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THE NORMALIZATION PROCESS BETWEEN TURKEY AND ARMENIA

The normalization process between Turkey and Armenia

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Twenty years after the dissolution of the USSR, Armenia (one of their old constituent republics, which formally declared its independence in 1991) still does not have normal relations, in the strict sense of formal diplomatic ties, with Turkey – one of the main regional players. This adds an additional destabilizing factor in the South Caucasus, a region of complex and diverse problems.

This article analyzes one of the issues, the normalization process between Turkey and Armenia, which strives to modify the status quo in light of the history that frames and conditions the origin of the bilateral ties. Other factors, including the repercussions and effects of this process on other state players, ie: Russia, the United States and Azerbaijan are also taken into account.

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History of the relations between Modern Turkey and Armenia at the time of the Great War (1914-1918) and its immediate aftermath

The young Democratic Republic of Armenia (DRA) was established in Yerevan on May 28, 1918, in the middle of the disintegration of imperial Russia – a direct consequence of the two revolutions of 1917. In 1920, after a brief war, the Grand Turkish National Assembly signed on December 2, 1920, the Alexandropol Treaty with the DRA in Alexandropol (currently Gyumri, Armenia) – the first treaty signed by Turkey's revolutionaries with an independent and internationally recognized state. In Alexandropol, the DRA agreed to give up 50 % of the territory, under its control before its war with Turkey and to denounce the Sèvres Treaty (August 10, 1920, signed by the Ottoman Empire and the winning powers of the Great War), thus forfeiting the idea of a Greater Armenia, as envisioned by President Wilson. Alexandropol also set up the border between the territory controlled by the Grand Turkish National Assembly and the DRA at the new line of Ardahan-Kars (1). The Treaty of Alexandropol had to be ratified by the Armenian parliament within a month, but this did not happen as Armenia was occupied by Soviet forces that had begun the invasion of the DRA from Azerbaijan, when the terms of the treaty were being negotiated.

On October 23, 1921, in Kars, Turkey, the Grand Turkish National Assembly (who would proclaim the Republic of Turkey in 1923) and the Soviet Socialist Republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, signed the treaty of Kars. These three republics had been under Soviet control since November 1920, April 1920 and February 1921, respectively, and would later join the new USSR in December 1922. This treaty, which further complemented the treaty of Moscow or treaty of friendship between the Grand Turkish National Assembly and Soviet Russia of March 16, 1921, established the current limits between Turkey and the South Caucasus states. (2) The treaty of Kars was ratified in Yerevan on September 11, 1922.

The treaty of Kars set up the definitive border between modern Turkey and Soviet Armenia (the present day Republic of Armenia) at the Akhurian and Aras rivers. Turkey received from Armenia most of the Russian oblast of Kars, including the uyezd of Surmalu with Mount

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Ararat, and the cities of Igdir and Koghb (Tuzluca), the cities of Kars, Ardahan and Oltu, the ruins of Ani and Lake Cildir. Most of these territories were under Turkish military control and the treaty only required that Turkish forces withdrew from the western part of the Armenian province of Shirak. (3)

It is important at this point to attest that Kars signified a great territorial loss for Armenia, as the Soviet leadership accepted to abandon vast territories in what is now North Eastern Turkey since they saw Turkey's new revolutionary rulers as potential allies in their anti imperialist struggle. Many historians have put in doubt the validity of Kars, as the Ottoman constitution of 1876 granted only the sultan the right to sign treaties with foreign powers with the consent of parliament (in spite of the adoption of a new constitution in January 1921, the Grand Turkish National Assembly would not be recognized by the West, as a successor state to the Ottoman Empire until the treaty of Lausanne in 1923) and it is also clear that from a historical point of view, the Soviet regimes in the South Caucasus were not autonomous when taking political decisions. Kars still remains the internationally recognized border, as has been the case since 1921.

After the Second World War, the USSR (already a superpower) tried to have Kars annulled without success. Both Turkey and the new republics of Azerbaijan and Georgia recognize the validity of the treaty.

The 325 km border between Turkey and Armenia was closed for most of the Soviet period (there are two crossing points, the railway crossing between Kars and the Armenian city of Gyumri, and the Markara-Alican Bridge). The railway pass was opened in the 1980s (there has not been a land route open in modern times). (4)

Relations between Turkey and Armenia following the dissolution of the USSR

A certain spirit of cooperation started to gain ground in 1991 and took a practical turn with precise actions on the Turkish side. Following the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Turkey was the second country after the United States to recognize Armenia's independence. Volkan Vural, the Turkish ambassador to Moscow who had had contacts with the Armenian Apostolic Church, made a visit to Armenia. (5)

Turkey accepted the compromise to provide electricity to Armenia after its independence, and in 1992 made efforts to let Armenia join a new regional organisation, the Organisation for the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), at the same time as Azerbaijan. Arme-

nia opened a representative office in Istanbul in 2001 (6). Armenia's first president, Levon Ter-Petrosian (1991-98) tried to normalize ties with Turkey, in spite of opposition from the media, the Armenian diaspora, and decades of hostile popular attitudes. He also tried to act on Armenia's position on Kars. But the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs was not in agreement with the establishment of diplomatic ties, and when the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict grew worse in 1993, Turkey closed the rail link between the two countries, on April 3, 1993, in an attempt to slow down the advance of Armenian troops on the territory of Azerbaijan (7). Already by March 1993, Turkey had announced that it would inspect the flights that would cross its airspace in the direction of Armenia, in an attempt to stop the arms smuggling. In the following decade, there were no positive developments, even though Turkey allowed an air corridor between Istanbul and Yerevan in 1995, and granted Armenians the right to visit Turkey. In 2009, the number of Armenians living in Turkey without legal permits was estimated to be 40,000 (a number that could reach 70,000 nowadays).

