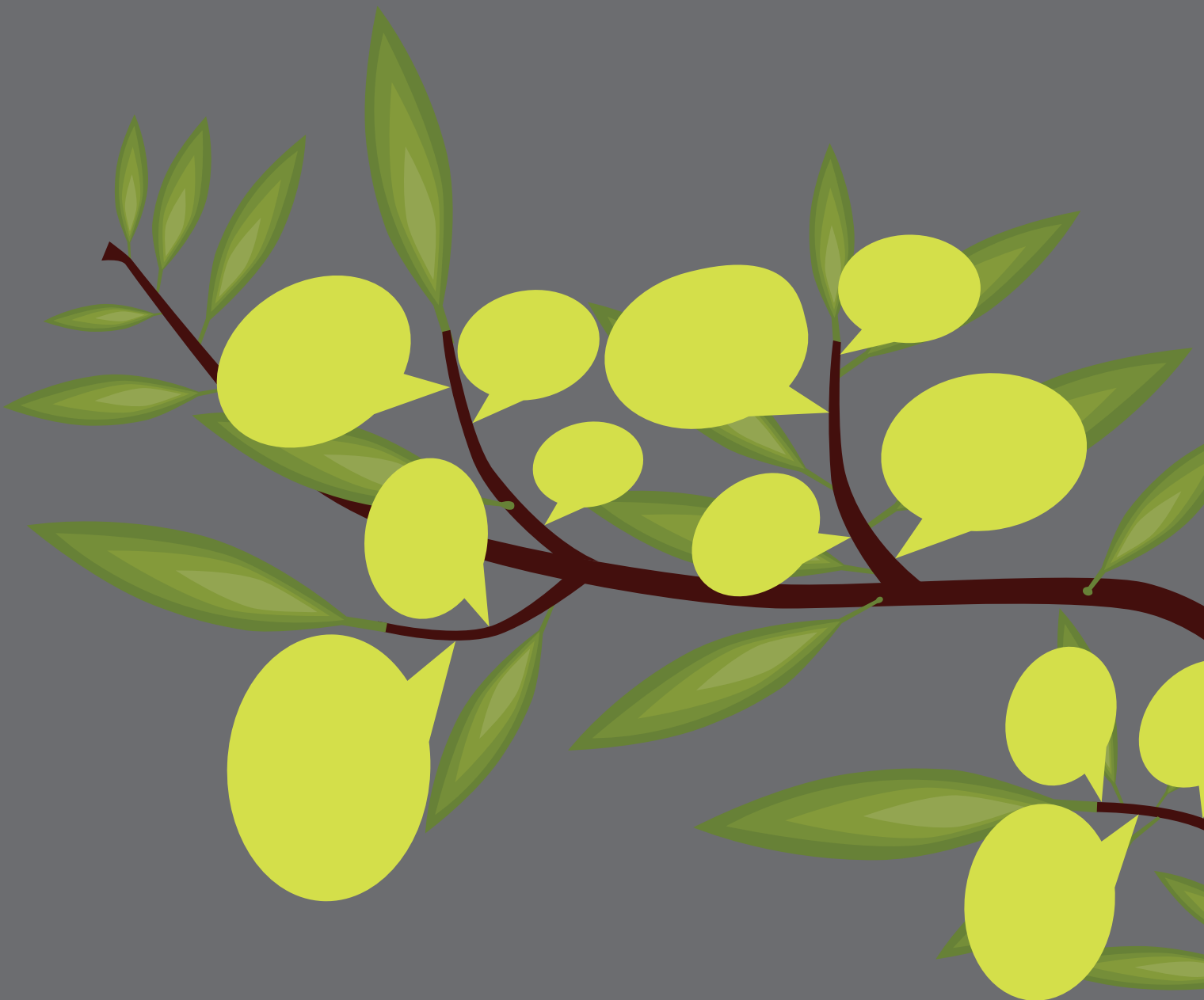


Breaking the Ice: The Role of Civil Society and Media in Turkey-Armenia Relations

Susae Elanchenny & Narod Maraşlıyan



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An Evaluation of the "Dialogue-Building between Turkey and Armenia" Project

Susae Elanchenny & Narod Maraşlıyan

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PREFACE

Almost three years have passed since the Protocols on Turkey-Armenia relations were signed in October 2009. With their failure to be ratified than a year later, Turkey-Armenia relations have once again seemingly fallen off of the Turkish government, media and public's agenda.

Three years from now on April 24, Armenians will commemorate the 100th anniversary of the mass massacres and deportations of Armenians that took place in the Ottoman Empire between 1915 and 1917. Without a new initiative to restart the rapprochement process, it seems like the next time the Armenia issue will be on Turkey's agenda in a significant way will be during this commemoration.

In short, official relations are "frozen" at present and perhaps for the near future. Yet GPoT Center's extensive experience in "second-track" diplomacy and conflict resolution projects in various countries gives it a long-term view that lends it hope about future prospects for Turkey-Armenia relations. Particularly in Armenia, GPoT has enacted and continues to enact numerous exchange programs, roundtable discussions and research projects with its Armenian partners that bring together stakeholders from both countries to create and foster dialogue.

The "Dialogue-Building between Turkey and Armenia" program was one of such projects. As GPoT Center Project Officers Susae Elanchenny

and Narod Maraşlıyan show in this unique report, civil society and media can play an important role in the normalization process even when official relations are "frozen." By providing the opportunity for Armenian and Turkish journalists, retired officials and civil society activists to have informed, respectful dialogue with one another, these projects can play a key role in "breaking the ice" in the rapprochement process.

On behalf of GPoT Center, I would like to thank our participants in this project, and also our partners, whose diligent efforts resulted in its success: Svetlana Kimayeva and Josh Machleder of Internews Network; Manana Aslamazyan, Armen Sargsyan and Nouneh Sarkissian of Internews Armenia; Boris Navasardian, Haykak Arshamyan and Mikayel Zolyan of Yerevan Press Club; and Mehmet Binay and Caner Alper of CAM Film, along with their colleagues. The authors and I would also like to thank Dr. Sylvia Tiryaki, Lenka Petková, Can Yirik, Meltem Abalı, Natalie R. Chambers and Sofia Hafdell of GPoT Center for their contributions to this publication. Finally, we extend our appreciation to the United States Department of State for their sponsorship, and Istanbul Kültür University's academic and administrative staff, especially the Chair of the Board of Trustees, Dr. Bahar Akingüç Günver, for their support of this project and publication.

Dr. Mensur Akgün

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INTRODUCTION

With the signing of the Protocols on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations and on the Development of Relations between Armenia and Turkey on October 10, 2009, in Zurich, Switzerland, it seemed that after 16 years the border between the two countries would be reopened and official relations normalized in the near future. Yet these hopes were dashed after the Protocols were suspended by Armenia on April 22, 2010 and removed from consideration in the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA). As of early 2012, there is no sign that the rush of diplomatic activity on the part of Armenia, Turkey, the United States and Switzerland that occurred between 2006 and 2009 will be repeated any time soon to revive the Protocols (Phillips, 2012, p. 99).

Analyses about the failure of the Protocols generally fall into one of two categories, reflecting external and internal factors. In one view, the opposition of Azerbaijan (see de Waal quoted in Phillips, p. 100), and significant numbers of the Armenian diaspora (Görgülü et al., 2010, p. 15) to the Protocols hindered their progress in Turkey and Armenia, respectively. In another view, dynamics between the political leaders and policy-makers in each country along with the lack of widespread popular support for the Protocols among the Turkish and Armenian publics impeded their ratification (Phillips, 2012, p. 105).

These two analyses of the Protocols' failure also correspond to the two general perspectives on what should be done for relations to normalize, either within the framework or independently of the Protocols. For some, the normalization of relations is only possible after political rapprochement occurs, i.e. the border between the two countries is opened and official relations established. For others, reconciliation between the two countries' peoples (perhaps including the Armenian diaspora) must take place first in order for any attempt at political settlement, such as the Protocols, to be tenable.

Of course, rapprochement and reconciliation are not mutually exclusive processes that unfold in a vacuum (Phillips, 2012, p. 99); what goes on in "track one" affects or even defines the limits and effectiveness of "track two"¹ initiatives, and vice versa. Yet in most contemporary coverage of Armenia-Turkey relations, the failure of the Protocols seems to overshadow the success of numerous Turkish and Armenian civil society initiatives in laying the groundwork and creating a positive, supportive environment for the official normalization of relations. Indeed, while newspaper articles and academic analyses regarding the Protocols and various issues in Turkish-Armenian rapprochement abound, publications that focus on the role of civil society, both in terms of what has been done and what should be done, are scarce.²

This publication aims to help fill in this gap by providing a detailed account of the "Dialogue-Building between Turkey and Armenia" project, which was funded by the United States Department of State Bureau of Democracy, Rights and Labor and jointly implemented by the Global Political Trends Center (GPoT) of Istanbul Kültür University, Internews Armenia, the Yerevan Press Club, CAM Film (based in Istanbul) and Internews Network (based in the US) between September 2010 and December 2011. As part of this project, GPoT Center and its partners organized three exchanges of 13 Turkish

1 "Track two [diplomacy] involves contact, communication, and cooperation between civil society representatives who come together to discuss their differences...Track two contributes to the development of mutual understanding with the goal of transferring insights to decision-makers and shaping public opinion. It is not a substitute for official diplomacy; however, its flexibility helps compensate for inherent constraints on officials" (Phillips, 2012, p. 15).

2 Two notable exceptions published in 2012 include Esra Çuhadar & Burcu Gültekin Punsmann's *Reflecting on the Two Decades of Bridging the Divide: Taking Stock of Turkish-Armenian Civil Society Initiatives* and David L. Phillips' *Diplomatic History: The Turkey-Armenia Protocols*.

and Armenian television and print journalists; produced 12 short documentaries directed by Armenian and Turkish students in Turkey and Armenia, respectively; led a media reporting bus tour for 12 Turkish and Armenian journalists through eastern Turkey and Armenia via Georgia; and funded the production of 27 episodes of two talk shows focusing on Turkey-Armenia relations in both Turkey and Armenia.

The Dialogue-Building Project was certainly not the first or only civil society project aimed at the normalization of relations that either GPoT or numerous NGOs in Armenia, Turkey and third-party countries have carried out in the past decade. Yet due to a lack of time and resources, many of these NGOs have been unable to publicize the results of their efforts effectively in either their home countries or among policy-makers from donor countries, most importantly the United States.³ Given Çuhadar and Punsman's (2012) finding that US funding for NGOs working on Turkey-Armenia relations generally increases in times when "track one" diplomacy is active and decreases when it is inactive, the failure of the Protocols seems to forebode further difficulties for these NGOs in conducting and promoting their activities (p. 15).

