the scope of *'customary international law'* created a situation which supported the claims of Armenians. According to David Philips, who was the moderator of TARC, this report created a win-win situation and provided the governments with a crucial opportunity to break the deadlock between two countries.<sup>52</sup> However, things once again returned to an impasse as neither side seemed willing to make concessions. Thus, the report which some had seen in an optimistic light paradoxically brought forth the dissolution of the TARC.

According to Gündüz Aktan, the report provided the Armenian side with a basis to be able to defend its arguments legally by answering a question which had not been asked. Although ICTJ is not a legal authority and is not an expert on genocide, thanks to this report, "Armenians seized the opportunity to legally assert that they were righteous, without going to arbitration or court, of which they were very afraid."<sup>53</sup>

49 David L. Philips, 'Hopeful Signs for Turkey and Armenia', *IHT Newspaper* (20 April 2005), [http://www.cfr.org/publication/8015/hopeful\\_signs\\_for\\_turkey\\_armenia.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/8015/hopeful_signs_for_turkey_armenia.html).

50 Gündüz Aktan, 'Ayıp (1)' [Shame (1)], *Radikal Newspaper* (31 March 2005), <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=148179>.

51 '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: Legal Analysis Prepared for the International Center for Transitional Justice' (4 February 2003), <http://www.umd.umich.edu/dept/armenian/news/ictj.pdf>.

52 David L. Philips, 'Hopeful Signs for Turkey and Armenia', *IHT Newspaper* (20 April 2005), [http://www.cfr.org/publication/8015/hopeful\\_signs\\_for\\_turkey\\_armenia.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/8015/hopeful_signs_for_turkey_armenia.html).

53 Gündüz Aktan, 'Ayıp (2)' [Shame (2)], *Radikal Newspaper* (2 April 2005), <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=148372>.

So, Turkish members who thought that the report was legally insufficient and felt that the commission was not going to be beneficial left TARC.

The factors that caused the end of the commission are not limited to the effects created by the ICTJ's report. After the report's announcement to the public, particularly the Dashnak Party and large groups in Armenian society began to severely criticize the Commission. The main reasons for the criticisms were based on the fact that the Commission's primary target was improving relations, a move they deemed would ignore historical arguments.<sup>54</sup> The Dashnak Party therefore issued a declaration asserting that it was impossible to speak about reconciliation unless Turkey accepted the historical facts, and that the commission had jeopardized the international recognition of the genocide by simply striving for reconciliation.<sup>55</sup>

As a result of these developments, TARC announced its dissolution on 14 April 2004 in Moscow and made some recommendations to the Turkish and Armenian governments, including opening the border without delay.<sup>56</sup> The commission took an important step by aiming to bring Turks and Armenians together and to reconcile them, but had to end its activities before reaching concrete targets. Both parties started to disapprove of the commission, and this played a role in its disbandment. Unfortunately, the official webpage of the commission<sup>57</sup> closed recently, it is now impossible to access firsthand information about TARC and to examine the studies it had carried out. Currently, the most important reference regarding TARC is the book by the commission's moderator David Philips, dwelling on the story of TARC.<sup>58</sup>

## B. TURKISH-ARMENIAN BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL (TABDC) AND OTHER NGO ATTEMPTS

In a 1997 summit meeting of Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) held in Istanbul, institutionalizing the economic relations between Turkey and Armenia was on the agenda. Some representatives from the business world, most of whom were from the transportation and logistics sector, suggested establishing a Turkish-Armenian business council. Thus, on 3 May 1997, the Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council (TABDC) was established with the

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

55 Haroutiun Khachatryan, 'Armenian-Turkish Reconciliation Commission Encounters Skepticism', *Eurasianet* (10 September 2001), <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eavog1001.shtml>.

56 'Ermeniler komisyonu yerden yere vuruyordu' (Armenians Severely Criticized the Commission), *Vatan Newspaper* (12 March 2005), <http://www.vatanim.com.tr/root.vatan?exec=haberdetay&tarih=12.03.2005&Newsid=48964&Categoryid=1>, <http://www7.gazetevatan.com/root.vatan?exec=yazardetay&sid=&Newsid=48965&Categoryid=1&wid=0>.

57 The official website of TARC ([www.tarc.info](http://www.tarc.info)) is now out of service.

58 David L. Philips, *Unsilencing the past: Track Two Diplomacy and Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005).

intent of improving cooperation between Turkish and Armenian business circles and contributing to the improvement of relations between the two countries. However, since there was no diplomatic relation between the two countries, it was impossible to integrate TABDC into the Foreign Economic Relations Board, and the Council started its operations without being granted official status. TABDC aimed to increase the trade volume, which was notable, despite the lack of diplomatic relations between the two countries and the closed border, and carried out projects to improve the mutual perceptions in two countries, the most important of which was projects aimed at the facilitation of the opening the border.

Within the scope of the projects aimed to improve the relations, cultural activities were organized in Turkey and Armenia. Headed by TABDC, an important attempt was made with the protocol signed between Middle East Technical University (METU) and Yerevan State University. This protocol initiated student exchange between the two universities, and METU welcomed a group of Armenian students from Yerevan. Ankara University also accepted a similar protocol. However, it is impossible to say whether significant outcomes have been achieved through these attempts of academic cooperation.

