

## METHODOLOGICAL MISTAKES OF INTERNATIONAL MEDIATION OF ARMENIAN-TURKISH RELATIONS

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To be able to discuss international mediation strategy of Armenian-Turkish relations we first need to summarize and categorize two types of mistakes made in the past: methodological and political. In an article published by World Politics Review (WPR) Daniel Bar-Tal describes two levels of peace building by international community, which faces the challenge of sustainable conflict resolution. The first is the process of conflict resolution itself by means of negotiations between the leaders of the parties in question, international mediation and arbitration. To be successful at this level one still needs popular support, without which official talks cannot be effective. The second level relates to “postconflict reconciliation”, which involves societal dialogue, permanent contacts between elite groups and individuals “that feed the conflict on both sides, in order to evolve a new repertoire that can serve as a foundation for stable and lasting peace”<sup>1</sup>.

Since there is no active conflict between Ankara and Yerevan, except for the railway and road blockade of Armenia since 1993 and the

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<sup>1</sup>Bar-Tal, Daniel, *From Resolution to Reconciliation in Postconflict Societies*, World Politics Review, September 25, 2012, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/12360/from-resolution-to-reconciliation-in-postconflict-societies>, (02.08.2014)

unilateral support of Azerbaijan by Turkey during the war in Nagorno Karabagh, the stage of conflict resolution described by Bar-Tal in this particular case should be replaced by the normalization of relations between the two countries. The main methodological mistake made by the international mediators of Armenian-Turkish relations has so far been an unjustified and chaotic merging of two negotiation formats, - **normalization** and **reconciliation**. The following is our definition of these formats, which envisages different participants/actors and distribution of roles for each of them:

- Normalization package should include the opening of the border and establishment of diplomatic relations between Turkey and Armenia without preconditions. Solely the governments of the two countries with international mediation should deal it with.

- Reconciliation - an unprejudiced discussion of the past with a view to build a common dignified future - should be a joint undertaking by the Armenian government, public organizations and the Armenian Diaspora on the one hand, and the Turkish government and civil society on the other.

In the light of the aforesaid it is irrelevant and often counterproductive to include major elements of **reconciliation** into the texts of protocols on establishment of diplomatic relations between countries in political conflict.

**Reconciliation** is a much longer and much more delicate process. In the case of Turkey and Armenia, it presupposes serious and consistent societal involvements from both countries and of the Armenian Diaspora worldwide<sup>2</sup>. To be able to deliver a comprehensive

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<sup>2</sup>See also: Shougarian, Rouben, Evolution of American Interests in the Black Sea/South Caucasus Region and Mediation of Armenian-Turkish Relations. *Normalization*,

rapprochement international mediators need to have strong support not only of the governments, but also of the civil societies of both countries and the Diaspora. In Armenia's case, the very existence of 6-million-strong Diaspora is the direct consequence of the Genocide and deportations. Internationally mediated **normalization** of Armenian-Turkish relations without any political preconditions should be viewed as a necessary foundation stone for eventual reconciliation. It is beyond doubt that down the road the process of **normalization** could include some auxiliary elements of **reconciliation**, as the very fact of opening the Turkish-Armenian border, even if it is at first a limited/partial opening and the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries are important confidence building measures on the path to a new regional identity. In other words, **normalization** has to become a **confidence building measure** for **reconciliation**. However, international mediators and direct parties to negotiations should avoid conceptual mixing of two separate conflict resolution notions and establishing direct links between two negotiation formats. This kind of argumentation does not necessarily presuppose that the process of **reconciliation** cannot start until the relations between Armenia and Turkey have been **normalized**. In certain circumstances, it could even precede the process of **normalization**, or ideally, run parallel to it. However, we still need to underline that from the standpoint of international mediation strategy and methodology **reconciliation** has to be viewed as the second and final challenge of peace building:

“This latter challenge, which lies at the heart of the peace-building process, is of great importance, because it lays the foundations for successful conflict resolution and at the same time prepares the

society members to live in a state of peace, which can be defined as mutual recognition and acceptance after the reconciliation process, as well as the jointly accepted goal of maintaining peaceful relations characterized by full normalization and cooperation in all possible domains of collective life<sup>3</sup>”.

Were the political conflict between Turkey and Armenia in a more active stage, i.e. were it not for a 100-year gap between the Armenian Genocide and *football diplomacy*, international mediation would probably have to begin from **reconciliation** and only then move to **normalization**. An interesting definition of what Yehudith Auerbach of Bar Ilan University calls material conflicts vs. identity conflicts with regard to the notions of reconciliation and normalization can be found in his research paper on the subject in question:

“Between material conflicts, which evolve around material and dividable assets, and identity conflicts, which involve deep-seated hatred originating in the feeling of at least one of the sides that the other has usurped their legitimate rights. While material conflicts can be brought to an end through traditional conflict resolution techniques, identity conflicts need “track two” diplomacy strategies, and particularly forgiveness in order to reach reconciliation<sup>4</sup>”.