The situation grew more complicated when Robert Kocharian came to power in Armenia in 1998 after having served as prime minister of Armenia and president and prime minister of the self proclaimed republic of Nagorno-Karabagh. Kocharian made the international recognition of the Armenian claims of genocide a key priority of Armenia's foreign and security policy. Armenia's new stance and the fact that the United States Congress came close in 2000 to passing a resolution classifying the events of 1915 as genocide (House Resolution 596, whose language not only implied the recognition of the genocide but also clearly touched on the subject of material reparations) further complicated the situation. These events led Turkey (who refuses to recognize the events occurred in World War One as genocide on historical grounds and also due to possible territorial and material claims) to suspend air links between both countries in 2000-2001 and to make it more difficult for Armenian citizens to visit Turkey.

Turkish visa restrictions on Armenian citizens were lifted in January 2002, but a real policy change only occurred when the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power at the end of that year. The new government adopted the policy of zero problems with its neighbors, and started to consider an improvement in the relations with Armenia as a strategic opportunity, similar to its own efforts to find solutions to other problems like Cyprus or the Iraqi Kurdistan. Six meetings took place between 2003 and 2008 between the foreign ministers of

both countries, Abdullah Gül of Turkey and Vardan Oskanian of Armenia. Ambassadors from both countries maintained contact at the technical level in Vienna and some conciliatory steps were taken by Turkey, ie: the restoration of an Armenian church, as a museum in Lake Van. (8)

Nevertheless, there were always contentious problems: the opening of the border closed in 1993, Armenia's stance on Kars, the formal establishment of diplomatic relations, the history of the events of 1915 and Nagorno-Karabagh.

The constitution of Armenia and Armenia's traditional stance on Kars

The government of Armenia always insisted that it does not dispute the border between both countries (as stipulated by the 1921 Treaty of Kars) and that it does not have any territorial claim on Turkish territory, as it regards itself as one of the successor states of the former USSR. Notwithstanding this, the Armenian declaration of Independence of August 23, 1990, in its article 11 refers to Eastern Anatolia, an integral part of Turkey, as Western Armenia. Taking into account that the Armenian constitution of 2005 (which replaced the 1995 constitution) recognizes as a base the fundamental principles of the Armenian state and the national hopes of the Armenian people, as stated in the declaration of independence, it thus accepts the characterization of Eastern Anatolia as Western Armenia, and in this way, even indirectly, there is a territorial claim. After recognizing the Independence of Armenia in 1991, Turkey proposed that both countries signed a document recognizing their borders before establishing diplomatic ties. Armenia's refusal to do so until the signature of the protocols in 2009 was always viewed with suspicion by Turkey. Turkey assumed that even though Armenia never made a formal claim, the fact that the constitution of Armenia did not say when these territories ought to be claimed left the door open for an eventual future claim. It was President Kocharain (1998-2008), who said that as Armenia did not have enough military might to enforce these claims, they ought to be left for the future generations to deal with when the conditions were more favorable. (9)

The different views concerning the events of 1915

Another contentious point between Armenia and Turkey since 1991 has been both countries' divergent views over the events of 1915 – a forced relocation accompanied by inter-communal fighting and massacres

(Turkey) or a planned genocide (Armenia), lasting from 1915 to 1918.

Turkey always tried to take the discussion of the genocide out of the international agenda, under the principle that the genocide claims must be discussed by historians and not members of parliament (a position it has defended internationally) as expressed by Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in 2004. In April 2005, Erdogan wrote to Kocharian suggesting that both countries submit their visions over 1915 to a commission of historians and experts. Erdogan's position was supported by the main opposition party in the Turkish parliament.

