



ARMENIAN - TURKISH TEAM REPORTING PROJECT

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This is a collection of articles, published as a result of exchanged visits of journalists, as well as findings of media research, implemented under "Armenian-Turkish Team Reporting Project" of Yerevan Press Club. The project was implemented with the assistance of Eurasia-Synergy foundation and Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

The societies guided with age-long hostility, unreserved stereotypes and negative emotions face the issue of acknowledging each other, establishing relations with each other, listening to each other - with no vindictiveness and hatred. Sometimes the candid words of an old man from Kars or a young Armenian fan of "Fenerbahce" say more about their feelings about the neighbors and possibilities for rapprochement, than the lengthy political discussions and diplomatic talks.

These sincere reports, interviews and feature stories, published in the Armenian and Turkish press, are to help the mutual understanding and tolerance between the two nations.

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TRANSFORMATION OF MEDIA COVERAGE OF ARMENIAN-TURKISH ISSUES IN BOTH COUNTRIES

The Armenian and Turkish media coverage on various aspects of Armenian-Turkish relations and on the ongoing events/problems in the two countries has significantly changed from 2007 to 2009, during the implementation of the Armenian-Turkish Team Reporting Project. It would be too ambitious to credit the project with most of these changes. However, the project did play a certain role in this process.

There has been a serious turnabout in the relations between the two countries over the last two years. This has had a decisive impact on the nature of media coverage. The public interest towards the neighbor has increased in both countries. The real turning point came in 2008, which was the beginning of the football diplomacy. At the same time, an analysis of press publications, which appeared as a result of this project, indicates that the range of covered topics was much wider than the traditional topics that existed before in the general flow of information.

Yerevan Press Club got involved in promotion of the Armenian-Turkish dialogue in 2000. Starting from 2001, YPC launched a consistent study of the Armenian and Turkish press to see how they cover the bilateral relations, regional problems and events in each others' countries. YPC came up with an initiative to publish an online newsletter, entitled Media Dialogue (2002-2007), which was a digest of main publications about the region, published by the Armenian, Turkish, Azerbaijani and Georgian media. This newsletter made it possible to get an understanding of the nature of coverage.

The Turkish colleagues started to take interest in such media studies in the recent years. They were using special computer software and online versions of newspapers to analyze how actively the Turkish newspapers covered the issues regarding Armenia. They compared the 2008-2009 data with similar data from ten years ago.

Comparative analysis of all studies, conducted by YPC and other organizations, shows that, in 2008, there was a significant difference between how the Armenian media covered Turkish issues and how the Turkish media covered Armenian issues. Turkey consistently occupied one of the leading positions among foreign countries in terms of the amount of coverage in the Armenian media and attracted constant interest towards itself. At the same time, Armenian issues appeared in the Turkish broadcast and print media only from time to time. "Armenian theme" became widely discussed by the Turkish media during the periods when certain issues related to Armenia were being prominently raised, i.e. new developments in the Mountainous Karabagh negotiation process, the memorial day for victims of Genocide honored by Armenians was coming closer, or the issue of Genocide recognition was being raised in parliaments or governments of third countries. However, as soon as the specific cause was exhausted, Armenia would disappear from the Turkish media for a long time.

Since the beginning of this century, the Turkish media interest towards the neighboring country had to do with the raising of the Armenian-Turkish relations issue in the context of Turkey's prospects for joining the European Union. At the same time, the like-

likelihood of US Congress passing a Genocide resolution increased. Because of this, the Turkish media started considering Armenia not simply as a neighbor with which Turkey and its close ally, Azerbaijan, have serious problems, but also as a constant factor with certain impact on Ankara's foreign policy. Consequently, interest towards Armenia became more systemic in nature. More active efforts of a number of international/foreign organizations to promote the Armenian-Turkish dialogue also contributed to this. Especially, significant were the activities of the Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission (TARC), established by the initiative of the US, and Track II projects carried out at the same time. These projects brought together more than ten non-governmental organizations from both sides. The content of such contacts between politicians, journalists, artists and representatives of women's and youth organizations was covered by the Turkish media from time to time, making their turn to Armenian issues more frequent.

At the same time, any reference to the neighboring country remained dependent on operative occasions, such as another stage of Ankara's negotiations with Brussels or another meeting of TARC. After these series of projects were completed in 2004, another information lull set in. This lull was briefly interrupted by an exchange of correspondence between the Prime Minister of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the President of Armenia Robert Kocharyan, in May 2005. Finally, Armenia and Armenian-Turkish relations occupied a solid and constant place in the Turkish media only in 2008.

Before 2008, there were also peak times when the subject of Turkey and Armenian-Turkish relations were featured prominently in the Armenian media. These peaks also had to do with developments in the Genocide recognition processes in foreign countries. However, the issue of Turkey continued to attract certain amount of attention even outside these peak situations. Many Armenian newspapers, television and radio channels and online publications followed and covered various aspects of life of the Armenian community in Istanbul, development of Turkey's relations with the United States, European Union, Russia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, domestic political situation in Turkey, the country's involvement in regional projects, the Kurdish and Cypriot problems, etc. Naturally, the Armenian media interest towards the aforementioned subjects was filtered through the prism of Armenian-Turkish relations. However, such a connection was not a necessary condition for covering the various aspects of life in the neighboring country. In other words, Turkey itself attracted a certain amount of interest.

Finding a negative side in the covered facts and events was a rather common phenomenon. The same approach often prevailed in the coverage of the Turkish-Armenian reconciliation commission's activities, of the cooperation between Armenian and Turkish businessmen, experts, contacts and joint projects by non-governmental organizations, as well as people vacationing in Turkey, Armenian traders and other citizens traveling to Turkey to make money.

At the same time, despite the fact that the issue of Turkey was constantly present in the Armenian media, one cannot state that it has been of primary political importance for the Armenian media and its audience. This is evidenced, in particular, in YPC's study on the Karabagh problem and Armenian-Turkish relations in the election campaign rhetoric of Armenian politicians. The study was conducted on the eve of the 2007 parliamentary

elections. It covered seven national newspapers of different political orientation. In the two months of the study, the Armenian-Turkish relations were referred to in the context of party positions only 27 times, 4 of which were very brief references. During that time, one would expect that parties would be trying to convince voters that they have the best solutions for the country's problems. However, the subject of interest was only covered in one out of 10 issues of newspapers selected for the study. These publications contained 66 references of various aspects about the relations between the two countries. Most frequently (in 16 cases), these references were on establishing diplomatic and other official relations, in 15 cases - about the Genocide of Armenians in 1915, in 10 cases - about the influence of Armenian-Turkish relations on both countries' domestic and foreign politics, and in 7 cases - about the opening of the Armenian-Turkish border. References to people's (civil) diplomacy and direct/multilateral contacts were made only in one case.

Publications in all the seven newspapers studied referred to the positions of only 9 out of 25 parties on the subject of interest. At the same time, even a superficial analysis of Armenian media from the middle of 2008 (when the so-called football diplomacy started) shows that the situation has changed strongly and almost every newspaper issues contain several references to political parties' positions on certain aspects of Armenian-Turkish relations. Therefore, it is possible to state that media interest to Turkish issues has risen significantly over the last year in Armenia, as well.

According to a study of two major national Turkish newspapers - Hurriyet (circulation - 465 thousand) and Zaman (circulation - 767 thousand) - conducted by Turkish colleagues, the changes in these newspapers are very dynamic. Hurriyet contained no more than 300 publications related to Armenia per year within 1998-2004. In 2008, the number of such publications increased to 929. In the first half of 2009, this number reached 726. The same dynamics can be observed in Zaman. It is important to note that Hurriyet is critical towards the current Turkish government, whereas, Zaman is loyal to the authorities.

If one compared the publications of 10-11 years ago with those over the last year, then it would be possible to conclude that issues of opening the Armenian-Turkish border and Karabagh conflict resolution attracted attention both then and now. At the same time, publications on these subjects were far less frequent and irregular back then. Moreover, in 1997-1998 references to them were frequently connected to other subjects, which were covered much more extensively (construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and supposed location of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan (Armenia was mentioned as a possible location)). It is noteworthy that in Zaman the word "Armenia" and other derivative words were most frequently found in materials by the newspaper's Baku correspondent, which is yet another indication that the interest towards Armenia was not direct. However, today the subject of Armenia is one of the central subjects in itself. In this regard, the coverage of Armenian-Turkish relations in both Armenian and Turkish media is more similar.

Only in September 2008, when the Turkish President Abdullah Gul visited Armenia, Hurriyet contained 340 publications (more than the average for every previous year), mentioning the word "Armenia" and derivative words. In the vast majority of cases, these articles were dedicated to Armenia and Armenian-Turkish relations. In the past, newspapers covered the Armenian issue in a purely political and diplomatic sense. Journalists were not

interested in the country, its people and their everyday life. In 2008-2009, newspapers started publishing articles on various aspects of life in Armenia, as well, in addition to political articles. Some unwritten taboos related to the problems between Armenians and Turks were overcome quickly in the last few months. For example, the Turkish media covered the initiative of a group of intellectuals to collect signatures in support of an online letter to Armenian people with apologies for the "great catastrophe" of 1915. One of the leading Turkish columnists, Cengiz Candar, who covered Abdullah Gul's visit to Yerevan, said that going to Armenia and not visiting the Genocide Memorial is the same as going to Mecca and not visiting the Kaaba.

Journalistic exchange projects and, in particular, YPC's initiative, supported by the Eurasia Partnership Foundation and Friedrich Ebert Foundation, largely contributed to the appearance of articles helping Turkish and Armenian readers learn more about each other outside of political relations and understand better how the people in both countries live and what's on their minds. Turkish journalists visited Armenia under the aegis of the Armenian-Turkish Team Reporting Project and wrote about regular people living near the border with Turkey, the prospects of development of these regions if bilateral relations normalize, the small business projects, being implemented jointly by Armenian and Turkish entrepreneurs, and the Armenian Diaspora's attitude towards the process of reconciliation between the two countries.

Turkish readers got an opportunity to learn through these publications what ordinary Armenians of different professions and ages think about various issues, how they feel about the reconciliation between Turkey and Armenia. Thanks to these publications, Turkish audience started to understand more clearly the positions of various Armenian political parties and organizations on the subjects of interest to the public in both countries. In May 2009, the Hrant Dink foundation organized a trip to Armenia for ten journalists from various Turkish media outlets, and this visit played an important role in presenting Armenia to the Turkish public. Each participant of this trip selected one specific aspect of life in Armenia to cover.

In their turn, the Armenian journalists participating in YPC's Armenian-Turkish Team Reporting Project were also able to diversify the subjects of publications about Turkey and Armenian-Turkish relations in the Armenian media. In particular, they told their readers about bilateral civil initiatives of the last few years, and tried to analyze their effectiveness. Their materials also covered contacts between journalists, representatives of non-governmental organizations and researches in various fields. Also of interest were publications about the life of Armenian community in Turkey, labor migration of Armenian citizens to the neighboring country, with which Armenia has no diplomatic relations.

YPC's project played a significant role in changing the intensity and the nature of covering Turkish issues (or about Turkey) and Armenian-Turkish relations in both Armenian and Turkish media from the point of view of widening the scope of subjects. In addition to the diverse materials that appeared as a direct result of the project, it showed to other journalists how to go beyond traditional topics and offered readers a fresh glance that made it possible to understand the neighboring country better and to go deeper into the existing problems.

ARMENIAN - TURKISH CIVIL INITIATIVES: PRESS COVERAGE

Press Review

The present research was undertaken under Armenian-Turkish Team Reporting Project implemented by Yerevan Press Club with the support of Eurasia Partnership Foundation.

The research covered the period of 2002-2007 and aimed to trace the coverage of the initiatives undertaken between the civil societies of Armenia and Turkey.

Below the reviews of Armenian and Turkish press coverage of the joint civil initiatives are presented.

ARMENIAN PRESS REVIEW

The research of Armenian press coverage covered the period of 2002-2007. The research drew on the online archives of Armenian media and the archive of MediaDilaogue web-site, maintained by Yerevan Press Club since 2002. The use of the latter web-site was due to its focus on the press publications on the relations of Armenia and Turkey.

The publications studied were made in the following media outlets:

- "Aravot"
- "Hayastani Hanrapetutiun"
- "Azg"
- "Hayots Ashkhar"
- "Haikakan Zhamanak"
- "Iravunk"
- "Golos Armenii"
- "Novoye Vremya"
- "Respublika Armenia"

TURKISH-ARMENIAN RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

The activities of TARC were quite broadly covered in press. The first publications (2001) expressed a cautious mistrust; some media voiced their amazement at the members of the TARC. The press published a number of interviews of the Commission members from the Armenian side who explained the purposes and the tasks faced by TARC (e.g., "Aravot" of July 14, December 8, 2001). Soon the vast majority of Armenian media started to criticize the activities of TARC, the main argument being the assumption that the setup of the Commission allows the Turkish party to create pretence of dialogue with Armenia, with its true purpose being impeding the process of the Genocide international recognition.

The most characteristic example is the interview of TARC member, the Moscow professor Andranik Mihranian to "Golos Armenii" (##8, 9 in 2002), in which the Russian political scientist explained what the mission of the Commission was and why its efforts were futile. In particular, the object of criticism of Andranik Mihranian was the stance of Armenian authority and the coverage of the TARC activities in the Armenian media. "Of course, the reproaches and accusations of the leadership of the country, if Mr. Mihranian's allegations are true, are fair and call for additional explanations at least from the Foreign Office. However, when indulging in wide-scale accusation of Commission adversaries - which means all Armenians of the world - Mr. Mihranian displays not only contempt to them but also a complete lack of understanding of Armenian national mentality, its attitude towards Genocide makes him dependent on political and other petty considerations", the editorial comment on the interview of Andranik Mihranian said, in particular.

Further the media discussed the issue in the context of the assessment made by the International Center of Transitional Justice regarding the applicability of the UN Convention on Genocide to the events of 1915 (e.g., "Haikakan Zhamanak", November 7, 2003), in the context of summing up the Commission activities (e.g. "Haikakan Zhamanak" on April 21, 2004) and the publication of reminiscences of TARC Coordinator David Philips (e.g., "Azg" of February 9 and 11, 2005).

TURKISH ARMENIAN BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

The activities of the Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council are covered whenever there is a news pretext to that. It received the bulk of attention during the first years of its establishment; the Armenian press published even the interviews of the Turkish co-chairman of the Council Kaan Soyak, his speeches at press-conferences, held jointly with the Armenian co-chairman. Throughout the past years the media mostly published news reports (see, for example, "Hayastani Hanrapetutian", September 30, 2004, "Azg" of February 15, 2005, and "Respublika Armenia" of April 4, 2007).

MULTILATERAL COOPERATION

Involvement of Turkey's representatives in military exercise in Armenia, held under the NATO auspices, caused mostly negative response from the Armenian press (the most characteristic example - "Askyars in Armenia" article, "Golos Armenii", November 7, 2003).

COVERAGE OF CIVIL INITIATIVES

Below the list of publications covering joint Armenian-Turkish Initiatives in various spheres of activity is provided.

Politics, history, peace initiatives

"Any attempt to reconsider Kars treaty must be justified" ("Azg", on March 21, 2004) - about the forum of intellectuals, initiated by the Writers Union of Armenia and dealing with the Russian-Turkish Treaty of March 16 and Kars Treaty of October 13, 1921.

