

# TURKISH-ARMENIAN RELATIONS AND THE THINK-TANK EFFECT

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**Abstract:** *The increase in the interest on Turkish-Armenian relations within the international realm can be seen through the numbers and properties of published articles and reports on this subject. Especially, the Turkish-Armenian rapprochement process being brought forward following President Abdullah Gül's visit to Yerevan in September 2008, has drawn serious attention within the international sphere. The negotiations held for the normalization of Turkey-Armenia relations has been conducted in many different areas. The protocols being signed by Turkish and Armenian authorities carries crucial importance for the continuing of this process. While the international actors are determining their attitudes regarding the Turkish-Armenian relations, attempting to identify what the parameters might be that they must venture has become a matter of necessity in the forthcoming process. In this research, reports and articles published from 2007 onwards on the Armenian issue within the scope of Turkish-Armenian relations in the international realm, Turkish foreign policy, Turkish-EU and Turkish-Atlantic relations has been examined. In these reports and articles, the international community's proposed policy options for Turkish-Armenian relations and prospective developments have been taken into consideration and replies to several essential questions have tried to be obtained.*

**Key Words:** *Armenians, Think-Tank, Report, Foreign Policy*

As a result of the recent developments, there is an increasing interest on the Turkish-Armenian relations. Georgian-Russian war of August 2008 brought the unresolved conflicts in the region, while neither Western countries and EU nor the international organizations such as UN could prevent the sides from engaging in a small-scale but drastic war. This passivism and inability of the international community to prevent a war raised concerns on the future of the Caucasus region, which is of critical strategic importance for the West, Russia and the neighboring countries. Turkey's pioneering role in the post-war settlement proved effective, but since all these actors concerned with the developments in the region did not want any further escalation of conflicts, other major problems also came into the agenda of the international community. Hence, it's observable that international community began to perceive Turkey's role in the region and its relations with neighboring countries as bearing critical importance for the future settlement of the regional conflicts and the securitization process. President Abdullah Gül's visit to Erivan in September 2008 signaled a critical moment

for the normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia, while it also drew attention of the international community to the resolution of regional conflicts.

Here, I will try to examine various reports that have been written on the critical issue of the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations that were published by international organizations, Think-Tanks and research groups since 2007. This study also tries to answer one main question: how do the international policy-research agencies see the future of Turkish-Armenian relations and its impact on the regional setting? In order to answer that main question, the reports were examined in terms of 5 main subjects:

1. Problem of Genocide Claims
2. Territorial Claims and Reparations
3. The rationale behind the Opening of Borders
4. Normalization process and the Preconditions
5. Turkey-Armenia Relations and the Nagorno-Karabakh Dispute

## **1. Recognition of Genocide Claims**

### **a. Recognition by Turkey**

Recognition of the so-called Armenian Genocide has been one of the most critical problems for Turkish policy-makers. Increasing efforts towards acknowledgement of the genocide claims has put pressure on Turkish foreign policy. Until today, Turkey's reaction was limited to diplomatic means to persuade other states and international community that these claims are ungrounded, and if recognized, could cause harm to Turkey's relations with those countries. As Turkey's foreign policy began to experience a shift with the coming of Justice and Development Party, this policy of persuasion was transformed into a more active policy, which assumed that as soon as this problem remained a subject of international politics this would result on continuous political pressure on Turkey. Turkey's offer to establish a commission of historians to examine the 1915 events was welcomed by the international community, as Turkey began to underline the possibility of normalization of relations with Armenia, if the genocide claims are not used as political tools to pressurize Turkey in the international arena.

When the reports that discuss Turkish-Armenian relations are examined, it is observable that on the issue of the recognition of genocide claims, nearly none of them present demands, suggestions or foresights. As the most critical problem in Turkish-Armenian relations, reports abstain from taking sides on the issue, as most of the reports seem to highlight the emergence of a possible rapprochement in the near future. Reports indicate

that the recognition of the genocide claims became a state policy for Armenia.<sup>1</sup> This is seen as one of the several factors that cause enmity in Turkish-Armenian relations and that prevented the rapprochement until today. Still, most of the recent reports emphasize domestic developments in Turkey, such as the “Campaign for Apology” which began after the murder of Armenian writer Hrant Dink as being of critical importance in Turkish-Armenian relations. International Crisis Group announced in a report that was published in April 2009 that developments in the historical perceptions and the beginning of a process through which those historical perceptions are openly debated as “striking”.<sup>2</sup> In some reports, some EU countries’ attitude towards Turkey and their efforts to bring up genocide claims as a precondition of EU membership is highlighted.<sup>3</sup> But still none of the reports imply that Turkey must acknowledge those claims. It is observable that in reports the issue of genocide recognition will be of critical importance for the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations, although it may be undermined if there are positive developments such as the beginning of face-to-face dialogue.

#### **b. Recognition by Third Parties**

It is well-known that Armenian Diaspora has significant impact on the success of efforts towards pressurizing Turkey to acknowledge genocide claims or make sure that third-country parliaments recognize Armenian genocide.<sup>4</sup> International Crisis Group indicates that Resolutions which are submitted to the US Congress annually are among the most influential tools of the Armenian Diaspora to this effect.<sup>5</sup>

In other reports and articles, especially after Robert Kocharian coming to power as President, it is noted that the efforts of the Armenian Diaspora in pursuing the parliaments of third parties to accept the genocide allegations have increased.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, in many reports, it has been conveyed that Kocharian has made the international recognition of the genocide allegations a priority of Armenian foreign affairs.<sup>7</sup>

*New strains appeared after the coming to power in 1998 of a hardline Armenian president, Robert Kocharian, who made international recognition of the country’s genocide claims a priority of its foreign and security policy, and the*

1 *The Closed Armenia-Turkey Border: Economic and Social Effects, Including Those on the People; and Implications for the Overall Situation in the Region*, European Parliament- Directorate General External Policies of the Union, August 2007, p.8: “Since 1998, the Republic of Armenia, supported by the Armenian Diaspora, has made it a matter of state policy to strive for the international recognition of the events of 1915 as genocide.”