However, GPoT's analysis of the Dialogue-Building Project – based on the content of the Project's media output and coverage as well as the reflections of the project participants – in the context of the failure of the Protocols demonstrates that now more than ever media-based civil society initiatives aimed at reducing stereotypes and misperceptions about Armenia in Turkey and vice versa are crucial if future "track one" developments are to succeed. This is especially true for Turkey, the size of whose population (about 26 times that of Armenia) and crowded foreign policy agenda (resulting in

a lack of coverage about Armenia in the press) make the task of impacting the perceptions of the public and policy-makers quite difficult. While including the compelling reflections and writings of some of the project's 23 Armenian participants and coordinators, this introduction and the four sections detailing the project that follow will thus particularly focus on the problem of Turkey-Armenia rapprochement and the impact of the Dialogue-Building Project in the context of Turkey. It will then conclude with a series of both technical and conceptual recommendations for civil society organizations, the media, and governments in Armenia, Turkey, and third-party countries who wish to contribute to the normalization of relations in the aftermath of the failure of the Protocols.

Defining the Problem: Major Issues in Turkey-Armenia Rapprochement

In terms of both "frozen" conflicts in the Caucasus and Turkey's current foreign policy doctrine, Turkey-Armenia relations are in many ways an anomaly. There is no direct war or violent conflict at present between the two countries, nor is there likely to be in the near future; thus Armenia-Turkey relations are rarely considered as a case study in traditional conflict resolution literature dealing with the Caucasus. And although Turkey has a history of periodically tense relations with virtually all of its neighbors, only in the case of Armenia did it close its border, in 1993. That same decade Turkey almost went to war with Syria and Greece, the former over its support for the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the latter over a territorial dispute regarding the Imia or Kardak islets in the Aegean Sea. Yet while Turkey's relations with both Greece and Syria (at least until the Arab Spring) improved after 2002 in concert with Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's "zero problems with neighbors" policy, resulting in the relaxation of visa requirements, Turkey's land border with Armenia remains closed to this day.

The border between Turkey and Armenia was not always closed and relations "frozen," however. In fact, Turkey sent its Moscow Ambassador, Volkan

³ Of course, the continued sensitivity of Armenia-Turkey relations means that Turkish NGOs must often carefully consider whether publicizing their efforts will have an overall positive or negative impact. However, the progress (inadequate yet substantial) in Turkey in the last five to ten years regarding the freedom to discuss the Armenian issue means that normalization projects increasingly can and should be publicized.

Vural, to Armenia for meetings in April 1991 before Armenia even declared its independence (Özbay, 2011, p. 3). Turkey was among the first to recognize Armenia's independence along with that of the other former Soviet republics on December 19, 1991 (Hale, 2008, p. 271), and opened the railway between the border towns of Kars and Gyumri afterwards (International Crisis Group [ICG], 2009, p. 1). In 1992, as discussions about establishing official relations were held between pro-rapprochement President Levon Ter-Petrossian's foreign affairs officials and their Turkish counterparts, Turkey pushed for Armenia to become a member of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), despite Armenia's lack of a border with the Black Sea (Hale, 2008, p. 273); since 2001, senior Armenian diplomats have been based in Istanbul within the framework of BSEC (Gunter & Rochtus, 2010, p. 160).

Yet two major disputes caused Turkey to cease discussion of establishing official diplomatic relations with Armenia in 1993 and continue to hinder the normalization of relations to the present day: the genocide issue and Nagorno Karabakh. The massacres and mass deportations of Armenians that took place between 1915-1917 in the Ottoman Empire and whether or not they should be termed as genocide is the fundamental problem in the normalization of Turkey-Armenia relations. At present, Armenia sees the rapprochement process partly as a means for Turkey eventually to recognize the genocide; Turkey, on the other hand, believes the process will discourage foreign governments from genocide recognition (Phillips, 2012, p. 65). On the other hand, many Turks see the issue of Nagorno Karabakh – a disputed region over which Armenia took control in a war with Azerbaijan that lasted from 1991 to 1994 – as vitally linked to the Turkey-Armenia rapprochement process, while Armenia, including some pro-rapprochement Armenian civil society activists, rejects this linkage. The following sections provide a brief overview of these two issues with particular focus on how they affect the normalization process in Turkey.

The Genocide Issue and Territorial Claims

The fundamental differences between the official views of the Turkish and Armenian states with regards to the killings and deportations of Armenians that took place in the waning years of the Ottoman Empire, largely shared by their respective publics, help feed the mistrust and stereotypes that hamper the normalization process. According to Armenia, 1.5 million Armenian men, women and children from across the Ottoman Empire were killed (and many of the survivors forcibly converted to Islam) as a result of the deliberate effort by the Young Turk Ottoman government to eliminate the entire Armenian population (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, 2012). For some Armenians, any attempt at contextualizing or seeking explanations for the Young Turks' actions besides a racist one amounts to a rationalization of the genocide (Suny, 2009, p. 932).

Turkey, on the other hand, argues that many more Ottoman Turks were killed or forced to flee from the Balkans and the Caucasus to Anatolia in the years leading up to World War I than the Armenians who died between 1915 and 1917 (Phillips, 2012, p. 3). In the official Turkish historical narrative, the legitimate decision was made to deport the Armenians after they took up arms against the Ottomans in cooperation with Russia, and the massacres of innocents (much less than one million) that did take place were carried out by rogue local officials and bandits acting on their own who were later prosecuted and executed by the Ottoman authorities (ICG, 2009, p. 11). Turkey also asserts that “the Ottoman socio-cultural experience did not harbor racist attitudes that would facilitate such a horrific crime” as genocide (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, 2012).

External circumstances delayed a full-fledged debate between these two states on the genocide issue. The Soviet Union took control of the Democratic Republic of Armenia in 1920, and Soviet Armenia signed the Treaty of Kars with the nascent Turkish state in 1921, establishing the current border between the two countries (European Stability Initiative [ESI], 2009, p. 2).

While Soviet authorities gave permission to Armenian historians to write about the 1915-1917 massacres (Sanjian, 2008, p. 1), the first large-scale commemoration was only able to take place in Yerevan on April 24, 1965, on the 50th anniversary. After this event, “genocide and the campaign for its recognition became central to Armenian national consciousness” (ESI, 2009, p. 23).

This national consciousness, often connected to territorial claims to land in “Western Armenia” (eastern Turkey), was reflected in the texts of the founding documents of the independent Republic of Armenia. The 11th clause of the Armenian Declaration of Independence of August 23, 1991 states 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.” In addition, the second paragraph of the 13th article of the 1995 Armenian Constitution declares that Mount Ararat (in contemporary Turkey) is to be depicted on the Armenian coat of arms. In February 1991, the Armenian Parliament also ruled that it does not recognize the Treaty of Kars, and thus the modern Turkey-Armenia border (Özbay, 2011, p. 3). Turkey’s suspicions regarding these documents were compounded by the Armenian terrorist group Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA)’s assassination of 34 Turkish diplomats between 1975 and 1982 with the stated aim of getting Turkey to recognize the massacres of 1915-1917 as genocide and make territorial concessions and reparations (Phillips, 2012, p. 3).

From the suspension of relations until the beginning of the Protocols process, Turkish diplomatic efforts regarding Armenia consisted mostly of trying to prevent the passage of resolutions recognizing the massacres and deportations of Armenians in 1915-1917 as genocide in foreign parliaments. After the Uruguayan Parliament passed such a resolution in 1965, the Greek Cypriot, Russian, Greece, French, Swiss, Polish and German ones, among others, followed suit (Çuhadar & Punsmann, 2012, p. 69). While none of these resolutions explicitly call for Turkey to cede part of its territory as a result of

recognition,⁴ various Turkish governments have treated them as grave attacks on Turkey’s territorial integrity and national honor, and have expended considerable effort and resources trying to block the passage of future resolutions, particularly in the United States Congress. Despite its threats to enact sanctions against countries as they are debating or after they have passed genocide resolutions, Turkey’s “genocide diplomacy” has overall been unsuccessful (ESI, 2009, p. 15). Even though Turkey did in some cases recall its ambassadors from these countries, it now has normal if not positive relations with many of them, such as Russia and Poland. Indeed, the diplomatic efforts that resulted in the Protocols were mediated by Switzerland, even though genocide denial is a crime there (Phillips, 2012, p. 27).

Until the foundation of the Republic of Armenia, the Armenian diaspora was the only driving force behind these genocide resolutions. Over twice the size of the population of the Republic of Armenia, the largest Armenian diaspora communities reside in the US, Russia and France (ESI, 2009, p. 19). According to Richard Giragosian, “the diaspora has a one-issue identity; it’s the genocide and nothing more” (quoted in Whitmore, 2009). Unlike Levon Ter-Petrossian, the first President of Armenia, his successor Robert Kocharyan gave increased importance to genocide recognition as part of Armenia’s foreign policy agenda during his term from 1998 to 2008 (Çuhadar & Punsmann, 2012, p. 69). Current Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan has followed Kocharyan’s example, most recently shown in his government’s open support for the 2011 French Senate bill that would criminalize genocide denial. Given Giragosian’s observation, it seems as if Armenia has little power to stop these resolutions even if it wished to (ICG, 2009, p. 6).

In the Turkish media, these genocide resolutions are generally treated as ploys by politicians to garner votes among diaspora Armenians, who are perceived as being “all-powerful” (Çuhadar & Punsmann, 2012, p. 68), anti-Turkish, and covetous of Turkish territory. Rather than

⁴ The complete texts of these resolutions are available on the website of the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute: <http://www.genocide-museum.am/eng/states.php>

encouraging Turks to re-examine their history and reconcile with their Armenian neighbors (as is their apparent aim), the genocide resolutions instead exacerbate the suspicion that foreign powers are trying to divide up Turkey as did the post-World War I Treaty of Sevres.⁵ This suspicion is somewhat well-founded: Armenian political leaders have made contradictory statements regarding their recognition of the current Turkish-Armenian border (ICG, 2009, p. ii), and many members of the diaspora explicitly do not recognize it (see Davidian, 2009, p. 10). This fear, in turn, leads to the reinforcement of stereotypes that poisons the atmosphere for the normalization of relations to take place.