"Caucasus Reconciliation Conference in Ankara" ("Azg", March 29 and 31, 2005) - a report on the peace conference of Rotary Clubs of Yerevan, Gyumri, Tbilisi and Baku, held in Turkey.

The Armenian press made a broad coverage of the visit of the Armenian delegation to Turkey on the inauguration of the renovated Armenian Church on an island in Van (e.g., "Respublika Armenia", March 23 and 30, 2007).

European Integration

"Turkey Wary of Azerbaijan?" ("Respublika Armenia", November 23, 2007) - about the conference "Armenia and Turkey in European Integration Process" with the participation of Turkish Media and NGOs (in particular, the editor of "Turkish Stability Initiative" publication Nigar Goksel), organized by the Analytical Center for Globalization and Regional Cooperation.

Economy and business

"Armenian-Turkish Border to Open Soon?" ("Novoe Vremya", November 7, 2003) - on the correspondence between the Associations of Transporters of Armenia and Turkey.

"Border Opening. What Next?" ("Respublika Armenia", July 15, 2005) - report from the presentation of a Study of the Economic Impact on the Armenian Economy from Re-Opening of the Turkish-Armenian Borders implemented by Armenian-European Policy and Legal Advice Center, AEPLAC upon the commission of the Armenian Government. The study focus at the consequences of border opening in short term (up to a year) and mid-term (up to 5 years). Some findings of the research supporting the positive economic effect for Armenia that the border opening would have were also quoted in "Haikakan Zhamanak" (July 14 2005) in "Figure of the Day" section.

The initiator of the long-term project "Caucasus Business Development Net" is the UK-based International Alert NGO. The project is implemented in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey, Abkhazia, Mountainous Karabagh, South Ossetia and was covered in

particular in "Respublika Armenia" newspaper ("Business and Peace Initiatives" article in the issue of October 27, 2006; "Political Realities Are Lagging behind the Life" - in the issue of April 4, 2007). The latter article was dealing with the forum of Turkish and Armenian businessmen held in Kars on March 22-25. The event was organized by the Turkish Armenian Business Development Council (TABDC) and Caucasian Center for Proposing Nontraditional Conflict Resolution Methods (CCPNTCRM) under the project above "Caucasus Network for Business and Development".

"Playing into the Same Gate" ("Republic of Armenia", January 16, 2007) - on the conference "The Economic and Social Consequences of Opening the Border Between Armenia and Turkey: Implications for Armenia ", organized by the Armenian International Policy Research Group with the financial assistance of USAID, Eurasia Foundation and the UK Embassy in Armenia. The article also tells about other attempts of civil dialogue between the NGOs of Armenia and Turkey, reports the intention of hosting a similar conference in Turkey.

CULTURE

"Dialogue is possible" ("Respublika Armenia", December 12, 2005) - interview of the Armenian co-editor of Armenian Turkish "Woman's Magazine" Narineh Mirzoyan on the publication of the first issue.

"Armenian "Flagship" Conquered Turkey" ("Respublika Armenia", September 27, 2006) - interview of Arto Tuncboyajian about the concerts of his folk jazz group.

Stimulation of bilateral relations, awareness raising

"Neighborly talk" ("Respublika Armenia", September 5, 2007) - a report about Eurasia Foundation allocating funds to promote constructive dialogue between Armenian and Turkish publics to 6 organizations - the Komitas State String Orchestra, "Youth Academy" NGO, Yerevan Press Club, "Azg" daily, "Urban" Sustainable Development Fund and "Patker" LLC".

"Armenian-Turkish "Merhabarev" (YPC Weekly Newsletter, October 20-26, 2006) - about the Armenian-Turkish photo exhibition "Merhabarev", implements under a joint project of "PatkerPhoto" and "Nar" in partnership with Caucasus Media Institute and with the assistance of Heinrich Boll Foundation and "Anadolu Kultur" NGO of Turkey.

Yerevan Press Club throughout the past years implemented a number of projects, described in detail on the web sites of the organization: www.ypc.am, www.mediadialogue.org as well as the following projects: "Karabakh Issue and Armenian-Turkish

Relations in the Pre-Election Rhetoric of Armenian Political Figures" (2007, YPC, supported by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation);

"MediaDialogue Web-Site as a Regional Information Hub" and "Expansion of "Media Dialogue" Web-Site to Meet the Present-Day Needs" (2005-2006, YPC, assisted by the OSI Network Media Program); "Armenia-Azerbaijan-Turkey: Journalistic Initiative-2002" and its follow-up (2002-2004, project implemented by YPC, "Yeni Nesil" Journalists Union of Azerbaijan and the Association of Diplomacy Correspondents of Turkey, supported by the OSI Network Media Program); "Mutual visits of Armenian and Turkish Journalists" (2002, YPC and the Association of Diplomacy Correspondents with the support of Center for Global Peace of the American University in Washington).

Some of these projects were also covered in a number of national media (e.g. "Aravot" of May 9 and 10, September 26, 2002).

TURKISH PRESS REVIEW

The research of Turkish press coverage covered the period of 2002-2007. The research drew on the online archives of Turkish media and the archive of MediaDilaogue web-site, maintained by Yerevan Press Club since 2002. The use of the web-site is explained by the fact the web-site was weekly updated throughout 200-2007 with articles from Turkish media dealing with Armenian-Turkish relations.

The publications studied were made in the following media outlets:

- Turkish Daily News
- Hurriyet
- Milliet
- Aksam
- Zaman
- Radikal
- The New Anatolian

It should be noted here that while the Turkish press keeps Armenia and Armenians-related issues at the focus of its attention, the scope of the coverage is not very broad per se, with very little attention paid to specific Track 2 Diplomacy initiatives.

The bulk of attention to these initiatives is placed on two structures, the Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission and the Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council. For this reason under the study above the reporting of the two initiatives has been singled out into separate themes. It should also be noted that in most cases the two structures are either referred to in broader context of Armenian-Turkish relations or the representatives of the two structures are often addressed by the media of Turkey for comment and opinion on various developments in the relations of the two countries.

TURKISH-ARMENIAN RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

This initiative is probably the most actively covered one in Turkish press, with the bulk of the publications on this issue coming in 2001-2002. While many of the publications dealt with the Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission itself, it was also often mentioned in the coverage of various other issues, related to the Armenian Genocide. The Turkish press mostly regarded the Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission to be a failure and expressed its regret on that. ("It will be much easier to reconcile two nations if the failure of the Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission is overcome and the issue of "genocide" is finally solved", Gunduz Aktan writes in "Radikal" newspaper on May 19, 2002). Among publications on the operations of the TARC the following articles can also be mentioned: "Seeking Reconciliation With Armenians" by Semih Idiz in "Aksam" newspaper of June 15, 2003, which notes the failure of the Commission: "The

commission which from the very first day was attacked by Dashnaks, eventually failed to be productive. If information on the TARC meetings appears, these efforts are more like rowing upstream".

Particular attention was paid to the release of the report of International Center of Transitional Justice, commissioned by TARC and viewed very negatively by the Turkish members of the Commission. (e.g., "A Turkish View on the Applicability of The Genocide Convention to the Armenian Incidents and the ICTJ's Report", by Gunduz Aktan in "Turkish Daily News" of February 18, 2003.

While the majority of the pieces on TARC appeared in Turkish press in 2001-2002, later references to the commission were also made, in broader context of the possibility for Turkish-Armenian reconciliation (e.g., "Friends and Foes, Turks and Armenians", by Yuksel Soylemez in "Turkish Daily News" newspaper of April 23, 2006).

TURKISH ARMENIAN BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

TABDC was founded in 1997 to promote commercial relations between Turkey and Armenia and to be executed by the co-chairmen of this organization in both countries. The organization opened a bureau in Brussels in March 2003 and became an EU nongovernmental organization. In the communication of Cihan News Agency, published in "Turkish Daily News" newspaper, it was noted the organization had signed the progress report of the European Commission concerning Turkey, being the only NGO that had signed it. References to the Turkish co-chairman of TABDC was also made in a number of other pieces, also quoting him as an expert on Turkish-Armenian rapprochement and joint business initiatives (e.g. "An Armenian-Turkish-American Friend" by Yusuf Kanli, published by "Turkish Daily News" of October 9, 2005).

Economy/Environment

Overall, the economic contacts between the two countries are little covered by the Turkish media. The highest level that of interstate trade was referred to in the context of Black Sea Economic Cooperation, with quotation from Karen Mirzoyan, heading the Armenian representation at BSEC ("Armenia Aims at Regional Cooperation", "Turkish Daily News" of February 24, 2007). The Turkish press also covered the meeting of business leaders of Armenia and Turkey, organized by Armenian International Policy Research Group; quoting opinions from the two heads of the TABDC, Kaan Soyak and Arsen Ghazarian. According to the report of TDN on January 15, 2007, while the business leaders favor the opening of the border, the representative of the Armenian Foreign Ministry was more skeptical. "Armenian Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Arman Kirakosian hailed the spirit of the conference but said the situation between the two countries would not change any time soon. "Every conference of this type influences public opinion... but we have to understand that it will not lead to a normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations.

We currently have no relations," he told AFP, "Turkish Daily News" writes. On a less official level, the possible economic cooperation was also discussed at the meeting of Rotarians in March, 2005.

Turkish press also occasionally refers to the issues of possible economic cooperation with Armenia in the context of border opening (particularly, in terms of possible development of Kars as a border city), various infrastructure projects in the region (as a rule, bypassing Armenia) and the issues related to the Armenian Nuclear Power Plant and its possible environmental dangers. Thus, "Sabah" newspaper on January 19, 2003, in a piece headlined "Chernobyl Threat In the Vicinity Of Kars", quotes an Italian Ferrara University Academician Professor Hayrettin Kilic states that Metzamor Nuclear Power Plant of Armenia is posing a threat for Turkey. "He warned that any leakage in the power plant constructed by an old technology might cause the deaths of millions of people in neighboring countries. Kilic underlined that the nuclear power plant should be closed", "Sabah" writes.

CIVIL SOCIETY CONTACTS

The overall coverage of the civil society contacts followed the same trend as the contacts themselves - irregular. One of the earliest references to civil society contacts was made by "Milliyet" newspaper, on July 4, 2002. The newspaper journalist Ece Temelkuran writes about the two-day meeting named "The Civil Rapprochement in the Turkish-Armenian Dialogue", held by the Helsinki Citizens Assembly. "The meeting participants were much more interested in life than death and in future - more than in the past", the journalist writes.

Among the early civil society contacts were the reciprocal study visits of Turkish and Armenian journalists under the project of Yerevan Press Club, supported by Center for Global Peace (e.g. "With Baby Steps, Journalists from Armenia and Turkey Approach Each Other", published in "Turkish Probe" newspaper on August 3, 2002).

The meeting of Turkish-Armenian Women's Communication Group for the Black-Sea Economic Cooperation and Peace was also covered by "Turkish Daily News" newspaper on December 15, 2002. The newspaper quoted the Armenian coordinator, Hranush Kharatyan saying the group should travel a long and a difficult path and they want to begin this process with joint projects.

Turkish press produced reports also on various visits made by Turkish professionals to Armenia, such as the fact-finding visit of Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) to Yerevan. Sylvia Tiryaki writes about the visit on December 18, 2006 in "Turkish Daily News": "Unfortunately, this dimension of Armenian-Turkish relations was the least discussed topic -- if discussed at all -- in the meetings with the representatives of Armenian civil society, media and even government circles. The discussions centered primarily on issues related to their borders, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the tragic events of the early 20th century. Neither the natural selection of themes nor their differences in meaning for participants from the two sides were any surprise".

With regard to the civil society dimension, the Turkish press makes a much more regular coverage of issues related to the Armenian community of Turkey (See, for example, "Hurriyet" newspaper of October 29, 2002, story titled "We Condemn the Allegations of Harassment and Pressure" by Sefa Kaplan).

The Turkish press also covered the various academic events that dealt with the Armenian issue, such as "Art of Living Together in Ottoman Society," International Social Researches Symposium, held in March, 2007, the conference at Bilgi University, etc. Thus, on October 13 "Turkish Daily News" reported Vice Chairman of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly Vahit Erdem expressed his annoyance being invited to a seminar held by the assembly in the Armenian capital of Yerevan.

Of the more recent developments, somewhat related to the civil society involvement in the Turkish-Armenian rapprochement, the Turkish press reported 53 Nobel Prize winners sending letters for Turkish-Armenian border to be opened ("Sabah", April 12, 2007.)

CULTURE

One striking characteristics of the coverage noticeable in Turkish press is that during the past year there has been more references towards Armenia-related cultural events in Turkey, apparently, due to a greater number of such events per se.

In 2002, the hottest cultural topic, related to the relations between Armenia and Turkey, was the worldwide demonstration of Atom Egoyan's "Ararat" film. Thus, Mehmet Basutcu writes on May 23, 2002 in "Radikal" newspaper: "As a result, Atom Egoyan, apparently suffers from a feeling, well-known to us, Turks, the feeling of being misunderstood when your breath is hot with anger at yourself for not being able to convey your feelings, the anger with a sour taste of frustration. The film that tells about the time span that lasts till today, for the first time became a target for strong criticism! Yet, the director thought of this response when he first started to explore the subject that has a huge personal importance. The shiver that seized Egoyan when meeting us was similar to a search of a life belt".

Another cultural event, related to Turkish-Armenian relations in 2002, and reported by Turkish press was the concert of Turkish singer Sezen Aksu on August 30, where she performed songs in Turkish, Greek, Armenian and Jewish. "For this, it is necessary to have Sezen's concert in Istanbul and all of us, including the military, must maintain the climate of healthy discussion around the concert", Mehmet Ali Birand wrote in "Hurriyet" newspaper on September 4.

In June 2005 Yerevan State Opera & Ballet Theater performed "Gayane" ballet in Ataturk Cultural Center. As David Judson writes in "Turkish Daily News" of June 17, 2005, "We all know the world is seldom black and white. It is the grays that challenge our stereotypes and prejudices. But on Sunday night there was not a single gray tone in the challenge to widespread set notions, the black-white perceptions, on the relationship between Turks and Armenians. No, the challenge came in the twisting, turning, leaping and vibrant red, orange, blue and violet tones of the costumes and stage settings of the

Yerevan State Opera & Ballet Theater. And it came in the standing ovation of the crowd at the Ataturk Cultural Center in Istanbul where this gathering of Turks and Armenians delivered a powerful joint message: We are tired of the status quo".

A particular activation of cultural reporting occurred in 2007, when a series of joint cultural events were held - also to commemorate Hrant Dink, a Turkish journalist of Armenian origin, assassinated in Istanbul in January 2007. Thus, in May 2007 a joint exhibition of Turkish and Armenian photographers "Mehrabarev: Yerevan-Istanbul" was held, broadly covered by Turkish media. In September a group of Turkish artists paid a visit to Yerevan and gave a workshop to Armenian students. "Traumas in the past can be overcome only through art and dialogue, said the artists, calling on Turkish and Armenian youth to participate in the dialogue", Vercihan Ziflioghlu writes in "Turkish Daily News" on September 29, 2007. The same author also covered the concert of Armenian duduk virtuoso, Jivan Gasparian together with Turkish saz player and vocalist Yavuz Bingöl in Istanbul in honor of International Day of Peace (September 1, 2007) as well as the participation of artist Sarkis (Sarkis Zabunyan, France) in Istanbul Biennial for "solidarity".

CONCLUSION

The research showed that both Armenian and Turkish press cover the civil initiatives between Armenia and Turkey quite irregularly, focusing on events, rather than discussing the projects at length and analyzing their results. The two most actively covered initiatives in both countries were the activities of the Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission and the Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council.