2 *Turkey and Armenia: Opening Minds, Opening Borders*, International Crisis Group, Europe Report No.199, 14 April 2009, pp.24-25. “Just as striking has been an apology campaign initiated by some 200 Turkish intellectuals in December 2008 and signed by 29,500 people online.”

3 *Turkey-Armenia Relations: A Vicious Circle*, TESEV, November 2008 p.33

4 *As Turkey and Armenia inch toward reconciliation both sides talk the talk, but can they walk the walk?*, German Marshall Fund, October 2008, p.2

5 *As Turkey and Armenia inch toward reconciliation both sides talk the talk, but can they walk the walk?*, p.10

6 Görgülü, Aybars “Towards a Turkish-Armenian Rapprochement?”, *Insight Turkey*, 2009, p. 22

7 *Noah’s Dove Returns: Armenia, Turkey and the Debate on Genocide*, European Stability Initiative, April 2009, p. 27

*near-passage in 2000 of a U.S. Congressional resolution calling the 1915 events genocide.*<sup>8</sup>

It has been expressed that these attempts by the Diaspora constitute the purpose of creating an international character for the so-called genocide.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, it has also been expressed that this situation is among the most troublesome issues for Turkey.<sup>10</sup>

### **c. On the Establishment of a History Commission**

In April 2005, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's proposal of creating a commission consisting of Turkish and Armenian independent historians and specialists for the examination of the genocide allegations has drawn great attention in the international sphere. Based on reports and articles on this issue, it can clearly be seen that this proposal has been regarded as a positive development. Moreover, different and contradictory statements being made on the Armenian side concerning this proposal and opposing views towards the establishment of a neutral commission consisting of specialists and historians to examine an historical incident has strengthened Turkey's position in resolving the problem within the international arena.<sup>11</sup> This situation can also be seen clearly within the reports and articles being examined. In the report published by ARI from Spain, it has been expressed that the proposal of establishing a Joint Historical Commission has been a critical development in the progression for resolving the problem, "a way forward, as apparently agreed, would be to set up a Joint History Commission."<sup>12</sup> It has also been emphasized that Turkey attempts to block this initiative of the international recognition of the Armenian genocide allegations and supports a different way of resolving this problem by examining it within a "broader package of outstanding issues."<sup>13</sup>

Although Armenia has displayed a positive attitude towards the establishment of a commission, it can be seen that they opposed it at the beginning. It can be said that this Armenian opposition arose due to the idea that since many of the state parliaments already recognized the genocide allegations, participation in a commission would open the subject to debate and weaken the Armenian position. Moreover, it is also said that this could damage the Armenian national identity. However, if the commission is going to deal with the 1915 events, Armenian public opinion suspicious of the idea of establishing a commission, has expressed that it should also deal with the pre-1915 period and the Ottoman Empire's policies against Armenians.<sup>14</sup>

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8 *Turkey and Armenia: Opening Minds, Opening Borders*, p.2

9 *Turkey-Armenia Relations: A Vicious Circle*, p.18

10 *Turkey-Armenia Relations: A Vicious Circle*, p.18

11 Görgülü (2009) p. 22

12 *Turkey and Armenia Move to Bury the Hatchet*, ARI – Elcano Royal Institute, May 2009, p.6

13 *Changing Armenia-Turkish Relations*, p.2

14 *Turkey and Armenia: Opening Minds, Opening Borders*, p.6

The positive reaction from Armenia to the establishment of a commission of historians to examine 1915 events<sup>15</sup> also bears the danger of disregard for the works conducted by the commission. The reason for such a development is the common attitude in Armenia that the idea of a commission of historians was proposed in order to prevent the issue from debated in the international arena and prevents further efforts by the Diaspora and Armenia. While Turkey argues that this issue remains a subject of historical concern and be debated, Armenians claim that so-called genocide is a political and contemporary problem.<sup>16</sup> But since it would harm Armenian claims to reject the establishment of a commission, Armenians adopt a positive attitude towards this proposal by Turkey. Therefore it is suggested that the commission could not produce effective and objective research, since Turkish historians are unable to present pro-genocide arguments.<sup>17</sup> In a speech made in July 2008, President Sarkisyan raised doubts on Turkish proposal to establish a commission of historians, while he emphasized that the normalization of relations and the establishment of political dialogue between the two sides is a priority. He also argued that commissions can be established only after mutual political relations are reestablished.<sup>18</sup>

Many reports suggest that for normalization of relations, efforts aimed at persuading third countries to recognize Armenian genocide claims must be abandoned, and the problem must be left to historians Civil Society and Research organizations.

*“Armenia should refrain from setting preconditions for relations with Turkey, and remove the 1915 Armenian genocide recognition issue from foreign policy agenda, leaving it to historians and civil societies of Armenia and Turkey.”*<sup>19</sup>

It seems that there is a common agreement on the positive implications of the establishment of a commission of historians.<sup>20</sup> This positive attitude by the international community<sup>21</sup> and insistence that if established the commission must be wholeheartedly supported in its work,<sup>22</sup> also led to a shift in Armenian attitude.