Nagorno Karabakh

However, more than references to genocide and territorial claims, the Nagorno Karabakh issue caused Turkey to close its land border with Armenia in 1993. The dispute that had begun when the autonomous Armenian-majority enclave tried to secede from Soviet Azerbaijan in 1988 turned into a full-fledged war during the collapse of the Soviet Union. By the time a ceasefire was brokered in May 1994, Armenia had won control of Nagorno Karabakh and seven Azerbaijani provinces surrounding it. Armenia's capture of one of these provinces, Kelbajar, in April 1993 triggered Turkey's closing its border with Armenia in protest (de Waal, 2010, p. 2). The Minsk Group, founded in 1992 as part of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), in which Turkey is a permanent member, has so far failed in its goal of finding a solution to the conflict (de Waal, 2009, p. 4).

Turkey's linkage of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict to the Turkey-Armenia rapprochement process reflects two realities, strategic and identity-based. Azerbaijan's oil and gas reserves make it

an important country for Turkey to achieve its aim of becoming a major political and economic player in the Caspian Sea region. In March 1993, a month before the closing of the border, Turkey and Azerbaijan signed an outline agreement on what is now known as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) crude oil pipeline (Hale, 2008, p. 272). The pipeline began pumping oil in 2005, and Turkey stands to make over \$150 billion in revenue up to 2024 as a result of the pipeline (Tran, 2005). As a result, Turkey has important economically and politically strategic considerations it must take into mind in its relations with Azerbaijan.

Along with their strategic relationship, in their official state narratives Turkey and Azerbaijan also share an ethnic Turkic background; indeed, many Turks refer to Azerbaijan as a "brother country." While the significance of ethnic kinship as a driver of Turkey's foreign policy is sometimes overstated, its impact on shaping Turkish public opinion on foreign policy issues should not be overlooked. When a massacre of 500 civilians occurred in the Azeri-populated Nagorno Karabakh town of Khojali in February 1992, widespread protests took place in Turkey, and then Turkish President Turgut Özal considered military action against Armenia in retaliation (Hale, 2008, pp. 271-272). On the recent tenth anniversary of the massacre, a large rally was held in downtown Istanbul apparently with support from Azerbaijan and the Istanbul municipal government, and Home Affairs Minister İdris Naim Şahin participated as a speaker (Nalçı, 2009). In his speech, Şahin declared that "every event in Azerbaijan is of great importance to Turkey and the Turkish nation. Azerbaijan's joy and pain is Turkey's joy and pain" (quoted in Çalışlar, 2012). The rally caused a controversy due to numerous signs that carried racist statements against Armenians. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan dismissed these signs as "marginal and isolated," leaving one Turkish newspaper columnist Oral Çalışlar (2012) to wonder that only a few years ago Azerbaijan had used its influence with parliamentarians of the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) to undermine the Protocols and by extension Erdoğan, whose Justice and Development Party (AKP) government was responsible for them.

5 The Treaty of Sevres of 1920 was the peace treaty signed by the Ottoman Empire and the Allies at the end of World War I that divided up Anatolia between the Allies, and included an Armenian state with a western border extending well into present-day eastern Turkey. While the treaty was superseded after the Turkish War of Independence by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which defined the borders of modern Turkey, the "Serves Syndrome," or fear that foreign powers conspire to possess Turkish territory, remains (Phillips, 2010, p. 21).

The Attempted Solution: Football Diplomacy and The Protocols

Due to disagreements over the genocide issue and Nagorno-Karabakh, for approximately a decade after the Armenia-Turkey border was closed in 1993 Turkey and Armenia had little to no sustained diplomatic contact. However, when the AKP came to power in Turkey in 2002 a new chapter was opened in Turkey-Armenia relations. Rapprochement with Armenia fit into the AKP's stated pro-democracy agenda, and was championed from an early stage by then Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül, who held several informal meetings with his Armenian counterpart Vartan Oskanian on the sidelines of international conferences in 2003 and 2004 (Phillips, 2012, p. 25). On April 10, 2005, Erdoğan sent Kocharyan an official letter in which he proposed setting up "a joint group consisting of historians and other experts from our two countries to study the developments and events of 1915" (Görgülü, 2008, p. 43). Declining Erdoğan's proposal, Kocharyan replied that "it is the responsibility of governments to develop bilateral relations and we do not have the right to delegate that responsibility to historians" (Görgülü, 2008, p. 44). While the leaders of the two countries thus disagreed on the sequence of events necessary for the normalization of relations, their letters represented a public step forward after a decade of stagnation.

Events began moving forward at a quicker pace with the election of Serzh Sargsyan as the President of Armenia in February 2008, whose victory was tainted by allegations of voter fraud and mass opposition protests led by Ter-Petrosian in which ten people were killed (Musayelyan, 2011). Gül, who himself had recently become president in a divisive parliamentary election in August 2007, sent a warm congratulatory letter to Sargsyan in which he wrote: "I hope your new position will offer an opportunity for the normalization of relations between the Turkish and Armenian people" (quoted in ESI, 2010). In response, Sargsyan invited Gül to attend the 2010 World Cup qualifying match between Armenia and Turkey in Yerevan on September 6, 2008. Gül accepted and, after detailed logistical arrangements were made

between the two countries, became the first Turkish president to set foot in Armenia. While Gül returned to Turkey directly following the match, Foreign Minister Ali Babacan stayed to have a meeting with his Armenian counterpart Edward Nalbandian, the first of eight meetings that took place between September 2008 and April 2009, when both sides announced the road map for the normalization of relations (ESI, 2009, p. 3). Urged to act in a timely manner by the Swiss diplomat serving as moderator, the Protocols were signed just in time for Sargsyan to attend the second World Cup qualifying match between the two countries in Bursa, Turkey on October 14, 2009 (Phillips, 2012, p. 55).

The Protocols that resulted from this "football diplomacy" list the guiding principles upon which relations can be established and specific points of action to be undertaken within a set time frame. In terms of principles, the two sides "confirm the mutual recognition of the existing border...as defined by relevant treaties of international law," condemn all forms of terrorism, and "emphasize their decision to open the common border."⁶ Regarding concrete steps to develop relations, Armenia and Turkey agree to, among other things, "conduct regular political consultations between the[ir] Ministries of Foreign Affairs;" "take concrete measures in order to develop trade, tourism, and economic cooperation;" and "implement a dialogue on the historical dimension with the aim to restore mutual confidence between the two nations, including an impartial scientific examination of the historical records and archives to define existing problems and formulate recommendations."⁷

However, what was not included in the Protocols turned out to be as crucial a determining factor in their outcome as what was included. In Armenia, the nationalist Armenia Revolutionary Federation-Dashnaksutyun (ARF-D) severely criticized the

6 Protocol on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between the Republic of Armenia of the Republic of Turkey. Retrieved from www.mfa.gov.tr/data/DISPOLITIKA/turkiye-ermenistan-ingilizce.pdf

7 Protocol on the Development of Relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Turkey. Retrieved from www.mfa.gov.tr/data/DISPOLITIKA/turkiye-ermenistan-ingilizce.pdf

lack of reference to genocide in the text of the Protocols (Palandjian, 2010, p. 9), and 16 of its parliamentarians left the governing coalition in protest (Phillips, 2012, p. 60). This criticism was shared by the otherwise pro-rapprochement Armenian National Congress (ANC) party led by Ter-Petrossian, who stated that “from the viewpoint of real politics there is only one provision in the Protocols unacceptable for the Congress, the one that speaks about the establishment of the joint commission of Armenian and Turkish historians” (Ter-Petrossian, 2009), which would lead in his opinion to the questioning of what is an unquestionable event. Furthermore, while Sargsyan tried to portray the diaspora and Armenia as united behind the Protocols (Palandjian, 2010, p. 2), he received withering criticism from members of the diaspora during his visits to France, Lebanon, Russia and the US to garner support for the Protocols in early October 2009 (BBC, 2009). The Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), in particular, lambasted the Protocols as “the last hurdle to U.S. recognition of the Armenian Genocide” (quoted in Palandjian, 2010, p. 6).

While in Turkey the inclusion of the historical commission was considered a success, the exclusion of any specific mention of Nagorno Karabakh created controversy. In his address to the TGNA on October 21, 2009, Davutoğlu made the argument that the ratification of the Protocols would help lead to a solution to the conflict: “Is there harm [from the Protocols] to friend and brother Azerbaijan? No there is not. It is because of this status quo that for 17 years their land has been under occupation” (quoted in Hürriyet, 2009). The two main opposition parties, the MHP and the Republican People’s Party (CHP) did not accept this logic, however: CHP leader Deniz Baykal stated, “We will not give approval [to the Protocols] as long as Azerbaijan remains under occupation by Armenia” (quoted in Yeni Şafak, 2009). For its part, Azerbaijan reacted with surprise and condemnation to the signing of the Protocols, leading Erdoğan to declare in a speech to the Azerbaijani parliament that the border with Armenia would remain closed until Armenia had withdrawn all of its troops from

Azerbaijani territory, a stricter position than that of the Minsk Group (Phillips, 2012, p. 49).

While diplomats from Armenia and Turkey were able to reach an agreement through the Protocols on a way forward to normalize relations without stated preconditions on either the genocide issue or Nagorno Karabakh, “both sides failed to adopt a public diplomacy strategy, preparing public opinion for compromise” (Phillips, 2012, p. 101). In short, while the leaders were ready for rapprochement, the majority of the publics were not. This is particularly true in Turkey, where a July 2010 German Marshall Fund survey found that 55 percent of Turks opposed the ratification of the Protocols while 29 percent supported the normalization of relations and the opening of the border (Phillips, 2012, p. 72). It thus seems that for rapprochement efforts to be successful the publics must be made aware of and convinced by the arguments for normalization, as well as overcome the stereotypes and biases that underlie the current state of relations – a task that civil society and the media are particularly well-suited to carry out.

Turkey’s Normalization of Relations with Armenia: An Increasingly Internal Process

Just as the major impediments to Armenia and Turkey’s opening the border and establishing relations have in many ways remained the same from 1991 to the present, so too have the incentives for normalization. Armenia remains a small, landlocked country whose closed border with Turkey adversely affects its already weak economy and makes it overly reliant on Georgia for transportation routes, the liability of which became painfully apparent during the Five Day War between Russia and Georgia in August 2008 (Torbakov, 2010, p. 33). An open border with Turkey would also likely lessen the preponderance of Russian influence over the country’s military, political and economic apparatuses (Torbakov, 2010, p. 36). For Turkey, establishing relations with Armenia would allow it to play an increased role in the Caucasus and thus contribute to its aim of becoming a key energy transit country for Europe. Turkey also believes that the normalization

of relations would also make it less likely that foreign governments, particularly the US, would recognize, or criminalize the denial of, the 1915-1917 large-scale massacres and deportations of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire as genocide.

