

Waiting on the Protocols: Armenian-Turkish Relations and Possible areas of Cooperation

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Introduction

The uneasy, contentious, history-ridden relationship between Armenia and Turkey has been important in the security and development of the South Caucasus region ever since Armenia gained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Turkey was among the first to recognise the small landlocked Armenia's independence, yet over the last almost two decades the two neighbours have been at loggerheads – for historical and geopolitical reasons, due to military conflicts with third countries and simply as part of some inertia. As of late, there appeared a new light on the horizon signalling re-establishing of diplomatic relations and opening of the closed mutual border, namely the signing of official Protocols to these ends by the two foreign ministers late in 2009; the Protocols are to come into effect after ratification by the respective legislatures. But ratification prospects have started to dim in view of a tangible slowdown in the process, mutual accusations by the two sides of each one's attempts at introducing preconditions for ratification, and even threats of abrogation.

The current moment seems to be geopolitically opportune for a general rapprochement, establishing of relations and opening of the border. Turkey and Armenia have shown a tendency in the last couple of years for softening towards each other and readiness to talk, despite nationalist outbursts at home and the slowdown in the ratification process. Many a major stakeholder in the Black Sea region seem to favour a normalisation of Armenian-Turkish relations: the United States and the European Union have traditionally supported it, while Russia's position has transformed after the 2008 Georgian war from neutral and even negative to tacitly approving of rapprochement. Also, in times of world economic slump, the moment offers a valuable chance of opening one border and spurring development on both sides of it. And last but not least, it is high time for normalisation to happen in view of the approaching 100th anniversary of the April 24, 1915, events when Armenia commemorates the mass killings and deportations of Armenians committed by the Ottoman Empire and when, nationalist sentiments are expected to rise.

Restored diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey, a reopened border and a launched cooperation, which is immediately feasible in a number of spheres, will be of tangible benefit to both countries, especially their border regions, and will boost regional cooperation and stability in the Caucasus in the long run. The present inertia and lack of resolve for changing the status quo towards conflict settlement and cooperation in the Caucasus as a whole has led to no improvement in relations. An open, pragmatic and economically advantageous relationship between Armenia and Turkey should serve as an example for the rest in the entire Black Sea area.

This paper aims to identify a number of possible areas where cooperation between Armenia and Turkey could take immediate effect even before diplomatic relations are re-established, given the border is opened. These are spheres of common interest that could be logical object of pursuit for every modern state in the 21st century. The paper first shortly examines the background of oscillating relations between the two countries since the early 1990s; tries to identify the basic factors that have been determining those relations; and then juxtaposes to them the areas of possible cooperation and common interest. Surprisingly, the possibilities for mutual benefit are not fewer in number than the drawbacks pulling for preservation of the status quo. It remains to be seen whether they are stronger.

Overview of Armenian-Turkish relations since 1991

The relations between Turkey and Armenia have been tense ever since the latter gained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Although Turkey was the second to recognise the new state after the United States, the two countries failed to establish diplomatic ties immediately. Then relations worsened after Turkey closed its border with Armenia in 1993 in solidarity with its close ally Azerbaijan, Armenia's eastern neighbour, due to Armenian occupation of Azerbaijan territory in and around the region of Nagorno-Karabakh (majority Armenian-populated) and the ongoing conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan have thus been a decisive external factor in Armenian-Turkish relations.

There were two distinctive attempts by the Armenian and Turkish sides to start some form of communication during the post-1993 years. One was the establishment in 2001 of the Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission (TARC), comprising six Turkish and four Armenian members and chaired by U.S. diplomat David Phillips. The commission's aim was to devise ways to improve relations between the two countries, and its formation was initially not announced to the public, though both governments were aware of its existence.¹ What TARC did was analyse the applicability of international legal documents on genocide to the events of 1915, make some

¹ Goshgarian, Rachel. "Breaking the Stalemate: Turkish-Armenian Relations in the 21st Century". *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol 4, No. 4 (Winter 2005). Available at http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi_turkey_tpq_id_46.pdf.

recommendations to the Turkish and Armenian governments and disband itself in 2004: “While the establishment of such a committee was promising for the future of Armenian-Turkish relations, it is not clear whether or not this committee had any real impact on the relationship between the two countries.”²