Another civil initiative intended to improve regional cooperation is Anadolu Kültür AŞ (Anatolia Culture Inc.) In cooperation with Kars Art Center, which was established in February 2005, Anadolu Kültür organizes joint cultural and art activities with organizations from Caucasian states, and particularly aims to strengthen Turkey-Armenia relations through joint activities with Armenia. It has in the past organized activities in the areas of music, cinema and photography in cooperation with artists from Armenia. With the contribution of Anadolu Kültür, photographers from Istanbul took pictures of Yerevan and vice versa. Thus, the first joint art activity, called 'Merhabarev', was organized in November 2006.

Another project, the foundations of which were laid by TABDC, was the renovation of the Akhtamar Church in Lake Van. The renovation was made thanks to the contributions of the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and the church was opened as a museum on 29 March 2007. This step is seen as a sign of goodwill showing the intentions of Turkey to improve its relations with Armenia.<sup>59</sup>

Yet another attempt to facilitate mutual dialogue was made by the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly. In August 2005, twenty four university students from Turkey and Armenia came together in a ten-day seminar program held in Antakya, Turkey.<sup>60</sup>

59 'Ankara Restores Armenian Church', BBC (29 March 2007), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6505927.stm>.

60 For detailed information, please visit: <http://www.yavasgamats.org/en/default.aspx>.

In addition to these attempts, the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation issued a report regarding the ‘Armenian-Turkish Citizens’ Mutual Perceptions and Dialogue Project’ in 2005, and visited Yerevan in December 2006. During this visit, it held talks with several important Armenian NGOs about normalizing the relations between the two countries. Apart from these initiatives, non-governmental organizations and think tanks such as Arı Movement, ASAM, USAK, and Friedrich Neumann Stiftung have done studies on Turkey-Armenia relations.

### C. LOCAL ATTEMPTS

The Turkish region that has been most affected in economic terms by the closed border between Turkey and Armenia is Northeastern Anatolia, where the border gate of Doğu Kapı is located. According to local business circles, after losing its role as Turkey’s gate opening to the Caucasus, this region also lost the opportunity to develop economically. Disturbed by this unfavorable situation, local authorities tried to convince the government to open the border by emphasizing the economic advantages that it would provide. With respect to this issue, nearly 100.000 people signed a petition requesting an open border and presented it to the then Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan in 1996. In addition, the Industrialists’ and Businessmen’s Association of Kars visited Armenia and was received by Petrossian and Kocharian.

One can assert that such attempts made by local lobbies up to now have been influential and have formed a pressure group of considerable impact. However, while the efforts of civil society improve the dialogue between the communities, they are not enough to solve complicated problems. Having said that, we must acknowledge that when foreign policy comes to a deadlock, initiatives made by civil society and other pressure groups will prove to be of great importance.

## 2. DIPLOMATIC ATTEMPTS

As stated before, efforts to normalize Turkey-Armenia relations are not limited to the attempts of civil society. Official representatives have come together on various platforms, discussed problematic matters and tried to find solutions. Although authorities state that both sides want to normalize relations, they have not yet achieved reconciliation in terms of politics. Within the scope of official dialogues, the most important recent attempt has been the letters exchanged between Prime Minister Erdoğan and President Kocharian. As stated before, prior to this move, official representatives from both sides had for some time been conducting unpublicized negotiations and bargains in Vienna.<sup>61</sup> These series of negotiations

61 Barçın Yinanç, ‘Türkiye’den Ermenistan’a Tarihi Açılım’ (Historical Advances from Turkey to Armenia), *Referans Newspaper* (2 October 2006), [http://www.referansgazetesi.com/haber.aspx?HBR\\_KOD=50727&ForArsiv=1](http://www.referansgazetesi.com/haber.aspx?HBR_KOD=50727&ForArsiv=1).

paved the way for the letter exchange and provided the sides with the opportunity to solve the problems through negotiation. Since the Vienna talks were secret, no pronouncement has been made with regard to the context of these meetings. The fact that the Vienna talks were hidden from the public is important since it shows that both sides were cautious of the restrictions of domestic politics and probable reactions from their societies.

Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan's letter sent to President Kocharian in April 2005 focuses on the effects of the genocide issue on the relations of the two countries.<sup>62</sup> According to Erdoğan, the painful events that occurred in the past between the two communities sharing the same history and geography have hindered the establishment of friendly relations today. With the intent of leaving the future generations a peaceful environment where mutual respect and understanding prevails, Prime Minister Erdoğan called for forming a joint historical commission to investigate the 1915 events. According to this proposal, which was supported by the leader of main opposition party, Deniz Baykal, not only the archives in Turkey and Armenia, but also the archives in third-party countries will be opened to researchers and results will be shared with the international community. Both countries will respect the results, thus a significant step will be taken towards normalizing the relations of the two countries. Erdoğan states that it is possible to discuss the details of the commission which will be founded if Armenia gives a positive answer.