At the same time it should be noted that throughout the 2007 there has been an activation of reporting on cultural initiatives - particularly noticeable in the Turkish press.

Overall, it can be noted that the coverage of civil initiatives in both Armenia and Turkey lacks consistency and particular focus. The media address the issues related to official diplomacy, the existing political and historical controversies between the two countries rather than the efforts of the civil societies, which may not be very frequent but their due publicizing is of crucial importance for the rapprochement of the people in the two countries.

**ARTICLES PRODUCED
BY ARMENIAN AND TURKISH
JOURNALISTS
AS A RESULT
OF EXCHANGE VISITS**

Tsovinar NAZARIAN

Currently a freelance reporter, Tsovinar Nazarian worked for more than 5 years at "Hayastani Hanrapetutiun" newspaper as political reporter. Earlier she worked for a variety of media, including TV, covering subjects ranging from culture to politics. Tsovinar Nazarian studied International Relations at Yerevan State University.

"YOU CAN'T REWRITE HISTORY"

Despite the dark pages of past history, Armenian and Turkish journalists know by now, that "Turks are not cannibals, and Armenians are not traitors".

"It is absolutely true, that the Turkish media mostly covers Armenian - Turkish relations, when there is an important event or an expectation of something happening. At other times, when it doesn't seem that there is anything important happening, the Turkish press rarely covers those relations. Our research of the past 9 years reveals, that this is the direction Turkish press have taken on covering Armenia and Armenian - Turkish relations. The media in Armenia are more persistent in their coverage, but the areas covered are limited to certain narrow subjects - genocide, border opening, establishing diplomatic relations", President of Yerevan Press Club Boris Navasardian says.

Artificially stimulating in-depth reporting

The journalists' exchange program, thanks to which I was able to come back to Istanbul again after so many years, was initiated by the abovementioned Yerevan Press Club (YPC), with the support of Eurasia Partnership Foundation and Friedrich Ebert Foundation. YPC's partner in Turkey is the well known "ARI Movement", which is responsible for selecting Turkish journalists prepared to visit Armenia. Both sides are ready to make due efforts to turn the reciprocal reporting visits of journalists a tradition.

"Our goal is to provide incentive for leading media and journalists in Armenia and Turkey to pay more attention to various aspects of Armenian - Turkish relations and if possible, to prepare investigative materials about the prospects and effectiveness of various initiatives in the context of mutual dialog", Boris Navasardian explains.

4 Armenian and 6 Turkish journalists have visited the neighboring countries and covered a range of programs implemented over the past two years in various areas of the two countries' life, including politics, public diplomacy, culture, economy and others.

Unlike research organizations, which are not very many in this field, journalists were able to present their findings about the neighboring country to their societies using plain

language. Notably, the stereotypes existing in the societies of Armenia and Turkey about the neighbors were reflected in some articles.

Boris Navasardian notes that unlike key political events, the deeper aspects of life in the neighboring country are usually overlooked by the mainstream media. Likewise, mutual civil initiatives, which have considerable input in facilitating Armenian - Turkish dialog are often neglected.

"There's a need to artificially encourage this type of coverage using the resources available by international organizations, and who else, if not the non-government organizations, should do it, especially the ones working in the sphere of media."

"Don't want to feel guilty for what my grandfather did!"

The journalists we met in Turkey, just like their Armenian counterparts, insisted, that programs like these are very useful. They were quite pleased with their exchange visits and were ready to visit Armenian again, even though some of them had been exposed to such experiences, which are not that easy to accept.

"I don't want to feel guilty when I come to Armenia. What do I have to do with what my grandfather did? He might have been a scoundrel, what do I have to do with it? Everyone looks at me as if I'm the grandchild of that Turk, who... I don't want to be looked at like this", this is how the journalist of "Aksam" newspaper Nagehan Alci opened our conversation at a small open-air tea-house with a charming view of the Galata Bridge.

In response to our question, Nagehan confessed, that nobody has said anything like that to her in Armenia: they were very kind with her. It's just because of the way they looked at her.

"People on the both sides of the border don't know, that Turks are not cannibals, and nor Armenians are traitors", Nagehan says.

Armenia is small, interlocked, and nationalism grows there - this is the impression the Turkish journalist got during her Yerevan visit.

"I understand that this type of nationalism perhaps comes from the feeling of being victims. But if we want to normalize relations, we have to get rid of that feeling. Speaking for Turks I can say that we don't like the feeling of being guilty when we meet Armenians. I think that Armenians also shouldn't leave that impression as if they're thinking about us: "Those are the ones, who've done that in the past". This attitude is wrong on both sides. I don't accuse anyone. We all grew up together, but we don't know each other."

"Hurriyet" reporter Vercihan Ziflioghlu is sure that the main reason for hostility is lack of knowledge about each other: "People don't know what has happened in the past. Don't criticize them, because they were not told everything."

Vercihan Ziflioghlu tells how she won the prize of Turkish journalists' association for her article on Parajanov. The other grand prize of the same organization was also handed out to an "Armenian subject". A Hamshenian journalist got the prize for an article telling about Hamshen Armenians. Whereas, in the past, Vercihan says, it was hard to find good articles about Armenia and Armenians in the Turkish press.

"Armenians were like a distant island for Turkish journalists, and their articles were sometimes even getting offensive. For example, someone kills somebody, and they note that the murderer is of Armenian descent. This way the fact of Armenian, Jewish or Greek identity was given more attention than the fact of murder itself, which could happen in any country."

This is not just about Armenia but Armenians in general - because they always remind Turkey of its historical past. Nevertheless, positive tendencies are noticeable in Turkish press. Turkish newspapers are increasingly covering Armenian issues with a view to the future. Especially more so after Hrant Dink's murder. My colleague, who was concerned before traveling to Armenia, asked me: "Will they hurt me there?" She came back from Armenia with the most positive impressions.

The Armenian journalist of the Turkish press

Vercihan is ethnically Armenian, and knowledge of the Armenian language helps her a lot. Vercihan's first visit to Armenia was commissioned by "Hurriyet". The journalist has been writing mostly about Armenians, particularly - Armenian Turks in the past 2.5 years.

"People are surprised. They keep asking me - did those things really happen in Turkey? Is it true that Armenians established the Turkish theatre?" Vercihan tells us, noting that it was something of a revelation for the Turkish media.

Vercihan says she hasn't had any problems related to her Armenian identity in her journalistic career of 11 years. Another one of the prizes awarded to her by the Swedish "Anna Lynd" foundation, brought the Turkish minister of culture to Athens and turned Armenians and Armenia into the main subject of discussion at the award party.

"I believed that we need to look forward to the future. Yes, many bad things were lived through, but I thought, that for the sake of future, for the future of our generations, we have to leave good foundations", Vercihan Ziflioghlu says.

The readers have to know

Experienced "Chumhurriyet" journalist Leila Tavashanoghlu was one of the first representatives of Turkish media to visit Armenia accompanying Patriarch of Istanbul and All Turkey, Archbishop Mesrop Mutafian. She has been invited to Armenia many times afterwards (by YPC among others). She was involved with an Armenian - Turkish women's group and has visited Armenia as part of civil initiatives on many occasions.

"Such initiatives should be encouraged. I mean to say, that public diplomacy is very useful - getting to know each other, to realize that neither Armenians, nor Turks are barbarians. That they are regular people like us. To get acquaintances, to make friends. These are all important. Journalists are part of civil society and such ties should be encouraged more and more", she says.

Laila assured us, that she had no stereotypes before coming to Armenia - she was coming to learn.

"They never turn me back. I go to Yerevan, present myself and ask for an interview and they agree. This happened with Arman Kirakosian. In one hour. He was taking part in a big conference. Same with Oskanian. He invited me to Yerevan for an interview. An excellent politician. I've never had difficulties in Yerevan. Never."

Leila Tavshanoghlu says she's valued as an unbiased reporter - they trust her and "it is mutual". Thanks to that she has her sources in Armenia, and if her information doesn't come from the source, Laila is always able to check the information received from Armenian media.

Leila Tavshanoghlu says she likes the interviews made with Ex-foreign minister Vardan Oskanian and the late Catholicos Garegin A.

"I liked the realistic answers they gave me. I was partial towards the late catholicos. He was a wonderful gentleman, I liked him a lot. Very progressive. The answers that both he and Oskanian gave were very constructive for [Armenia - Turkey] relations. The main message was that the relations should be normalized without any preconditions. The response here was very positive."

Leila confirmed the impressions we had from Istanbul, that the "Armenian topic" is very "fashionable" in Turkish press. According to her: "It started after AKP party came to power, when they put forward the idea of opening the Armenian border. The journalists were encouraged to come to Armenia. Various non-government organizations were invited them. Boris [Navasardian, president of YPC] was one of the initiators of journalistic meetings and he keeps doing that now as well."

Responding to the question - what is the message that the readers want to hear from you, or perhaps, what are those painful questions they don't want to hear about, Tavshanoghlu said: "But they must - yes, they have no choice. There are facts. I can't erase them from history, so I have to write about it."

Freedom of speech without borders

Despite the fact, that Article 301 of Criminal Code, which is considered a serious limitation of freedom of speech in Turkey, has been reformulated, there are still people charged with it. The lawyer of Hrant Dink and his family - Fethiye Chetin, whom we met at a film presentation dedicated to Dink, had this to say about the law: "The change is not a fundamental one, but the fact, that it has been modified, has had a positive effect on the ongoing processes."

The presentation was taking place in one of Istanbul's prominent Bilgi University. The author of the film was a Turkish emigrant to Germany, journalist, film director Osman Okkan. Before the presentation in Turkey, the film had only been screened in Germany (first in Nuremberg), and will be brought to Yerevan soon. I informed about this Jivan Gasparian, the author of the film's music, while accompanying a Turkish colleague to interview the musician.

The film tells about Armenians: those who lived in Turkey and those who still do. Dink was supposed to have been the film's consultant, but after his murder, the author made Dink the main personage, through whom Osman Okkan tries to make heard what he has to say: "Hrant was trying to explain people that they have to learn their own history, talk to each other, and that will help a lot. Turks have to understand how Armenians live, what problems they have, what they feel. This is a long journey, but Turkey must take steps on that direction, and hopefully, achieve success. I think that Hrant changed a lot, just as his death changed a lot. 5 years ago you wouldn't be able to see a film like this in Istanbul. Now you can."

"I HAVE NO PROBLEM SPEAKING ARMENIAN, AS WELL AS TURKISH"

Deputy Mayor of Shishli Vasken Parin says.

Vazgen Parin (Vasken Barin in Turkish) is the highest ranking Armenian in state office in today's Turkey. He is the deputy mayor of Shishli for over 10 years. In 1950 there was an Armenian with a higher post - it was Shelekhshyan, who was elected as a member of Turkish parliament.

Shishli is one of Istanbul's districts, with 450 thousand inhabitants. 30 thousand of them are Armenians - long-time Istanbul residents. There are also newcomer Armenians from Armenia, but their numbers are unknown. Among long-timers we don't mean just those Armenians, who have always lived in Istanbul, but also those, who have come over the past 40-50 years from the depths of Anatolia. Parin himself is from Shrnaq, 100 kilometers from Van, which is a mostly Kurdish populated area. He didn't know a word in Armenian till the age of 13. He hadn't seen Armenian letters until they moved to Istanbul and Parin was taken to Armenian church-school. After our interview Parin recited some beautiful pieces of Western Armenian poetry.

During last Sunday's local self-government elections in Turkey, Mustafa Sarigul was reelected as Shishli's mayor for the third time, having received 54.65% of the vote.

His deputy, Vazgen Parin has a great role in this victory. As he proudly told us, during the first election Sarigul received 42%, the second one - 68.6%.

"We don't put any differentiation between Armenians and Muslims. Under Mustafa Sarigul's leadership the municipality has been very helpful to the Armenian community. We bring our service and care to all of Shishli, as well as the Armenian community, perhaps a little more in the latter case", Vazgen Parin says. He enumerates all the Armenian institutions - the church, school, cultural groups, hospital, cemetery, which are under care of the municipality, and adds: "But, of course, we take care of also mosques, other local schools and unions, because I don't see difference in people. I have no problem speaking Armenian, as well as Turkish."

Parin speaks Armenian at all the events held with the Armenian community, and it is duly accepted by current Turkish officials. Our interview was in Armenian as well, and the meeting took place in Shishly, at tailor Mkrtych Ozjian's workshop, which Parin preferred from a range of much quieter locations.

"Armenians were not engaged in state affairs during the past 10 years and were often left in shadow, but mentality has changed in Turkey in the past years. As a result of ties with the European Union there is, of course, improvement in legislation and the way of thinking," Vazgen Parin says. "By a combination of circumstances I was appointed as deputy mayor 10 years ago. 5 years ago I was reelected by all the shishlians - Armenians, Muslims, Jews, etc. And I encouraged my Armenian friends and other members of the Armenian community to become more engaged in state affairs in Shishly and elsewhere. Because, if we get there, and do things, it will be better for our community as well and there will be more government assistance available for our institutions. Currently there are about 8-10 Armenians who are members of elder's councils in different municipalities."

Speaking on Armenia - Turkey relations Parin noted, that all the things he said 4-5 years ago on Armenian TV are "slowly coming to life" now. He had said that the borders should be opened.

"The 1915 events are not meaningless things, but I don't think it is that important to know what is its name - genocide or something else. Both sides have faced dangers, and it is possible, of course, that Armenians have suffered more. But if we only concentrate on that and don't look to the future, if both sides live like enemies for thousands of years, what will be the outcome? Bad mistakes have been committed, whether you call it killings or genocide. If we keep insisting on that mistake and don't prepare the future for the upcoming generations, what will be the end?"

"There's no way to solve the issues if you just remain angry and avoid talking," Parin says. He doesn't accept one-sided way of thinking, refusal of other points of views. "If you were born in Turkey, raised as a Turkish child, you would say - we haven't committed Genocide, they have killed us. Why? Because that's what his father tells him, that's what is written in the books," says Parin, expressing hope, that one day people, who speak like that, will read other books as well. The same he wishes for Armenians.

To illustrate his point, Vazgen Parin makes an allegory. "Let's say Mkrtych asked 1000 golden coins from me and promised to return in 2 months. Didn't return, said - I don't have money. Then again - no, don't have it. So I come and go, we argue. I tell others - this is not right. It is several months, several years - Mkrtych is not returning my debt. 5 years have passed, I keep talking. One day I see his son and tell him - your father is a bad man, took my 2000 golden coins and didn't return it, for 7 years now. His son will, of course, reply - get lost, you're a liar. He calls me a liar. Do you see what I mean? You have to make sure to behave wisely. Instead of behaving like that, you should think - what should I do to win 2000 golden coins instead of the initial 1000."

In the end, this exceptional Armenian who is integrated as a Turkish citizen, wishes, or assures. "I hope that one day Armenians will have great days, I hope that the borders will be opened, cultural ties will be established and the 1000 years of animosity will be over."

BORDER OPENING - A PACKAGE DEAL

A view from the other bank of Araks

Mehtat Melen from the "National Action" party of the Turkish parliament supports Armenia - Turkey border opening, if all the other problems between the two sides are resolved. "It is impossible to discuss only one issue - the border with Armenia or any other country of the Caucasus. Everything should be discussed: the behavior of the [Armenian] Diaspora in the United States and border opening, of course because we do some trade together, but you can't discuss it alone, without discussing the Karabakh issue. You can't promise anyone, USA - that the border will be opened. Because you have to have a complete program and I'm not sure - is it being discussed or not?"