Quite to the contrary, Armenians always affirmed that the commission was a Turkish initiative to counteract or deny the recognition of the genocide. In his answer to Erdogan, Kocharian said that a commission could meet once diplomatic ties had been established. Another traditional objection of Yerevan to the creation of a commission is its position that no further proof is needed, that many countries have recognized the genocide, and that there is a danger that a commission might put into doubt the Armenian position. Another delicate point from the Armenian perspective is the subject of representation, as only a third of the world's Armenians live in the present day Republic of Armenia, the self proclaimed republic of Nagorno-Karabagh and the Javakhq region of Georgia. Consequently, the diaspora considers the issue of the genocide as a Pan-Armenian, not an Armenian subject. (10)

The impact of the conflict of Nagorno-Karabagh on the bilateral ties between Turkey and Armenia

Armenia's traditional position has been that there must be no connection between the normalization of relations with Turkey and the conflict it has with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabagh. From the Armenian point of view, Turks and Azerbaijanis have always been considered a threat to their national security. Turkey has always found in Azerbaijan, to the contrary, not only a solid trading partner with shared oil and gas pipelines, but also a shared sense of a common destiny with cultural, linguistic and ethnic links based on a common historical heritage. Turkey's traditional position has always been to support Azerbaijan, reaffirmed by a strong pro Azerbaijani lobby in Turkey. For fifteen years, Turkey took the position that before opening the border and establishing diplomatic ties with Armenia, there had to be a withdrawal of Armenian forces from the territory they occupy in Azerbaijan and an integral solution to the problem of Nagorno-Karabagh. At the end of 2008, there

were indications that Turkey was no longer speaking of a direct link between both issues, and that it would be satisfied with parallel processes, that would signify on the part of Armenia, the intention of withdrawing from occupied Azerbaijani territory. Turkey never had the intention of damaging its relations with Baku and it is clear that Baku was kept informed of its dealings with Armenia, even though it is difficult to know the level of detail. Also, there are indications that Turkey tried to let Azerbaijan know that it would not be sacrificed in an eventual rapprochement with Armenia. Azerbaijan has always been opposed to the idea of normalization between Turkey and Armenia before an Armenian withdrawal from the occupied territories. Azerbaijan has always feared that an act of this nature would end the isolation of Yerevan and would lessen Armenian incentives to negotiate. Initially, Baku's reaction to the rapprochement was confused and silent, as there was no consensus on the implications of the new policy. Some Turkish officials close to the normalization process indicated that in the beginning in Baku, there were expectations that Turkish-Armenian normalization would help in the resolution of the difficult problem of Nagorno-Karabagh, giving Turkey a larger say on the issue and reducing Russia's role. (11)

The election of Sargsyan in Armenia and the beginning of new negotiations.

The process of informal contacts reached a new dimension when the President of Turkey Abdullah Gül congratulated his Armenian colleague Serzh Sargsyan on his election in February 2008. During a visit to Moscow in June 2008, Sargsyan stated that he would invite Gül to Armenia, and this finally happened on July 4. The two presidents met for the first time on July 6, 2008, in Astana, Kazakhstan. In August 2008, after the interruption of normal trade routes between Russia and Georgia due to the war, Turkey lifted the restrictions on the use of its airspace by Armenia. On September 6, 2008, President Gül visited Yerevan to attend a football qualifying match for the World Cup between the two national teams (accepting the invitation only three days before the match). The visit only lasted six hours, but the personal talks followed by frequent ministerial meetings notably improved the bilateral relationship. Armenia facilitated the security arrangements presented by the Turkish authorities and also unilaterally suspended its visa requirements to allow for the visit of the Turkish football fans. In another symbolic gesture, Armenia stopped vetoing Turkey's full membership in the European Bank for De-

velopment and Reconstruction (EBDR) in September 2008. (12)

Some skeptics assumed that the Armenian invitation was an exercise in public relations to improve Sargsyan's international reputation, under the assumption that no president of Turkey would accept it (13). But the ministers of foreign affairs of Turkey and Armenia, Ali Babacan y Eduard Nalbandian, met for a new round of talks and Prime Minister Erdogan and president Sargsyan met at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2009, after a very emotional and charged public meeting between Erdogan and the president of Israel, Shimon Peres. The ministerial meetings between both countries continued under the mediation of Switzerland and in the context of the BSEC. President Gül's visit to Moscow on February 12-15 2009, was badly received in Baku. In Baku, a perception started to grow that in order to get closer to the European Union and become a regional powerhouse, Turkey would be willing to sacrifice Azerbaijan's national interests. When the Turkish government blocked a resolution sponsored by the parliamentary opposition that would have recognized the February 1992 massacres of Khojaly as genocide, Azerbaijan felt insulted even though the government position reflected Turkey's traditional view to oppose all parliamentary resolutions that describe historical acts as acts of genocide. As negotiations moved forward with Armenia, on February 19 an official of the office of the president of Azerbaijan expressed the first official criticism of his government to Turkey's refusal to confirm or deny if there has been a delinking between normalization with Armenia and Nagorno-Karabagh. President Aliyev of Azerbaijan cancelled his participation in the conference of the Alliance of Civilizations on 6-7 April, sending instead a low level delegation and resisting, according to sources, telephone calls from Gül, Erdogan and Secretary Clinton. On 7 April 2009, the government and opposition parties in the parliament of Azerbaijan signed a rare joint communiqué opposing the opening of the borders between Turkey and Armenia, while the territory of Azerbaijan remained under occupation. At the same time, Azerbaijani government officials increased in private their criticism of Turkey, indicating that a rapprochement between Turkey and Armenia, on the terms being discussed, would have significant consequences for Turkish interests in the development of the natural gas deposits of Shazdeniz, on the Azerbaijani coast of the Caspian Sea. As Turkey got closer to an announcement on normalization with Armenia, the Turkish leadership finally came to understand the dominant thinking in Baku and tried to

clarify to Azerbaijan that an agreement with Armenia would hasten a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabagh issue. At the same time, it tried to help in the resolution of the conflict by putting pressure on the United States, Russia and the European Union – a policy pursued throughout the year. (14)