The other attempt appears to have been more successful, as it has a specific, pragmatic focus and has lasting effect until the present day. The Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council (TABDC) was formed in 1997 and has dubbed itself “the first and only official link between the public and private sectors in each of the two countries' communities.”³ TABDC tries to influence Turkish and Armenian foreign policies in a way as to improve economic and trade ties between the two countries, which would ultimately benefit both.⁴

Overall, post-1991 relations were until 1993 nascent and somehow prospective when Levon Ter-Petrossian was Armenian president and Suleyman Demirel was prime minister of Turkey; hostile and murky after the onset of the Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the border closure, especially under nationalist Armenian president Robert Kocharian; budding for new life after the 2002 advent to power of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey and especially the endorsement of the “zero problems with neighbours” foreign policy line, reflecting the ideas of the 2001 work *Strategic Depth* by current Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoglu; and promising and visibly warming up after the election of Serzh Sargsyan as Armenian president in early 2008, the ‘football diplomacy’ and the signing of the Protocols in October 2009.

Breaking the ice

A positive spirit in high-level political relations between Armenia and Turkey became perceptible in the beginning of 2008, when Turkish President Abdullah Gül congratulated warmly his newly elected Armenian counterpart Serzh Sargsyan on his victory. Sargsyan then extended an invitation to Gül to attend a World Cup qualifying football match between the two countries' international teams in September of that year, which Gül did. In the meantime, it became known that officials from Armenia and Turkey were preparing the signing of a comprehensive rapprochement deal. This deal took the form of the Protocols signed in October 2009 after diplomatic efforts by the United States, the EU, France, Russia and Switzerland. The Protocols called for establishing diplomatic relations, opening of the mutual border and setting up of a joint commission to address historical issues between the two countries. However, they cannot take effect until ratified by Armenia's and Turkey's legislatures.⁵

² *Ibid.*

³ Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council official website, <http://www.tabdc.org/>.

⁴ Goshgarian.

⁵ Foreign Ministry of Armenia, www.armeniaforeignministry.com/pr_09/20090831_protocol.pdf.

The signing of the Protocols was a cornerstone in Turkish-Armenian relations which received mixed reactions from both sides. The immediate interpretation in the media in Armenia was that “Turkey had escaped the issue about the mass killings and deportation of Armenians by the Ottoman Empire in 1915, although one journalist said that the normalisation of ties was inevitable. The tone in the Turkish press was more positive but commentators remained cautious on the subject of the ethnic-Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh [in Azerbaijan].”⁶

On the domestic political scenes, the reaction of the opposition parties was also mixed. The Republican People’s Party (CHP) and Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) in Turkey saw the rapprochement as “selling out” Turkish national interests and showed willingness to exploit the issue against the ruling AKP. The AKP is concerned about that, as it is appealing to the same political constituency.⁷ The Armenian extreme nationalist Armenian Revolutionary Federation party (ARF), understandably, strongly condemned the signing of the Protocols; it even had left the government coalition earlier in 2009 because of President Sargsyan’s too soft policy towards Turkey. But the main opposition figure, former president Levon Ter-Petrosyan, supported Sargsyan and declared himself against nationalist criticism, thus suggesting that his Armenian National Congress (HAK) will not join the “nationalist hysteria.”⁸

A stalemate

Despite ardent Western support for Turkish-Armenian rapprochement, the generally positive geopolitical climate and the potential benefits from it realised by both parties, the ratification of the Protocols by the two parliaments has not still become reality, and prospects for ratification are getting dimmer. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has on a number of occasions linked ratification of the Protocols by the Turkish parliament with progress in resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh problem between Armenia and Azerbaijan – notably at the OSCE summit in Athens in December 2009 and on his visit to Washington later that month. Erdoğan made it clear that Ankara regards as progress the withdrawal of Armenian troops from occupied areas outside Upper Karabakh, pending a determination of the region’s future status.⁹ In January 2010, the Armenian Constitutional Court ruled that the Protocols on establishing diplomatic relations and on deepening cooperation were in compliance with the country’s constitution, opening the way for parliamentary ratification. This decision

⁶ “Turkey, Armenia Split on New Ties”. *BBC*, October 14, 2009. Available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8306641.stm>.