15 “Cooling Off”, *The Economist*, April 27, 2009  
[http://www.economist.com/daily/news/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id=13565679](http://www.economist.com/daily/news/displaystory.cfm?story_id=13565679) Last Access: November 12, 2009

16 *Turkey and Armenia: Opening Minds, Opening Borders*, p. 6

17 *Turkey and Armenia: Opening Minds, Opening Borders*, p. 30

18 *Turkey: Selected Foreign Policy Issues and U.S. Views*, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress US Congress August 2008, p.14

19 *Agenda for Armenian Foreign Policy 2009-2010*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung & Analytical Centre on Globalization and Regional Cooperation, 2009, p. 22

20 *Turkey and Armenia: Opening Minds, Opening Borders*, p. 30

21 European Parliament announced that it welcomed Turkish government’s offer to establish a commission of historians for the examination of 1915 events. *Turkey-Armenia Relations: A Vicious Circle*, p.20; *The Closed Armenia-Turkey Border*, p.4

22 *The Closed Armenia-Turkey Border*, p. 27

## Territorial Claims and Reparations

Related with the recognition of the so-called genocide issue is the problem of territorial claims as well as the reparations issue. The two cases constitute another problematic area concerning the Turkish-Armenian relations. The problem arises as the Armenians both in Diaspora and the Armenian Republic seek for reparations and territorial amends from Turkey as they put forward the claim that their ancestors were forced out of the “historical Armenian” lands while their properties were forcibly confiscated. Especially the Diaspora Armenians continue their efforts in their resident countries via legal cases so as to force Turkish government to pay reparations for territorial and material losses. Considering the recent development in Turkish-Armenian relations many international organizations and Think-Tanks touch upon these claims and Turkey’s response in their evaluations on the future of the bilateral relations.

Firstly, it is well observable that there is no common understanding as to the nature and the legal implications of the territorial claims and reparations issue in the international scene. This is particularly due to the recent developments concerning the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations, as well as to a lack of historical understanding of the underlying reasons. Armenian Diaspora is specifically concerned with the issue, although the problem does not directly concern Armenian and Turkish national authorities. The individual efforts by the Diaspora cause uncertainty, since the cases are handled by the courts in countries where Armenian Diaspora members reside.

Most of the reports on Turkish-Armenian relations do not touch upon the problem of reparations or the territorial claims. If the problem of reparations and territorial claims is included in the legal context and as a result of the so-called genocide claims, then from a legal point of view, the reports indicate that these two issues do not have retroactive applicability.

*“The Genocide Convention contains no provision mandating its retroactive application. To the contrary, the text of the Convention strongly suggests that it was intended to impose prospective obligations only on the States party to it. Therefore, no legal, financial or territorial claim arising out of the Events could successfully be made against any individual or state under the Convention.”<sup>23</sup>*

It is well emphasized that the legal confirmation of the so-called genocide claims saddles the two sides with prospective responsibilities rather than retroactive responsibilities.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, it is claimed that official recognition of the Armenian genocide does not bring any material liabilities to Turkey.

*“The genocide resolutions have not drawn any link between acknowledgment of genocide and either reparations or territorial concessions. In fact, the trend*

23 Noah’s Dove Returns, p. 22; Turkey and Armenia: Opening Minds, Opening Borders, p.14

24 Noah’s Dove Returns, p. 22

*towards international recognition has not carried any material consequences for the Turkish state.*"<sup>25</sup>

Thus, it has been argued that the issue of territorial claims and reparations is not among those demands that are listed in genocide resolutions that are presented to different parliaments and Congresses.<sup>26</sup> Still, Turkey's concern on the recognition of genocide and the possibility of arising calls for reparations as well as territorial claims remains.<sup>27</sup> Thus, Armenian government did not show any efforts to amend or withdraw references to the Declaration of Independence, in which Turkish East Anatolia lands are called Western Armenia, or to the Ağrı Mountain as the national symbol of the Republic of Armenia.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the legal implications, Diaspora's efforts towards the recognition of the genocide and therefore reparations and territorial claims still continue. In the reports although it is mentioned that Diaspora's stance on those two issues is softening,<sup>29</sup> since it is impossible to find neither harmony nor unity among the Diaspora the issue will remain on the agenda as long as the Diaspora, either individually or via an organization, continues their efforts for that specific cause.<sup>30</sup> International Crisis Group's report indicates that a resolution that was submitted to the European Parliament in 2008 is in fact an example of these continued efforts. According to the resolution, Turkey is asked to compensate for the losses suffered by the Armenians in a European-like manner.<sup>31</sup> Thus another resolution which was presented to the American Congress in 2000 produced the same effect in Turkish foreign policy.

To conclude, the overall opinion on the achievability of the territorial claims and the reparations negates the possibility that Turkey would recognize a so-called Armenian Genocide claim, or any compensation which would arise from that recognition. It is indicated that despite the declining trend, the efforts by the Diaspora and the Armenian authorities to pressurize Turkey to recognize Genocide claims and force it to pay reparations would continue to be influential in the course of Turkish-Armenian relations. Thus, it's also possible to argue that Diaspora would never give up these efforts, since the so-called Genocide is one of the main determinants of the Armenian identity for those living outside the Republic of Armenia. During the course of relations, Turkish and Armenian authorities may take significant steps towards rapprochement, even concerning the genocide claims, while Diaspora's role in the reparations and the territorial claims will continue to remain on the agenda.