In his reply to Prime Minister Erdoğan on 25 April 2005, President Kocharian puts emphasis on the lack of official relations between the two countries and underlines that the primary objective should be opening the border and establishing diplomatic relations.<sup>63</sup> He also repeats that Armenia is ready to establish diplomatic relations 'unconditionally'. Kocharian underscores the fact that there are countries in Europe that can maintain normal relations with each other despite conflicts stemming from the past. He expresses that it is necessary to adopt an understanding which will focus not only on history but also on the present and the future, and suggests founding an intergovernmental commission that will find solutions for all problems between the two countries through negotiation. At this point, it can be said that, while the Armenian side sees the problems between the two countries as a whole, Turkey approaches each problem individually just like the question of the Aegean Sea, and formulates policies within this perspective.

Erdoğan's letter can be regarded as a step forward towards normalizing the relations. Although the Armenian side is not unfamiliar with the suggestion for founding a joint historical commission, a suggestion made to this effect by the highest official has given it a renewed sense of urgency. While the Armenian side

62 See Appendix 1.

63 See Appendix 2.

does not totally refuse the idea, they disapprove of a group of official authorities supported by experts discussing the genocide issue, which has now become a part of the Armenian community's character and historical perception.<sup>64</sup>

According to the Turkish side, the aim of the commission is providing direct communication between Turkish and Armenian researchers, and thus, creating an appropriate environment for conducting studies on these issues. For Turkey, results of the group's studies are not clear, and it is because of this uncertainty that Turkey wants Armenia to give a chance to this initiative. Turkish authorities highlight that Turkey shows utmost tolerance and they expect a similar commitment from their Armenian counterparts.<sup>65</sup>

In spite of the letter exchange between Erdoğan and Kocharian, the aforementioned commission or commissions have not been founded yet. Aiming to normalize the relations, this initiative also seems unsuccessful due to the long time that has passed, but, occasionally, establishing a joint commission comes back on the agenda again. Most recently, Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan called for reestablishing the commission on 21 April 2008.

64 Mustafa Karaalioglu, 'Koçaryan'ın Mektubu ve Soykırım' (Kocharian's Letter and Genocide), *Yeni Şafak Online* (29 April 2005), <http://www.yenisafak.com.tr/arsiv/2005/nisan/29/mkaraalioglu.html>.

65 'Ermeniler'den Komisyona Ret' (Armenians Reject the Commission), *Sabah Newspaper* (15 April 2005), <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2005/04/15/gnd108.html>.

# III. Why is a Solution Necessary?

## 1. STRATEGIC VISION AND MEDIATION IN NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT

The chaos in the Caucasus, where stability has never been completely established since the collapse of the USSR, also has a spillover effect in Turkey. The other powerful neighbor in the region, the Russian Federation, is not affected as much because it has reached its former power thanks to the large territories it governs and the rise in the oil prices following the Iraq War. Russia also compounds the problem by formulating policies supporting this instability. And since Russia is the successor of the USSR, it exercises greater power over the states in the region when compared to Turkey.

The failure to normalize the Armenia-Turkey relations and to establish diplomatic relations in the past seventeen years eventually forced Armenia to establish closer relations with Russia. Staying under Russian influence for long years and also having religious ties with Russia naturally pushed Armenia into the Russian zone of influence. In addition to that, there is a very politically active Armenian diaspora in Russia.

Therefore, it would not be accurate to evaluate the Russia-Armenia convergence just in terms of the problems between Armenia and Turkey. This situation is reflected in the groupings between the countries in the region. As a result of the closure of the Turkey-Armenia border, the polarization between the Turkey-Ukraine-Azerbaijan-Georgia alliance and the Russia-Iran-Armenia bloc has further intensified.<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, it is a fact that the lack of diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey creates a circumstance favorable to Russia's regional interests.

It is also a well-known fact that the Caucasus region has acquired a greater significance during last ten years. Particularly in geopolitical terms, the region's position as a circulation and communication junction between Asia and Europe, and its function as a transfer corridor for oil and natural gas pipelines have drawn the attention of various players, of which the most prominent are some European countries and the USA. In order to assuage the instability in the Caucasus, Turkey

66 Nathalie Tocci, 'The Case for Opening the Turkish-Armenian Border', TEPSA (July 2007), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/activities/expert/eStudies/download.do?file=18288>.



has to accept responsibility over several important tasks. This is a must in order not only to ensure a future role in the production and transfer of energy resources in the Caspian basin, but also to maintain its self-proclaimed role as a regional power. The Nagorno-Karabakh problem, which is the greatest conflict in the Caucasus, seems unlikely to be resolved in the near future. Twenty percent of Azerbaijan's territory is still under Armenian occupation and no solution has been found to this problem during the fourteen years since the ceasefire in 1994. In accordance with its strategic vision, Turkey wants to act as a mediator in this deadlock, but it lacks diplomatic relations with one of the parties and acts as a 'brother state' towards the other, making it difficult for it to assume such a role.