⁷ Taspinar, Omer. “Turkish-Armenian Stalemate”. *Today’s Zaman*, January 11, 2010. Available at <http://todayzaman.com/tz-web/columnists-198162-turkish-armenian-stalemate.html>.

⁸ Danielyan, Emil. “Turkish Diplomacy Reshapes the Armenian Political Landscape”. *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Volume 6 Issue 216, November 23, 2009. Available at <http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm>.

⁹ Socor, Vladimir. “Ankara Links Karabakh Settlement to Rapprochement with Yerevan”. *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Volume 6 Issue 226, December 9, 2009. Available at <http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm>.

shifted the responsibility for the lack of progress in normalisation even more on the part of Turkey.¹⁰ What Turkey did was scold the Armenian Court for referring in its ruling to Paragraph 11 of the Armenian Declaration of Independence, which states that Armenia will strive to achieve international recognition of the 1915 events as genocide. Armenian Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian, on his part, said that Turkey was manipulating the court decision to block progress in normalisation. Overall, Armenia has been criticising Turkey for setting preconditions for rapprochement by linking Nagorno-Karabakh resolution to the process; and Turkey has been blaming Armenia for setting preconditions via the Constitutional Court ruling. Thus, “[t]he Armenian and Turkish governments’ inability or unwillingness to counter domestic opposition stalled the parliamentary ratification process. Recently, both parties indicated that rather than exploring ways to escape a looming stalemate, they prefer to engage in a blame game.”¹¹ The reasons behind the latest developments in Turkish-Armenian relations could be sought in the factors determining those relations.

Factors influencing Turkish-Armenian relations

There are a number of factors that have historically had their impact on relations between Armenia and Turkey and can partially explain the difficulties in achieving progress after the signing of the Protocols in October 2009. Some of these factors obstruct immediate cooperation between the two countries but others can contribute to it. The three general groups of factors are history, mutual perceptions and images and geopolitics.

Historical influences

History has been arguably the most powerful factor in Armenian-Turkish relations. Here under history is meant not only the 1915 mass killings and deportations of Armenians by the Ottoman Empire, but also more recent events such as the war between Armenia and Turkey’s ally Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh in the 1990s. History has been obstructing the improvement of relations, and is now indirectly hindering the Protocols’ ratification and cooperation.

The problem related to the 1915 events concerns the diverging official interpretations by the Turkish and Armenian sides and the foreign policy agenda pursued by them as a result of these interpretations. While convergence on the factual details among independent scholars has been growing, generally the Armenian side holds that there were some 1.5 million deaths in an organised killing campaign which constitutes genocide, whereas Turkey rejects the term and interprets the events as unplanned

¹⁰ Freizer, Sabine. “Turkey-Armenia Relations: All Eyes now on Ankara”. *International Crisis Group*. Available at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=6474&l=1>

¹¹ Kardas, Saban. “Turkey Reacts to Armenian Constitutional Court’s Decision on Protocols”. *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Volume 7 Issue 17, January 26, 2010. Available at <http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm>.

massacres with murders on both sides.¹² Consequently, Armenia's foreign policy agenda has been to garner international recognition of the 1915 events as genocide, and Turkey's aim has been to block such development, as recognition may have its legal consequences – an avalanche of territorial and financial compensation demands.¹³ That is how the 1915 killings add a territorial dimension to the bilateral dispute. Thus the events have effectively turned into a factor obstructing relations between the two countries, and they are also referred to in the Protocols and the subsequent Turkish criticism of the Armenian Constitutional court decision. The 1915 killings epitomise the larger historical issue between Armenia and Turkey of whether Turkey is responsible for the policies of the Ottoman Empire, i.e. the question of continuity.¹⁴

Another problem from historical point of view that has direct effect on current relations between Yerevan and Ankara and the Protocol ratification process is in fact a problem of Armenia with a third country – Azerbaijan. The Armenian-populated Azerbaijani province of Nagorno-Karabakh has been the site of the oldest of the 'frozen conflicts' in the Black Sea region which emerged along with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. And Turkey and Azerbaijan are close allies sharing common cultural and linguistic background and enjoying strategic ties in their energy and military policies. While the essence, chronology and human impact of the Karabakh conflict are not subject of the current paper, Nagorno-Karabakh has played an important role in the Armenian-Turkish relations. Turkey closed its border with Armenia in 1993 in solidarity with Azerbaijan, with which Armenia was at war over Nagorno-Karabakh. And as mentioned above, Turkish leaders have been increasingly invoking progress in resolving the Karabakh situation before any ratification of the Protocols takes place.