However, recent developments have to some degree reduced the external incentives for Turkey to normalize relations with Armenia. While many analysts previously pointed to pressure from the European Union on Turkey to open the border and recognize the genocide as a motivating factor for Turkey to institute relations (Görgülü, 2008, p. 32), today Turkey's foreign policy operates in what Soner Çağaptay (*Hürriyet Daily News*, 2012) calls a "post-EU world" in which full Turkish EU membership is considered an increasingly distant (and less highly desired) possibility. At the same time, the changed political environment in the Middle East after the 2003 US-led war in Iraq and the 2010 Arab Spring have resulted in Turkey making the Middle East a top foreign policy priority as a market for its goods, influence and ideas (Barkey, 2011). Turkey's key role in these issues, particularly in Syria, also makes it unlikely that US President Barack Obama would jeopardize his good professional relationship with Erdoğan by pushing too hard on the issue of rapprochement. And, in the Caucasus, the accelerating effect (Görgülü et al., 2009, p. 10) that the Russia-Georgia War had on the Armenia-Turkey normalization process in 2008 has dissipated; Turkey's relations with Russia – which has a publicly supportive but privately ambivalent attitude toward Turkish-Armenian rapprochement (Torbakov, 2011, p. 31) – are strong, as evidenced by their recent agreement on the South Stream pipeline project (Karakaya, 2011).

Due to the mitigation of external incentives, at the moment domestic Turkish politics are vital to determining the present and future prospects of rapprochement. In Turkey, the push for rapprochement that eventually resulted in the Protocols was the work of the leaders of one political party, the AKP. The ruling power since November 2002, the AKP has enacted or tried to enact more liberal policies towards Turkey's minority communities, including the

Turkish-Armenian community, compared to previous governments. The same year that Gül led efforts for Turkey-Armenia rapprochement, Erdoğan launched the "Kurdish Opening," which aimed to end the armed struggle with the PKK through granting greater cultural rights and some local autonomy to Kurds, who make up about 20 percent of Turkey's population, while also improving relations with the Iraqi Kurdistan government (Carnegie, 2009). Indeed, many Turkish media outlets even termed the Protocols process as the "Armenian Opening."

The coinciding timing of these two initiatives was one of the factors that shaped nationalist opposition to the Protocols on the part of the CHP and MHP. A month before the Protocols were signed, Baykal stated that "stories and statements about 'openings' have come to an end, but today Turkey has become a country where compared to yesterday disintegration is spoken more and where people fear disintegration" (quoted in CNN Türk, 2009). Similarly, MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli labeled the AKP's initiatives on the Kurdish and Armenian issues as part of a project for the "destruction" of Turkey organized by the United States and other foreign powers (Bahçeli, 2009, p. 12). These attacks were successful enough that in the run-up to the June 2011 Turkish Parliamentary elections instead of defending the by that time stalled Kurdish opening and Protocols process, Erdoğan employed similar nationalist rhetoric in the hope of winning enough MHP votes to achieve a "super majority" in Parliament (see Christie-Miller, 2011).

For Turkey, then, the success – or even initiation – of rapprochement with Armenia is increasingly dependent on domestic political factors. High among these factors is public opinion, which is susceptible to the nationalist rhetoric of politicians. For this reason, Turkish civil society initiatives whose goal is to reduce biases, stereotypes and misperceptions as well as increase knowledge about Armenia and Armenians among the Turkish public are particularly necessary for official rapprochement efforts to succeed.

Re-Defining the Problem: The Persistence of Misperceptions and Biases

“After the murder I went to Hrant Dink’s home, and I saw that it was no different from an Anatolian home. In that home I smelled Anatolia.”⁸

- Bülent Arınç, Deputy Prime Minister of Turkey, January 19, 2012

“In every aspect of life [in Armenia] there are so many traces of Anatolia you could feel like you are in a small Anatolian town.”

- Mehmet Ali İzmir (participant of the Media Reporting Bus Tour), “All Roads in Armenia Lead to Anatolia,” *Star*, May 25, 2011

The murder of Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink in broad daylight in front of the office building of *Agos*, the newspaper of which he was the Editor-in-Chief, on January 19, 2007, and the reaction in Turkey that followed, mark a turning-point in Turkey’s internal debate on the Armenian issue. In his writings in *Agos* and various Turkish newspapers as well as his appearances on television shows, Dink had spoken openly about his views on Turkish and Armenian identity and the massacres and deportations of the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire. In 2002, he was charged with “insulting Turkishness” under Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code after stating in a speech in Şanlıurfa, “I am not a Turk... but an Armenian from Turkey” (Dink, 2007a). While he was acquitted of that charge in 2006, in 2004 he was tried again for an article he wrote in *Agos* that examined evidence that Sabiha Gökçen, an adopted daughter of Turkey’s founding leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, was of Armenian origin (ESI, 2009, p. 7). He was murdered before he was about to appeal another case to the European

Court of Human Rights in which he was sentenced to six months in prison for an article he had published in February 2004 (Dink, 2007b).

Dink was part of a larger group of intellectuals who pushed the Turkish state for greater freedom to discuss issues relating to Armenians particularly in the 2000s (ESI, 2009, p. 3). In 2005, a group of such intellectuals and historians held a conference in Istanbul entitled “The Ottoman Armenians during the Era of Ottoman Decline” as part of the Workshop on Armenian-Turkey Scholarship (Sunny, 2009, p. 942). Unable to take place at Bosphorus or Sabancı universities due to last minute court orders, the conference finally went ahead at Bilgi University in September (ESI, 2009, p. 7). In response, Minister of Justice Cemil Çiçek declared that the participants in the conference “stabbed us in the back” – an expression that references the nationalist view of the actions of the Ottoman Greeks and Armenians at the end of WWI – and that “we need to end this period of betrayal to the nation” (quoted in *Hürriyet*, 2005).

Despite nationalist backlash, this movement continued, and its significant support among part of the Turkish public became strikingly clear during Dink’s funeral on January 23, 2007, when tens of thousands joined a procession from the place of the murder to the church where the funeral service was to be held carrying signs reading “We are all Hrant; we are all Armenians” (Sunny, 2009, p. 944). On April 24 (the date on which Armenians commemorate the “Meds

⁸ Quoted in *Radikal* (2012, Jan 19). Arınç’tan Dink davası hakimine sert tepki [A sharp reaction to the Dink case judge from Arınç]. Retrieved from <http://213.243.16.15/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetayV3&ArticleID=1076089&CategoryID=78>

Yeghern” or “Great Catastrophe”) of that year the first public commemoration in Turkey took place in Taksim square in downtown Istanbul (Phillips, 2012, p. 36). And in December 2008, 230 prominent Turkish intellectuals (ESI, 2009, p. 9) signed an online petition entitled “I apologize,” which states: “My conscience does not accept remaining deaf to and the denial of the Great Catastrophe that the Ottoman Armenians were subjected to in 1915. I reject this injustice, share my Armenian brothers’ feeling and pain, and apologize to them.” As of March 2012, over 30,000 signatures had been collected.⁹

AKP leaders, particularly Erdoğan, have sometimes distanced themselves from or acted in contrary to these developments. Erdoğan voiced his disapproval of the apology campaign, stating that “we didn’t commit a crime that would mean we should apologize” (quoted in Kanal A Haber, 2008). Two years later, after the US House of Representatives passed a resolution recognizing the massacres of 1915 as genocide, Erdoğan threatened to expel the “100,000” Armenians working without permission in Turkey (Yeni Şafak, 2010). And on January 8, 2011, Erdoğan declared that the “Humanity Statue,” constructed in 2006 in the border city of Kars at the initiative of local leaders as a symbol of Armenia-Turkey friendship, was a “monstrosity,” and it was later destroyed (Aktemur, 2011). The latter two events in particular received wide coverage in the Armenian press, further negatively affecting perceptions in Armenia in an atmosphere already tainted by the failure of the Protocols to be ratified.

On the other hand, the AKP has also instituted policies that have supported Armenia-Turkey reconciliation, often by challenging the ultra-nationalist “deep state” institutions and mentality opposed to the AKP itself. In 2007, the AKP restored the ancient Armenian church on the island of Akhtamar on Lake Van in eastern Turkey, with Armenian officials attending the opening ceremony (BBC, 2007); later, in September 2010, the first mass was held at the

church, which some members of the Armenia diaspora attended (Head, 2010). In August 2008, long-time Turkish Historical Society president Yusuf Halaçoğlu was removed from office the year after he claimed that many Alevi Kurds are “unfortunately actually Armenian” (CNN Türk, 2008). In addition, despite Erdoğan’s rhetoric in 2010, the Turkish Ministry of Education decided to allow non-citizens of Turkey, such as the children of unofficial Armenian workers, to attend the schools of Turkey’s minority communities in January 2012 (Habertürk, 2012). That same month, while falling short of condemnation, Erdoğan (Sabah, 2012) acknowledged the public’s outrage at the ruling in Dink’s murder trial.

Of course, none of these positive developments occurred without nationalist reaction in Turkey, such as Bahçeli’s praying at Ani, the ancient Armenian capital located near Kars (CNN Türk, 2010). At the same time, details like the AKP’s refusal to let a cross be placed on top of the Akhtamar church was used as evidence by some Armenians who believe the renovation and service amounts to little more than “propaganda” (see Sassounian, 2010). While issues related to Armenia and Armenians can be debated in the Turkish public sphere more freely compared to the past (ESI, 2009, p. 10), misperceptions and mistrust still exist, shaping Armenia’s views of developments in Turkey and vice versa.

From Problem to Solution? Media, Civil Society and the Dialogue-Building Project

In their study entitled “Armenian-Turkish Citizens’ Mutual Perceptions and Dialogue Project,” Kentel and Poghosyan (2004) conducted extensive surveys in Turkey and Armenia to discern both the level of knowledge and perceptions of the two societies. They found that while Turks had both positive and negative perceptions of Armenians roughly varying by higher to lower economic class, “for Turks, the neighboring Armenia is an unknown country” (p. 43). The authors recommended the development of media as a way to address this lack of information, as the media provides an

⁹ The petition can be viewed at www.ozurdiliyoruz.com

alternative channel for information outside of the official state discourse (p. 47).