While in Armenia the general consensus is towards normalizing relations with Turkey on a "phase by phase" approach, Melen claims it will be a short-term solution. To reach a long-term settlement like in Lozan agreement, all problems must be solved first. "I don't mind discussions with Armenia. I've been insisting that we should have closer ties with Caucasus, including Armenia over the past 10 years. Because things happen illegally: 70 thousand Armenians live and work here. That's why we must open our hearts, of course, our doors, and have proper relations."

Mehtat Melen, who is also a columnist at "Turkish Daily News" and "Dunya" newspapers, and who has been present at the 'private' announcement of Turkish officials in Washington, whereby they assured, that the border will be opened after local self-government elections in Turkey on March 29th, doesn't believe that the border opening and creation of a historians' committee is indeed being discussed with Armenians.

He says those issues weren't on the agenda of local self-government elections even in Kars region bordering with Armenia. During our conversation Mehtat Melen notes that while in US they think those issues are discussed in Turkey, it is not so in reality. Speaking of "package" option of border opening he reminds, that the US faces many issues in the region. They intend to bring armed forces from Iraq, Afghanistan, and US needs NATO support. There are NATO and EU enlargement issues, etc.

Melen doesn't think Obama will use the word "genocide" on April 24th.

"I believe Armenians have common sense. I mean the Armenians in Armenia, not in US. They use it, and by using it, they hurt Armenians who live in the Republic of Armenia and they damage our relations. Like the rest in this region, you are also in a bad economic condition, and they're damaging you by this, because all the economic issues have been left out. Who benefits from this? Some people who live in the States."

The Turkish MP says his family living in Van was slaughtered by Armenians, so whatever happened was war, not genocide. At least, he said, he wasn't raised in an anti-Armenian spirit. "Because we were founding a new nation, new ideas, and Lozan had an important role here. We have to share prosperity in this region, do more trade, find acceptable solutions and avoid being used by others. I'm stressing that - avoid being used."

Turkey should solve the Armenian issue - posed in the European Union accession talks, with Armenians, not Europeans, our interlocutor says.

Answering to the question, do Turks want to join the EU, Melen said - if you asked 5 years ago, I'd say yes. But today people are indifferent.

"The Europeans pretend that one day they will let us in, and we pretend, that one day we will become full members. So, both sides pretend quite successfully."

Mehtat Melen, member of Turkish - European "harmonization committee" says he's "fed up" with all this and doesn't hide his attitude in talks with Europeans.

"Over 40% of Turkey's trade is with Europe, more than 5 million Turks live there. Trade with Europe accounts for 18% of US GDP, while in our case it is more than 50%. How can anyone in my party be against Europe? But how can such important financial partners, such as Turkey, be ignored and not taken seriously in Europe? And, really, how can we delay this day by day taking advantage of these issues?"

Ashot SOGHOMONIAN

Expert on Turkish studies Ashot Soghomonian, born 1975, has graduated Yerevan State University's department of Oriental studies. He acquired his PhD on Turkish studies on 2004. Ashot Soghomonian has practiced journalism from 1998 to 2002, at "Azg" Daily, "Yerkir" newspaper and "Armenpress" News agency. Currently Mr. Soghomonian is a Docent, Professor at Yerevan State University. He frequently publishes articles and analyses on Armenia - Turkey relation and developments in Turkey in Armenian newspapers and makes appearances on TV.

REFERENCE: ON RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN ARMENIAN - TURKISH RELATIONS

The recent developments taking place in Armenian - Turkish relations, especially the attempts to start a new phase in relations with the help of football diplomacy, highlight the importance of researching once again the official and unofficial contacts that have taken place between the two nations over the past years. After the football match many were expecting activation in Armenia - Turkey relations and serious progress on that front.

The contacts that have taken place between the two countries

The bulk of Armenian - Turkish contacts have taken place between the non-government organizations (NGOs). The two sides have had more active contacts on the official level within the framework of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) organization, especially after the establishment of permanent representation of Armenia to BSEC in Istanbul. Official contacts taking place before that were happening between foreign ministry officials of the two countries.

Active ties between the NGOs started back in 1997, when the Armenian-Turkish Business Development Council (TABDC) was founded. The establishment of that organization initially had a political purpose, but as it wasn't able to serve the purpose, soon it lost the support of the political authorities.

Contacts between non-government organizations became more active since 2001, when the US government allocated \$1 million US to the American University of Washington for the development of Armenian - Turkish relations. Within the frameworks of that grant various NGOs implemented a range of small and large-scale projects in the course of 3 years.

The efficiency of the contacts that took place in the past

A new process of genocide recognition throughout the world started in 2000. Resolutions recognizing the genocide and condemning it were adopted by the parliaments of various countries. This was undermining the projects implemented by NGOs, much as they were geared towards bringing the two nations together and having them find out more about each other. During each meeting the genocide recognition process was creating obstacles in facilitating more open relations between the two sides.

The situation is different in the meetings that are taking place in recent years. Turkey's attempts to become a European Union member and turn into a democratic country have really changed the attitudes of more educated layers of the society towards the development of Armenian - Turkish relations and perceptions of the Armenian genocide. Turkish intellectuals and a wide range of the society have become freer to express themselves. More importantly, they have a new desire to find out more and accurate information on the Armenian genocide. One of the recent reflections of this reality is the petition launched by Turkish intellectuals to join the "Forgive us, Armenians" initiative, which was signed by more than 30 thousand Turks in the matter of several days.

The issue of self-identity in Turkey

The issue of self-identity is a very sensitive one in Turkey. The democratic changes taking place in Turkey over the recent years have created various problems for the government and certain layers of the society. It is very difficult to find a pure-blooded Turk, whose parents would be originally Turkish. This was the reason, why the identification documents mark the citizenship status rather than the national background of the citizens.

Another major issue for the Turkish state in terms of self-identity is the problem of Muslim (hidden) Armenians. Many long-term (6 years) researches carried out by us have revealed, that a large number of Kurds living in the eastern parts of Turkey consider themselves Armenians and live by the traditions inherited from their grandfathers. They also marry their children to children of Armenian descent.

After raising this dangerous issue for the Turkish state in several public speeches and interviews, historian Yusuf Halachoghlu, the head of Turkish historical association, known for his anti-Armenian orientation, was fired from office. Turkish authorities explain Halachoghlu's dismissal by the following two arguments. Firstly, they say, he was a politicized historian and secondly, his anti-Armenian announcements might hinder the newly developing Armenian - Turkish relations.

In reality, Yusuf Halachoghlu was fired, because his announcements about Muslim Armenians might give those hidden Armenians incentive to come tougher and think about their identity.

Parallel to Halachoghlu's announcements the Union of Sasun Armenians was estab-

lished, bringing together Armenians from Turkey's Sasun region, which held its first meeting on July 2008. Around 2000 Muslim Armenians have joined the union.

The issue of self-identity was raised again after the killing of Hrant Dink, when many Muslim Armenians (who currently live in Istanbul) joined the protest actions. Our research shows that the issue of self-identity in Muslim Armenians is in the process of moving from Turkey's Eastern regions to the largest city - Istanbul.

Turkish society braces out of control

The term "Deep state" is circulating in Turkey for many years now. The Deep state denotes a situation, where certain representatives of the higher class in a state directly decide the internal, foreign, economic policy of the state as well as all the other issues in the country.

The Deep state has been able to rule the nation during the past decades and control every type of opposition and intolerance. The democratic process in Turkey during the recent years has really enabled the Turkish society to think and act more freely.

Parallel to mentioned changes the concept of "Deep Turkey" has come into circulation, which checks and balances the "Deep State". The "Deep Turkey" denotes the contemporary Turkish society, which has gone out of control and tries to interfere with the activities of the "Deep State".

In order to control and rule the Turkish society the Deep State has started to cooperate with the PKK leadership in the recent years. The clashes between the Turkish army and Kurdish terrorists during the past two years have been organized as a result of the agreement between the Deep State and PKK leadership. Currently the Turkish state faces threats not only from Kurds, but also from Kurdicised Armenians and Alevies.

Notably, the majority of Alevies are also Armenians who have changed their religion. Currently there are several dozens of thousands of Alevise in Turkey's Tunjeli (Dersim) region.

The Deep State makes every effort to retain the lead of the country, but as a result of developments in Turkey the system of government is also undergoing changes.

The stereotypes between the two nations

The Turkish society has several stereotypes about Armenians and Armenia. An average Turkish citizen (Turk) remembers ASALA (Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia), remembers assassinations of Turkish diplomats in various countries and feels frightened and threatened. Traditional Armenian political parties are also associated with stereotypes for Turks. This concerns Dashnaktsutyun and Hinchakyan party primarily, as well as the "rebellions" organized by those organizations. A new stereotype concerns the US Armenians, whose actions, according to Turks, are aggressive towards Turkey.

The prevailing stereotypes Armenians have about Turks is mostly related to Turks' committing genocide and being murderers. Even now there are people who are afraid of getting in touch with Turks.

The existing stereotypes are deeply rooted in the consciousness of the nations and can only be eliminated by mutual relations, recognition of each other and trust built on long-term peaceful relationships.

In reality the Armenian - Turkish relations cannot be improved by football matches, or historians, or politicians or president. The issue can be solved only by the nations when the time is right for that.

Armenian - Turkish border: should it be opened, or not?

The issue of Armenian - Turkish border opening has become a topic of discussion by official, as well as non-official circles of the two countries for already several years. Before 2008 the Turkish side was putting forward several preconditions to border opening, including the Karabakh issue, recognition of Turkey's territorial integrity, genocide recognition† Currently the Turkish side does not present any preconditions for border opening.

The US pressures the current Turkish government to open the Armenia - Turkey border. This poses a serious problem for the Turkish authorities, as the nationalist forces have become quite active in the recent years and the Armenian - Turkish border opening issue may be exploited by them.

Local self-government elections are scheduled in Turkey on March 2009. Before those elections Erdogan's party will not only keep the border close, but will also halt attempts to continue the contacts that have started.

Any contacts by current Turkish administration with the Armenian side will not only damage the chances of Erdogan's party at the elections, but will also beef up the chances of nationalists to achieve serious results.

Theoretically the continuation of the current diplomatic talks can be continued since April, when Turkey will try to exploit improvement of relations with Armenia in order to stop the newly elected US President from using the genocide word in traditional April 24th address, as well as to block entry of the resolution recognizing Armenian genocide into the agenda of the U.S. Senate.

Turkey has a big problem with border opening and establishing relations. The Turkish society is not ready yet to opening the Armenian border and establishing relations. By using various propaganda techniques Turkish authorities are trying to prepare their nation to improvement of Armenian - Turkish relations and border opening, but national forces interfere with this as well.

Political and economic analyses are being made in both countries; materials are being published in the media and various magazines, which highlight the importance of border opening for Turkey, as well as for Armenia.

In reality, however, the border opening issue is only important for Armenia in order

to overcome the economic problems faced by the country. Turkey is not interested in opening the border with Armenia either from political or economic perspective. Some economists claim that if the border is opened Armenian economy will grow 30 percent within several months.

Nevertheless, the experts don't indicate to what degree the Armenian economy will become dependent on Turkish economy.

It is obvious that border opening will not have any considerable impact on the Turkish economy.

Levon BARSEGHYAN

The Council Chairman of Gyumri Journalists' Club "Asparez" Levon Barseghyan, 42, has started his career in journalism since 1987. On 1992 - 2002 Mr. Barseghyan worked in various local TV and radio companies in Gyumri as editor in chief, news editor, anchor, and video-operator.

Levon Barseghyan is an advocate of developing Armenian - Turkish relations. He has made over a dozen reporting trips to Turkey in recent years, has working relations with a number of journalists in Kars region and Istanbul.

THE LAST TWO HUNDRED KILOMETERS OF THE IRON CURTAIN

"I'm waiting to see when Armenia will extend its hand to us"

This is what the editor of "Kars Haber" daily, one of Kars' most influential local newspapers told us about a year before the Armenia - Turkey football match.

Gyumushpalla Qortague, the editor, had strong words for the powers in both countries, who, he assured, seed animosity and deepen the divide towards each other. He covers these issues in his paper from time to time: "We heard from our grandfathers, that Armenians used to live here, and although it is our government that has closed the border now, I'd like to know what will come out of the Armenian Diaspora's intolerant stance towards Turkey."

It is easy to find people to talk to if you come from Armenia. People find you themselves. The town barely has 80 thousand inhabitants, a couple of hotels. Everybody knows each other. When foreigners settle in the hotel the news spreads fast.

It is enough for the guest to tell a little bit about his business and the hotel staff find corresponding people and let them know there are guests who've come to meet them.

All talk of Armenian - Turkish border opening, interviews, and conversations with karsians of all backgrounds end in folklore tales on friendship of nations. Common people, workers, craftsmen, keep explaining that when someone's donkey gets lost, it is the neighbors who join in first to try and help in finding the lost animal.

The editor in-chief of "Olchek" newspaper, Sali Shahin tells the tale of fingers on one's hand, saying they are never equal in size and explains - there are close neighbors, there are distant ones, but all† on the same hand, how can they be enemies† and so on.

It's hard to find anyone in Kars, who hasn't watched the Turkey - Armenia football match on September 6, 2008. The reason is not just the rise in Turkey's football and lack of pastime in Kars. Despite the closed Armenia - Turkey border and continuation of the 80-year-long 'tradition' of keeping it shut, the majority of Kars inhabitants have consider-

able and personal interest in re-opening of the border. They are convinced that it is necessary to work with neighbors, cooperate, make reciprocal visits, engage in trade, etc.

18 years after the fall of the iron curtain a 200 long section of it in fact remains untouched, blocking the Armenia - Turkey access.

Most Kars journalists say they are all for establishing neighborly relations with all the bordering countries.

By various estimates about 6-10 thousand people have settled in Kars moving from Nakhijevan over the past 18 years. Nakijevanians have settled well: they do business, engage in agriculture, teaching. Some are journalists. The opponents of border opening are mostly people representing this group, and the Azerbaijan consul in Kars promotes these views by means of medium quality anti-Armenian propaganda, sometimes bordering with hysteria and several local structures of Turkish nationalist parties.

The socialists and communists in Kars sometimes call nationalists 'fascists' with a tone of sarcasm, making it clear that it's useless to talk of anything about friendship or establishing relations. The efforts are deemed to fail. Despite all my efforts, all of them refused to meet and talk. One of such politicians agreed initially, but, at the last moment, excused himself citing urgent business to be taken care of.

All conversation with political and social figures in Kars on Armenian-Turkish border opening leave an impression that these people, however friendly they seem, seek advice with their superiors in the capital before saying a word, expressing an opinion.

Journalists, craftsmen and businessmen, on the other hand, have some independence and relatively freely share opinions.

Gyumushpalla remembers how in the days of his youth the word "Armenian" was considered a swearing, but thinks those times have passed: "Armenians are now considered as a nation. I personally perceive them also as friends, but Oskanian¹ is fascist!"

This was one year ago.

"...he played really well, though..."