On April 22, 2009, Turkey and Armenia finally announced that they had agreed on a road map to normalize their ties, without signing any document. Both Foreign ministries stated that both Turkey and Armenia had made tangible progress and reached mutual comprehension on this process, and that they had agreed on an integral plan for the normalization of bilateral ties. At this time, most of the diplomatic analysts concluded maybe optimistically that the road map would lead to a quick reopening of the border and the establishment of diplomatic relations in the short term and that maybe, Turkey was ready to sacrifice Azerbaijan (15). At the same time, in Yerevan, many suspected that the announcement had much to do with the expected statement from president Obama on April 24, Armenian Memorial Day (16), taking into account the position assumed by Obama during the 2008 presidential campaign in favor of granting recognition to the Armenian genocide.

The original optimism suffered a setback on May 13, when in Baku, prime minister Erdogan declared that the closing of the border between Armenia and Turkey was the result of the occupation of Nagorno-Karabagh, and that border would remain closed if the occupation continued. President Aliyev's reaction was highly positive, stating that his country could not receive better guarantees and that Azerbaijan's misgivings have been satisfied. Many analysts were surprised by the link made by Erdogan with the Armenian withdrawal from Nagorno-Karabagh. Before the road map was announced, the presumption always was that Turkey would normalize its ties with Armenia when Armenia withdrew from seven (or at least six) Azerbaijani districts next to Nagorno-Karabagh. Even though the occupation of Nagorno-Karabagh took place in 1992, the closing of the borders happened in 1993, when Armenia extended its occupation to the adjacent territories. (17)

The Armenian reaction came swiftly. President Sargsyan and foreign minister Nalbandian declared that as had been made clear during their contacts with Turkey, any Turkish attempt to interfere in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict would only damage the process of normalization. The same statement was made by minister Nalbandian a few days later during an international conference on Security and Cooperation in the

Caucasus in Yerevan. Nalbandian made it clear that the ball was in the Turkish court (18). The reaction was not only negative in Yerevan, but in Washington, the European Union and some circles in Turkey as well. What prompted Erdogan to say what he said, one can only speculate: the highly negative reactions in Baku, the impression that even though Azerbaijan was aware of the process, it did not know the particulars and Azerbaijan's threats to get closer to Russia, with the signing of a gas agreement. This led Ankara to panic, as Ankara had always assumed that sooner or later Azerbaijan would accept the situation. Another point to take into account is that the process of reconciliation was carried forward by the more moderate Gül. Neither Erdogan nor his foreign minister Davutoglu, who had previously served as Erdogan's international advisor, were 100% convinced. Davutoglu had always maintained that reconciliation with Armenia could not be sustained without a solution in the Caucasus. (19)

A few days later, France, one of the cochairmen of the Minsk Group of the OSCE charged with finding a resolution to the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict, ratified that there should be no link between the Turkish-Armenian normalization and Nagorno-Karabagh. After a visit of Bernard Fassier to Ankara, it stated that they were parallel processes, but each following its own way. At the end of May, during a visit to Baku, the new Turkish foreign minister Ahmed Davutoglu ratified the importance of the historical relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey, the importance of a prompt resolution of the conflict of Nagorno-Karabagh and that Turkey's message to all the regional actors was clear: the region should be free of occupations and tensions.

The United States also ratified the importance of the fact that the Turkish-Armenian normalization and the process of Nagorno-Karabagh would be carried as separate processes but working in parallel each at its own speed, as expressed by Matt Bryza, deputy assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs (and since December 2010 United States Ambassador to Azerbaijan) and his boss, Philip Gordon, who also supported the creation of a commission of researchers to study the events of 1915 – comments which angered the Armenian American community. (20)

In the following months, negotiations between both capitals complicated the situation further. Turkey insisted on the parliamentary ratification of a future agreement (21). At the same time, Sargsyan in Yerevan was under pressure. The reaction in Armenia to the creation of an investigation commission was particularly

negative; because it symbolized for many Armenians the negation of the genocide (former president Ter-Petrosian also criticized the creation of the commission while being supportive of the process in general). Also, the ultranationalist party Dashnak left the governing coalition, and the Armenian diaspora continued to criticize the normalization process as it had been doing since its announcement in April 2009. In an attempt to calm the popular opinion, Sargsyan announced that he would not attend the football match in Turkey scheduled for October 14, if by that time there were no advances in the process of normalization – especially the reopening of the border. (22)