The international community will perceive the normalization of relations with Armenia as a sign of Turkey's will to play a truly constructive role in the solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Moreover, it will make it possible to convey a message about Turkey's equal distance to Armenia and Azerbaijan. Attempting to play an active role in the solution of the Palestine-Israel question, Turkey needs to display the same will and constructiveness in ending this war right beside its borders.

## 2. RELATIONS WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION

For Turkey, another important dimension of improving relations with Armenia is the negotiation process with the EU. The annual progress reports, which evaluate the course of negotiations and the reforms carried out, always put emphasis on establishing good neighborly relations and the importance of opening the border without delay.<sup>67</sup>

Moreover, the EU accepts Armenia as a country within the scope of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), and supports high-budget projects to establish democracy and market economy in the country. The EU's idea of establishing a 'common market' with the countries within the scope of the ENP in the future makes it crucial for Turkey to review its relations with Armenia immediately.

Resolution of border conflicts and good neighborly relations are some of EU's expectations from candidate states. Both Turkey and Armenia have diplomatic relations with the EU, and this provides the EU with the opportunity to play an active role in the Turkey-Armenia border question. Nonetheless, two factors impede the potential of the EU to improve Turkey-Armenia relations. The first factor is the different diplomatic relations the two countries have with respect to the EU. While Turkey is an accession candidate to the EU, Armenia is a part of its ENP.<sup>68</sup> This difference in the relations of the EU with the two countries endows the Union with

67 For detailed information, please visit: <http://www.eutcc.org/articles/8/15/document229.ehtml>.

68 Armenia signed the European Neighborhood Policy Action Plan in 2006.

greater leverage over Turkey. In other words, the EU's ability to 'exert influence' on these two countries is not equal, and this complicates the role the EU can play in the improvement of Turkey-Armenia relations.

The second factor that impedes the opportunity of EU to play an active role in the Turkey-Armenia border problem is the ambiguity of EU-Turkey relations and Turkish accusations of the EU for not being sincere in its promise to eventually grant Turkey full-membership. As it is well-known, while the EU recognizes Turkey as a candidate to membership, there is no consensus within the Union regarding the full-membership of Turkey. Led by France and Austria, a group of member states object to Turkey's membership and this has adversely affected Turkey-EU relations. Due to this negative atmosphere, Turkey questions the EU's sincerity, and this restricts the EU's influence over Turkey. Therefore, in order for the EU to play a more active role in the improvement of Turkey-Armenia relations, it is necessary to clear up the ambiguity in EU-Turkey relations. Considering that Turkey's Armenia policy has developed problematically since the emergence of Armenia as an independent state, if the current policy continues, it is inevitable for this problem to be another blind alley for Turkey in the EU membership process, just like the seaport crisis with Southern Cyprus.

The last important dimension of Armenia's relations that influences the negotiation process with the EU is related to the genocide allegations. Since recognizing the Armenian genocide was not one of the Copenhagen criteria, these allegations did not pose a problem when starting negotiations with Turkey. On the other hand, the parliaments of leading EU member countries such as Germany, France, Belgium, Greece, Italy and the Netherlands, as well as the EP itself adopted bills on the genocide allegations. Moreover, some of these countries stress that Turkey should recognize the genocide as a requisite to becoming an EU member.<sup>69</sup> The general opinion in the EU member countries that adopted bills on the genocide claims is that, by closing its borders, Turkey is now punishing a people against which it perpetrated genocide in the past. However, given that Turkey's accession to the EU will be a quite favorable development for Armenia, foreground EU alienating Turkey by frequently pushing the genocide issue to the foreground damages Armenia indirectly and creates a paradoxical situation.

The influence of Armenia-Turkey relations on the Western organizations is not just limited to the EU. Another essential dimension is the matter of Armenian accession to NATO. Although this issue has been exhaustively debated, one should never ignore the fact that Armenia does not want to jeopardize its relations with Russia. Therefore, Armenia sees its NATO membership as a means, rather than as an end,

69 Cenk Başlamış, 'Soykırım Kriteri' (Genocide Criterion), *Milliyet Newspaper* (1 September 2006), <http://www.milliyet.com/2006/10/01/dunya/adun.html>.

and makes use of this process as an opportunity for its democratic and economic development. And for Turkey, accession of the Caucasus to NATO will be able to both provide additional security for its eastern borders, and counteract Russian dominance in the region.