Chief Director of Kars Center of Arts Israfil Parlak: "Neither Kars, nor Turkey, nor Armenia, nor many other nations of the world are defined by their borders. I have to know how the people live in Armenia, how aborigines live in Australia. People, especially kids, must be taught about the life of the neighbor nation. Their culture and interests should be imported. We stage performances with children here. The costs are covered by the municipality. I dream of presenting a play in Armenia. Jivan Gasparian² played here once in 2005. There was also a musician from Kars. They performed. The listeners went crazy about the sound of dudouk, they were charmed. Someone said after the performance: "Although he [Gasparian] is an Armenian, but he played as if from my heart. Another one said - an Armenian - but played so well!"

1 Armenia's former foreign minister Vartan Oskanian.

2 Famous Armenian dudouk player.

Israfil Parlak told all this and went on to tell about his trips to Armenia in search of any Turkish translations of Yeghishe Charents¹ hoping to stage a poetry evening using those verses. As everyone else, he has watched the Armenia - Turkey football game.

"Artists don't understand political figures. But such progress is quite welcome. I'd like to see more high-level visits. The common people are getting along; it is up to the ones above to improve relations."

Armenia - Turkey: 0:2

This exceptional football meeting between Gul and Sargsian raised hopes of seeing further diplomatic talks for this artist, as well as for Kars journalists.

"Kars Postas" daily is six years old. Print-run is 800 copies. Sefer Tan is the acting editor in-chief. He has watched the game. Says he even guessed the score. Says the development is highly positive from political standpoint.

"Gul's visit to Armenia was very useful. I want the border opened. Why don't you somehow solve the Karabakh issue and have the border opened? There is no hostility between the nations. I once got lost in Yerevan when walking around. The police found me, took to the hotel. I wasn't expecting such a treatment."

Sefer was in Armenia five years ago: "I decided to come see your country, was really interested. There were elections there at that point," Sefer Tan told us and added that he met no hostile treatment in Yerevan. Then he invited us for dinner. We had to rush, he understood - wasn't offended.

Local self-government elections take place in Kars every five years. Kars mayor Naif Alibeyoghli is in office for the third term and is seeking reelection in March 29, 2009 elections (Like us [Armenians], they also try to be reelected as many times as possible).

Four years ago he came forward with an unprecedented initiative - organized a petition on border opening to be sent to Turkish authorities and was able to collect 50 thousand signatures in Kars region which has a total population of 350 thousand. Journalists topped the list of signatories. All the media outlets widely covered the petition. I'm told there were tables put out in major crossroads of Kars and people would come to them and sign. The collected signatures were sent to the parliament.

Alijan Alibeyoghli, one of Kars mayor's brothers, has been to Armenia. Talking to us he expressed surprise at the low price for food in Armenia. Like many other businessmen in Kars, he is interested in the price of sheep, construction materials and fuel in Armenia. These people, so to say, are all ready for border opening in the hope of lively trade with Armenia. They also expect a sharp rise in price of land in the border areas.

People in Kars make no secret about their motivation to have the border opened and the whole absurdity of its remaining closed. People here mostly complain about Ankara's policy, asking - why should the Armenian citizens be able to freely travel to Istanbul by airplane, but not to Kars. Why can't they themselves travel directly to Gyumri or Yerevan

1 Armenian poet

from Kars and have to go through Georgia. What is different about going through Georgia, but no way to travel directly?

"Isn't Ankara damaging Kars and other bordering areas more than Armenia by keeping the border closed? Isn't it creating an artificial barrier to the region's development?"

These questions, unanswered as they were, kept popping up during our discussions with everyone, who has ever campaigned for border opening. Considering the moods prevailing in Kars under this light, it is easy to conclude, that the central government in Turkey is having to compromise by sacrificing the needs of Kars and other regions bordering with Armenia for greater needs of the state policy. Hence, all those who speak of border opening, including the mayor of Kars, raise the anger of Ankara. At least, this was the situation before the match talked about football game and the closed meetings of Armenian and Turkish diplomats.

The construction firms and builders in Kars are seriously interested in Armenian construction materials, especially tuff. Meanwhile, upon seeing a visitor from Armenia they mention their worries about the explosion drilling taking place in the Armenian (Anipemza) stone-mine across Ani¹, on the other side of Akhuryan river.

We're often asked - how did you come to Turkey. We respond, that instead of the 80 kilometer direct trip we've had to travel a 340 kilometer distance through Georgia, they make a mocking gesture - holding the left ear with the right hand passing over the head and start laughing - that's what the situation is like, they say...

The editor of "Huryurt" newspaper Erol Huryurt told us, like other colleagues, that he wants the border opened. But, he also mentioned, this is a matter of state importance. The sixty-year old says the leaders of the state know better.

"The questions you pose (doesn't specify which ones), put us in an uneasy situation. Even if we just express a point of view, it will still damage us. The border was opened in 1992-1993, people were free to travel, it was good for the trade. It was lively. From what I understand, our country had to close the border because of Karabakh issue," Erol Huryurt says.

The newspaper is being published since 1954. The print-run is 300-350 copies. 250 of those are subscription based. This and other newspapers raise the print run during the election days. Those are the good days for the papers here, the print-run goes up to 1500-2000 copies. The reception at this newspaper looks like a tiny museum: an old printing machine, which is costs 40,000 liras (25,000 US Dollars) as an antiquity; various diplomas, honorary papers, etc.

Erol Huryurt has watched the football match. He thinks Abdullah Gul's visit was not a political one, but purely a sport one. Even though it was unprecedented, he says it's pointless to lay serious hopes on it.

"Russia keeps falling apart..."

One of the three local radio stations in Kars is "Kavkaz" radio (95.5 FM). It is located in an apartment. The staff as well as the guests of the radio station must take off their

1 Medieval Armenian capital, now half ruined, in the territory of Turkey.

shoes before entering the apartment. There are no exceptions. The radio station operates since 1996. It broadcasts news, advertisement, music, programs on the work of the municipality, live phone interviews, social-educational programs especially for women. They often invite psychologists and doctors for interviews - to give advice on pregnancy, birth, women needs.

The director, Levent Ata, is about 35 years old. Says he liked the Armenia - Turkey football match and welcomes Turkish president Abdullah Gul's visit to Armenia.

"There is the Turkish - Armenian issue, those are historical issues. We have to be able to overcome those. Armenians and Turks made business together in Ottoman times, why can't we do so now? We have to remember, that blood cannot be washed with blood. Blood is washed with water. We are neighbors," Ata explains to me.

"We have to engage in dialogue. We'd like to see Armenia's president as our guest as well. That way our relations will improve - one step at a time."

Speaking on prospects and expectations of border opening the director of the radio station said it will be very helpful for developing trade and business relations.

"I think it will be beneficial even for Georgia if the border is opened. And the obstacles to border opening are now very few. Russia keeps falling apart. It's time for the dialogue of nations: Abkhazia, Osetia, Georgia... there shouldn't be any superpower. I think Russia should not invade Georgia under any circumstances."

Erol Ata said he hasn't been to Armenia, but has very good friends there. They are mostly tradesmen, who travel to Turkey to buy goods. He says he has been to Georgia, but not to Armenia and is worried, that being a Turk he might be mistreated there.

A small Eurovision debt...

Sali Shahin, editor of "Olchek" cultural newspaper says Turkish president's visit to Armenia is a welcome move. He has published an article about it in his newspaper.

"Armenia is a neighboring country. We have friendly relations with Georgia and Azerbaijan. We have common things in music and art, folklore. I think it should be easy to cooperate in these spheres. Those above - in the governments, should deal with the existing disagreements. The political figures should be wiser. Certain politicians in Armenia and Turkey take advantage of existing disagreements instead and keep the citizens of Armenia and Turkey in suspense. They create obstacles to economic, cultural cooperation. Many didn't like our president's visit to Armenia in this respect. However, the society for the most part welcomes very much Abdullah Gul's visit to Armenia," Shahin says.

"We expect serious dialogue between Armenia and Turkey after that visit. I know that our president's visit created serious disagreements in Armenia. When our anthem sounded during the broadcast of the football match, we saw people who applauded our president, as well as people who refused to stand up. We were wondering what the attitude of most people in Armenia is towards our country. During Eurovision, for example, Turkey awards very big points to Armenia, but we don't receive similar treatment in return."

"There are participants from Armenia in the Kars cultural festival organized with the initiative of Kars municipality. Karsians pay special attention to the Armenian participants. We have heard high quality performances, music is especially appreciated. But there are also those who envy. They are not many, of course. We want this atmosphere of improvement to continue. Your visit to find out our moods, our opinions of developments in Turkey-Armenia relations are very important. But there are some journalists who disapprove of our relations like this," Saly Shahin concludes.

"Imperialistic"

Umid Kylyj leads the Kars' regional brunch of the People's Democratic Party (DTP Democratic Topulumm Parti). It is perhaps safe to say, that he was the only leader of local party brunches, who agreed to meet and talk to us. The others managed to avoid meeting us on various excuses.

DTP party was established in 2005. It is represented in the 550 strong Turkish parliaments by 21 seats. It is a socialist party and has two million members. Their numbers are growing and DTP has bureaus in 48 vilayets. They hope to gain 100-150 seats in the next parliament. 55 heads of local governments, including those of Batmani, Diarbekir, Van, are members of this party. The party activists hope to win position of local government heads in 105 communities during March local self-government elections.

In the past Umid Kylyj has had to take political asylum in Belgium to escape political persecution. He has cooperated with Armenians and representatives of other nations during his Belgium stay.

"I'm sorry, but I must say that I have an 'imperialistic' view of football - I'll support the strongest playing team. Whoever plays better - I become their fan."

Speaking on President Abdullah Gul's Armenian visit Kylyj said: "Armenia is our closest neighbor. My heart's desire is to sit in the car, travel to Yerevan, walk around a little and return. There have been unpleasant things in the past. It must be forgotten. We need to establish cooperation which is beneficial for both countries. Opening of the Eastern border will benefit Armenia as well as Kars and our region. In no point in time people are enemies. It is just that there are certain conditions created which result in hostility. I think that if our people know each other better, this hostility will go away.

"Po Russki znayem"

I asked a colleague from Kars to take me to a meeting with one of Kars' older people. He made the appointment, we went.

The house was in the old city. It was built of black, faceted stone. They no longer build houses like that in Kars. The floors of the rooms are covered with carpeting and rugs.

Several hundreds of liters of water were stored in plastic containers lined up in the entry hall. The walls were mercilessly painted in a yellowish color. The furniture was old. The logged ceiling had bent down under weight of a hundred years, coming down about half a meter with no traces of repair.

The old man lived with his old wife. The old lady served us tea. Photos of their sons were posted on the walls. The DVD player was set up in its honorary place. Nearly all houses here have their personal satellite dishes, and everywhere they serve tea...

Qyarash Durmush was 89 years old, from Chakmach village, Chalgavur region. He used to live with Molokans. Told us about Armenians who lived in their village, recalled some names - Aram Vardanian, Khachik...

"Po Russki znayem," suddenly the old man said and went on saying: "Samavar, valinka, krushka."

Durmush's father has told him about the emigration of Armenians. He has seen Kemal Ataturk. Died in 1938. This house is a Russian house Durmush says. As to the Armenian - Turkish border opening, he's sure: "If the border is opened, there won't be more hitting - killing each other."

The owner of a large horse-ware shop, himself a big man, also the shopkeeper and maker of some of the horse-ware, got quite excited upon seeing us and finding out our being Armenian. He started to show us all his work, than went on to show photos of his parents, than of his horses. In the end he went on saying with incredible straightforwardness: "I've always dreamed of border-opening, so I can open a shop like this in Armenia... you have horses over there, don't you?"

"Sure, excellent ones... "I responded.

Meanwhile, the desires and dreams of common people remain in serious conflict with the known and obscure needs and interestes of the country's government. About two dozen people I talked to in Kars perceived and understood fully well the need to reciprocally reevaluate historical memory, make efforts on both sides to eliminate stereotypes and display will-power to solve frozen Karabakh conflict, figure out Azerbaijan's energy resources, Russia's obvious interests, unpredictable developments of the Kurdish factor, the Armenian Genocide card played on the way of Turkey's European integration.

Meanwhile, everyone understands that the border will remain closed as long, as it has to be.

No generation in Armenia or Turkey recalls the open border. No one here has a psychological problem with the fact that the border is closed.

Psychologically, Australia and New Zealand are closer to us, than Kars or the Kars region - considered as geographical units. Even Istanbul is perceived as something closer than Kars, situated one kilometer away from Akhourik river.

For the inhabitants of today's Kars the abovementioned countries are also psychologically closer than Gyumri, which they only remember by the tales of their grandfathers.

Armenia is not even in the list of first ten issues for the Turkish authorities. It is Diaspora with all the headache caused to it... This whole issue is so complicated, that the issue of border opening is only seen as a tiny dot behind it. Are we compatible, or not? If not, excuse me for asking, but who and where are expected to move? All places, they say, are occupied. Are there eternal enemies? Or aren't there? So long as those questions remain unanswered in the political thought of both countries, the border will remain closed. More closed, than opened...

Alin OZINIAN

Alin Ozinian is a political researcher. She was born in Istanbul and currently lives in Armenia. She studied International Relations at Yerevan State University and holds a MA degree on Turkish Studies. She is a regular contributor to Turkish Zaman Daily and various Armenian Newspapers, with analysis about the Caucasian Region and Turkish-Armenian relations. Alin Ozinian is also the press coordinator for Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council, as well as the regional project coordinator for Caucasia Business Development Network.

EMIGRATION TO A COUNTRY WITH CLOSED BORDERS AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

The problems of illegal Armenian guest-workers and its impact

Millions of people in contemporary world leave their country for different reasons in legal and illegal ways. In other words, the fact of emigration and its impacts, in the past, as well as in our days, is one of the most important realities.

The fact, that millions of people abandon their native countries for various reasons and travel to other countries legally or illegally is considered one of the most important international issues. Undoubtedly, it results in a large number of problems. This problem, which is reaching very serious scale on the international arena, is important for Turkey mostly from the point of view of Armenia - Turkey relations.

The "illegal foreign workforce" in Turkey and the problems caused by them are generally a matter of concern for Turkey, but the "illegal Armenian workforce" is considered on a different plane, as compared to the "Illegal foreign workforce".

Because of economic problems and unemployment, a short while after declaration of independence of the Republic of Armenia some part of the country's population left for the neighboring countries hoping to find work there. Turkey became the first of such destinations. Turkey was preferable for the unemployed in Armenia, because Turkey is close to Armenia, cargo is affordable and life is cheap. However, because of the existing issues between Turkey and Armenia, the Armenian citizens coming to work in Turkey are denied a legal work and stay permit. Despite that they do not leave Turkey and try to stay illegally.

There is no reliable data about the number of Armenian citizens working in Turkey illegally. According to a 2005 announcement by Abdullah Gul their number is 30,000 (thirty thousand). In another announcement in 2006 several Turkish parliament deputies noted, that the number of illegal Armenian workers is 70,000 (seventy thousand).

The issue of Armenian citizens working in Turkey is seen as a trump card in bilateral relations, as the conversations about their extradition have become more frequent recently.

Turkey has had to adopt differentiated policies towards immigrants from the East and the West. It was expected, that migrants from Turkey's eastern neighbors - Middle East and Asia would come to Turkey. In order to prevent this, according to 1951 Geneva agreement, work and stay permits are granted to migrants of Turkic descent, others are denied the permits. They are only allowed to transit through Turkey to third countries. Nevertheless, a limited number of migrants moving from the countries of Eastern Europe to Turkey have taken place since the times of the Cold War.