In the middle of concerns that the process might be aborted and under strong Swiss mediation, both sides reached an agreement after mutual concessions. Armenia seemed to have set aside the principle that both processes are independent, at least in private, (the protocols make no reference to Nagorno-Karabagh or the occupation of Azerbaijani territory), getting in exchange the announcement of a process of political consultations that would lead to the signature of formal agreements. In the meantime, Turkey gained time with the need to have the agreements ratified by parliament, in hopes of a future possible agreement in the Caucasus that would protect its historical relationship and energy related business interests with Azerbaijan. Thus, on August 31, 2009, both countries announced the beginning of formal negotiations with the end goal of normalizing ties, with the presentation of two protocols – one on development of bilateral ties, and the other on establishment of diplomatic relations. Both countries announced that with Swiss mediation, they would negotiate and have consultations for six weeks until the formal signature of the agreements that would include specific steps for the reopening of the borders, mutual recognition of existing frontiers, creation of bilateral commissions and establishment of diplomatic relations. Turkey placed special emphasis on the fact that the protocols, once signed, would require parliamentary approval. (23)

Azerbaijan's reaction came swiftly enough. The foreign ministry stated that the establishment of diplomatic relations between Turkey and Armenia was a sovereign decision of Turkey but the reopening of the border was against the national interest of Azerbaijan, reminding everybody of Erdogan's public statements in Baku in May. (24)

Finally, on October 10, the two protocols were signed in Zurich, while on October 14, in spite of his original pronouncements, Sargsyan attended the football

match in Bursa, Turkey next to his Turkish counterpart. Again, after the signature of the agreements both Erdogan and Davotoglu ratified the importance of Armenian withdrawal from Azerbaijan. Particularly, Davotoglu was clear when he expressed that the Turkish government wanted the approval of parliament for both protocols, but that both protocols would be submitted to the assembly in a propitious political and psychological environment. He restated that not only seven districts of Azerbaijan but also Nagorno-Karabagh were under occupation, and that this had to end. The signature of the protocols nevertheless created a new diplomatic crisis between Turkey and Azerbaijan, when the Turkish flag was withdrawn from the office of religious affairs in Baku and the Turkish memorial under the orders of the government of Azerbaijan. The office is affiliated to the embassy and the memorial remembers the 1130 Turkish soldiers dead fighting for Azerbaijan's independence in 1918. (25)

In the meantime, in spite of the declarations of the leaders of the Minsk Group of the OSCE and after numerous formal meetings of the leaders and foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan (there had never been so many in a same year), 2009 ended without changes in the conflict.

On January 12, 2010, Armenia's Constitutional Court recognized that the protocols signed by Armenia and Turkey in 2009 were in conformity with the constitution of Armenia. Turkey's reaction came swiftly enough. The Turkish government asked for clarifications from Armenia through a formal document, worried over the court reference that the protocols could be applied or interpreted in contradiction with the wording of the preamble of the constitution of Armenia (which says that it is the mission of the government of Armenia to obtain the international recognition of the events of 1915 as genocide) and the requisites of article 11 of the Armenian declaration of independence that refers to Eastern Anatolia as Western Armenia. The Turkish government understood that the decision of the Armenian Constitutional Court placed restrictive preconditions and provisions that were contrary to the letter and spirit of the protocols. (26)

2010 and the first half of 2011 passed without substantial changes. Even though the process continues formally, the protocols have not been ratified by the national parliaments and there seems to be no change in the positions of both countries. Turkey refuses to move forward, meanwhile there is no change in the conflict of Nagorno-Karabagh and Armenia considers that Turkey is not seriously interested in making the process advance.

In October 2010, the Armenian foreign minister Eduard Nalbandian said in an article to The Wall Street Journal that Turkey had gone backwards and that it pretended that the problems of the region had a global solution – a nice but empty phrase, pure rhetoric.

For Sergey Minasyan, director of the Political Science Department at the Caucasus Institute in Yerevan, Armenia is considering ratifying the protocols after this June's parliamentary election in Turkey, won by AKP, to put pressure on Ankara. Other analysts speculate a new momentum following this past June's Turkish elections and Armenia's parliamentary elections in 2012. In spite of the lack of diplomatic progress, cooperation between both civil societies continues, with regular meetings of activists, professionals and academics. (27)

The process of Nagorno-Karabagh has not seen substantial modifications either, with lack of agreement on the basic principles. The only movement on this issue in the last two years was the release of the Document on Basic Principles into the public domain in two declarations made at the Group of Eight summits at L'Aquila and Moscow in 2009 and 2010, the last (of numerous) summits on Nagorno-Karabagh in Kazan, Russia, on June 24, 2011 ending in failure.

External influences: the United States, Russia and the European Union.

The Armenian Americans and the organizations that represent them are keen to have the events of 1915 recognized as a genocide by the government of the United States (43 state legislatures in the United States have already done so) and particularly in the annual formal announcement made by the president of the United States on April 24 every year. President Obama had promised during his electoral campaign in 2008 to recognize the genocide, but in his announcements of April 24, 2009, 2010 and 2011, Obama did not use the word genocide, even though he referred to the massacres of 1915 with the Armenian phrase *Meds Yeghern*, which is normally translated as great calamity. President Obama's statements were not well received either by the Armenian diaspora or Turkey. It is a fact that the Turks are ready to accept any language no matter how strong, except the word genocide. In his annual statements, president Obama has encouraged both countries to advance in the normalization process.