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25 *Noah's Dove Returns*, p. 22

26 *Noah's Dove Returns*, p.23

27 *Turkey and Armenia: Opening Minds, Opening Borders*, p.13

28 *Turkey and Armenia: Opening Minds, Opening Borders*, p.14

29 *Turkey and Armenia: Opening Minds, Opening Borders*, p. 1

30 *Turkey and Armenia: Opening Minds, Opening Borders*, p. 13

31 *Turkey and Armenia: Opening Minds, Opening Borders*, p.14

### 3. Opening of Borders

#### a. Economic Reasons

Many reports indicate that the isolation has been the most detrimental factor that caused Armenia's economy to suffer, which, in return, has led Armenia to become a politically fragile and dependent country in the region. It is also highlighted that Armenian economy's dependency on the Black Sea ports and railways of Georgia hampers country's trade with the rest of the world.

*“Landlocked Armenia, dependent on rail and road connections through Georgia and its Black Sea ports, would gain access to the port of Trabzon if the border with Turkey was opened. Trade with Turkey would begin to flourish and foreign direct investment could rise from very low levels as Armenia's risk perception would be lowered”<sup>32</sup>*

One-sided dependency increases transportation costs for Armenia's trade with the European countries. Moreover, because of the limited access to world markets, a more competitive and developing market could not be established within Armenia. It is highlighted that Armenia presently carries 70% of its trade through its northern borders.

*“Armenia has long wanted an open border with Turkey, a natural trading partner, and the 2008 war underlined its dependence on a volatile Georgia to its north for the passage of 70 percent of its imports. Armenians would see normalization with Ankara as a new opening to Western countries and a point scored against their rivals in Azerbaijan.”<sup>33</sup>*

Trade from the northern border is dependent on the fragile Georgian ports in the Black Sea that leads to higher transportation costs, expensive and low-capacity trade.

*The closed border has raised Armenia's transport costs and made it largely dependent on expensive, low capacity and vulnerable rail and road connections through Georgia and its Black Sea ports.<sup>257</sup> An open border would lower these costs and increase flexibility. Potential savings from removal of the embargoes and opening of the railway line are variously estimated to range from \$75 million to \$300 million. While access to Trabzon would be a useful strategic complement to Georgia's port of Poti, Turkish Mediterranean ports like Mersin are even more desirable, since cheaper, large ocean container carriers can use them. Increased choice in trade routes would also reduce Armenia's dependence on Russia<sup>34</sup>*

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32 Turkey and Armenia Move to Bury the Hatchet, p.6

33 Turkey and Armenia: Opening Minds, Opening Borders, p.3

34 Turkey and Armenia: Opening Minds, Opening Borders, p.28



Armenia's isolation and the resulting over-dependency to Georgian ports leave the country vulnerable to any instability that would arise from a regional conflict. Thus, the Georgian-Russian conflict in August 2008 resulted in Armenia's blockade and caused huge economic shock for the country.

It has been argued that another complication that arises from the isolation which increases Armenia's economic and political vulnerability is its increasing economic dependency on Russia.

*Armenia may exploit the new-found opening with Turkey as an important new form of leverage to counter its over-dependence on Russia. Such a move is especially important for Armenia in terms of protecting its already fragile sovereignty and independence in the wake of Russia's recent reassertion of power and influence in the South Caucasus region.*"<sup>35</sup>

While Russia "counts on Armenia to maintain its influence in the region... Armenia sees Russia as an ally capable of ensuring its security in a hostile environment."<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, it can be argued that Armenia is not comfortable with the increasing dependency on Russia, since Russia's role in keeping status quo in its advance hampers the development and stability in the region, as was the case in Russian-Georgian war. Russia's efforts to keep the status quo in the region, namely keep Armenia's isolation and its dependency on Russian economic support, as well as the conflicts that hampers the regional stability, became a problem for Armenia.

On the other hand, there are other political-strategic reasons behind this harmony between Russia and Armenia,<sup>37</sup> although Armenia's isolation is an additional factor that increases the dependency of Armenia to Russia. In the end, Armenia is excluded from the regional energy and development projects, while is becoming more and more dependent on Russia. Moreover, Armenia's isolation leaves the country vulnerable in the face of Russian political and economic interference.

Having listed some of the negative impacts of the closed Armenia-Turkey border, it is well observable that nearly none of the reports mention any Turkish economic losses. Although Turkey is already pursuing region-wide energy and trade projects, it is argued that Russia's intervention in Georgia revealed the vulnerability of the ongoing projects and energy transport. Armenia is therefore presented as an alternative option for the future regional projects.<sup>38</sup> Normalization of relations is expected to bring about stability and security, which would in turn provide a convenient basis for enhanced cooperation in the region. Thus, it is generally argued that Turkey's efforts for the normalization of relations would bring economic and political gains as well.

35 *Changing Armenia-Turkish Relations*, Fokus Südkaukasus & Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, January 2009, p.4

36 *Armenia, a Russian Outpost in the Caucasus?* by Gaidz Minassian, IFRI, February 2008, p.4

37 *Armenia, a Russian Outpost in the Caucasus?*, pp.7-12

38 *Agenda for Armenian Foreign Policy*, p.37

## Armenia

Unlike Turkey, Armenia is expected to highly benefit from a possible opening of border with Turkey. Reports indicate that with the opening of borders, trade as well as investment and financing opportunities with Turkey would commence.<sup>39</sup> Also, the opening of borders would decrease Armenia's trade costs and provide Armenia with economic flexibility. It is highlighted that lifting of embargo and the opening of the railway line would provide 75-300 million dollars of saving, as it would also open access to Trabzon and Mersin ports of Turkey.<sup>40</sup>