### 3. ECONOMIC DIMENSION OF THE NORMALIZATION OF THE RELATIONS

Some experts frequently defend the thesis that Armenia has a limited trade volume in connection with its population, and therefore, opening the border will not make a radical contribution to the economy of Eastern Anatolia. The fact that Eastern Anatolia is the least developed region of Turkey in spite of open borders and trade with Iran, Georgia and Nakhchivan strengthens these claims. Although Turkey's GDP is forty times greater than Armenia's GDP, the share of Eastern Anatolia in the Turkish GDP is just 4.14%.<sup>70</sup> The primary provinces in the region that are affected by the closure of the Turkey-Armenia border are Kars and Trabzon. When Ardahan became a province, the connection of Kars with Georgia was broken, and as Iğdır became a province, Kars lost its Nakhchivan border gate to this new province. Thus, Kars now has no territorial connection with countries other than Armenia to engage in foreign trade. Since the border with Armenia was closed in 1993, the economy of Kars took a downward turn. The Turkish government subsequently had to face the angry remonstrations from local authorities, protesting against the closing of the border. The basic reason of this dissatisfaction had its roots in the fact that, while economic trade and relations were not discontinued over the Istanbul-Black Sea-Georgia route, authorities in Kars felt victimized as overland trade from their region to Armenia was allowed to be sacrificed. Similarly, the province of Trabzon also suffered from the closure of the border. The economic power of the Trabzon Harbor was reduced, and its competitive power in comparison to Georgian harbors decreased. By making a contribution to the development of the Trabzon harbor, opening the Turkey-Armenia border has the potential to improve the economic condition of this city.<sup>71</sup>

Without doubt, the closure of the border affects Armenia more so than it does Turkey as a whole. The closed border increases transport costs for Armenia and restricts its economy. Armenia conducts 90% of its foreign trade over Georgia, and that gives Georgia the opportunity to become a monopoly. An open Turkey-Armenia border has the capability to break the Georgian monopoly and reduce transport costs for Armenia. Another positive effect of opening the border on the Armenian economy is Armenia's potential to increase its exports. A study by the World Bank in 2001 forecasts a 100% increase in Armenia's exports if its borders with Azerbaijan and Turkey were to re-open.<sup>72</sup> Yet another report prepared by the World Bank in 2001

70 Nathalie Tocci, 'The Case for Opening the Turkish-Armenian Border', TEPSA (July 2007), p. 15, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/activities/expert/eStudies/download.do?file=18288>

71 Ibid. p. 16.

72 Ibid. p. 17.

estimates a 30% increase in the Armenian GNP if the border opens. Other reports examining the probable effects of opening the border are less optimistic, and the Armenian-European Policy and Legal Advice Centre foresees only a 2.7% increase over five years in Armenia's GNP provided the borders were re-opened. But despite there being vast differences between the speculations of these two reports, it is clear that, all things considered, opening the border can only affect the Armenian economy for the better.<sup>73</sup> In conclusion, Turkey has the upper hand in the economic aspect of opening the border. This is because it is Armenia and not Turkey that stands to substantially benefit from an open border in economic terms. Therefore, this legitimizes the Turkish stance of not opening the border unless a solution can be found for the other problems between the two countries.

The greatest advantage that opening the Turkey-Armenia border can provide to the Southern Caucasia region will be an increase in the economic efficiency of the region as a result of decreases in transportation costs and opening of new markets. An open border has the potential to improve the means of transportation and to increase security in the region by contributing to the solution of Nagorno-Karabakh dispute. Therefore, one can claim that a positive atmosphere created by opening the border is as important as its economic advantages. People should consider solving the ethnic conflicts in the region, supporting disarmament, and achieving a stable atmosphere over all of the Caucasus as objectives that are as urgent as the economic development of the region. In addition, it is not quite wrong to claim that a Southern Caucasia which solves the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and does not have border problems is likely to achieve greater economic development.

#### 4. SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS

One of the most important outcomes of the normalization of Turkey-Armenia relations is the positive effect it is likely to create upon the mutual perceptions of the two countries' citizens. According to the findings of the study carried out by Ferhat Kentel and Gevorg Poghosyan through face-to-face interviews in Istanbul and Yerevan, besides the mutual negative prejudices, the societies of the two countries do not really know each other.<sup>74</sup> While on the Turkish side perception are so muddled that there are those who think that the major religion of Armenia is Judaism and the Communist Party governs the country, all Armenian perceptions towards Turkey are constructed within the framework of the genocide issue, which constitutes a key element in the foundation of Armenian national identity. Being a particularly important element in the socialization of the young generations in Armenia, this issue

73 Ibid. p. 11.

74 Ferhat Kentel and Gevorg Poghosyan, *Ermenistan ve Türkiye Vatandaşları Karşılıklı Algılama ve Diyalog Projesi (Armenian-Turkish Citizens' Mutual Perceptions and Dialogue Project)*, (Istanbul: TESEV Publications, 2005), p. 40.

creates differences in the mutual perceptions of the two societies. It is therefore not an exaggeration to state that there exists mutual mistrust among the two societies. In addition to the alienating “us versus them” rhetoric used by both sides, it is hard to rid the mutual perceptions from the burden of history, since there is no scope for dialogue and hence no interaction between the two societies.

Turkish and Armenian societies have lived together since ancient times, but their current perception of each other is quite problematic. The responsibility rests with the decision-makers to make concerted efforts so as to reverse these feelings of mistrust and improve bilateral relations. At the same time and along with the governments, civil society should also take it upon itself to improve the image of the “other” in the public’s eye. With regards to this, intercollegiate cooperation projects and student exchange programs could prove to be essential. Additionally, it is crucial to accelerate dialogue between members of civil society from both sides of the border, and to carry out projects that will draw civic attention in Turkey towards Armenia. Efforts such as these will go beyond local attempts that are effective just along the border, like those made by the authorities in Kars, and provide the issue with a national scope and measure. The closed border, of course, obstructs the improvement of such initiatives, and reinforces the current perspective shaped around the perception that Armenia is an ‘alien’ state far away.