The positions of politicians, NGO leaders on immigration and smuggling are quite important in Turkey. The interesting thing on this regard is that the issue of "illegal Armenian workforce" is brought to the agenda when there are political issues between the two countries [Armenia and Turkey]. When there are no issues, the matter is not discussed.

It is known, that some of the biggest political problems between Armenia and Turkey are the genocide resolutions adopted by parliaments of other countries. When such resolutions are brought to agenda, the issue of "illegal Armenian workers" is one of the first countermeasures remembered. And the goal is not to solve the issue, but rather to expel the illegal workers.

In the year 2000 the leader of "True Way" party Tansu Chiller was the first to use this issue as a counterargument, when the US House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Relations was considering the genocide resolution. The leader of "True way" party Tansu Chiller suggested expelling the Armenian citizens working in Turkey as a counter-measure to the resolution.

Chiller's suggestion was approved by some circles, while others considered it a vulgarity. The figure 30 thousand Armenians was of special interest (it is still not known if he meant also the Armenians, who are Turkish citizens?). Tansu Chiller didn't name the source of information.

While the fate of illegal workers is considered, it is quite interesting to know what their real number is. The issue of "illegal Armenian workers" was rarely brought to the agenda before 2006. The issue was brought up again immediately after the October 12, 2006 resolution adopted by the French Parliament.

In 2006 the "issue of expelling" was first brought up again by a deputy of Democratic - Republican party Shyuqru Elekdagh. Speaking at October 17th, 2006 Session of Turkey's National Great Assembly (TNGA), Elekdagh said the following: "Dear friends, the so called "Armenian Genocide Denial Condemnation Bill", which foresees imprisonment and monetary fine, is a stupidity from every respect, it is illogical and antidemocratic in nature. I think one of the most effective measures to block this bill is to implement sanctions against Armenia. Turkey should send off the 70 thousand Armenians working illegally to their country."

In this way the number of Armenians illegally working in Turkey jumped from 30 thousand to 70 thousand, but nobody ever mentioned the source of this information.

Elekdagh's point of view was supported by former ambassador, Dyuzje deputy of "Justice and Development" party and head of EU integration committee of TNGA, Yashar Yakshil. On November 2007 he made a similar suggestion - to send home the 70 thousand illegally working Armenian citizens.

Speaking at the discussion "Dyuzje and economy in 2006" at the Tashly hotel organized by Byuzje's Manufacturers' and businessmen's union, Yakshil said the following: "There are 70 thousand Armenians illegally working in Turkey. If the Turkish government enforces the laws and says: 'you're working illegally, you're not allowed to work anymore', they'll find themselves in an impossible situation. If the Armenians illegally working in Turkey are sent back, Armenia will be in a hard situation. You might say that the mistake is committed by Turkey, but Armenia is being punished. Still, Armenia should understand its responsibility."

The issue became a subject of discussion by intellectuals and writers.

Murad Bebiroghlu wrote the following in an article on October 22, 2006: "Ambassadors like Alev Alatli, Gyunduz Aktan and Shyuqru Elekdagh demand to apply the strictest measures† It will come to a point, when all the Armenians will start saying we're afraid of Turkey. If I'm not mistaken, Shyuqru Elekdagh, quite unexpectedly made the number of Armenians living in Turkey (those who are not considered Turkish citizens) turn from 30 thousand to 70 thousand. Everybody started using this figure. It would be interesting to know - is there an official figure like that? Was it a blunder? Or was it a message to the West? The implication there is that we will not only exile the Armenian citizens, but also those Armenians who are Turkish citizens. You might say that it is a general plan, but not very many think that."

In an article entitled "The reminders of illegal Armenian workers" published in "Zaman" newspaper on October 13, 2006, Kadir Diqbash tries to bring in another point of view: "†France insists in a hostile manner. The bill was adopted in the Parliament. Senate is next. Now Turkey is discussing the counter steps. One of the options under discussion is the issue of expelling the 40 to 70 thousand estimated Armenian citizens illegally working in Turkey. This question, which has so far never been discussed, was brought into agenda parallel to the adoption by French Parliament of the bill on prosecuting "genocide denial". It is hard to understand, why they had turned a blind eye on illegal workers and there was no action against it, while Armenia and France keep calling Turks "genocide committers" and carry out special policy on that direction."

Anahit Hazaryan approached the issue from yet another perspective: "Parallel to breakdown of the Socialist regime, Armenia and Armenians who had found themselves in modern day slavery, turned to Turkey as one of the main hopes for finding work and food. In this way about 50 to 60 thousand Armenian Armenians will join the locals, who have been oppressed (Armenians who are Turkish citizens). The Turkish state, which mistrusts the Armenians who are its citizens, is faced with the fact of presence of poor Armenian Armenians. The Armenian poor, as the people from all socialist countries, apart from find-

ing themselves in a status of slavery and at risk of being banished every minute, are also forced to withstand expressions like this: "You accuse us of committing genocide, but we eagerly accept you"."

US House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Relations adopted a resolution in its session on October 30, 2007 on Armenian genocide with 21 against and 27 pro votes. The suggestion was made by California senator Mr. Shiff and his friends. As in other cases, when such resolutions were adopted, the question of "what should be done with illegal Armenian workers" was raised again.

This time it was Professor Dr. Kemal Chicheq, who first addressed the issue. He offered a model of limited solution to "Genocide claims". On Sunday, October 14, 2007 issue of "Zaman" newspaper the following malicious "solution" was proposed in a published article: "In this case, in order to stop the process of entering the Armenian bill into the House of Representatives agenda, actions should be undertaken not against the Turkish Armenians, but Armenians from Armenia and Diaspora. The illegal workers who have come to Turkey from Armenia should be immediately expelled from the country. This step will force the Armenians in Armenia oppose the Diaspora and the controversy between them will deepen with time."

During this time the issue of illegal Armenian workers was not raised, but in an article published on October 9, 2007, Hasan Qanbolat turns to the issue with certain predisposition: "Despite Armenia's hostile stance Turkey allows regular bus travel via the Black Sea region through the territory of Georgia to Armenia. Armenia is allowed to use the Trapizon port for import and export. On October 10, 2002 Turkey abolished the strict visa regime. Turkey turns a blind eye to the activities of 100 thousand illegal Armenian work migrants."

The issue of "illegal Armenian work migrants" is paid a lot of attention to and is a matter of serious discussion in Turkey. The matter is not viewed in the context of internal problem of the country, as part of the "illegal foreign workforce" issue. Over the past years it has become politicized and even if a solution to it is found, it is seen more as a gesture in relations with Armenia, than an issue which needs solving. The matter of "illegal Armenian workers" is brought to the agenda when foreign parliaments discuss a resolution (Armenian genocide): "Should we expel 30 thousand Armenians? But those 70 thousand poor Armenians have nothing to do. Although they work, they are very friendly."

The issue of "illegal Armenian workers" is under a painful process, as it is not fully researched. As it was in the past, it remains to be not an issue of illegal workforce, but a political gesture, or is pointed to as an example of hospitality. When the need arises, it is also used as a trump card. Failure to present clear figures of illegal workers or non-disclosure of that figure, as well as inclusion of Turkish Armenian citizens, be it intentional or unintentional, causes worries of the Armenian society.

Vercihan ZIFLIOGHLU

Vercihan Ziflioghlu works with English language newspaper Hurriyet Daily News and Economic Review as a reporter since 2007. She worked with Turkish language "Hurriyet" ten years (1998-2007). Before Turkish media she had an experiences with Istanbul Armenian's media "Marmara", "Jamanag", "Agos" and "Nor San". She is covering foreign policy issues, especially the Turkish-Armenian relations.

In 2008 Vercihan Ziflioghlu won the Sweden Institute's prize "Anna Lindh Foundation - Dialog Between Cultures." In 2009 she also won "The best reportage of the 2008" journalism prize from Ankara based Contemporary Journalist Association for a story on Armenia - Turkey relations.

BARBED WIRE FENCE DIVIDING TWO NEIGHBORS

YEREVAN - Despite diplomatic relations picking up in recent months with President Gul's visit to Yerevan, the border between Armenia and Turkey remains closed. People that remember once breakfasting in Turkey and lunching in Armenia, now have a barbed wire fence cutting them off.

There is a lake between Turkey and Armenia that separates the two countries. The Armenians call it "Aghuryan," and the Turks, "Arpachay." The lake is so fertile it is swarming with fish. Neither Armenians nor Turks can fish in the lake. Just 20 minutes from the lake, barbed wire splits a railroad in two.

It is just one segment of the immense railway that stretches through Armenia to Turkey. The entrance to Haygadzor Village at the north of the lake is under the control of Russian and Armenian soldiers. A sharp lookout is kept at the border of the village. It is forbidden for an ordinary Armenian to enter the church of the village, even for the Sunday service. The only way to attend the service is with special permission to enter the village.

Before sunrise, in a cab driven by a Mr. Suren, we hit the road for Gyumri, the closest border point to Turkey and the second biggest city in Armenia. We spoke with Mr. Suren throughout the journey and occasionally stopped at villages to speak to villagers. We were told by 90 percent of villagers that they escaped from various cities and towns of Anatolia, especially Kars, during the events of 1915, to Armenia, which was then under Soviet rule.

The Armenian language they speak has an Anatolian accent. Every village has its own special dialect. Because of this, it is sometimes hard for people in neighboring villages to understand each other. The villages are no different from typical Anatolian villages and neither are the villagers. They have named the places they live in after the towns and cities in Anatolia they migrated from. Nearly all of the villagers understand Turkish, even if they do not speak it.

Protecting the churches

The major problem these villagers face is the regular supply of water. While Yerevan, the extremely modern and European looking capital of Armenia, is only 40 minutes away, these villages are still without pipes. The villagers also face great difficulties when the temperature drops below -40 degrees during winter. Heating is as much of a problem as water.

We traveled from Yerevan to Gyumri in just over two hours in fits and starts. The first stop for the Hurriyet Daily News was at a journalist's club in Gyumri called Asparez. Without delay, we continued on to the border with the club president, Levon Barseghyan. Along the way Barseghyan acquainted us with the city. He told about the one storey houses built precaution to Gyumri's location on a fault line. Barseghyan said the streets and houses in Gyumri were similar to those in Kars. "The Armenians migrated from Kars to Gyumri and brought their lifestyle with them to this city."

Barseghyan's grandfather was born in Kars. Before the closing of the border, they used to go to Kars for breakfast and be back in Gyumri for lunch. According to Barseghyan, the Soviet rulers demanded the demolition of the churches of Gyumri but the people cleverly built tall buildings around the churches, hiding the churches in within the buildings courtyards. They saved many thousand-year-old churches from demolition this way. When the Republic of Armenia gained independence after the fall of the Soviet Union, the tall buildings were demolished and the churches were visible once more.

During Soviet rule, Gyumri was called "Leninagan", in homage to Lenin. Barseghyan said the city was now known by both names. There are still visible traces in the village of the 1988 earthquake. We walked around Gyumri under Barseghyan's guide and reached the border with Turkey.

Barseghyan warned us to hide our cameras as a precaution as we approached the barbed wire. A few minutes later, we passed down the road, walking along the railway line, half of which extends into Turkey. We reached the border between the two countries, and looking through the mesh of barbed wire, I gazed upon the country of my birth, before rounding up my week long trip to Armenia.

A vintage blend of the Caucasus

YEREVAN - After Caucasus cheese, an Armenian businessman and peace activist plans to blend grapes from across the region to produce a perfect Caucasus wine. He believes an appetite for good food goes a long way to create an appetite for peace.

Grapes from vineyards in Turkey, Azerbaijan and Armenia are going to be blended together to create a perfect vintage of Caucasian wine that will be the latest effort by a group of businessmen from across the Caucasus.

The initiative comes only a few months after the same businessmen produced the first Caucasian cheese under a joint brand by Georgia, Turkey and Armenia.

The Center for non-Traditional Methods for Conflict Resolution, or CCPNTRM, and its founding president, Artush Mkrtchyan, were the brains behind the cheese, which went on sale this May with labels printed in Turkish, Armenian and Georgian.

Mkrtchyan spoke to the Hurriyet Daily News and Economic Review about his projects for the near future.

The effort dubbed "cheese diplomacy" kicked off several actions that significantly boosted the bilateral contact between the two nations.

Turkish President Abdullah Gul going to the Armenian capital to watch the football match between Turkish and Armenian national teams Sept. 6 and the Armenian Foreign Minister coming this week to attend the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, or BSEC, meeting were only the most public displays of the recent efforts to improve the relations between the two neighboring countries.

Gul's visit may have been the culmination of years of work by diplomats, but some may note that it came only a few months after the Caucasian cheese was released onto the market, which might reflect the improving cultural and commercial ties over the past few years, with businessmen and artists taking the lead.

Entrepreneurs, for whom time is money, cannot afford long delays in improving official ties, and partners from Georgia, Armenia and Turkey have decided not to wait.

Immediately after the Caucasian cheese started to appear on market shelves, Mkrtchyan begun to work on the production of a vintage of wine, which does not have a name yet. Using grapes from vineyards of Azerbaijan, Turkey and Armenia, he brought together the tastes of the Turkish, Armenian and Azerbaijani in the same bottle. The wine will be on the market in the next few months with a label that will read in three languages.

Mkrtchyan said he found his inspiration for the wine in the Bible. "God's word is in the grape and the wine. I placed my heart on the side of friendship and peace," he said.

Mkrtchyan is already working on a dessert composed of fruits from the countries of the Caucasian for his next project after the wine is on the market.

FIRST STEPS FOR BETTER RELATIONS BEGAN IN 1995

YEREVAN - The reconciliation process between Armenia and Turkey began long before President Gul's visit to Yerevan with the first steps taking place in Paris in 1995, with the Armenian Diaspora Research Center and the Turkish-Armenian Democratic Dialogue Movement

Throughout the years, Armenian and Turkish individuals have played a vital role in fostering dialogue between the two societies in an effort to reconcile their rocky past.

Raffi Hermonn is one of those individuals, who since 1995, has made a great effort to increase communication between the estranged communities. Hermonn said he was the

only journalist of Armenian origin to be registered in the Turkish Journalists' Union by the end of the 1970s. He moved to France just before the military coup of 1980 but kept on believing in his dream that Turks and Armenians may one day become friends again, despite all the tragedies of the past.

He was a leading figure in social developments in France aimed at fostering such dialogue, establishing the "Centre de Recherche sur la Diaspora Armenienne "(Armenian Diaspora Research Center), and the Turkish-Armenian Democratic Dialogue Movement.

Later, he got together with Jean Claude Kebapcian, a prominent name in the 1968 movement in France. Hermonn spoke to the Hurriyet Daily News & Economic Review on his works over the past 12 years. "In the mid-90s, we started the Turkish-Armenian Democratic Dialogue Movement, an organization that (former President) Jacques Chirac labeled the 'diplomacy of the people.'"

Armenia vs. Diaspora

Kebapcian and Hermonn were able to introduce many Turkish intellectuals to the Diaspora in France, particularly Aysenur and Ragıp Zarakolu, two of the founders of Belge Publications. However, not every step was successful and they faced many difficulties trying to initiate dialogue.

One example was an attempt to actualize the Turkish-Armenian Dialogue Congress in 2000, while the French National Assembly was debating recognizing Armenian claims of genocide. "French Armenians took action and put pressure on Armenia to not give passports to attendees. Likewise, pressure was put on the French counsel at Yerevan to not give visas to Armenians," said Hermonn.