According to the reports, another benefit for Armenia would arise from the increasing investments to Armenia, since the risks and isolation would be eliminated by cooperation and regional integration. Thus, in-country production is also expected to increase.<sup>41</sup> International Crisis Group suggests that with the opening of border, it is highly probable that the costs of production in the construction sector would be decreased as the Turkish companies enter Armenian market. It is estimated that the amount of bilateral trade, which increased from 30 million dollars in 1997 to 120 million dollars in 2007, would reach 300 million dollars if and when the borders are opened.<sup>42</sup> Electricity trade has already begun in 2008. Thus, the reports indicate that Armenia would be able to find new partners in railway and electricity sectors, which would enhance security of its arteries of commerce and diminish the possibility of a Turkish threat.<sup>43</sup>

Another report which was made prepared by the European Parliament suggests that not imports from but exports to Turkey would begin to rise by a factor of 14, while total imports from Turkey are expected to increase by a factor of 2.6.<sup>44</sup> Same report highlights the possibility of a revival in electricity, metal production, and textile and ironware industries.<sup>45</sup> GDP would increase 0.67% and payments 0.28%, while 1500 new jobs are expected to be created. Per capita income is expected to increase 0.5% and tax revenues would increase 1.16%. Accordingly, 5 years after the opening of borders, country's economy is expected to grow 2.7%.<sup>46</sup>

Despite the gains, according to some reports, Armenia could also experience problems with the opening of borders in specific areas. Firstly, an uncontrolled opening of the Armenian market to outside world is assumed to break down the competitiveness of the Armenian small producers.<sup>47</sup> Secondly, it is suggested that Armenian population would possibly emigrate because of the harsh economic conditions in the country.<sup>48</sup>

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39 *Turkey and Armenia Move to Bury the Hatchet*, p.6

40 *Turkey and Armenia: Opening Minds, Opening Borders*, p.28

41 *Turkey and Armenia: Opening Minds, Opening Borders*, p.28

42 *Turkey and Armenia: Opening Minds, Opening Borders*, p.28

43 *Armenia and Turkey: A Door Opens Slowly*, p.1-2

44 *The Closed Armenia-Turkey Border*, p.12

45 *The Closed Armenia-Turkey Border*, p.12

46 *The Closed Armenia-Turkey Border*, 13-14

47 *The Closed Armenia-Turkey Border*, p.3

48 *The Closed Armenia-Turkey Border*, p.14-15

Politically, many reports underline that Armenia has a fragile political structure. In recent years, and since the independence, Armenia has been witnessing internal political struggles, which are further deepened with the economic problems that arise from the closed borders.<sup>49</sup> The fragile political conditions in Armenia contribute to the ongoing economic and political dependency on Russia, which in return prevents Armenia from developing a more multilateral foreign policy approach. Armenia's regional position and prestige is therefore overshadowed by the increasing Russian influence. The root of many problems of Armenia, The Nagorno-Karabakh issue could not be resolved although both Azerbaijan and Armenia are seeking ways to find a solution under third party mediation (i.e. Russian patronage). Thus, the competition between Russia and the Western powers that see the region as of critical importance does negate the possibility of a solution, as the parties are either trying to keep the status quo (i.e. Russia) or change the conjuncture so that they could develop alternative policies to contain Russia's regional influence. The instability and insecurity in the region deepened with the eruption of Georgian-Russian war in August 2008.

In many reports, it is suggested that the opening of borders with Turkey is a priority for Armenian foreign policy. One reason is that Turkey is seen as a natural trade partner for Armenia, for reasons outlined in the previous paragraphs.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, it has been argued that the closed border results in political and economic instability for Armenia, and increases its dependency on Russian Federation.

Thirdly, it is argued that opening of borders would provide Armenia with the proper basis to gain more power during the negotiations with Azerbaijan. Accordingly, this would mean a victory for the government about a very urgent foreign policy issue; therefore strengthen the position in domestic politics.<sup>51</sup>

In most of the reports, the opening of border is evaluated not only as an economic relief but also as a politically and socially beneficial development. It is also suggested that the integration of Armenia via opening of borders would help resolve Karabakh problem as well as contribute to regional stability.<sup>52</sup>

Many reports suggest that the opening of borders would contribute to the Turkish-Armenian human interaction and therefore help eliminate cultural, social and ideological differences. It is also expected that the opening of border would positively influence Armenian public opinion, because it would reduce an exaggerated belief and political movements which are fed with this belief, which foments hatred against the Turks. It has also been argued that with the increasing human interaction, media and press rapprochement would follow and that would help create a common understanding of different public opinions to be voiced and heard.<sup>53</sup>

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49 *Changing Armenia-Turkish Relations*, p.4

50 *Turkey and Armenia: Opening Minds, Opening Borders*, p. 4

51 *Changing Armenia-Turkish Relations*, p.1

52 *The Closed Armenia-Turkey Border*, p.3

53 *The Closed Armenia-Turkey Border*, p.14, p.25

## Turkey

Compared to Armenia's economic and political gains, the position of Turkey as uttered by Think Tank reports seem to be more limited. At that point, it is suggested that economically Turkey's possible gains will be limited and regional than international. With the opening of borders, it is generally claimed that Turkey's east will benefit economically, especially in the agriculture, tourism and energy sectors. Reports highlight that Armenia is able to offer energy supply, through the possible export of surplus electricity to Eastern Turkey, and as an agricultural producer.<sup>54</sup> Thus, during the Soviet era, Armenia had exported electricity to Turkey. After President Gül's visit to Armenia in September 2008, Turkey declared its intention to buy Armenian electricity, and today the talks on the electricity imports from Armenia continue. Accordingly, Armenia is expected to supply Turkey with 1.5 billion kw/h of electricity per year, which would gradually increase up to 3.5 billion kw/h in the coming years. Despite the preparatory works were finished, the electricity trade that was to start in April 2009 has not been launched due to technical problems.