The United States congress can, nevertheless, act contrary to the interests of the administration due to the strong influence of the Armenian lobby. In March 2009, the House Resolution 252, which recognizes the Arme-

nian genocide, was introduced in the House of Representatives. As in 2007, the committee on foreign affairs approved the resolution on March 4, 2010, even though many analysts expected a different outcome in view of the normalization process. In December 2010, as the resolution was not scheduled to be voted, it had to be reintroduced with a new number in 2011 – this happened in June 2011. As in 2007, Turkey recalled its ambassador to Washington for consultations, and later the ambassador returned to the United States capital. The administration expressed its concern on the effect this resolution could have on the process of reconciliation between Armenia and Turkey. Clearly, the United States support the process of reconciliation and they are conscious of the negative implications a congress resolution could have on the bilateral relations, particularly with respect to the military cooperation between both countries. (28)

Russia now supports reconciliation between Armenia and Turkey – it was in Moscow where president Sargsyan invited his Turkish counterpart Gül to the football match in Yerevan in 2008. Previously, Russia had not been a keen supporter, preferring a closed border which keeps Armenia dependent from a military and economic point of view, with a Russian military base in Gyumri and Russian guards at the border with Turkey and at Yerevan airport. It seems Moscow's change of mind is due to its intention in keeping non-regional powers out of the South Caucasus, and its desire to isolate Georgia following the war of 2008. Also, Baku's differences with Ankara could be used by Russia, who signed in 2009 a new gas deal with Azerbaijan and seems to have increased its clout in the country. But Russia also benefits if there is a rapprochement between Ankara and Yerevan, as it needs a new transit route for its military base in Gyumri and Russian investments in the Armenian economy would get a boost in value with an open border and increased trade between Armenia and Turkey. (29)

For the European Union, which already has a conflict in Cyprus with a difficult resolution, normalization between Ankara and Yerevan eliminates a problem in its periphery and increases the chances of Turkey's application to join the Union – even though this application depends on other factors.

Conclusions.

Much was said in the beginning of the process of the great benefits a successful process of normalization would have offered both sides. For Turkey, this includes a better relationship with the United States (who has always had a normalization between Turkey and Armenia

as a key objective), a better chance of joining the European Union (even though the application does not depend on the Armenian dossier alone), the possibility of finding an acceptable solution to the difficult subject of the events of 1915, and a chance for Turkey to actively participate in the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict as a mediator. All these, notwithstanding the fact that the protocols as they were finally signed represent a work of art of diplomatic language, and they omit all reference not only to the Caucasus conflict but also to the genocide. For Armenia, benefits include the chance of reducing its dependence on Russia, ending Turkey's foreign policy subjection to the interests of Azerbaijan, and economic improvements due to access to the Turkish ports of the Black Sea and the Turkish route system.

Until now, the delays in the normalization process have reinforced the full impact of the three key problems: the problem of the genocide (1915), Nagorno-Karabagh, and the Turkish-Armenian border. The position of the United States on the issue of the genocide represents a potential threat for Turkey, although limited by the possible nationalist backlash in Turkey and the negative effects that this could have on the strategic interests of the United States. Nagorno-Karabagh never appeared in the road map or in the protocols, but it seems it was always a condition on the Turkish side. It is doubtful that Turkey thinks that Nagorno-Karabagh will be integrated into Azerbaijan – the problem continues to be the seven districts occupied by Armenia during the war in the short term, and the future self-determination plebiscite in Nagorno-Karabagh in the medium term. Turkey has also put false expectations on its initiative for Stability and Cooperation in the Caucasus; it is not clear how this can work when the Minsk Group has not been lucky so far in the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The economic effect of the reopening of the border, assuming the doubts about Kars are sorted out, should not be exaggerated, as the economic advantages mentioned so far are only estimations. Maybe the Russian investments in Armenia will be the biggest winners in an eventual reopening of the border.

It seems Turkey underestimated Azerbaijan's reaction or else assumed (as the co chairs of the Minsk Group have been saying) that an agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan was around the corner. Azerbaijan is surer of it and has clearly put limits to the Turkish initiative. Also, the presumption that the problem of the genocide would disappear has turned out not to be right, as the Armenian Constitutional Court has given Yerevan the chance to get out of an agreement if it suits its interests,

and it is clear that the creation of a commission of historians, if it proceeds, would not avoid the declarations on the genocide in the United States Congress or other countries. Maybe, Yerevan should ratify the protocols first if it wants to put pressure on Turkey, if it is really interested.

In the meantime, It could be expected that civil societies in Armenia and Turkey gradually contribute to improve the environment of better understanding between the two countries. The European Union can also help, working more closely with Turkey in its application process, which might give Turkey a greater incentive to go on working in the normalization process. In short, no immediate results can be expected.