Mutual perceptions and images

Public opinion and mutual perceptions have played a role in shaping the relations between Armenia and Turkey. Yet what is striking is the extremely low level of communication between the two societies, contributing to lasting stereotypes and hindering the improvement of bilateral ties. According to a qualitative survey on Turkish perceptions,

Armenia and relations with Armenia are not high on the agenda in Turkey. In society, opinions about Armenia and Armenia and Armenia-Turkey relations are not based on knowledge, and the merits of policies pursued are not debated much at all. This is both a cause and an effect of a lack of clarity about a multitude of issues, ranging from whether the [Armenian] diaspora is a third party or should be assumed an extension of Armenia, to which side is responsible for not following up with initiatives launched. Ultimately the issue of Armenian relations is not received with a sense of urgency among the Turks. [...] one of the most important steps to be taken is to

¹² International Crisis Group. *Turkey and Armenia: Opening Minds, Opening Borders*. Europe Report No. 199, April 14, 2009, p. 8. Available at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=6053>.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

break down common wisdoms among the people on both sides, to reduce people's vulnerability to nationalist provocation, and to ease the way for the governments to reconcile down the line.¹⁵

Perceptions in Armenia have also been based on scarcity of information about Turkey and very low levels of communication among people from both sides of the border. "For most Armenians, Turkish society is *terra incognita*; and given the geographical proximity, this lack of contact only serves to further promote stereotypes and keep hostile legacies alive. The image of Turkey in Armenia remains that of the Ottoman Empire, of a tragic story from the history schoolbook, not a place several miles away."¹⁶

But the tendency in both Armenian and Turkish societies is that those stereotypes gradually give way and attitudes towards bilateral relations turn to the positive. According to a qualitative survey of opinions in Armenian organisations, "[t]he interview responses show that the attitudes of Armenian society, in particular, the attitudes towards Armenian-Turkish relations, have changed seriously."¹⁷ And as put by an International Crisis Group report on Turkey and Armenia,

Armenian-Turkish reconciliation is not only an elite driven process; public opinion in both countries is also ready for it. Two thirds of Turks supported President Gül's Yerevan visit. According to a think tank director in Ankara, "there is a lot about the visit on opposition websites; it is a domestic political football, but public opinion is ready. They're saying, open it [the border] and be done with it. It is a question of timing, not preparation." In Armenia support for a border opening even without Turkish recognition of an Armenian genocide has grown to more than half of the population. Even the once fiercely anti-Turkish Armenian diaspora now has a more nuanced approach.¹⁸

Geopolitics

The relations between Armenia and Turkey have of course been determined by external factors as well. Relations were shaped until 1991 by the realities of Cold War, with Armenia being part of the Soviet Union and Turkey being one of the United States' closest allies. Naturally, there was not plenty of room for improvement at the people-to-people level, and the hostility existing because of the 1915 events was reinforced by the strains along the Cold War axis.

¹⁵ Goksel, Diba Nigar. "Analysis of Interviews with Turkish Organisations". In Stepan Grigoryan (ed). *Global Challenges and Threats: Are Joint Efforts between Armenia and Turkey Possible?*. Yerevan: Analytical Centre of Globalisation and Regional Cooperation, 2008, p. 120.

¹⁶ Görgülü, Aybars et al. *Breaking the Vicious Circle: TESEV-Caucasus Institute Joint Report*. p. 13. Available at www.caucasusinstitute.org.

¹⁷ Grigoryan, Stepan. "Analysis of Interviews with Armenian Organisations". In Stepan Grigoryan (ed). *Global Challenges and Threats: Are Joint Efforts between Armenia and Turkey Possible?*. Yerevan: Analytical Centre of Globalisation and Regional Cooperation, 2008, p. 125.

¹⁸ International Crisis Group, p. 22.