## Conclusion

This study examined the history of Turkey-Armenia relations, which have never been able to normalize since Armenia emerged as an independent state. Considering the current state of relations, it is an undeniable fact that the problem stems from a correlated set of circumstances. Given that the bilateral problems have four different aspects involving Azerbaijan, Russia, the EU and the USA, it is easier to understand why normalization has not yet been achieved.

The Azerbaijani aspect of the problem is important since Turkey has been politically entangled in the conflict between the two countries. Turkey regards Azerbaijan as a 'brother country' and considers its economic and political cooperation accordingly. Therefore, Armenia-Turkey relations are, in a sense, burdened by the presence of Azerbaijan in what is already a convoluted mix. In other words, it seems that Turkey must overcome the dilemma between improving its relations with Armenia at the cost of endangering its relations with Azerbaijan.

The Russian and American aspects of the problem are far more complicated. This is because Russia takes advantage of the non-existence of diplomatic ties between Turkey and Armenia to keep the latter within its sphere of influence. Given that Armenia is another element in the struggles between the USA and Russia to exert dominance over the Caucasian region, it is not surprising that both countries constantly strive to not 'lose Armenia,' as it were. The largest American embassy in the region, which is in Armenia, and the American support for the normalization of Turkey-Armenia relations are two of the primary signs of this struggle. Any improvement in Turkey-Armenia relations is likely to help in reducing Armenian dependence on the Russian Federation, and driving Armenia towards the EU and, particularly, NATO. Although the Russian Federation-Turkey relations are at their peak, inclination of Armenia towards a bloc with Turkey will push the Russian military presence further away from the Turkish borders.

The EU, which is the last aspect of the problem, hinders the solution through the policies it implements. While there are obvious advantages of including Armenia in the ENP and granting Turkey membership to the EU, some member states of the EU set the recognition of genocide as a precondition for Turkey's accession to the

EU. Armenian support for this precondition further estranges Turkey from the EU and jeopardizes any possible diplomatic consideration that could be made by Turkey to thaw the relation between the two countries.

Considering the seventeen-year old history of Turkey-Armenia relations, it is evident that the past has always overshadowed their relations. Attempts to improve the relations between the two communities until now, upon which most of this study has touched, have undertaken a crucial task in the process of building trust. The aforementioned attempts have proven that the two sides can come together, that there are many common grounds and, most of all that a solution can be reached. On the other hand, in order for the painstaking efforts of the civil society to bear fruits, it is necessary to show political will explicitly. As long as the states fail to normalize the relations at the official level, the efforts of civil society to establish dialogue between the two communities are likely to fall short of changing the status quo.

Taking the current situation into consideration, it is apparent that both sides believe that they are doing their part and can only wait for the next advances from the other side. The Turkish side announces that an important opportunity might emerge for the normalization of the relations, provided that Armenia makes favorable advances after the presidential elections held in Armenia on 19 February 2008<sup>75</sup>, while the Armenian authorities put the ball in the court of the Turkish side. So there is still ambiguity concerning what kind of a roadmap will be implemented in normalizing the Armenia-Turkey relations at the official level in 2008. In addition, the protests triggered by the opposition in the aftermath of the presidential elections in Armenia have turned into armed conflict since March 1st, and a state of emergency has been declared in Armenia; these incidents show that Armenia will be occupied with trying to assure domestic stability for a while to come.

Armenia only has access to the outer world through Russian routes over Georgia and Iranian routes, and gains limited economic benefits from these. Add to this the presence of increasing domestic unemployment and poverty in the country, and we have a situation in which it is really difficult to say as to how long Armenia can persist in a stalemate in its relations with Turkey. The economic picture looks especially dire when one also considers the Turkish and Azerbaijani embargo on Armenia and how it is tightening the screws on Armenia further with each passing year.<sup>76</sup> This condition has reverberated into the last election campaigns in Armenia: all candidates made commitments to fight poverty. However, as long as Armenia's most important border gate to the West remains closed and the economic embargo by the two neighbor

75 Tansu Peker, 'Ermenistan'da Seçimler Sonrası Pozitif gelişme Olur mu?' (Are Favorable Advances Likely in Armenia After the Elections?) *Actuel Online* (8 February 2008), <http://www.lactuel.be/detail.php?id=3030>.

76 Semih İdiz, 'Ermenistan Liderini Arıyor' (Armenia Seeks its Leader), *Milliyet Newspaper* (14 February 2008), <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2008/02/14/guncel/agun.html>.

countries continues, questions concerning how to meet these commitments will keep rising. Within this context, the principal rival of Sargsyan in the last elections and currently the indisputable leader of the Armenian opposition, former president Petrossian's warnings that peace must be achieved in Nagorno-Karabakh immediately are of great importance. According to Petrossian, Azerbaijan, which is gaining strength each passing day thanks to oil revenues, is going to reach the power to recapture its lost territories through war in a short while.<sup>77</sup> In contrast, Armenia is weakening and slowly losing the trumps it currently holds in its hand. Although the West supports Petrossian's moderate approach, considering the fact that Sargsyan has won the elections and all opposition in the country has been silenced with oppression, it becomes evident that the status quo in Nagorno-Karabakh is likely to continue.