Yet, in the way that it covers Turkey-Armenia relations at present, the Turkish media at least can be seen as generally having more of an exacerbating than alleviating effect on these misperceptions. Based on a survey of 450 Turkish newspaper articles from between April 2006 to April 2009, Boratav (2009) found in a GPoT Center report that coverage of Armenia-Turkey relations follows the state agenda and the statements of politicians, and that human-interest stories involving Armenians are noticeably absent (p. 13). As a result, most of the “Turkish press is over-representing the Turkish view to the Turkish readers. The Armenian view is seriously disadvantaged, if not completely excluded” (p. 13). The “Media Research Report” of the YPC and Izmir University’s Faculty of Communications that examined the media representation of key events in Turkey-Armenia relations from 2008 to 2010 similarly found that relations are treated as a “state affair” rather than one with human dimensions (p. 36).

Since the foundation of the Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council (TABDC) in 1997 and the Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission (TARC)¹⁰ in July 2001 (Phillips, 2012, p. 16), numerous civil society organizations in Turkey and Armenia have been active in facilitating people-to-people contact between the two societies. While TABDC deals with economic issues and TARC dealt with the political and historical aspects of the relationship, at present Turkish NGOs are working on every area of relations, including the media.¹¹ Despite difficulties in organizing events due in part to the existence of only twice a week pre-dawn direct flights between the two countries and some visa restrictions, these organizations have made

much progress in advancing the normalization of relations within the past decade.

However, the results of the media bias studies show that much work still needs to be done to change misperceptions and increase knowledge about Armenia in Turkey and vice versa. The “Dialogue-Building between Turkey and Armenia” project was conceived to address this issue on a large scale, with four activities involving dozens of participants from each country over the course of 16 months. The articles published, films produced and television show episodes broadcast in Turkey as a result of this project all grapple with the major issues in the relationship using human-interest stories, adding a sympathetic personal dimension to the otherwise impersonal political news stories that dominate the Turkish-Armenia media agenda. While some might argue that the project was less effective because it started after the suspension of the Protocols, we believe that the failure of the Protocols in fact demonstrates the need for civil society organizations and governments to once again focus on tackling the fundamental misperceptions and lack of knowledge that underlie the relationship in the respective domestic contexts.

As Arsenault et al. (2011) note, “the media’s ability to produce change [in conflict areas] is neither straightforward or self-evident.” At the same time, however, its power as a means of communicating information and ideas between societies closed to one another should not be overlooked. While the media and civil society initiatives cannot undo the past, they can shape the terms of reference with which the past is interpreted. Thus, in bus tour journalist Mehmet Ali İzmir’s rendering, Anatolia is presented not as a land that divides Armenia and Turkey over territorial claims and a violent history, but rather one that unites the two societies in their common love and connection to it. Bülent Arınç’s touching upon the same theme reflects the fact that politicians both have perceptions and play a role in shaping those perceptions among the public. The Dialogue-Building Project’s goal to encourage such positive, unifying perceptions was by and large successfully accomplished, as will be demonstrated in the following sections.

¹⁰ For more on TARC, see Phillips, D. L. (2005). *Unsilencing the Past: Track Two Diplomacy and Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation*. USA: Berghahn Books.

¹¹ Some of these organizations include Anadolu Kültür (Anatolian Culture); Toplum Gönüllüleri (Community Volunteers Foundation); the Hrant Dink Foundation; the Heinrich Böll Foundation – Turkey office; and the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV).

The Dialogue-Building between Turkey and Armenia Project

YOUTH EXCHANGE

The aim of this activity was to have six Turkish and six Armenian students reflect on how they see the neighboring country from the other side of the border through directing ten-minute documentaries. As it is hard for people to visualize the unknown, seeing images of the people about whom they have misperceptions provides an effective way for them to re-examine their preconceived ideas. Cinema has the significant power to transmit emotions to the target audience when words are not enough. Moreover, films exist in perpetuity, and thus have the potential to impact future generations.

“I believe exchange activities between Turkey and Armenia will help the people of two countries to learn and know each other. I am happy to have been a part of this project since all parties and participants were very enthusiastic to actualize the goals of the project.”

Lülüfer Körükmez

On December 20, 2010, GPoT Center hosted the Armenian participants of the project in Istanbul Kültür University for a roundtable discussion. GPoT staff briefed the students about its mission, Turkish-Armenian relations and Turkey’s current foreign policy. They also had the chance to pose questions regarding Turkish society and life in Istanbul. After a small discussion session, the students were more informed about Turkish culture. In the following six days in Istanbul, the students were trained in documentary filmmaking by Mehmet Binay, Caner Alper and their colleagues from CAM Film, a production company based in Istanbul.

“I went to Istanbul very excited and intrigued. The idea of making a documentary seemed to be a big challenge and an adventure for me. And it really was! The experience we gained during the project was great: we saw the city, felt the colours of it, shared our ideas and professional views with Turkish colleagues. And finally I made documentary on the topic I have always dreamed to make. I am happy that I have been given the chance to be part of this dialogue project.”

Ani Stepanyan

During the first visit of the students from Turkey to Armenia the week of February 21, 2011, Internews Armenia hosted the participants for a one-week training in which they participated in lectures given by notable Armenian directors and academics. During the training, both the Turkish and Armenian participants of the project had the chance to bond while visiting important cultural and historic sites in and around Yerevan. After doing research in the city, they also finalized the topics they would cover in their respective documentaries.

After several discussions on potential themes of the films, the students prepared the scripts and visited the neighboring country for three to four-day trips on their own or in pairs in order to shoot their documentary films, working with a cameraman from the partner organization.

In the course of filming, however, some of the students realized that the ideas they had conceived for their documentaries in their home country were not always applicable to the neighboring



Bulut Tar, Işıl Şahin, Armen Sargsyan, Burag Peksezer and Halil İbrahim Ünal view Ani from the Armenia-Turkey border in December 2011. (Credit: David Hovsepyan)

“The most important thing that this activity provided me was to let me to make an international film. I had the chance to learn a new culture and to meet with new people. I had an amazing experience and made great friendships through this project.”

Bulut Tar

country. For instance, one of the participants from Turkey chose to make his documentary about Mount Ararat, and traveled to Armenia in the spring in order to shoot clear images of the mountain. However, he ended up not being able to film the mountain because of the unexpectedly foggy weather. Despite his disappointment about being unable to film Ararat, in the end he used photographs to complete his film. Another participant who was planning to shoot her documentary on the sounds of Armenia had a similar experience. When she travelled to Armenia, she realized that Yerevan was not as noisy as Istanbul, and she changed her topic accordingly. While such cultural and geographical

differences between the two countries created challenges for the students, they also helped the participants understand the neighboring country from a deeper perspective.



The Turkish and Armenian participants of the Youth Exchange meet with US Ambassador to Armenia Marie L. Yovanavitch in February 2011 at the Internews Armenia offices (Credit: Internews Armenia)

“This project was quite satisfying in terms of cultural exchange and filming experiences. I personally learned a great deal of special things and had unforgettable memories. I am grateful to everyone but especially to Armen [project coordinator at Internews Armenia] who was always with us and never said ‘no’.”

Burag Peksezer

Compared to the other project activities, a special feature of the Youth Exchange was the engagement of students. The impact of the students’ involvement was very high due to their eagerness and enthusiasm. Both the Turkish and Armenian participants were open to talk about and discuss the issues between the two communities, and they were also curious about learning about each other’s cultures. In addition, as young people are much more active in the social media, the participants of the Youth Exchange still publicize our project by sharing their work and experiences in social media platforms. Based



The Turkish and Armenian participants with Internews staff visit Khor Virap, a monastery near the Turkish border in Armenia.

“The Documentary Filmmaking activity positively contributed to the Dialogue-Building Project, and it showed once again that the problem between Turkey and Armenia is only political.”

Selin Kırımlı

on the positive results of this activity, we believe that more opportunities should be created for the engagement of youth in these types of projects. By attending such projects, their point of view will be shaped based on their experiences, and this will help them to counter stereotypes against their neighbors.

As of March 2012, the films that were produced both in Turkey and Armenia have been screened

“From the beginning I decided to make a film on the general image of Istanbul. During the editing I understood that it would be more interesting if I used the poems of the Armenian poet Zahrad, who was born, lived and died in Istanbul. The project aimed to build media dialogue between Armenia and Turkey, so using Zahrad’s poems for showing Turkish culture is a kind of cultural dialogue as well, in my opinion.”

Sergey Kirakosyan

in several platforms, and our participants are still seeking venues to show their films to a wider audience. The first screenings was held in Armenia between December 5 and 7, 2011 with the participation of the Turkish and Armenian participants. The films were screened at the Club Restaurant, Slavonic University and the State Theater and Cinema Institute in Yerevan, as well as the Sakharov Center based in Gyumri. On December 16, 2011 the films were screened in Turkey for the first time at Anadolu University in Eskişehir, and later at Istanbul Kültür University on December 23, 2011. The Istanbul Kültür University screening and the films received press coverage on the Habertürk television station; Jamanak, a Turkish-Armenian newspaper; and the Gamurç/Köprü program on the IMC TV network.

JOURNALISM EXCHANGE



Müge Akgün (left) visits the Papayan family in Garni, Armenia. Mrs. Papayan (seated) is from Ani, which she particularly requested to be mentioned in the caption of her photograph. (Credit: *Narod Maraşliyan*)

“It is apparent that, in order for the two countries to understand each other better, Turkey needs to remember its past while Armenia needs to not keep its pain so alive and forget its past. It’s time for the two societies to overcome the weight of the past. I hope that the [closed] border crossing between us will open in the near future and that the two societies will be able to a greater degree to become closer to one another.”

Müge Akgün,
“To Look at Ararat from Yerevan,”
Radikal, November 26, 2011

The thirteen Turkish and Armenian journalists chosen to participate in the journalism exchange activity made up a diverse group in terms of age, experience, and the ideological leanings of the media outlets in which they work. Yet generally, all of the journalists lacked extensive knowledge of and previous experience with the neighboring country. As Mutlu Tönbekici wrote in her column in the Turkish daily *Vatan* on November 22, 2011 after her arrival to Armenia, “I came with complicated, strange feelings. Armenia has been our neighbor for thousands of years but I know nothing, I mean nothing, about Yerevan!” This reflects the reality that while Turkey-Armenia relations and Turkey-related news are often on the top of the news agenda in Armenia, news about Armenia in Turkey is usually restricted to times when bills recognizing the massacres of Ottoman Armenians in 1915-1917 as genocide are discussed in foreign parliaments or by foreign politicians.