After the end of the Cold War and the emergence of Armenia as an independent state, relations between Armenia and Turkey have been determined within the larger pattern of relations among regional powers in the Black Sea area. Generally, Armenia has been within the Russian sphere of influence, and its relations have traditionally been better with countries along the north-to-south axis – Russia, Georgia and Iran. Along the west-to-east axis, that is the one involving Turkey and Azerbaijan, Armenia has had problematic ties sometimes escalating to war, and has remained in isolation, especially after the Turkish border closure in 1993. But with the advent of Turkey's new foreign policy line of "zero problems with neighbours," the emergence of its Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform initiative of guiding an improvement of relations in the region, and the implications of the Russian-Georgian war of August 2008, an opportunity for ending the Armenian isolation has appeared, most visible through a potential opening of the border with Turkey and establishing diplomatic ties between the two neighbours.

There are two groups of external factors – ones acting in favour and obstructing progress, respectively. On the one hand, the United States and the EU are traditionally pushing for settlement and normalisation of relations between Yerevan and Ankara. The U.S. has an interest in the stabilisation and development of the region, which is a key artery for Caspian, Central Asian and Middle Eastern energy sources bound for Europe. The region as a whole, and especially Turkey, has been also a stepping stone for U.S. military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. The EU is interested in a stable Black Sea region, a route for an alternative hydrocarbon supply to that originating from Russia. The EU, in addition, has a strong stake in and has always supported stability and democratisation in its immediate neighbourhood. Turkey is a candidate country, and Armenia is increasingly declaring willingness for stronger cooperation with the EU. The bloc cannot afford unsettled relations, let alone a closed border, between a candidate member and its neighbour. A new positive factor here is the changing, pro-rapprochement position of Russia after the August 2008 war with Georgia. It seems that Russia is willing to give the green light for normalising Armenian-Turkish relations, even if that would mean weakening its influence on Yerevan. The reason might be that one of the net losers of an opened border would be Georgia. Currently, most of Armenian trade is realised via Georgia at high transit costs. A reopened border would redirect a large portion of that trade towards Turkey, and Georgia will cease to be so decisive a factor in the Caucasus trade flow.

On the other hand, there is the negative attitude of Azerbaijan, Turkey's close ally, which insists that no progress should be pursued in Armenian-Turkish relations without first resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Azerbaijan is firm that Armenian troops have to immediately leave the districts surrounding Karabakh and then a comprehensive peace agreement should be signed on the province itself, with status settlement as its key part. Azerbaijan, Turkey's main energy supplier, warned Turkey of energy supply cuts if some deal with Armenia was signed without meeting its Karabakh-related demands, and even threatened renewal of hostilities in Nagorno-

Karabakh.¹⁹ As mentioned above, Turkey has made it clear on several occasions it will comply with Azerbaijani demands. Another factor in this group is the sheer possibility of U.S. Congress passing a resolution condemning the 1915 events as genocide and President Barack Obama mentioning the term ‘genocide’ in his annual April 24 address on the Ottoman massacres of Armenians in 1915. A U.S. House of Representatives committee approved on March 4, 2010, by a one-vote margin a non-binding measure to condemn the killings as ‘genocide.’ But it is unlikely that the full House will vote on it, and less likely that it will go to Congress, as the Obama administration has moved to stop the motion in view of preserving good relations with key ally Turkey.²⁰ The third external factor working against rapprochement is the influence of the Armenian diaspora, which has most of the time been against any normalisation with Turkey. The basis of the Armenian diaspora was formed after the 1915 killings and deportations, and, understandably, the position of many Armenians abroad remains firm in this respect. Yet as mentioned above, even the diaspora’s stances are becoming increasingly nuanced.

Possible areas of cooperation before the ratification of the Protocols

Despite the stalemate in the process of rapprochement between Armenia and Turkey and the controversial interplay of domestic and external factors, the moment is ripe to open the border and launch cooperation in a number of areas. For this kind of cooperation to happen, a political decision is all that is needed, even without formally establishing diplomatic relations. Moreover, the date of April 24, 2015, is approaching, when Armenian people will commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Great Catastrophe of 1915. It would be wise to have at least partial progress until then which could serve as a good basis for further development of bilateral ties and general well-being of the Caucasus region. Following are several areas in which Turkish-Armenian cooperation is immediately feasible and should be pursued by both sides. The minimum prerequisite for that is, of course, the reopening of the mutual border.