REFERENCES:

- (1) Essentially the border of the treaty of Brest Litovsk of 1918 between the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic and the border of the treaty of Batumi (present day Batumi, Adjara, Georgia) of 1918 between the Ottoman Empire and the DRA, the first signed by the DRA, with slight modifications.
- (2) The territories ceded to Turkey had been acquired by Imperial-Russia in the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78 with the exception of the region of Surmalu, acquired by the treaty of Turkmenchay (1828) which put an end to the war between Russia and Persia of 1826-28.
- (3) The treaty also established that the region of Nakhchivan would become an autonomous territory under the protection of the SSR of Azerbaijan. In 1924, Nakhchivan would become an autonomous republic within the SSR of Azerbaijan.
- (4) *Turkey and Armenia, Opening minds, opening borders*, International Crisis Group, Europe Report N 199, 14 April 2009, page 5. www.crisisgroup.org
- (5) *Turkey and Armenia, Opening minds, opening borders*, International Crisis Group, Europe Report N 199, 14 April 2009, page 1. www.crisisgroup.org
- (6) *Turkey and Armenia, Opening minds, opening borders*, International Crisis Group, Europe Report N 199, 14 April 2009, page 2. www.crisisgroup.org
- (7) The disputes over Nagorno-Karabagh started in 1918, when Armenia and Azerbaijan proclaimed their independence from Russia. In 1921, the soviets consolidated their control over the whole Caucasus and Nagorno-Karabagh, with an Armenian majority, became fairly soon an autonomous oblast of the SSR of Azerbaijan. On 1 December 1989, the Supreme Soviet of Armenia and the Regional Soveit of Nagorno-Karabagh adopted a joint resolution on the reunification of Nagorno-Karabagh with Armenia. After its own declaration of independence on 30 August 1991, Azerbaijan revoked Nagorno-Karabagh's autonomous status on 26 November. Nevertheless, the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabagh continued with their efforts to separate themselves from Azerbaijan and they organized a plebiscite (without the participation of the Azeris) voting for independence. No

sovereign nation, not even Armenia has recognized the independence of Nagorno-Karabagh proclaimed on 6 January 1992.

The military conflict lasted from 1988 until 1994 and had their moments of greater intensity in 1992-3. The ceasefire was signed in May 1994 but it is not stable, a clear indication of this, are the constant violations at the border. Azerbaijan has lost 3000 soldiers and civilians since then. The Minsk Group of the OSCE created in 1992 and with the co chairmanships of USA, France and Russia has tried to find a solution to the problem since then. The Prague process facilitated by the Minsk Group of the OSCE looks for a new solution since 2004, after the failure of several peace plans, rejected by Nagorno-Karabagh in 1997 and Azerbaijan in 1998. The answers of the parties to the negotiations of Key West in 2001 are not known. The Prague process has distinguished itself from prior negotiations by its incremental model instead of trying to search for a comprehensive agreement. The process was kept confidential until the cochairs decided to go public in June-July 2006. The cochairs confirmed that the principles were based on a renunciation on the use of force, the withdrawal of Armenian forces from the territories of Azerbaijan, the acceptance of an interim status for Nagorno-Karabagh, the deployment of an international peace force, a post conflict reconstruction, the return of the IDPs (internally displaced persons) and a plebiscite or popular vote on a date to be determined to set up the definitive status of Nagorno-Karabagh. The principles would require both parties to make important concessions. Armenia would have to accept to withdraw from the occupied territories and the return of the IDPs. Azerbaijan would have to accept a plebiscite that might result in the independence of Nagorno-Karabagh. In spite of this process, there were problems in 2006, when the parties started to relate the principles to one another and to go back on previous agreements. Event though there were high level interventions from France, Russia and the USA to facilitate an agreement, the difficulties continued. Since then, the meetings continued on the basis of the Minsk Group principles of 2006 and the Madrid principles, which were never made public, and which were presented during a ministerial meeting of the OSCE in November 2007, in Madrid. It is assumed that the Madrid principles maintain most if not all the principles of 2006. It is clear at this step that the final status of Nagorno-Karabagh is a determining factor, and above all, the modality of the plebiscite, who will participate and which will be the consequences. In practical terms, the conflict resulted in the occupation of the territory of Azerbaijan. The military forces of Nagorno-Karabagh, supported by conscripts and soldiers from Armenia occupy 13,4 % (11,722 sqkm) of the territory of Azerbaijan. This includes 92,5 % of the territory of old Administrative Oblast of Nagorno-Karabagh (NKAO), five districts outside Nagorno-Karabagh: Kelbajar, Lachin, Kubatly, Jebrail, and Zangelan y and significant segments from other two: Agdam y Fizuli (even though there are disputes between the parties over the effective territory controlled by them). The territory occupied outside the ex NKAO is 7409 sqkm, practically double the territory of the old Soviet oblast. When the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabagh talk of the self proclaimed Republic of Nagorno-Karabagh (5089 sq km), they state that 15 % of their territory is occupied by the Azerbaijani army. This 15 % includes part of the districts of