For the Armenian journalists, their one-month fellowship from April 18 to May 15 2011 in Istanbul allowed them both to learn more about and to examine their previous ideas about Turkey, and to write stories about Turkish society and culture often lacking in Armenian press coverage of Turkey.

Through meetings with experts such as Dr. Fuat Keyman, director of Sabancı University’s Istanbul Policy Center; Mr. Yavuz Baydar, columnist at *Today’s Zaman* and ombudsman at *Sabah* daily; and Mr. Ferhat Boratav of CNN Turk, the journalists were briefed on the current issues in Turkish politics and media. In addition to covering issues in domestic Turkish politics, the journalists also had the opportunity to write about stories related to Turkey-Armenia relations, such as the public commemoration of the 1915 tragedy of about 100 people in downtown Istanbul (Simonian, 2011),



Sonia Tashjian, famous Armenian cuisine television host and writer, hosts Müge Akgün in her kitchen.

“Every house wants to see it. Every hotel next to it advertises that you can see it from their premises. In every store, workplace, restaurant, art gallery and probably every house one can find a photograph, a painting, or an illustration of Ararat. I understand now that what the Bosphorus is for Istanbul, Ararat is for Yerevan. Ararat is Yerevan’s Bosphorus. It’s as if this city lives for Ararat. If they were not monotheistic, if they did not believe in God, they definitely would have worshiped Ararat.”

Mutlu Tönbekici, “Like Dried Herbs, a City of Dried Memories,”
Vatan, November 24, 2011

and the exhibition of photographs and interviews with Turks and Armenians from villages along the Turkey-Armenia border by Turkish artist Erhan Arık entitled “Horovel” (Abrahamyan, 2011).

In addition, two groups of Turkish journalists traveled to Armenia as part of the journalism exchange. The first group of journalists, from the state-owned TRT network, shot a documentary about life and culture in Armenia in June 2011. As it deals with modern Armenia, the documentary will be the first of its kind to be broadcast on TRT, standing in stark contrast to the historical documentaries about 1915-1917 such as the “Sarı Gelin” (“Blond-Haired Bride”) (ESI, 2009, p. 5). During their stay in Armenia from November 20-24, 2011, the second group of journalists (all working for mainstream, widely read Turkish print newspapers) had the opportunity to meet with Salpi Ghazarian, the director of the Civilitas Foundation; Richard Giragosian, the director of the Regional Studies Center; and Sonia Tashjian, the famous cuisine television program host and writer, among other important Armenian political and cultural figures.

As the excerpts from their articles show, these Turkish journalists addressed the major issues in an informed, personal manner that contributed positively to the internal Turkish discourse on the normalization of Turkey-Armenia relations.

“When I came across the little glass bottles filled with earth from Kars, Muş and Ani and the water from Van Lake [all located in modern day Turkey] on the wall on a small restaurant named Mer Gyux (Our Village) on Sayat Nova Street my eyes teared up. The next day I met with the Ruben-Ruzen Papayan couple, who have been giving free painting and sculpture lessons to children in the village of Garni for twenty years. Mrs. Ruzen showed me the dried flowers that she had placed in the nicest corner of her living room. ‘I gathered them from Van, Kars, Diyarbakır,’ she said. Again I felt the same feeling. I remembered what Hrant Dink had said at every opportunity when he was debating on TV, the story of the Armenian woman who returned from Europe to her village in Sivas to die there. My belief that these two publics, which love the same land so deeply despite all the pain that was experienced, will be steadfast friends once they meet face to face was strengthened.”

Serhan Yediğ, “The Land of Ani, the Water of Van, the Nostalgia of Yerevan,” Hürriyet, December 5, 2011



Erdal Güven, Mutlu Tönbekici and Serhan Yediğ (center to right) are briefed by Salpi Ghazarian, the director of the Civilitas Foundation, in Yerevan. (Credit: Narod Maraşlıyan)

MEDIA REPORTING BUS TOUR

The media reporting bus tour, beginning in Istanbul and ending in Yerevan, was carried out with the participation of eight Armenian and eight Turkish journalists between May 3-18, 2011. The aim of this activity was to provide these journalists with the opportunity to report on issues related to the neighboring country, including human-stories reflecting the characteristics of that society, as well as to form a network to facilitate future collaboration on Turkish-Armenian media-based normalization projects. The 15 articles published in major Turkish newspapers as a result of this activity in May and June 2011, all of them as multi-part series, reflect that the Turkish media has an interest in the issue of Turkish-Armenia relation even outside of crisis times. This suggests that, at least some of the mainstream Turkish media is willing to play a positive role in the normalization process when presented with opportunities to do so. Given the media's key role in shaping public opinion, the scope of the impact that the media can have on the rapprochement process should not be overlooked.



Aysel Yaşa, Özgün Özçer and Hakkı Özdal (left to right) attend a roundtable meeting at the Asparez Journalist Club in Gyumri, Armenia. (Credit: Tigran Tadevosyan)

As the Turkish media's agenda at the time of the bus tour was dominated by the 2011 parliamentary elections, there was a real possibility that the

journalists, even those interested in the Project, would not be able to attend the two-week program. While this was reflected in some last minute changes, GPoT found journalists who were very eager to participate in the Dialogue-Building Project between Turkey and Armenia.

“We, as the six ‘lucky’ journalists from Turkey, had the chance to trace the Armenian community that used to live in Anatolia and also get to know Armenia through the Armenian participants of the tour. On the 3000-kilometer road, the Turkish and Armenian journalists and also the organizers of the tour created our own story and tried to understand each other’s feelings. We thus comprehend the meaning of East Anatolia for the Armenian journalists, whose families were deported from Erzurum, Kars, Doğubeyazıt, Van and Muş.”

Özgün Özçer, “Let my Daughter Remember, my Grandchild Forget,” Taraf, May 26, 2011

The Armenian journalists travelled to Istanbul from Yerevan by plane and joined their Turkish colleagues in Istanbul. After spending one night in Istanbul, the group flew to Adana, the fifth largest metropolis of Turkey.

Of the places visited in Turkey, Vakıflıköy was one of the most interesting for the journalists. Because it is known as the only remaining Armenian village in Turkey, they wanted to get as much as information they could from the people living there. They held a long interview with Berç Kartun, the *mukhtar* (the head of the village) and the other active members of the community. The one of the main reasons that our participants

were very much interested in this place was the multicultural characteristic of the area. As Berç Kartun told that Hatay cuisine is famous with its rich food culture, not because of the good chefs are being raised in this area, but it is just because of the different cultures living together. With its

“The city to which we are going is just like a mosaic of civilizations. Indeed, people from every nation, religion, race and language live here peacefully in a way that is an example to the world. Yes, I am talking about Antakya. Antakya is a very important city for the Armenian journalists, because it has the only remaining Armenian village: Vakiŕt. After 1915 it was the last village to remain.”

Aysel Yaŕa, “We Have Drifted Apart,
My Brother,”
Yeni Ŗafak, May 21, 2011

multicultural characteristics, this place stands as a model for the region.

Following Antakya, the group visited Ŗanlıurfa, Diyarbakır, Van and Kars in the Turkey part of the tour. After changing buses on the Turkish-Georgian border, they arrived and spent a day in Akhaltsikhe in Georgia. Even though it was a notable travel experience for all the participants,

“Gyumri is the closest city between Turkey and Armenia. The distance from the second metropolis of Armenia to the Turkish border is only eight kilometers, and 50 kilometers to the Kars city center. However, we pass through Armenia via Georgia, which means extending the road 450 kilometers...”

Mehmet Ali İzmır, “All Roads in Armenia Lead to Anatolia,” Star, May 25, 2011

entering Armenia via Georgia remains a problem between Turkey and Armenia because of the closed border.

Alongside blocking interactions, the closed border hinders the economic development of two countries, particularly Armenia. According to Markar Esayan of *Taraf* newspaper, opening the borders will not only contribute to Armenia’s economic development, but also Turkey’s: as

“In almost all of the cities outside of Yerevan, economic imbalance and poverty are conspicuous. It still has problems of corruption and bribery that sprung up after the end of the Soviet regime and have continued to the present day. But the effect of the closed border with Turkey on the economic backwardness of these cities is great. With its large population and economic potential, Turkey could become an important trade area for Armenian cities.”

Hakkı Özdal, “There was a ‘Protocol,’
What Happened?”
Radikal, May 28, 2011

Armenia has a free trade agreement with Russia, Turkey would be able to send its goods to Russia via Armenia without paying customs duty (Afat & Turan, 2009).

Crossing the Georgian-Armenian border, the group continued their way by visiting Gyumri, Alaverdi, Vanadzor, Dilijan, Goris, Meğri and Yerevan in Armenia. The most solemn visit during the Armenian part of the tour was Gyumri because of the physical and psychological damage of the 1988 earthquake. After attending a roundtable at the Asparez Journalist Club, the journalists had the opportunity to choose where to visit. They all agreed on visiting a family living in a temporary shelter after the earthquake, even though they could have chosen to visit a museum and other sites in the city.



An Armenian family living in a shelter in Gyumri hosts the bus tour group in their home. (Credit: Tigran Tadevosyan)

“We are in a neighborhood that consists of temporary shelters. We are visiting the six-person Palonyan family, which includes two sons, their sister-in-law and a grandchild. Granddaughter Anahit wanders from one lap to the next. Her father, who was three-years-old when the earthquake happened, is unemployed like most of his peers. They are hosting us, saying that offering is a custom in Armenian tradition. It has been said that 3,000 families will be moved to the new houses in two years. However, the ones who did not own a house before will not have this opportunity. We see that wounds made by earthquakes do not discriminate between geographies.”

Burcu Ballıktaş, “Let Your Way be Cotton,” Bianet, June 2, 2011

In October 2011, the city of Van in southeastern Turkey experienced severe damage and loss of life after a massive earthquake of 7.2 magnitude struck the city. According to Armen Sargsyan, project coordinator at Internews Armenia,

many Armenians were very saddened because they had experienced the same disaster in 1988, and they shared their empathy and sorrow via social media. Shared pains may bring the societies and also the states closer together, and could be commemorated together through joint ceremonies. However, the aim of the Dialogue-Building Project was to bring these two societies together in positive platforms. As reflected in the articles written by the project participants, the bus tour was a successful example of this.