In the near future, it seems impossible for the parties to change their standings towards the issues of genocide allegations and Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which are the primary problems between the two countries. Neither side seems willing to compromise on this issue. As for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Armenia wants Turkey to look at the problem from an evenhanded perspective. On the other hand, there are no convincing reasons for Turkey, which has taken Azerbaijan's side since the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict broke out, to change its position. Within this context, in order to be able to start a dialogue process for establishing diplomatic relations, handling the relations of the two countries independently from the genocide allegations and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict seems essential. Otherwise, even if new attempts are made in the near future, it is quite likely for these efforts to fall within the same vicious circle.

Turkey-Armenia relations have turned into a matter of domestic politics, and this hinders the success of the advances made through official channels. During the fifteen years that have passed since 1993, while Turkey has kept the land border closed, it has opened its airspace to Armenia and allowed direct flights between Yerevan and Istanbul. However, such favorable advances have not translated into comprehensive normalization in political relations. Undoubtedly, the uncompromising attitudes of the two countries' governments play a crucial role in this reality. If the decision-makers who have the necessary authority for the solution, go on implementing policies that perpetuate the deadlock, it seems impossible for a comprehensive improvement to be achieved in the relations in the near future.

Within this framework, if Turkey aims at zero problems with its neighbors in accordance with its regional influence and strategic vision it needs to establish

77 Sinan Oğan, 'Rusya ve Ermenistan'da Devlet Başkanlığı Seçimlerinin Bölge ve Türkiye'ye Etkileri' (The Effects of the Presidential Elections in Russia and Armenia on the Region and Turkey), 2023 (15 March 2008).



diplomatic relations with Armenia without delay. It is crucial to free the issues related to Turkey-Armenia relations, which have been indexed to the border recognition question, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the genocide allegations, from these pressures, and to improve relations within a wider framework. Normalization of the two countries' relations, which have now acquired an excessively ideological character, has additional importance for the stability of the Caucasian region. Struggling to implement an active and constructive foreign policy in this region, this is certainly the best opportunity for Turkey to watch the developments in a neighboring state in the region closely, and to solve its problems with Armenia through diplomacy.



## Author's Note on the Recent Developments

Four months after the publication of the Turkish edition of this report in May 2008, the Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan invited Turkish President Abdullah Gül to watch the World Cup qualifying football match between the national teams of the two countries. This gesture has drawn all the attention in both countries to the relations between Turkey and Armenia, which was deadlocked since the first years of existence of the latter as an independent state. President Gül's positive answer came after a long consultation process and his trip to Armenia has raised expectations after decades of lack of official relationship between the two countries. This first visit by a Turkish head of state to Armenia took place almost one month after the conflict between Russia and Georgia escalated and has served as a clear demonstration of both sides' desire to solve their complex problems and regional matters within the scope of diplomacy and good neighborly relations.

Although the quality of the football was mediocre, Gül's trip to Yerevan could open a new chapter in Turkey's troublesome relations with Armenia. The visit is well received by most of the Armenians and applauded by majority in Turkey. Besides the media and policy analysts of the other countries cited the gesture as a positive step. Now the real question remains to be answered: What next? The first high-level contact in Armenia was surely a significant step; however it was not undisclosed that the latest round of secret negotiations between Turkey and Armenia has been underway for more than a year. In addition, Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan, who has also visited Yerevan with President Gül, held a meeting with Armenian Foreign Minister Eduard Nalbandian. The two discussed the modalities of establishing diplomatic ties as well as the initiative proposed by Turkey to establish a regional alliance with the participation of the three Caucasus states together with Turkey and Russia. After this meeting, it was made public that Babacan and Nalbandian would meet for a second time in New York on September 26. This declaration increased expectations of the public on both sides for a rapid normalization of the bilateral relations.

Foreign Ministers of Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan came together on September 26 during the general assembly meeting of the U.N. which took place in New York. This first tripartite meeting has passed in a positive atmosphere and the general theme that was discussed predominantly during the summit was Turkey's Caucasus Stability Platform initiative. Even though Nalbandian has recently stated that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was not of the issues discussed during this meeting; media representatives following the talks later reported that development in

Turkey-Armenia and Azerbaijan-Armenia relations were expected after the Azerbaijani elections of October 15. Not surprisingly, this last election in Azerbaijan resulted with the victory of Ilham Aliyev and he was re-elected with 87% of the votes for another term.

Three weeks after this 'victory', Sargsyan and Aliyev signed a joint declaration in Moscow with the presence of the Russian President Medvedev and demonstrated their will for the 'peaceful resolution' to their dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh on the basis of 'binding international guarantees'. This first document signed by the two countries on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue since 1994 is critical in terms of purporting the change in Russia's position regarding this intricate conflict. Russia's strategy to freeze the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has apparently changed after the conflict with Georgia. Most likely Russia will begin to pursue a more active role for the resolution of the dispute in collaboration with the co-chairs of the OSCE's Minsk Group. This change in Russia's position will probably facilitate the resolution in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which is at the same time the core problem in Turkish-Armenian relations.