In international relations, there are cases when **reconciliation** is viewed as part and parcel of **normalization** and not vice versa. In this respect, looking into conflict resolution experiences in the Balkans and South Africa, Mitja Žagar from the University of Ljubljana is of the

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid

<sup>4</sup>Auerbach, Yehudith, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: The Religious Dimension*, Terrorism and Political Violence, Vol. 17, Issue 3, 2005, Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/09546550590929174#.VdZss0U1InI>, (12.06. 2015)

opinion that **reconciliation** should be viewed as an integral part of the broader notion of **normalization**. The former is a process of graduation beyond the past. International political and academic experts consider it to be a legitimate approach to restoring mutual trust, i.e. a powerful confidence building measure. This is nothing other but an attempt to return back to square one, not burdened by collective memories. Yet such a turn of events can become a reality only if all conflicting parties are committed to **reconciliation** talks and prepared to accept their outcome without prejudice<sup>5</sup>.

However, conflict resolution and peace building are complex processes, which are often unpredictable. There can't be a uniform, textbook mediation technique to approach different standoffs.

In this respect Žagar points to practices and experiences in the Balkans and South Africa, which are demonstrable examples of both successes and failures of **reconciliation**. He stresses the need to rethink and re-conceptualize **reconciliation** and develop alternative approaches<sup>6</sup>.

In an article titled *Armenia and Turkey: From Normalisation to Reconciliation* Fiona Hill, Kemal Kirisci and Andrew Moffatt write:

“...Given the multidimensional nature of the dispute between Turkey and Armenia and their peoples, reconciliation faces immense challenges. It is a process that must occur at the individual, societal, and state levels. Reconciliation requires time and a reconsideration of identity as well as of history. In contrast, the normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations is more limited in scope. In theory, it could proceed more quickly. However, progress has been erratic in recent

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<sup>5</sup>Žagar, Mitja (2010) "Rethinking Reconciliation: The Lessons from the Balkans and South Africa," *Peace and Conflict Studies*: Vol. 17: No. 1, Article 5.  
<http://nsuworks.nova.edu/pcs/vol17/iss1/5>, (02.06.2015)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

years. Both Turkey and Armenia have made positive steps forward toward normalizing their relations, only to have the apparent progress met by new setbacks and competing priorities<sup>7</sup>”.

The *setbacks* and *competing priorities* the above-mentioned article speaks about include political pre-conditions imposed on the Turkey-Armenia **normalization** format by a third party, Azerbaijan. The inability or unwillingness to calculate a way to neutralize pressures on Ankara by the Aliyev Administration constitutes the second political mistake made by the international mediators of *football diplomacy*. The need to make Ankara less susceptible to the growing blackmail from Baku has been tacitly acknowledged not only in the US but also within the academic community in Europe.

Piotr Zalewski, an Istanbul based European Stability Initiative (ESI) expert has serious doubts about Turkey’s ability to implement the policy of *zero problems with neighbors* especially with regard to the **normalization** of relations with Armenia. While he never questions Ankara’s desire to change things on the ground, in Zalewski’s opinion, it is totally unrealistic. This is because the South Caucasus is a geopolitical crossroads, where interests of major players “often intersect and collide<sup>8</sup>”.

Therefore, according to Zalewski, Ankara must put together a priority list, because sooner or later it would have to make difficult geopolitical choices, unable to be “everybody’s friend” in the South Caucasus region. To do that Turkey “must stop pretending” that the

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<sup>7</sup> Hill, Kirisci, and Moffatt, Andrew <http://www.brookings.edu/experts/kiriscik>

<sup>8</sup>Zalewski, Piotr, Abnormalisation: The Bumpy Road to Turkey-Armenia Rapprochement, 17 December 2009, Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), <http://www.ceps.eu/system/files/book/2009/12/Turkish-Armenian%20Rapprochement%20e-version.pdf> (16.09.2014)

opening of the border with Armenia will not have any negative impact on its relations with Azerbaijan. On the other hand, “a two- thirds discount on Azeri gas” cannot last forever. Most importantly, Ankara has to persuade both the political opposition at home and the Aliyev administration “that it can better serve Azerbaijan’s interests by engaging with Armenia than pushing it away”. However, in our opinion, such an approach by a European expert does not take into account whether the Ankara administration has at all planned and tried to convince the domestic opposition and the Azerbaijani authorities that the opening of the common border and the establishment of diplomatic relations with Armenia were in the strategic interest of the entire region. Zalewski stopped short of asking if it was not a tactical *good cop-bad cop game*.

To look at the evolving history of the problem mentioned above from a different angle one needs to analyze Turkey’s mediation strategy vis-à-vis Russia within the framework of the CSCE/OSCE Minsk Group. Using its crucial role in the mediation of the Karabagh talks, Russia has always tried to reinstate its influence in the South Caucasus, which was partly lost after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. It also spared no effort to limit or minimize “advances by others” thus outlining the framework of the future settlement of the conflict. On the other hand, Ankara had to come to terms with this geopolitical reality agreeing not to participate in an international peacekeeping force to be deployed between Nagorno Karabagh and Azerbaijan, except for providing logistical support. Meanwhile, the Karabagh problem gradually evolved from a local conflict at the southern borders of the Soviet Union into a regional dispute to eventually become “a token in an international game

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid

of power politics, the stakes of which involved millions of barrels of Caspian oil<sup>10</sup>”.