Reports suggest that another economically beneficial effect of the opening of border for Turkey comes from the tourism sector.<sup>55</sup> It is indicated that Turkey's Eastern part is host to several Armenian historical sites, such as recently restored Armenian Church of Surp Haç placed on Akdamar Island, "Kız Kilisesi" in Edremit Van and ruins of Ani.<sup>56</sup> With the opening of borders, it is assumed that Armenian tourist will begin to visit these sites, which in return is expected to revive economic activity in the region.<sup>57</sup> For historical reasons Armenians see this region, and other places like Adana (for there was a kingdom called "Kilikya Armenian Kingdom" in the past) as of critical importance for Armenian historical identity. This view of Turkish lands as the historical Armenian territory is also the basis for territorial claims. But still, it is argued that the opening of borders, to the degree that it helps develop communication between Turkish and Armenian societies, would provide an opportunity for Turkey to come to terms with the Armenian public opinion.

Thirdly, it is indicated that lower labor costs on the Armenian side will inevitably attract Turkish producers to make investments in Armenia.<sup>58</sup> Economically, this will help Turkish producers to benefit from the low-cost production and present their products in the Armenian market. Because of the isolation and the high import costs, Armenian consumers seek alternative and cheaper products in all sectors, which present an economic opportunity for Turkish producers.

Another economic and strategic benefit for Turkey if borders are opened is expected to

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54 *Changing Armenia-Turkish Relations*, p.4

55 *Armenia and Turkey: A Door Opens Slowly*, p.1

56 *Towards a Turkish-Armenian Rapprochement*, p.29

57 *The Closed Armenia-Turkey Border*, p.3;

58 *The Closed Armenia-Turkey Border*, p.3

enhance Turkey's role as a trade hub country.<sup>59</sup> Accordingly, this would increase the importance of Trabzon port as well as its competitiveness in international trade by providing the city with an economic hinterland and allow the city to compete with the Georgian port.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, with the opening of borders, Turkey should host more active north-south, east-west trade corridors.<sup>61</sup> It is claimed that Arpaçay border crossing would yield significant benefits for the local population in the underdeveloped province of Kars, Iğdır, Trabzon and Erzurum.<sup>62</sup>

Concerning Turkey's political motives, the reports provide a more detailed account of the implications for opening of the borders. It is assumed that one of the most intriguing motives for Turkey to open its border grows out of a necessity to promote the securitization of the Caucasus region, which experience frozen and hot conflicts that carries the possibility to hamper regional security, stability and cooperation. Thus, most of the reports indicate that the international community is becoming more and more aware of the potential role for Turkey in the Caucasus region, as well as the need for a more involved and flexible approach in the regional affairs. Especially after the recent conflict that erupted between Georgia and Russian Federation in 2008, together with the shift of Turkey's initial foreign policy priorities into "zero-problem with neighbors",<sup>63</sup> the rapprochement process between Turkey and Armenia is seen more like a securitization process by the international community.

Therefore, an analysis of Turkey's political motives behind the rapprochement process is of critical importance for understanding the formation of a new political conundrum in the Caucasus region.

Reports indicate that Turkey's relations with the European Union, the promise of full membership and relations with the West are basic motivations for the country to show efforts towards the normalization of relations. Thus, it is well known that open borders is an EU membership requirement,<sup>64</sup> although European Union violated this principle in the membership of Southern Cyprus case. Still, Turkey's efforts to play a more constructive and effective role in the Caucasus is seen as a factor that will boost Turkey's European credentials and image in a critical point during membership negotiations.<sup>65</sup> It is argued that opening of borders with Armenia would provide Turkey with a relief off the pressures from the Western partners on relations with Armenia and the Diaspora's efforts to isolate and keep down Turkey in the international arena.<sup>66</sup> Some reports even claim that reconciliation with Armenia would increase "the credibility of arguments that

59 *Closed Armenian-Turkish Border*, p.3

60 *Closed Armenian-Turkish Border*, p.17

61 *Closed Armenian-Turkish Border*, p.18

62 *Closed Armenian-Turkish Border*, p. 16; *Towards a Turkish-Armenian Rapprochement*, p. 29

63 *Turkey and Armenia Move to Bury the Hatchet*, p.6

64 *Turkey and Armenia Move to Bury the Hatchet*, p.1

65 *The Dynamics of Change in the Southern Caucasus*, p. 3

66 *Changing Armenia-Turkey Relations*, p.4

id does not need external pressure to address historical disputes with its neighbors, a position that could help stop international qualification of the 1915 events as genocide.”<sup>67</sup> Moreover, it is believed that Turkish-Armenian rapprochement would help pro-Turkish sentiments in the European Union gain weight against those proponents of alternative membership status for Turkey.<sup>68</sup> An open border with Armenia is seen as a sign of positive domestic reform for Turkey.

Reports also suggest that opening of borders should help create alternative communication and transportation route for energy resources and trade. Accordingly, this would also help secure the already existing routes via Turkey and South Caucasus region as this new route will help develop regional cooperation.<sup>69</sup> The regional integration, it is assumed, would create bonds that prevent conflicts or help solve disputes via dialogue and not by confrontation. It is claimed that the security building process would be strengthened by Turkish-Armenian rapprochement,<sup>70</sup> pave the way for recognition of borders, and in the last analysis help overcome the “other” perception<sup>71</sup> in Turkish-Armenian relations. Moreover, with the economic and political improvements in the region, the opening of border can also positively affect Kurdish problem by providing stability eastern parts of Turkey.