He said, President Robert Kocharian and Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian then made an unexpected statement, "Kocharian and Oskanian were saying 'every effort to support Turkish-Armenian dialogue is beneficial. Let the Armenian youth do it, there is no harm in that.'"

Taboo book

Hermonn said this was the first step in recent developments of a Turkey - Armenia reconciliation. "The congress took place in a French senate chamber. Jirayr Libaridian, advisor of former president Petrosian, was in attendance as was Lavrenti Parseghyan, ex-director of the Genocide Museum in Yerevan, on the stage next to Turkish intellectuals."

Hermonn's life course changed with a telephone call from Turkey in 1994. On the other end of the line was Pars Tuğlacı, an ethnically Armenian Turk, who spoke of a book that had an unorthodox thesis on the Armenian issue and about to be published in Turkey.

The "Ermeni Tabusu" (The Armenian Taboo), by Yves Ternon was published by Belge Publications. "I could not believe my ears when I heard such a work had been published," said Hermonn. Less than a month later, he heard the news of a Zarakolu

couple being prosecuted and the publishing house being bombed. Hermonn decided to take action, he prepared a file on what had happened to the Zarakolu couple and presented it to some French foundations. Hermonn said 16 foundations, including France Liberte, founded by Danielle Mitterand, the wife of the ex-president François Mitterand, approved the file. The document, requesting a reconsideration of the conviction of the Zarakolu couple, was presented to then Prime Minister, Tansu Ciller, during a visit to France.

"There was no 'good Turk' for the Armenians, however, I was presenting a Turk who was risking his own life," said Hermonn. He said they invited the Zarakolu couple to the 80th anniversary of the events of 1915, "Even the Dashnaks were silent."

Hermonn's has summed up his 12 years dedicated to the cause, "I knowingly called out for dialogue from France. I acted via the French, which was very important. Otherwise, I would have faced even greater difficulty. I received lots of threats during the period. The Armenian diaspora was claiming there is no such thing as a good Turk," but they were wrong.

Nagehan ALCI

Nagehan Alci works with AKSAM newspaper as a columnist. She studied political science and international relations at Bosphorus University in Istanbul. Nagehan Alci writes three columns weekly and has an interview page, on which she interviews prominent politicians and academicians. She is currently working on subjects concerning Turkey's foreign policy.

DEDICATED TO YOU - JANAN ARTMAN

Aram operates a small bar in Yerevan. He looks like a 'rocker' to the outside eye. A guy with a typical Western stance: rings on his fingers, specific clothes and beer in his hand, which he never puts aside. When you talk to him, you understand, that compared to his European peers, he comes from a completely different world.

* * *

Aram was born in Beirut. The family escaped from Ottomans to Lebanon. They weren't able to settle there and moved to France. He lived 10 years in Paris. And so, in his 28 years he kept writing letters to relatives living in various parts of the world. With poor Armenian and English - learnt later...

* * *

The main topic of the letters was the ring on his finger. The ring belonged to the grandfather. Aram's grandfather was forced away from his house in Hata. He never returned, but some how, after years, his ring was passed on to his wife. The grandmother passed the ring to her son. The ring has been handed down to the men in the family for the third generation now. The ring is now on Aram's finger, but nobody knows where and how did the owner of the ring - the grandfather, die...

* * *

I know, some of you are asking. "OK. But why aren't you telling about our dead. Why aren't you telling about that?" Whatever, my sorrow is not 'theirs'... Some of them, or some of us, have had their hearts burn in these lands. A lot of people have been spread away because of burnt hearts: It has become chaotic. People have had to change their passports. Maybe tried to change the language and religion, but wasn't able to fully learn it in the end...

* * *

It is important to explain this. It would also be more correct to show, that this has happened to both sides. I know it is possible to understand the painful reality of stories and see, that this pain wasn't one-sided. The way to this is through reciprocal contacts...

* * *

The people I met in Yerevan, the life-stories I was told, the music - were all like 'ours'. The people, who considered themselves 'nationalist' and didn't want to sit at the same table with me, would become friends after talking for a couple of minutes. I understood that when we take politics away, we remain mostly naked. This nakedness reveals our similarities.

* * *

But we don't know this. And because we don't - we never understand those stories, where the main actors, with variations, are presented from the two sides. Whatever happens, we are the product of generations brought up with reciprocal animosity. That is why you are also right. We are told, that if we hear something different from those lectures used to brainwash us from the day we were born, we should be afraid and move into defensive.

* * *

That is why I consider last week's developments in this country put under the title 'Armenian' as a 'collision of circumstances' of sorts. And since that's how it happened, I'm dedicating this to you Mr. Janan Artman. You are a typical representative of the dozens of generations, who have had their brains messed up with the obligation of 'us and we'. That's what you are, and it's not your fault. Because your nature has not demanded any further clarifications, every expression you were told was put into the corresponding drawer. The word Armenian was put into the drawer, which is entitled "enemy".

* * *

There is not problem to this point. The problem is that your name occupies space in the drawer called 'intellectual'.

I AM ALSO ARMENIAN

2 days are left to the second anniversary of Hrant Dink's death

"My life was created not to damage anyone's dignity." This country badly hurt the dignity of the man who said these words. In fact, several times. And in the end - killed him. Took him away from here. Took him† Hrant Dink is gone for two years now†

* * *

Dink's murderers must have thought that they are 'man'. I don't mean just the one who pulled the trigger. I mean those, who dope their minds with the world "blood" and perceive the world as divided into "Turks" and "others".

* * *

This deluded group is everywhere and in everyone† When Dink died, they and appendicitis like them were petting each others' backs. They formed the 'men's club' feeling among themselves. And shouting 'kick away those blocking our way' in public considered themselves patriotic.

* * *

Dink had long before uncovered them. Once he had said: "Conditioning your personality by the existence of the other is an illness. If you need an enemy to make you live, it means your self-identity is sick."

* * *

These sick people took away a patriot from us. Moreover, they dared to call their separatism - 'patriotism'. They even laughed shamelessly. And snorted to themselves†

* * *

They snorted and criticized those people, who were saddened after Dink. They even criticized the expression "We are all Armenian" voiced by those who protested against the murder, because the protesters were thus placed into the 'others' category of the 'Turks' and 'others' subdivision. They made speculations. They wrecked the sorrow. They made people doubt.

* * *

Two years have passed. These days last year I wrote an article on this again. 365 more days passed, still no good news† At first there was a backlash, but than, in the course of two years, the already started separatism grew stronger, and the details of the murder, unfortunately, did not come out. Maybe, they didn't want to disclose it? Because they're still too 'men'? And that 'man' needs an 'enemy' for the needs of its broken identity? Whatever† that enemy is in their minds. You can't kill it†

* * *

There are some hopeful signs in recent times. The evidence going counter to the mainstream. Brave interrogations. There are people on this land who have conscience, sense and want to do well. There are people who know how to say sorry and are ready to bear the shame of their country†

* * *

This part of the year I'm also Armenian. Last year, as well as this year and for as long as the murderer or murderers have not been arrested. Every year it will be the same. And I don't care about what they say about this†

DASHNAKTSUTYUN PARTY COMMENTS ON THE "EXCUSE" PETITION

Background: There is an interesting process taking place in Armenia. In a country, which, under usual circumstances, moves forward by stepping over Turkey, life becomes more active in such situations. They are holding their breath, expecting to see how the 'excuse' petition will affect Armenia - Turkey relations.

The politicians we met in Yerevan agreed on one thing: nobody wanted to delay the border opening process. They even said that their stance on this has recently softened.

Such an obvious softening of position is especially visible in Dashnaks. The Dashnaktsutyun party is known as the party which represents Armenians in Diaspora as well. This is a highly nationalist party, with strong socialist traditions. It is a political group which never backs away from Genocide claims - during Gul's visit they were noted for organizing demonstrations. Meanwhile, they are part of the coalition government.

This party rarely meets Turkish journalists, however, last Friday the General Secretary of the party, responsible for international relations Kiro Manoyan met with us in party's Yerevan office.

It was clearly not the best time for them. They were worried, that the nationalist forces [in Turkey] might launch serious backlash against the petition. They were worried, the the Armenia - Turkey dialogue might stop and the border might remain closed. That is why, even if the Genocide claims continue, they will be in a milder form, because it is important to push for recognition, even if there are problems in Turkey.

The developments shouldn't hinder border opening

The "excuse" petition process worried Manoyan of Dashnaktsutyun party as well. The developments shouldn't hinder the dialogue and border opening process.

Q: Historically, Dashnaktsutyun has an aggressive image. Some even claim that your party was established as a result of the Armenian question. It is known for its firm stance. Has the "excuse" petition started in Turkey changed your attitude?

A: I have to say, that, owing to our past experience, we are taking the developments in Turkey very seriously. We think that the petition in itself is a positive thing. A part of the society has been brave enough to face their history. Don't forget, that the mentioned history doesn't only concern Turks. It is also our history. In 1919 the Ottoman government itself criticized the events of 1915, however, later, due to certain political reasons; the current policy of denial was put to action. And it continues to this day. If the initial policy of the Ottoman government was continued, everything would have been different now. Today, there is hope again.

Q: I think by saying hope, you mean the petition? Does the announced text satisfy you?

A: The organizers of the petition, Baskin Oran and Chengiz Aktar have used the expression "great calamity" instead of saying "Armenian Genocide" in their interviews to foreign journalists. Because we perceive those expressions meaning the same thing, there is no problem with the process itself. However, we would have preferred if the word Genocide was used in the text.

The children of those in hiding

Q: *Would you be satisfied if the Turkish government signed under a similar text?*

A: Of course it wouldn't, but for the moment there is something else we've noted. The people signing the petition form a very small fraction of the society. Meanwhile, the petition signed against it is much bigger. It seems as though the children of those, who helped hide Armenians in their houses during the 1915 events have signed it. Their numbers in the society is approximately the same. At any rate, the hundred thousand people were out in the streets after Hrant Dink's burial. They haven't signed under this text yet.

Q: *What do you think, why?*

A: Because the backlash of nationalists is very strong, that's why. Meanwhile, most organizers are generally not against the word genocide, but they are unable to express that. We don't want the backlashes of the recent times to interfere with the dialogue started between the two countries. As Dashnaksutyun party we support establishing relations and opening border with Turkey without any preconditions. Meanwhile, the petition shouldn't be left alone. A group of Armenian intellectuals have written a letter to Gul, demanding the recognition of the genocide.

There has been progress during AKP rule

Q: *Are you saying that both sides had organized this movement?*

A: That's not what I'm saying. Similar efforts are undertaken on both sides. As a result, we have misperception. This is not a question to solve one-sidedly. This concerns you as well. That is why I find it hard to understand Prime Minister's reaction. On the one hand, he speaks of committee of historians, on the other, says - we haven't done anything.

Q: *Do you mean to say, that Erdogan's reaction will further complicate relations between the two countries and that Turkey's milder stance will be changed again?*

A: No. Erdogan spoke about the petition. All the positive developments in our relations were achieved during AKP rule. We don't think that there can be steps back just because of that.

We haven't organized protest actions against Gul's visit

Q: *Hearing that from me is astonishing. Because it is you, who were protesting during Gul's visit.*

A: Those protests were misunderstood. We weren't protesting against Gul's visit. We had organized demonstrations to announce about our demands. We were saying that if the hopes related to that visit are not realized, it will be worse.

Q: *What do you think the process that followed the visit?*

A: It was a positive period. But the 'excuse' petition created some confusion. And now Tayip Erdogan believes in the opposition situation. I think this initiative has put relations in danger.

Q: *Politically, you are the strongest voice of Diaspora. What are they thinking about the recent developments?*

A: Let's correct a common mistake first. There is a perception, that the Diaspora is more sensitive and hard-line. This is wrong. It is very important for Turks to face their history.

Q: *Why? Do you see any danger today?*

A: Of course. If the happenings are not accepted, there is a possibility that it will happen again. Remember 1993. Chiller was making plans for attacking Armenia. We don't know what will happen tomorrow.

Q: *Let's assume that there is really a danger. In reality, I don't see any danger at all. But, if Turkey admits what you want, how will that danger go away?*

A: Look at Germans. They've been talking about it from generation to generation. Points of views in Turkey will change with time as well. As a result, we will feel ourselves more secure. That's how we can get rid of fear dwelling in our sub-consciousness.

Q: *So the use of Genocide word is also more a way to receive future guarantees?*

A: Of course. Our demand is directed towards the present and future. Our goal is not just to calm down our consciousness.

Berivan TAPAN

Berivan Tapan currently works as an editor at Haberturk media. Before that, she worked as an editor for the "Cumhuriyet" newspaper for 5 years. Berivan Tapan graduated from Istanbul's Bigli University, from the department of Political Science.

A 'YOUNG' VIEW ON TURKEY FROM ARMENIA

One of the spectacular campaign promises of the new black US President Barack Obama was the promise given to the Armenian community to "recognize the genocide", the "Nabucco" project and the border opening which have entered the Armenian - Turkish agenda in the recent times† Apart from the global crisis, these are the most discussed issues in Armenia.

The relations with Turkey as regards the attitudes and the April 24th developments remain sensitive. When one looks into the "genocide" process, which has been an unchanging line of Armenia's foreign policy, one understands that the genocide issue is a "headache" for the young people in Armenia. Opening the land borders has become a main issue for the nation. Because of widespread unemployment and deepening economic crisis, which followed the collapse of the Soviet Union, many young people in Armenia are forced to look for work abroad. According to Armenia's official statistics the rate of unemployment is very low. But the reason for this is because most of the unemployed travel abroad, the other is that many unemployed are not registered. Many Armenian women have to go to Turkey looking for work. Many work as sex-workers (prostitutes).

Luxurious mansions are being built in Yerevan and on its outskirts for Diaspora Armenians and the local rich. However, the Diaspora avoids making investments geared towards decreasing unemployment.

We asked questions about Turkey as well as Armenia - Turkey relations and economic issues to young scientists, students, NGO representatives and common people.

"It's the Diaspora pushing for the genocide agenda, not us"

Yerevan State University Analyst Haik Kocharian tells the following. "It's not like we're talking about the Genocide all day long. This issue is mostly kept on the agenda by the Armenian communities in Diaspora. I don't believe the relations between the two countries can be normalized by the efforts of the governments. It can only be done by the efforts of the common people and non-government organizations. Many Turkish businessmen, for example, come to Armenia, start business and make friends with Armenians as a result. Such civil initiatives make seeds to revive the historical ties forgotten these days."

"It's not us who's arguing, it's them"

On hearing that I come from Turkey, the owner of the "Real Armenian Food" restaurant in central Yerevan, Artush Babayan starts speaking. He told about the difficulties of making a transition to market economy after the Soviet Union: "We lived a proper life in Soviet times. Now the young people are left without work", Babayan says. His son Garik, a lawyer, is a representative of the new generation. He listens to his fathers words with a smile and add: "All the people who lived in Soviet times speak like this. But for us everything is new and we're quite happy."

Babayan is angry with politicians because of the constant arguments between Turkey and Armenia: "We, the common people, don't argue. It's them. It is widely known, that those arguments are a way to make a living for politicians. Let those, who don't like Turks, visit Turkey for once. They'll understand better after that. I have many Turkish friends and I like them a lot."

"I've been most sorry about Hrant Dink's murder. I wish he wasn't killed", he says, nothing that's what stirs his frustration most of all. At the end of our conversation Babayan insisted on showing me the national pride of all Armenians - Mount Ararat.