In brief, the football diplomacy has surely paved the way for the normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia. The positive atmosphere created after the Yerevan meeting of Gül and Sargsyan is followed by official declarations from both sides stating that there is no obstacle for the reconciliation between the two countries. In addition, Turkey's non-permanent membership of the UN Security Council for 2009-2010 will certainly push Turkey to adopt a much more active and constructive foreign policy; and normalizing relations with Armenia is a sine qua non component of this process.

**Aybars Görgülü,**  
November 2008

# Appendix 1: Prime Minister R. Tayyip Erdoğan's Official Letter to Armenian President Robert Kocharian

His Excellency Robert Kocharian  
President  
Republic of Armenia  
Yerevan

Dear Mr. President,

The Turkish and Armenian peoples not only shared a common history and geography in a sensitive region of the world, but also lived together over a long period of time. However, it is not a secret that we have diverging interpretations of events that took place during a particular period of our common history.

These differences that have in the past left behind traces of painful memories for our nations continue to hamper the improvement of friendly relations between our two countries today.

I believe that, as leaders of our countries, our primary duty is to leave to our future generations a peaceful and friendly environment in which tolerance and mutual respect shall prevail.

These views are also shared by the leader of our main opposition party, Mr. Deniz Baykal, the Chairman of the Republican People's Party (CHP). Within this framework, we are extending an invitation to your country to establish a joint group consisting of historians and other experts from our two countries to study the developments and events of 1915 not only in the archives of Turkey and Armenia but also in the archives of all relevant third countries and to share their findings with the international community.

I believe that such an initiative would shed light on a disputed period of history and also constitute a step towards contributing to the normalization of relations between our countries.

I hope that our proposal, which aims to create a friendly and more peaceful climate to be passed on to future generations, will meet your consent. If we receive a favorable response from your side to our proposal of forming such a group, we will be ready to discuss the details of this proposal with your country.

Sincerely,  
**R. Tayyip Erdoğan**

# Appendix 2: Armenian President Robert Kocharian’s Official Response Letter to Prime Minister R. Tayyip Erdoğan

H.E. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan  
Prime Minister  
Republic of Turkey  
Ankara

Dear Prime Minister,

I’m in receipt of your letter. Indeed, as two neighbors, we both must work to find ways to live together in harmony. That is why, from the first day, we have extended our hand to you to establish relations, open the border, and thus start a dialogue between the two countries and two peoples.

There are neighboring countries, particularly on the European continent, who have had a difficult past, about which they differ. However, that has not stopped them from having open borders, normal relations, diplomatic ties, representatives in each other’s capitals, even as they continue to discuss that which divides them.

Your suggestion to address the past cannot be effective if it deflects from addressing the present and the future. In order to engage in a useful dialog, we need to create the appropriate and conducive political environment. It is the responsibility of governments to develop bilateral relations and we do not have the right to delegate that responsibility to historians. That is why we have proposed and propose again that, without pre-conditions, we establish normal relations between our two countries.

In that context, an intergovernmental commission can meet to discuss any and all outstanding issues between our two nations, with the aim of resolving them and coming to an understanding.

Sincerely,  
**Robert Kocharian**

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## About the Author

### **AYBARS GÖRGÜLÜ**

Aybars Görgülü was born in Istanbul in 1981. For his secondary and high school education, he attended Saint Benoit French Highschool in Istanbul. After graduating from the Department of Social and Political Sciences at Sabancı University in 2005, he completed his postgraduate education in the Department of Diplomacy and International Relations at Clermont-Ferrand I University in France. In December 2006, he joined TESEV's Foreign Policy Program as assistant project officer. Simultaneously, he continues to work as a teaching assistant while continuing his doctoral studies in the Department of Politics at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences in Sabancı University.

The fact that Turkey - a country making full membership negotiations with the European Union and assuming active roles in the Balkans, the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, the Caucasus and the Middle East - has in spite of seventeen years not yet established full diplomatic relations with a neighboring state tells of an inconsistency with the declared strategy of active and positive foreign policy it adopted after the Cold War.

The governments of the two countries have abstained from making advances towards a comprehensive solution due to the constraints of domestic politics, and this has reduced the relations between the two communities into a vicious circle. After years of stalemate, normalizing the relations between the two countries without delay seems of vital importance to protect against the possibility of a second Cyprus case for Turkish foreign policy.

It is crucial to free the issues related to Turkey-Armenia relations, which have been indexed to the border recognition question, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the genocide allegations, from these pressures, and to improve relations within a wider framework. Normalization of the two countries' relations, which have now acquired an excessively ideological character, has additional importance for the stability of the Caucasian region. Struggling to implement an active and constructive foreign policy in this region, this is certainly the best opportunity for Turkey to watch the developments in a neighboring state in the region closely, and to solve its problems with Armenia through diplomacy.

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