Trade and the economy

Trade exchange and the economic advancement of the two countries constitute the area that will most visibly gain from an opened border and where cooperation is immediately feasible. A profound study on the impact of an open border on Armenian trade and economy concludes that “exports to Turkey will increase 17.4 times in the medium-term compared to those in 2003, while imports from Turkey, which are already high, will go up nearly 2.3 times. Moreover, [...] Armenia is able to produce

¹⁹ “Azerbaijan Warning Ahead of Talks”. *BBC*, November 22, 2009. Available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8372794.stm>.

²⁰ “U.S. Vows Bid to Halt Armenian Genocide Measure”. *The New York Times*, March 5, 2010. Available at http://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2010/03/05/us/politics/politics-us-turkey-usa.html?_r=1&scp=10&sq=nagorno-karabakh&st=cse.

and export extra electric power at 20% of its current production.”²¹ The determinants behind this positive impact are lower transportation costs (surrounding Georgia) and access to the Mediterranean ports of Turkey. In terms of effects on the Armenian economy, a reopened border will lead to some painful sectoral transformations, yet also to a real gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 2.7%, employment growth of 0.43%, total exports rise of 17.73% and a real state budget revenues hike of 3.46% in the medium term (up to five years cumulated). Following are details summarised for both short-term and medium-term effects:

*Table 1. Short-term and Medium-term Impacts of Re-opening of Borders on Economy*²²

	Simulation Results of Trade Flow Increase In Armenia, Change (“+” Growth, “-” Downturn/Decline)	
	Short-term scenario (up to 1 year)	Mid-term scenario (up to 5 years cumulated)
Real Gross Domestic Product, bn AMD	10.65	43.00
Real GDP, %	0.67%	2.70%
Employment (person)	1.573	4,808
Employment, %	0.14%	0.43%
Total real exports, %	5.23%	17.73%
Total real imports, %	4.71%	12.95%
Domestic private consumption, real, %	0.58%	1.02%
Consumption Price Index, %	0.03%	0.68%
Gross real wage rate, %	0.28%	0.91%
Gross real investments, %	0.27%	0.59%
State Budget revenues, real, %	1.16%	3.46%
Disposable income, real, %	0.55%	1.79%
Disposable Income per capita, real, %	0.50%	1.62%

The effect of border opening will not be of such scope to the Turkish economy as a whole, due to its size and the potential small rise in trade with Armenia relative to the total size of Turkish external trade. But the effect on the economy of the Turkish border regions will be tangible, given the lower level of development of these regions compared to the rest of the country. According to the above study, these regions are five times less developed than Turkey on average and 2.5 times less developed than

²¹ Jrbashyan, Tigran et al. “Study of the Economic Impact on the Armenian Economy from Re-opening the Turkish Armenian Borders: Implications for External Trade”. *Armenian Journal of Public Policy*, March 2007, p. 73. Available at <http://www.aiprg.net/UserFiles/File/journal/proceedings/aeplac.pdf>.

²² Source: Jrbashyan et al., p. 84.

Armenia on average, which suggests that an opened border will inevitably contribute to raising the GDP and standards of life there.²³

Cross-border cooperation

Cross-border cooperation is closely connected with trade and economic cooperation. By opening the border the two governments will immediately open the way for more intense business and cultural ties between the border regions, as well as help foster local infrastructure development. As mentioned by the ICG,

the border opening would boost small businesses and develop the economy of depopulated and sometimes isolated eastern border towns like Kars, Iğdır, Trabzon and Erzurum, where Turkish traders have long been unhappy about delays at Georgia's busy border and high transportation costs. In Kars, more than 100,000 signatures were collected from people supporting an open border with Armenia as a step toward opening the Caucasus at large. Communities in Kars and Iğdır particularly want to sell dairy products, fruits and poultry across the border. The fine, ancient Armenian churches, the ancient Armenian capital of Ani and other heritage sites just over the border in Turkey could boost tourism, attracting tours not just from Armenia but also from wealthy members of the diaspora and other foreign tourists.²⁴