*“...opening of the border has also acquired a new significance for Turkey, as the need to stabilize the eastern Kurdish regions of Turkey has become an even more essential element of Turkish national security.”<sup>72</sup>*

#### **4. Normalization of Relations and Recognition of Territorial Integrity**

In the course of the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations, one of the most critical problems has been the issue of the recognition of mutual borders and territorial integrity. The problem arises from the Turkish perception of Armenian Declaration of Independence that refers to Turkey’s Eastern provinces as “Western Armenia”, while one of the most significant Armenian national symbols has been the Ağrı Mountain. Turkey’s concern is further deepened as Armenia “has been refraining from giving official notification to the effect that it is recognizing the 13 October 1921 Kars Treaty which delineated the border between Turkey and Armenia – the treaty that was signed by the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic”<sup>73</sup> An interview conducted by Nursun Erel with the then Minister of Foreign Affairs Vartan Oskanian in December 2006 reveals unofficial but still rather frequently spoken out rejection of Kars Treaty by the government and state officials. Oskanian claims that:

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67 *Towards a Turkish-Armenian Rapprochement*, p.3

68 *Towards a Turkish-Armenian Rapprochement*. p.3

69 *Breaking the Vicious Circle*, TESEV & Caucasus Institute, April 2009, p.10

70 *Breaking the Vicious Circle*, p.14–15

71 *Closed Armenia-Turkey Border*, p. 25

72 *Changing Armenia-Turkish Relations*, p.3

73 Lüttem, Ömer Engin “Facts and Comments” *Review of Armenian Studies*, Number 10, Volume 4 – 2006

*The Treaty of Kars is in force as far as I'm concerned, because Armenia is a successor in recognizing the Soviet treaties. And as long as any treaty hasn't been renounced officially or replaced by a new one, it has been in force. But the problem is that the agreement has been violated so much by the Turkish side. If a legal expert looks at this agreement and the way it's been implemented, I'm not sure if the legal experts would conclude that this is a valid treaty. The violation is from the Turkish side, (because of) having closed its borders with Armenia, and this is a violation of the Treaty of Kars.<sup>74</sup>*

In fact, The Treaty of Kars states that certain agreements concluded in the past are void and that no international document not recognized by Turkey will be recognized. In this manner with the Treaty of Kars, Armenia, as with the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, all have officially accepted not recognizing the Sevres Treaty. Moreover, it is not possible to interpret any article of the Treaty of Kars as foreseeing that it shall become null and void in the event that the border between two countries is closed, since there has been no official declaration by the Armenian government stating that the Treaty has been breached or is void also bears that the treaty is still in force.

Reports on Turkish-Armenian relations agree that despite Armenia's readiness and in fact insistence to begin the normalization of bilateral relations without preconditions,<sup>75</sup> Turkey has concerns on the recognition of territorial integrity, Karabakh issue and the genocide claims. Most reports indicate that Armenia's desire to establish relations without setting preconditions also meant that Armenia actually did not expect Turkey to acknowledge genocide.<sup>76</sup> But still, it is common knowledge that neither Armenian government nor Diaspora could and would abandon the policy for the recognition of genocide. Obviously, what "unconditional" normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia involves not the genocide propaganda, but the problematic issue of Karabakh settlement, as the Armenian government is both internationally and regionally stranded by the resolution of this critical problem.

International reports present no common understanding of a possible solution of the issue of setting preconditions for the normalization of relations. Some reports suggest that for the sake of building mutual confidence and in order to be able to resolve issues that prevent the two sides from establishing normal relations, Turkey must lay aside setting any preconditions, such as the resolution of Karabakh issue, since Turkey's closure of the border with Armenia was a reaction to the occupation of Karabakh and the surrounding provinces.<sup>77</sup> Still, Turkey's foreign policy shift is considered to be a critical factor that would lead the way for a possible abandonment of setting preconditions for the normalization process.<sup>78</sup> And in fact, recent signing of the "Protocol on the

74 "Interview with Vartan Oskanian" by Nursun Erel - TNA/Yerevan, *The New Anatolian*, 04 December 2006

75 *Agenda for Armenian Foreign Policy*, p. 35; *Noah's Dove Returns*, p.1

76 *Turkey and Armenia: Opening Minds, Opening Borders*, p.6

77 *Forward to the Past: Russia, Turkey and Armenia's Faith*, The Armenian Center for National and International Studies, p.2

78 *Agenda for Armenian Foreign Policy*, p.35

Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Armenia” and “Protocol on Development of Relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Turkey” was basically a sign of Turkey’s diplomatic attempt to overcome the issue of preconditions, despite Turkish government’s declaration that Karabakh issue is still on the agenda as the ratification process of the two protocols would inevitably involve consideration of the forthcoming developments in Armenia-Azerbaijan relations on a possible resolution of the Karabakh problem. It can be argued that Armenian side’s reconfirmation of the validity of Kars Treaty, also still far from being persuasive, were also influential in the signing of the Protocols. Therefore, Turkey still reserves the right to reconsider the ratification process by indirectly setting preconditions for the normalization of relations.

Other reports highlight that for the normalization process to be successful, both sides should be ready to make mutual concessions and be released from any precondition that involves third parties.<sup>79</sup> Many reports emphasize the need for a positive rapprochement process and the critical importance of Turkey’s choice concerning the preconditions. Still, it is also highlighted that Armenia should also fulfill its obligations for achieving progress, such as showing Turkey that Armenia “has no territorial claim on Turkey by explicitly recognizing its territorial integrity within the borders laid out in the 1921 Treaty of Kars.”<sup>80</sup> It is further argued that such an approach would also encourage Turkish government to be more open in its approach on the incidents of 1915.<sup>81</sup>

Since the reports that are examined in this article were written mostly before the signing of the protocols. Therefore, the issues of preconditions and the recognition of territorial integrity remained critically important until the two sides agreed on the current context of the diplomatic accord. The intricacy of the above mentioned reports to the issue of preconditions emanates from the uncertainty as to how this particular problem could influence the normalization process. In the end, both sides seem to agree that mutual concessions were given as the preconditions practically continue to remain on the domestic agenda of the two countries.