Martuni y Mardakert, which were an integral part of the NKAO and also the district of Shahumian and the settlement of Getashen, which were not part of it. The self proclaimed republic of Nagorno-Karabagh also considers Lachin as part of their territory, even though this was never part of the NKAO and no Armenian lived there before the conflict. Both parties have conducted ethnic cleansing in the territories they control. There are no precise figures over the exact number of refugees and IDPs, but over 400.000 Armenians fled from Azerbaijan and the regions of Armenia close to the border and more than 700.000 Azerbaijanis and Kurds had to leave Armenia, Nagorno-Karabagh and the adjoining districts. There are no precise number of victims from the conflict but estimates speak of 18.000 to 20.000 Azerbaijanis and 25.000 Armenians dead, but a smaller figure of total dead of 18.500 is estimated. See Torres Ricardo, *Azerbaij n: conflicto, pol tica y petr leo en el Sur del Ca cuso*, CARI, Art. No 54, 2009. www.cari.org.ar

- (8) *Turkey and Armenia, Opening minds, opening borders*, International Crisis Group, Europe Report N 199, 14 April 2009, page 2. www.crisisgroup.org
- (9) L tem, Omer Engin, *The Armenian Constitution and territorial claims against Turkey*, Institute for Armenian Research, November 6th 2007, www.eraren.org
- (10) *Turkey and Armenia, Opening minds, opening borders*, International Crisis Group, Europe Report N 199, 14 April 2009, page 5-6. www.crisisgroup.org
- (11) *Turkey and Armenia, Opening minds, opening borders*, International Crisis Group, Europe Report N 199, 14 April 2009, page 6-7 y 19-20. www.crisisgroup.org
- (12) *Turkey and Armenia, Opening minds, opening borders*, International Crisis Group, Europe Report N 199, 14 April 2009, page 1. www.crisisgroup.org
- (13) The public image of the president was affected by the hotly disputed presidential elections and the repression of the opposition on 1 March 2008, with ten people dead.
- (14) *Turkey and Armenia, Opening minds, opening borders*, International Crisis Group, Europe Report N 199, 14 April 2009, page 3 y 20-21. www.crisisgroup.org
- (15) Reuters News Service, *Turkey and Armenia draw up road map to mend ties*, 23 April 2009, www.reuters.com
- (16) The Armenian Memorial Day is celebrated in Armenia and by the Armenians leaving outside Armenia on 24 April every year. It remembers the beginning of the genocide in 1915 when the leaders of the Armenian community in Constantinople were rounded up and deported.
- (17) Today's Zaman, *Yereven to Erdogan: Don't interfere in Karabakh row*, 16 May 2009, and *Turkish-Azerbaijani relations get back on track*, 19 July 2009, www.todayszam.com
- (18) Today's Zaman, *Nalbandian: Ball in Turkey's court*, 18 de mayo de 2009, www.todayszaman.com
- (19) Chatam House, *Turkish-Armenian Diplomacy. Bilateral and Regional Implications of Efforts to normalize relations*, REP Seminar Summary, page 10, 3 March 2010, www.chatamhouse.org.uk
- (20) Today's Zaman, *Turkey should not link Armenian thaw to Karabakh*, 20 May 2009, *Azerbaijan's stability is highly important*

for us, *FM Davotoglu*, 26 May 2009, *Bryza: Turkey matters because of its democracy*, 30 June 2009, *US diplomat backs proposed commission on Armenian issue*, 18 June 2009, www.todayszaman.com

- (21) In general Turkey does not require parliamentary approval to recognize other states, a recent example of this is Kosovo. Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia on 17 February 2008. Turkey recognized it the following day, in a decision taken by the cabinet, without the participation of parliament.
- (22) Today's Zaman, *Turkey and Armenia: Soccer Diplomacy shifting Rules are creating a zero-sum game*, 31 August 2009, www.todayszaman.com
- (23) Today's Zaman, *Turkey and Armenia to launch talks on diplomatic ties*, 1 September 2009, www.todayszaman.com
- (24) Today's Zaman, *Azerbaijan concerned about Turkish-Armenian rapprochement*, 2 September 2009, www.todayszaman.com
- (25) Today's Zaman, Freizer, Sabine, *"Soccer diplomacy – lessons for Armenia and Azerbaijan"*, 18 October 2009, www.todayszaman.com also reproduced in www.crisisgroup.org and *Ankara launches bid to defuse tensions with Azerbaijan*, 22 October 2009. To see the full text of the protocols consult www.mfa.gov.tr/data/.../turkiye-ermenistan-ingilizce.pdf, of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- (26) Today's Zaman, *Armenia tells diaspora: we didn't sell the country*, 11 February 2010, *Does Armenia want a solution?*, 2 February 2010, www.todayszaman.com
- (27) Today's Zaman, *Protocols frozen, civilian efforts flourish between Turkey and Armenia*, 17 October 2010, www.todayszaman.com
- (28) *Turkey and Armenia, Opening minds, opening borders*, International Crisis Group, Europe Report N 199, 14 April 2009, pages 16–17. www.crisisgroup.org and The Christian Science Monitor, *Turkey: Why Armenian genocide resolution may hurt US interests*, 5 March 2010, www.csmonitor.com
- (29) *Turkey and Armenia, Opening minds, opening borders*, International Crisis Group, Europe Report N 199, 14 April 2009, pages 21–22. www.crisisgroup.org

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