"30 thousand sex-workers"

A historian, whose father served as a diplomat in Soviet times, on condition of anonymity told the following: "Soviet administration was a system of corruption. Even the university was corrupt. Sacks full of money were brought to our house and the money was later divided among bureaucrats and diplomats. The system changed and we now earn an honest living. But the new system has not fully justified itself yet. Many people look for work abroad trying to escape from unemployment here. It's mostly the men going abroad. There are 10 women per 1 man here. Seeing that they cannot find husbands and work here, most women go to Turkey. Currently there are about 30 thousand Armenian women - sex-workers and babysitters in Istanbul, Trapizon, Erzurum and Antalia. Pity!"

"If the border is opened drug-barons will appear"

The historian says genocide claims will continue even if the border is opened, and if there is any problem in mutual relations, the border will be shut again. What will change if the border is opened? Answering to this question he says: "If the border is opened the closest hospital for Igdir, Aghrin and Kars will be here. Heart surgery is very cheap here, for example. It costs around \$2 thousand. That's why the inhabitants of Turkish towns close to Yerevan will come here for treatment. The border opening won't bring any benefits to Turkey. Maybe, the goods that are imported from Istanbul

will be imported directly from Igdir and it will be profitable for Turkish cargo companies. If US bombs Iran, the Persians will run to Armenia. But in that case Armenia will close the border due to security reasons. And in such a scenario Turkey will be the third alternative route for Armenia to the world after Georgia. Parallel to border opening drugs will be smuggled to Armenia from Van. Soon drug-barons will appear in Armenia as well."

"We are a small country"

"Rock Bar" manager Harut Arabyan says many young people are against the border opening. The main reason for this is the following fear: "We are a small country. If the border is opened we will lose our culture and language."

Arabyan says his last name comes from his grandfather of Arabic descent, who used to fight against hamidie armed groups in Ottoman times. He shared his thoughts on genocide with us: "I would also like to forget about the Genocide issue. But how? We are taught about it in the kindergartens, later our elderly tell us some stories. That's how we grew up. I accuse the Ottoman state for what happened, not current Turkish Republic. But why are they protecting the guilt of the Ottomans? We are a small country. Are they afraid of us? That's one of the other things I don't understand."

Arabyan showed us documents belonging to his grandfather, according to which he has property in the territory of the Ottoman Empire and said he wants to take charge of his inheritance. The other young people talking to us started laughing.

"Let Turkey become EU member"

I asked Sergey Chamanian, the president of "Henaket" youth organization, what will be the impact of the global economic crisis on Armenia and what will be the steps to counter the expected rise in unemployment. He tried to reject all statistical data and claimed that the crisis won't affect Armenia.

Sergey says the Diaspora Armenians living in US and Russia make big investments in the country and the economy has developed noticeably over the past three years. Sergey thinks that Armenia's problems have nothing to do with religious differences, although the country is surrounded by Muslim states. Meanwhile, he says Turkey's accession to the European Union is very important: "Turkey should become an EU state. In that way the relations with Armenian Diaspora living in the European Union will be more cold-blooded and there will be positive results in bilateral relations. Turkey is not a closed country like Iran. Iran's borders are open, but because of the closeness of its political system, our relations are somehow 'close' as well. On another note, opening the land border will allow economic development of both countries. However, we shouldn't approach those matters only from the economic perspective, but also considering it an important step in our common future."

"It is foolish to form an opinion on Turkey because of Dink's murder"

Sergey also spoke about the situation in the country after the murder of "Agos" newspaper editor Hrant Dink. "The blame for Hrant Dink's murder lies on several radical terrorists. It's not right to blame all Turks for that. It's a pity that there are people like that in all nations."

"Dashnaktsutyun is centrist"

Sergey says Dashnaktsutyun party known for its nationalist policy has a centrist policy now and supports dialogue with Turkey. They have a hard-line position on Genocide issue, but that is not a political, but rather a sensitive issue for us. We won't forget our pains, but we're ready to turn the page. I believe the misperception about mutual visits between the two countries will be gone." "The worst peace is better than the best war", Sergey concluded.

"Gul came, but we invited him"

Although the Turkish press marks president Abdullah Gul's visit to Armenia as a great step, Sergey notes, that Armenia invited him and that was a step made by Armenia towards normalization of relations between the two countries.

"There are contentious issues among the two countries"

"If you ask on the street, which is the most important issue between Turkey and Armenia, they'll say the Genocide. But the reality is different," Tigran Matosyan, an academician, says. The scientist notes the following: "The so called genocide issue is not that important for Turkey. The problems brought to the table by the two countries are different. There are contentious issues. Because the issues seen as preconditions are different, a long-lasting agreement is not being achieved between the two countries. There are people in Armenia, who think, that as long as Turkey hasn't recognized the genocide, there is a probability that we may face a second calamity like that. Nevertheless the main feeling among the people is the desire to have an open land border. Even if I don't support the importance of border opening, I think, that via opening it the two countries will develop by way of sharing mutual historical values."

Matosyan also explains his reasons for not supporting border opening: "After the border opening there will be winners and losers in Armenia. If the border is opened cheap products will be imported into the country. That will put Armenian producers in a hard position."

Sevak Karamian was serving us with Istanbul-bought teacups decorated with eye-

charms and telling with a smile, how they were afraid of being killed during their first trip to Istanbul. He thinks that the misinformation in Turkish press comes from the fact, that they pay too much attention to the comments by Dashnaksutyun party: "Dashnaksutyun party's voice is heard more often on Turkish - Armenian relations. However, the amount of vote given to that party in the Armenian society is well known. The party in question has no adequate support in the society."

"Over 100 political parties for a nation of 4 million people"

Karamian says the third generation doesn't want to speak about the genocide issue anymore. Although the country of 4 million people has over 100 political parties, the youth are apolitical."

Karamian thinks that Obama won't implement his campaign promise to the Armenian community on recognizing the genocide. He is sure that the Armenian communities are waiting for April 24th in vain. This is how Karamian explains it: "It will endanger the relations with Turkey and the US will never let that happen."

Karamian thinks that if Armenia takes part in "Nabucco" project the relations with Russia might suffer. He thinks that the private sector will develop and the young people will find work on private sector and international organizations.

"Our families used to work for the state in Soviet times. But after the collapse of the Soviet Union those factories closed down and everyone was left jobless. When something was to be produced, one detail of it would be made in Armenia and sent to Russia. You weren't able to make a complete product in one location. It is what the Ford Company was doing."

Demonstrating his knowledge of Turkey, Karamian was naming Orhan Pamuk, Nazim Hikmeti, Tarqan, Hasan Shah and telling about the popular Armenian Kilikia bear, which owes its name to Turkey's Kilikia region.

At a night club in Yerevan we were talking about Armenia and Turkey with journalists coming from various countries. They are also used to solving issues around a drink. Onnik - an English citizen of Armenian descent shares his optimistic views about the two countries. "There's so many of us around this table, that we can solve that problem."

"The protest action organized by Dashnaksutyun during Abdullah Gul's Yerevan visit wasn't significant. There were 100 or 200 people. That's not a big issue. I will never forget the car bearing a Turkish flag escorted by Armenian security forces. That's what's important," Onnik says.

Onnik has serious doubts that the word genocide reflects the 1915 events. He says for many young people the genocide issue is a headache: "They want to be free and don't want to think about it anymore." Some of the Armenian songs sound like the independence hymn. That's perhaps a reason why young people prefer American music. The Soviet times are gone, but many soviet traditions remain: "If you want to trust the person you're talking to, don't say a word before you drink vodka together."

"There's no need for anyone's mediation"

Ani Grigorian, a major's degree student of the International relations department, thinks that Turkey will never recognize the genocide. "They'll put forward the Nagorno-Karabakh issue as a condition to recognize it", she says.

Grigorian stresses, that the genocide issue is not a historical, but a social issue for them. Grigorian goes on to say: "The two countries can solve their issues without the mediation of other countries. I don't see any substantial issue between the two nations. Big questions arise only when political figures engage in discussion. People here want the genocide to be recognized without preconditions. The "excuse" petition didn't have the expected feedback here. There was much discussion, but it wasn't seen as an important development. Diaspora Armenians have no interlocutor on this issue, because the countries, where they live, is not theirs and they can take charge of this issue only from the sensitive and patriotic points of views. I think that there is false information between the two countries. That, in turn, causes various misunderstandings. Only Armenian communities speak of the Armenian issue. Without their involvement the two countries can solve their problems. We don't need anybody's mediation."

"The young people grow up with American culture"

Avik Galustian who works as a waiter in a cafe tells the following about the changing appearance of Armenian young people: "10 years ago, when the Soviet traditions were strong, they used to laugh at the people dressed in tight jeans. That's because it was Western style. Now everybody is dressed like that. Young Armenian girls mostly have similar haircut and are dressed like each other. There is an abyss in relations between girls and boys in Armenia. That's why girls here are dressed up in exaggeration and put excess makeup. Currently the American dress style is seen as independence. Young people grow up with American culture."

Ipek YEZDANI

Ipek Yezdani is the foreign policy correspondent of Milliyet Daily based in Istanbul. She got her BA at Marmara University, Faculty of Communication. She studied her Masters at City University, London. She worked 8 years for Cumhuriyet Daily in Istanbul, one year for Associated Press Television News in London and worked in documentary projects for BBC Television News. She was selected for Knight Wallace Fellowship Program to study at the University of Michigan in the US for one semester in 2008. She has been working as a journalist for more than 12 years and covering the foreign policy news and conducting interviews with prominent foreign policy figures for more than 3 years now.

"THE BORDER WILL OPEN IN A COUPLE OF MONTHS"

Impoverished and jobless Armenians wish the border opened...

Director of the Armenian Center for National and International Studies (ACNIS) Giragosian says: "The secret meetings should stop. Armenian-Turkish border will open in a month or two. Diplomatic relations will be established sometime between May and December."

Preface: Armenia has long been a country which is seen by Turkey as an obstacle, and the Armenian question was one of the 'taboos'. Nevertheless, there have been important steps to improve relations between Turkey and Armenia in the recent years. The process, that started with President Abdullah Gul's visit to Armenia in 2008 after the invitation of Armenia's president Serzh Sargsian to watch the Armenia-Turkey football match, has brought the border opening perspectives closer and seems quite clear. But how do Armenians as a nation view the process of mutually improving relations? What moods did the "football diplomacy" with Turkey create in the Armenian society? What was the response to the "Excuse" petition initiated by a group of Turkish intellectuals in Armenia? How do Armenians view the idea of border opening? Looking for answers to these questions I was met with surprising warmth and friendliness in Armenia, despite my being a Turkish journalist. The recent developments have changed the stereotype of "danger" that the Armenian society associates with Turkey and Turks, even though they keep insisting, that "it's impossible to forget what happened in the past"...

Meetings between a regular Armenian citizen and a Turkish national are usually warm. The Genocide issue is still very important for Armenians, but most of them consider improvement of relations with Turkey and border opening to be separate from the Genocide issue. Nearly all the people we met made the following argument: "Diplomatic

relations should be established between the two countries and border trade should start as soon as possible".

Analyst Richard Giragosian is the Director of Armenian Center for National and International Studies (ACNIS). Giragosian, a US national, ethnically Armenian, has been living in Armenia for two years, and is also a consultant for the US Army (on US - Turkey military relations) and the International Crisis Group (on Armenia - Turkey relations). Giragosian is sure that the Armenian - Turkish border will be opened in a couple of months. He notes that the top diplomats are developing a secret plan on opening the border and establishing diplomatic relations for several months now.

Joint Commission

According to Giragosian, the secret meetings are over now: "Armenian-Turkish border will open in a month or two. Diplomatic relations will be established sometime between May and December."

Giragosian thinks that these steps will be followed by the creation of a joint "inter-governmental commission" by the two countries. As Armenians have a negative view of the "historian's commission", it will not be called a "historian's commission", to make Armenians accept the idea of establishing a commission. As a 4th step, resulting from these developments, a road map will be put together on peaceful settlement of Karabakh issue. According to Giragosian, in the light of these developments, the US President Barack Obama will not pronounce the "genocide" word on April 24th. But Giragosian is sure, that a Resolution on Armenian Genocide will be discussed in Congress by the year's end.

"The border will be opened"

A deputy from President Serzh Sargsian's Republican Party, member of party's parliamentary faction Eduard Sharmazanov also addresses this issue. Sharmazanov says meetings between Armenian and Turkish diplomats on border opening continue. He is sure in the following: "Not far from now, in near future the borders will be opened."

Sharmazanov stresses, that Armenia should be differentiated from the Armenian Diaspora, because Armenia is an independent state and has its interests.

Gasparian: "Turks saved my grandmother"

"We have lived together for years..." Even though I hadn't yet started asking my questions, the world famous duduk player Jivan Gasparian started speaking with these words. We were speaking in his nice, stone house built with old Armenian style. There were various musical instruments hanging on the wall. It was clear, that these are fre-

quently used. Although Gasparian has visited Turkey many times and has given concerts, I was still worried about what he might say.

I found out during our interview, that he isn't only a musician. He is also a scientist...

I told Gasparian about my family history: "We are Azeries, my grandfather on mother's side was saved by his Armenian neighbor while escaping from Dashnaks in Gyanja."

"What a coincidence", Gasparian responds, "My grandmother was saved by her Turkish neighbor when as a child she was running away from the 1915 Genocide." Below is Gasparian's family history:

"Hidden in the stable"

My family roots from mush. My grandmother was just a small kid during what you call "tragic events" of 1915, which we call Genocide. The Turkish neighbors took her and other children in the family to the stable and hid them behind the cows. That's how she stayed alive. Later she came to Armenia with other families. But we still can't find our roots there. There are many stories about similar cases.

I was warmly welcomed in Turkey. Went there in 2000 for the first time with concert in Istanbul. They hadn't announced my name yet, when the audience stood up and started applauding. I started shaking as I stood. I was planning to stay there for one day, but the Turks treated me so well, that I stood for a week. I couldn't feel the difference between being in Turkey or in Yerevan.

The author of "Sary Gelin" (the song "Mountain Girl") is unknown

Turks, Armenians, Azeries, and Iranians - all say that "Sary Gelin" is their song. Nevertheless, Sary Gelin is a popular song, the author is unknown. It's not even important. I have many Azeri friends. We used to meet here in the past. Now we can only meet in Moscow and have a shot of vodka together.

The bad Armenian film is the same as the bad Turkish film.

Armenian film director Harutyun Khachatryan, the president of "Golden Apricot" annual film festival held in Armenia, dreams of making a joint film with Turks. He has been giving a lot of exposure to Turkish films at the festival. In response to my question, does he see similarities in Armenian and Turkish films, Khachatryan said: "Bad Turkish films and bad Armenian films are very similar. Both contain exaggerated emotions."

The most biased group is university students

There's a group, which has always been against Turkey and Turks, in the past as well as now. I've been meeting them from time to time. They are the Turkologist youth. The

young people talking to me in Yerevan State University are quite rough in expressing themselves: "We don't want the border to be opened, because we don't trust Turks." Their biased attitude hasn't changed, even after hundreds of thousands marched during Hrant Dink's funeral. Professor Ruben Melkonian tries to calm me down by saying: "Their attitude stems from lack of information."

The pro-Fenerbahce barman...

Vardan Vardanian is a barman in one of Yerevan's hotels and is a real fan of Fenerbahce. He wears Fenerbahce socks and says all the walls in his room are decorated with Fenerbahce flags. Vardan has worked in Turkey for 6 years. During this time he has made friends with Turks and even become a Fenerbahce fan.