## 5. Turkey-Armenia Relations and the Nagorno-Karabakh Dispute

The Nagorno-Karabakh Dispute is one of the most critical problems in Turkish-Armenian relations. Turkey’s closure of its border with Armenia came as a result of Armenian-Azeri conflict which led to the invasion of Karabakh and the five surrounding provinces by Armenian forces. Today, Armenian and Azeri sides continue negotiations on the resolution of Karabakh dispute under OSCE’s Minsk Group mediation. Although

79 *Breaking the Vicious Circle*, p.15; *Agenda for Armenian Foreign Policy*, pp. 22–23

80 *Turkey and Armenia: Opening Minds, Opening Borders*, p. 6

81 *Armenia and Turkey: A Door Open Slowly* p.1



the conflict erupted in Azerbaijan territory, Turkey reacted harshly and closed the border in March 1992.

Reports present different opinions on Turkey's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh Dispute. There is a strong emphasis on the Armenian demand that Turkey abandon its position as a party to the conflict, which would initially lead to opening of borders and normalization.<sup>82</sup> It is suggested that Karabakh dispute must be kept aside from the Karabakh dispute, which is seen as a bilateral issue between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Despite the common vision on Turkey's attitude in the Karabakh dispute, reports also emphasize that Turkey should be more actively and objectively involved in the resolution of the dispute.<sup>83</sup> International Crisis Group suggests that Turkey should be "a part of a comprehensive process of conflict resolution... which includes troop withdrawals, deployment of peacekeeping forces and return of displaced persons."<sup>84</sup> In fact Turkey's emphasis on the resolution of the Karabakh dispute can also be interpreted as a sign of the country's involvement in the process, but Armenian side reads this attitude as a precondition<sup>85</sup> for the normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia. Thus, reports indicate that Turkey is already eager to act as a negotiator between the two sides, and argue that Turkey's policy of bringing stability and security to the South Caucasus also requires the resolution of this conflict that will inevitably lead to normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia.<sup>86</sup> It is also emphasized that Armenian side is in "occupier" position and expects Armenia to obey international law as well as UN Security Council Resolutions 822, 853, 874, 884.<sup>87</sup>

## Conclusion

Since both Armenia and Turkey were ready for a rapprochement process that is favorable for their interests, then what has changed to motivate sides to begin establishing dialogue? Think-Tank opinion on the future of Turkish-Armenian relations focuses mainly on three factors that promotes rapprochement. Firstly, Georgian-Russian war has revealed that the region is vulnerable and keeping the status quo is no more the justifiable option. Armenian policy on Nagorno-Karabakh, its relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan, as well as the alliance with Russia is still based on keeping the dynamics of the region unchanged. Azerbaijan's increasing military and economic power and Turkey's involvement in the region made it impossible for Armenia to wait "the Karabakh problem to solve itself."<sup>88</sup> But August War triggered Armenia to move forward

82 *The Closed Armenia-Turkey Border*, p.7; *Turkey and Armenia: Opening Minds, Opening Borders*, p.6

83 *Turkey and Armenia: Opening Minds, Opening Borders*, p.7

84 *Turkey and Armenia: Opening Minds, Opening Borders*, p.7

85 *Turkey and Armenia Move to Bury the Hatchet*, p.3

86 *Towards a Turkish-Armenian Rapprochement?* p.24

87 *Turkey-Armenia Relations: A Vicious Circle*, p.15

88 *After Soccer Diplomacy: The Turkish-Armenian Relations*, Bertelsmann Stiftung, Spotlight Europe No:10, October 2009, p.2

and begin a facilitating a more active policy in the region. On the other hand, Turkey also became aware of the need to become deeply involved in the region and directly engage regional problems so that it would be possible to pacify probable eruption of future conflicts.

Secondly, international community began to motivate the two sides for reconciliation, after the August 2008 war. Enhanced cooperation with Russia provided Turkey with the necessary support by the most influential actor of the region. On the other hand, with the coming of new US President Obama, Armenian side also began to look for alternative options in the region with the motivation by American policy-makers. President Sarkisyan's domestic policy also forced him to seek succeed in the international arena so as to persuade Armenian public opinion. The success of Armenian domestic politics is strictly bound with international support to Armenian government and its economic implications for Armenian population, which may have persuaded Sarkisyan to take steps for reconciliation. Thus, the intention to realign Armenia's regional role to adopt new alternative policies has been uttered several times, while reports pay much attention to the possibility of Armenia adopt a new regional role.

Thirdly, Turkey's foreign policy shift is seen as a significant factor that influenced the course of Turkish-Armenian relations. The policy of "zero-problem with neighbors" adopted during the advisory office of Prof. Ahmet Davutoğlu and was actively implemented during his Ministry has provided a regional outlook for Turkey to adopt a securitizing mission in its neighborhood. This outlook was enhanced by attempts toward establishing diplomatic relations with Armenia and positive reactions from Armenian side and international community. Today, Turkish foreign policy is seen as being more and more actively engaged in regional and international affairs. Reports that were examined in this study clearly exemplify this perception developing in the West and in the rest of the world.

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