Kristine Aghalaryan, Sona Kocharyan, Astghik Karapetian, Mehmet Ali İzmir, Burcu Ballıktaş and Narod Maraşlıyan (left to right) tour near Goris, Armenia (Credit: Tigran Tadevosyan)

TV TALK SHOWS

Even more than print media, television media in Turkey serves as both a liability and an opportunity for civil society organizations looking to advance the normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia due to the scope of its reach to Turkish citizens. After it was opened to private companies in the 1990s, the Turkish television sector became the top media source in Turkey, reaching over 98% of Turkish residents (Sözeri & Güney, 2011, p. 51). Yet like its print counterpart, the television media in Turkey generally does not dedicate much airtime to covering Turkey-Armenia relations, except during times when foreign parliaments or governments consider laws or make statements regarding genocide. In addition, no Turkish television company has an official correspondent or branch office in Armenia, which means most segments about Armenia include stock footage instead of interviews with Armenians. As a result, even when lacking strong bias or negativity, news coverage of Armenia on Turkish television networks is mostly impersonal and political (Boratav, 2009, p. 13).

In order to address this issue, GPoT Center and its partners supported the production of 27 episodes of two television talk show programs, one in Armenia and one in Turkey, that focused exclusively on Turkey-Armenia relations. In Armenia, 14 episodes of the the program “Yerkragund” (“Globe”), broadcast between April and November 2011 on the Yerkir Media TV network,¹² were devoted to topics in Armenia-Turkey relations. The program covered various issues related to Turkey’s internal and external

politics and Turkish-Armenian relations, including the parliamentary elections, the Van earthquake, the activities of Turkish human rights activists, and Turkey’s reaction to the Arab Spring. Guests were both Armenian and foreign journalists, historians, NGO activists and in certain cases political figures (including members of parliament). Kadri Gürsel, the winner of the first Turkey-Armenia Journalism Award organized by GPoT Center and YPC, was among the Turkish guests who appeared on the show.

In Turkey, on the other hand, 13 episodes of the *Gamurç/Köprü* (“Bridge” in Armenian and Turkish, respectively) talk show were produced on the IMC TV network between August and September 2011. IMC TV is a news channel that was founded in May 2011 with the aim of being the voice of marginalized and “othered” groups in Turkey (Karaca, 2011). The first program of its kind in Turkey to focus exclusively on Turkey-Armenia relations, *Gamurç/Köprü* hosted journalists, academics, businesspeople and civil society representatives knowledgeable about, or actively involved in, Turkey-Armenia relations, including Mete Çubukçu of the NTV television network; Osman Kavala, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Anadolu Kültür; and Dr. Cengiz Aktar of Bahçeşehir University. Turkish-Armenians and Armenians also appeared as guests; the shows’ topics covered issues such as the second church service on Akhtamar island, the Pan-Armenian games, and the state of education for the children of Armenian immigrants in Turkey. In addition, every episode of *Gamurç/Köprü* contained a segment with news from Armenia, often including interviews with Armenians. In this way, *Gamurç/Köprü* helped the voices and issues of Armenia and Armenians in all their diversity be accessible to a Turkish audience.

In order to understand in more detail the importance of *Yerkragund* and *Gamurç/Köprü* in

¹² Yerkir Media is broadcast through satellite and widely watched by Armenians in the diaspora; in fact, Yerkir Media is affiliated with the Armenian Revolutionary Federation-Dashnaktsutyun (ARF-D), a political party popular in the diaspora that opposes the Protocols. For more information, see www.arfd.info

the context of the role of the media in Turkey-Armenia relations, GPoT Center interviewed the two journalists who were deeply involved in their creation and execution: Aris Nalçı of IMC TV and turşu.tv, and Mikayel Zolyan of the Yerevan Press Club.

Interview with Aris Nalçı

Aris Nalçı is the host and producer of the *Gamurç/Köprü* television program on IMC TV and the founder of the production company turşu.tv. He is a frequent commentator and consultant on Turkey-Armenia relations.

1) In your opinion, has the media in Turkey generally had a positive or negative impact on the normalization process of Armenia-Turkey relations?

Generally the media has played a positive role in Turkey-Armenia relations. We see this particularly in the last five years. Before they write something about Armenia journalists in Turkey think twice and check the information with Armenia, because as many people go and come that's how many people meet one another. Just from the projects I know of and participated in there are 30 journalists, and these journalists act carefully on every news topic related to Armenia. I also see this: five years ago when Armenia's location was even written incorrectly in the newspapers now at least these things are prevented. In other words, there is sensitivity when news is being written about Armenia. For example, even when pessimistic news was being written about Armenia after the passage of the French resolution [making the denial of the killings of 1915-1917 as genocide a crime], the language used in the media tended toward the perspective that this was not connected to Armenia, and showed that journalists can think of the diaspora and Armenia separately. The reason that are able to do this is because of these [exchange] programs. And many of the journalists I know say they want to do more work in Armenia.

2) What media-based initiatives would you like to see carried out in the future to support the

normalization process? In other words, how can the Turkish media help the normalization process?

In addition to the foundation of a joint press club, I believe that there can be more exchange of newspaper columns. For example, I am advising on a project where articles written in Turkey are published in Armenian newspapers and articles written in Armenia are translated and published in Turkish newspapers. This is just as important for making the names and faces from Turkey known in Armenia as it is for people here. An editor from Turkey who publishes articles translated from Armenian to Turkish acts more carefully when doing news related to Armenia or Turkey-Armenia relations. In Armenia there are news portals that publish in Turkish, but they don't know what is written in the newspapers, and they don't know the editors, even by name. But for example when a piece by someone like Cengiz Çandar from *Radikal* gets translated and published in Armenia, journalists there ask themselves, "Oh, these things are also being talked about in Turkey?" Media is actually doing forward-looking advertising in this way; in fact, it is introducing people to one another.

3) What is the main goal of *Gamurç/Köprü*?

The main purpose of *Gamurç/Köprü* is to emphasize the common sides of both the Turkish and Armenian publics, and to demonstrate the existence and persistence of Turkey-Armenia relations. We now have filmed over thirty episodes: if there is enough material for *Gamurç/Köprü* to do an episode every week, that means that Turkey-Armenia relations are very active. There are many developments, but they are just not visible. *Gamurç/Köprü*'s goal is to make them visible.

4) How did you come up with the idea for *Gamurç/Köprü*? What is *Gamurç/Köprü*'s target audience?

The idea for *Gamurç/Köprü* came a year ago. Turkey-Armenia relations were in a very complicated state at that time; according to some they were "frozen." We thus came up with the idea of the *Gamurç/Köprü* television show in order

to show that relations are not frozen and that developments are still occurring. At the same time, television programs are a more visual thing [than conferences], and can be followed on the internet, which increases their reach outside of Istanbul, Izmir and Ankara, where most Turkey-Armenia activities take place. Our target audience is not Armenia or Armenians, but rather Turks, both those living in Turkey and the diaspora.

5) In the interviews and video segments on Gamurç/Köprü, you cover all aspects of Armenia-Turkey relations: business, culture, media, academia, etc. In which of these areas do you think civil society initiatives are most effective in advancing relations between the two countries, and why?

I believe that civil society organizations are most effective in the business and culture/art/cinema areas of Turkey-Armenia relations. On Gamurç/Köprü I hosted businesspeople from Turkey and Armenia. Because they are dealing with a real thing [money] they are face to face with reality. They explain how the trade to Armenia is increasing but not officially, how more work can be done together in Armenia, Turkey, Georgia and third-party countries, and the very significant obstacles that they have to overcome.

In the field of culture/art, perhaps the most important first step to be taken was Turkish and Armenian directors coming together in film festivals. We also screened a number of documentaries filmed in Armenia on Gamurç/Köprü and spoke with their directors. Even more important than their films are the experiences they have there.

6) Many episodes of Gamurç/Köprü feature interviews with Turkish-Armenians, and you yourself are Turkish-Armenian. What special role, if any, do you believe that Turkish-Armenians can play in media-based initiatives for the normalization of Turkey-Armenia relations?

We gave a lot of space on our program to Turkish-Armenians. When they go to Armenia Turkish businesspeople use Turkish-Armenians as a bridge, because of the fact that they speak the

same language (albeit a different dialect) builds partnership. At the same time, about six or seven times television programs came from Armenia to Turkey and did news stories about us. The reason for this was the fact that an Armenian from Turkey does the program. If a Turkish person was doing the program most likely the Armenian television programs would not have trusted him/her and would not have come. When I went to Armenia for an episode of Gamurç/Köprü, some people at the television companies there told me that if I am able to do a program in Turkey then a way has been opened for them. They expressed their wish to open an office in Turkey. This is because for Armenia Turkey is a very important topic. A Turkish television network's having an office in Brussels is of the same importance as an Armenian one's having an office in Turkey.

7) What are your plans for the future of Gamurç/Köprü?

There are about 10-15 Armenian students who are officially studying in Turkish universities at present. Some of these students worked as journalists in Armenia. In the future, we would like to show the image of Armenians living in Turkey by including them in Gamurç/Köprü... While perhaps on a smaller scale due to funding constraints, Gamurç/Köprü will nevertheless continue.

Interview with Mikayel Zolyan

Mikayel Zolyan coordinates Armenia-Turkey programs at the Yerevan Press Club. A historian by training, he also teaches courses on history and politics in V. Brusov State Linguistic University in Yerevan.

1) In your opinion, has the media in Armenia generally had a positive or negative impact on the normalization process of Armenia-Turkey relations?

It may be hard to assess the impact of the media in general as completely negative or completely positive. There are at least two reasons for that. First, media in Armenia is quite diverse not only in terms of the political-ideological orientation

and level of professionalism but also in terms of the level of independence. While print media and alternative media enjoy a relatively high degree of independence, the majority of broadcast media is mostly dependent on the government (either directly or through the owners who are close to the government circles), therefore the coverage of Armenian-Turkish relations mostly followed the government line, which in turn has been changing under the influence of external political circumstances. However, and this is the second factor which explains why it is difficult to give an unequivocal assessment of the role of the media, even in the independent media the coverage of Armenia-Turkey relations has been changing under the influence of internal and external circumstances. However, we can say that at certain periods, as during the period of football diplomacy, at least some parts of the Armenian media landscape acted as a space for vibrant and sometimes quite open discussions on the future of Armenia-Turkey relations, thus providing an important service to society.

2) What media-based initiatives would you like to see carried out in the future to support the normalization process? In other words, how can the Armenian media help the normalization process?

The Armenian media has been focused mostly on issues that are of immediate concern to Armenians such as football diplomacy or genocide recognition campaign, however Armenian society still does not receive a more complete picture of today's Turkey, its internal life and its international standing. The Armenian media should focus more on the internal life of Turkey and its foreign relations, thus providing the Armenian public an opportunity to understand this country better and thus to be able to form a more informed opinion on issue of Armenia-Turkey relations.