Environment

Joint environmental initiatives aiming at environmental protection and fostering sustainable development are feasible between Armenia and Turkey even before diplomatic relations are established. The environment is generally a less sensitive area which, however, has its equal impact on all concerned sides. In an age of devastating earthquakes, unprecedented storms, floods and forest fires, environmental cooperation and joint early warning initiatives are even mandatory among states. A study by Anja Wittich and Achim Maas on environmental and economic cooperation and their feasibility among the three South Caucasus countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) shows the importance of this issue and can serve as an example how cooperation can take place between Armenia and Turkey, too. According to the authors,

Sharing an ecosystem, such as a river basin, creates complex interdependences between different parties. Based on these relationships, environmental problems can provide incentives for cooperation and collective action across political boundaries and ethnic divides. In many instances, parties whose relations are otherwise characterised by distrust and hostility, if not open violence, have found that environmental issues, such as shared water resources, are one of the few areas in which they can sustain ongoing dialogue.²⁵

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

²⁴ International Crisis Group, p. 29.

²⁵ Wittich, Anja and Achim Maas. *Regional Cooperation in the South Caucasus: Lessons for Peacebuilding, from Economy and Environment*, p. 12. Available at the website of the Initiative for Peacebuilding, http://www.initiativeforpeacebuilding.eu/pdf/Regional_Cooperation_in_the_South_Caucasus.pdf.

The authors give a concrete example of Armenia and Azerbaijan both sending local experts to a joint OSCE-led mission to assess the damages of forest fires in areas surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh in 2006 and conclude that “in demand-driven cases in which there is sufficient ownership, there is some fertile ground for supporting joint approaches in the areas of trade, economy, the environment, health and disaster preparedness, which could be facilitated by third parties.”²⁶

Civil Society

Armenia and Turkey can cooperate by supporting civil society initiatives for networking, joint organisation of conferences and implementation of projects in a number of fields such as regional cooperation, security, economic development, democratisation, the environment, science, culture and education. Interaction between Armenian and Turkish non-governmental organisations is on the rise.²⁷ After the publication of the seminal work of the Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission (TARC) in 2001-02, “more than a dozen unofficial track two projects have aimed to improve relations. These have included joint concerts, joint art exhibitions, student exchanges, a youth summit the shared *Turkish Armenian Women’s Magazine*, reciprocal visits between think tanks to meet officials on the other side and an exhibition of Turkish photographers’ photos of Istanbul. These projects have succeeded varying success, but each has broadened public support for the recent diplomatic progress.”²⁸

To sum up, cooperation between Armenia and Turkey and their societies is feasible in a number of areas without formal ratification of the Protocols and establishing of diplomatic relations. Apart from the fields mentioned above, the list can be continued with cooperation in the spheres of anti-terrorism and, at a later stage, sharing of good practices in the process of European integration.

Conclusion

Relations between Armenia and Turkey have been problematic ever since Armenia gained its independence from the USSR in 1991. The reasons for that range from historic burdens to external factors to scarcity of communication and information exchange between the two societies which would help bring down stereotypes and lay down the basis of a fruitful and pragmatic relationship. Recent diplomatic efforts by Yerevan and Ankara to get closer to each other, establish diplomatic ties and open the mutual border have received Western encouragement, but have also come across

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²⁷ See Stepan Grigoryan (ed). *Global Challenges and Threats: Are Joint Efforts between Armenia and Turkey Possible?*. Yerevan: Analytical Centre of Globalisation and Regional Cooperation, 2008.

²⁸ International Crisis Group, pp. 22-23.

considerable opposition from Azerbaijan, some domestic factors and parts of the Armenian diaspora. This has led to a slowdown of the process of ratification of the Protocols signed between the two foreign ministers in October 2009 – the cornerstone event in bilateral relations giving hope for improvement and normalisation. Nevertheless, cooperation is feasible in a number of areas while waiting on the Protocols to be ratified. In most of the cases, a border opening is a precondition for this cooperation, but a political decision for border opening even ahead of Protocol ratification is needed. Cooperation in the trade and economic field, on environmental issues, support for intensifying civil society interaction as well as fostering cross-border initiatives would contribute much in the normalisation process ahead of the 100th anniversary of the 1915 events. It is up to the Turkish and Armenian politicians to bet on the pragmatic card in this important and auspicious moment, and to the United States and the European Union to assist them in the process.

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