3) It is sometimes stated that Turkey and Armenia-Turkey relations are always on the top of the foreign policy agenda in Armenia,

whereas the opposite is true for Turkey. How would you describe the television news coverage of Turkey in Armenia?

I wouldn't agree with the assessment that Armenia-Turkey relations are always on the top of foreign policy agenda in Armenia. While it remained one of the most well-covered topics for a long time during the football diplomacy, it lost this position after the Protocol ratification process was frozen. However, even when other issues come on top of the agenda, such as Karabakh conflict resolution and Armenia's cooperation with European partners, the Armenia-Turkey issue remains among the most widely covered topics. In general it can be said that the coverage usually follows the political (and other) developments.

4) What is the aim of Yerkragund?

The aim of Yerkragund is to bring opinions of independent and professional experts and analysts [including Turks] onto Armenian TV, and thus contribute to better understanding of international and regional politics, particularly issues important and relevant for Armenia, such as Armenian-Turkish relations, European integration (with a focus on ENP and EaP), Karabakh conflict resolution, etc.

5) What are your plans for the future of Yerkragund?

Yerkragund began with the Dialogue-Building Project, but parallel to programs on Armenia-Turkey relations and related issues, programs on other issues of international and regional problems were produced with funding from Open Society Foundations Armenia. The pattern was that the week following a program devoted to Turkish issues, we produced a program on some other topic, but sometimes we altered this model depending on the current developments (as before and after the elections in Turkey, for example). Currently, Yerkragund is on hold since we are looking for funding, but we hope to re-launch it this year.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The “Dialogue-Building between Turkey and Armenia” project was a conflict resolution and peace-building exercise that aimed at building bridges between the two countries on the second-track level. To achieve this aim, civil society and media played major roles in this project. Because of the lack of diplomatic relations between Turkey and Armenia, these publics have been kept distant from one another. However, as key actors in the conflict resolution process, civil society organizations and the media have sustained the relations between the two communities by conducting several projects, particularly in the last decade.

The Role of Civil Society and the Media

The characteristic that most distinguishes civil society organizations is their particular areas of expertise. For this reason, civil society members generally have the ability to spend more time than government officials and media representatives, for example, examining issues through in-depth research and analysis. GPoT Center has been conducting projects on Turkey-Armenia rapprochement since 2009, and with every project the outcomes have been increasingly successful in terms of their impact.

The work of civil society represents one the most effective tools in conflict resolution and second-track diplomacy. By creating platforms for discussion and negotiation, civil society makes it possible to strengthen the relations between communities, governments and states. Even raising awareness on the issues – whatever they may be depending on the civil society organization’s areas of expertise – is important. In the example of Turkish-Armenian relations, only give years ago it would have been impossible to imagine Turks and Armenians sitting around a table and talking about the tragedy of 1915

together. Today, representatives from both sides come together often in order to contribute to the rapprochement projects. In addition to the particular civil society representatives who participate, the interest of students, journalists and academics in the rapprochement projects is growing positively. The participation of actors from these key sectors is important in terms of influencing public opinion. At this juncture, the media plays a major role in transmitting the works of civil society organizations to the public and government positively or negatively.

By having the power of steering the public and also the politicians, the media is the most significant tool that can be used in dialogue-building processes. For this reason, GPoT Center aims to publicize its activities as much as its works to implement them. When the French resolution criminalizing the denial of genocide dominated the agenda intensively, the youth exchange activity appeared on a segment of the widely watched cable TV news network Habertürk under the title of “Turkish - Armenian Friendship.” Having our participants on TV supporting peace and collaboration during that tense time represented a real success. As much as these types of news stories transmitting positive messages to the audience we have, that much can we break the stereotypes and create links between the two communities.

As the lack of communication is one of the obstacles to Turkey-Armenia rapprochement, the first step in this process should be the establishment or strengthening of communication channels before expecting a development in diplomatic relations. That’s why in our activities we try to include representatives from Turkey’s mainstream newspapers and television companies whose impact on public opinion is stronger than that of more marginal media outlets. Furthermore, we pay particular attention

to create diverse groups of participants who represent companies, universities, media outlets, etc. that represent different ideologies. Reaching as many separate segments of society with our activities as possible is one of GPoT Center's main concerns during the implementation of its projects.

The Importance of the Project in the Normalization Process

If we take into consideration the studies of civil societies on Turkey-Armenia relations, the results are usually positive from the perspective of the personal relationships formed. The groups that we took to Armenia or hosted in Turkey within the scope of our activities always left with good reminiscences. At the end of the activity, on the personal level they become good friends, and on the professional level they have contacts to allow them to continue following the progress in bilateral relations. Mehmet Ali İzmir of *Star*, one of the journalists from the Bus Tour activity, stressed that they have become more interested in Turkey-Armenia relations and follow the news on this issue more carefully.

After participating in the Dialogue-Building Between Turkey and Armenia project, the participants were interested in other projects and events on the rapprochement of Turkey and Armenia. Two of the journalists in particular, Hakkı Özdal of *Radikal* and Özgün Özçer of *Taraf* became involved as the coordinators of a column exchange program of the Support to Armenia-Turkey Rapprochement (SATR) program, funded by USAID. It is also very gratifying for our institution to see the participants coming up with their own project ideas in order to contribute to the normalization process. Even though months have passed since their participation in the project, they continue to contact our Center in order to share their ideas and request contacts from Armenia.

Apart from the increase of their involvement in Turkey-Armenia rapprochement, the participants also share their experiences with their networks during informal meetings, such as an event that

Mutlu Tönbekici, a participant in the Journalism Exchange organized at her home. Just after her visit to Armenia, Ms. Tönbekici invited her close friends to a dinner at her home, where she cooked traditional Armenian recipes that she had learned in Armenia. People from all walks of life sat together and tasted Armenian food while comparing the similarities and differences between the two cultures.

The "Dialogue-Building between Turkey and Armenia" project demonstrates that a common point, whether it be food, cinema, journalism, etc., can help to bring Turks and Armenians together to "break the ice" and start an effective dialogue.

Recommendations

These recommendations are based on GPoT's experiences with the Dialogue-Building Project and its previous projects on Turkey-Armenia relations. Taking the necessity of opening the border and establishing diplomatic contacts as a given, these recommendations instead focus on initiatives (and the positive environment necessary for these initiatives to flourish) to support normalization projects between the two societies.

For Civil Society Organizations (CSOs):

- For the progress to be achieved in bilateral relations between Turkey and Armenia, the continuation of reconciliation projects is crucial.
- Engaging more students in civil society activities will positively contribute to the interactions between these communities. One idea for the bolstering of the trust building process would be pairing students from each side to work together on new and interesting topics in which they are interested.
- CSOs should not just repeat their previous projects; they should try to implement innovative ideas in order keep the interest, and broaden the number, of stakeholders.

- CSOs should try to strike a balance between including participants who have little interest or knowledge about Turkey-Armenia relations in addition to those who are enthusiastic and curious.
- Projects should focus on activities that allow the participants to learn more about all aspects of the neighboring country and people. Because what is unusual is more attention-grabbing than what is similar, civil society should also incorporate the differences between two countries as much as similarities in their projects.
- Turkish and Armenian CSOs should collaborate at every stage of enacting a joint project, particularly the creation, as the differences between the two countries can complicate the implementation of reconciliation projects.

For the Media:

- To avoid the negative impact of hate speech on public opinion, the language that the media uses is critical. The media should avoid publishing news in a provocative manner that may potentially reinforce misperceptions. While it takes much time to normalize relations, one word can be enough to retrogress the process.
- The media should give more space to personal, “human stories” related to Turkey-Armenia relations.
- The media should use “street reporting” when covering Turkey-Armenia relations from both the home country and the neighboring country. Through this, the media can cover the news more objectively while contributing to the publics’ examining their own views on the issue.
- More travel TV shows should be broadcast and articles published that reflect the touristic place of the two countries in order to arouse curiosity about the “other” culture and people.

For Turkey and Armenia:

- Turkey and Armenia should encourage the reconciliation work of CSOs, as it is vital to support the rapprochement process even when relations are going through a “frozen” period.
- The two states should enact visa regimes that ensure that their citizens can travel as freely as possible from one country to another despite the closed land border.
- The leaders of Turkey and Armenia should remember the large symbolic impact that their words and actions can have on the neighboring country’s population, and thus avoid nationalist rhetoric on issues sensitive to the neighboring country.
- Turkey and Armenia should provide opportunities to Turkish-Armenians to act as mediators and foster dialogue between the Turkish and Armenian communities.
- More resources should be included in the libraries as research materials containing wider information on the neighboring country.

For Third-Party Countries:

- Donor countries, particularly the US, should continue to support reconciliation projects despite the impasse in official relations, as they are necessary for rapprochement.
- Third-party countries should understand the potentially inflammatory and destructive impact of their actions relating to Turkish-Armenian relations. While these countries may have the intention of contributing positively to reconciliation, if they act without understanding the internal dynamics of both countries they may have the opposite effect, making the work of the CSOs supporting normalization harder.

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APPENDIX: MEDIA OUTPUT OF THE PROJECT IN TURKEY

Journalism Exchange

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TV Talk Shows

Episodes of Gamurç/Köprü (in Turkish) can be viewed online at gamurc.wordpress.com

Youth Exchange

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The failure of the 2009 Protocols to establish and develop diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey has largely overshadowed the success of civil society organizations in advancing the normalization process over the past decade. This report aims to help address this imbalance through a detailed account of the United States Department of State-funded "Dialogue-Building between Turkey and Armenia" project, implemented by the Global Political Trends Center (GPoT) of Istanbul Kültür University, Internews Network, Internews Armenia, the Yerevan Press Club and CAM Film between September 2010 and December 2011. Including an introduction that analyzes the current "frozen" state and historical background of Turkish-Armenian relations, *Breaking the Ice: The Role of Civil Society and Media in Turkey-Armenia Relations* presents the writings and reflections of the dozens of Turkish and Armenian journalists and students who participated in the project. The output of the Dialogue-Building Project demonstrates the continued, if not heightened, importance of civil society and media-based initiatives in the Turkey-Armenia normalization process, post-Protocols.

Since its founding in 2008, GPoT Center has played an active role in rapprochement and reconciliation projects between Turkey and Armenia through organizing numerous exchanges, roundtable discussions and conferences with the participation of leading Turkish civil society activists, academics, journalists and retired diplomats. For more information on these projects and GPoT Center, please visit www.gpotcenter.org.