To be able to play any logistical role in the Karabagh conflict resolution and become positively engaged in the South Caucasus region, Turkey, as a member of the OSCE Minsk Group, first needs to at least partially disassociate itself from one of the direct parties to the conflict. The only way to do that is through the unconditional **normalization** of relations with Armenia. This unequivocal message has to be conveyed again and again by the international mediators not only to Ankara, but to Baku as well. If we take into account that the US, one of the main mediators of Armenian-Turkish **normalization** and **reconciliation** talks, is simultaneously one of the three co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, while another co-chair, Russia, played an important role before the signing ceremony in Zurich, the relevance of such message will become all the more obvious. While, realistically speaking, in the present geopolitical circumstances it might not be possible to achieve complete separation of the two issues, and therefore, today, an all-around, comprehensive **normalization** between Ankara and Yerevan appears to be too long a shot, methodological modification of the Armenian-Turkish roadmap should constitute a basis for a new mediation strategy.

Irrespective of the fact whether the methodology of *football diplomacy* proved to be a mistake of omission or of commission, i.e. a *perfect failure*, the following conclusion can be made: whereas Turkey might have reached its short-term goals by signing but not ratifying the Zurich Protocols, it could pay a price for that in the long-term perspective. Going after tactical gains in the **normalization** talks with

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<sup>10</sup>Laitin, David D. and Suny, Ronald Grigor, Armenia and Azerbaijan: Thinking a way out of Karabakh, middle east policy, vol, vii, no. 1, p.162, october 1999



Armenia, Ankara used up most of its political resource losing the trust of international mediators.

The Gül-Erdoğan administration fell short of paving the way for the **normalization** of relations with Armenia. The same goes for the **reconciliation** process and “domestic debate on the genocide issue<sup>11</sup>”. Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code remained intact, while the policy of aggressive denial took new forms. Domestic consumption and internal politics predicated and pre-determined important decisions in the negotiations with Armenia and international mediators.

Thus, Turkey became a hostage to its own public opinion and political pressure from Azerbaijan. Stuck in a self-inflicted trap by putting forward preconditions on Karabagh, should it at any point try to resume **normalization** talks with Armenia it would face even more severe opposition from Azerbaijan. On the other hand, if Ankara does not make any attempt to press the re-set button in the relations with Armenia “it will have frustrated its regional ambitions, disappointed its EU backers, and severely undermined its credibility. Finally, if it continues to index its relationship with the US to the issue of genocide recognition, it will have consolidated the risk of a major crisis with Washington<sup>12</sup>”.

It was quite predictable that towards the centennial anniversary of the Armenian Genocide there would have been different academic and political attempts in Armenia, Turkey and by international mediators to address the future fate of the Zurich Protocols, as well as the prospects of **normalization** and **reconciliation** talks. In this regard, Dr. Vahram Ter-Matevosyan made an interesting proposal, citing the provisions of Part 3 and Part 4 of the 169 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties.

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<sup>11</sup>Zalewski, Piotr, *Ibid*

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid*

He suggested that Armenia should have taken a decisive step of inviting to its capital official representatives of all those states and international organizations who had participated “at the signing ceremony in Zurich on 10 October 2009”. The purpose of such hypothetical gathering would have been the adoption of a joint statement to recall the Zurich Protocols and start a corresponding lawsuit against the Turkish authorities at the international tribunal. Ter-Matevosyan admitted that while such an action could have provided a dignified exit strategy for Armenia, the main purpose of the **normalization** of relations between the two countries and the opening of the common border would not have been achieved<sup>13</sup>.

There is no doubt that a proposal to invite all the mediators and facilitators to Armenia had certain merits, especially in the field of Armenia’s public relations in the wake of the centennial anniversary of the Genocide. On the other hand, as for the exit strategy, it had already been provided by the Decision of the Armenian Constitutional Court of the January 12, 2010.

Analyzing the commitment of the leadership of Armenia and Turkey to the peace process in 2008-2009, Dr. Ter-Matevosyan noted that both countries generally “demonstrated a will to move forward”, each to a different degree. The Armenian authorities not only had to deal with domestic opposition, but also with a very critical reaction from the Diaspora. Against those odds, Yerevan chose “to move forward” with a hope that international mediators would use their

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<sup>13</sup>Ter-Matevosyan, Vahram, What Political Solutions between Turkey and Armenia? REPAIR, Armeno-Turkish Dialogue Platform, Oct. 22, 2014, <http://repairfuture.net/index.php/en/armenian-genocide-recognition-and-reparations-standpoint-of-armenia/2015-what-political-solutions-between-armenia-and-turkey-armenian>, (11.12.2014)

influence on Turkey to respect prior commitments and return to the negotiation table. Ankara, however, was not up to the task as, formally remaining in the peace process, it had started to backpedal from its earlier commitments as soon as the Turkish authorities started being criticized by political opposition. Concluding his article, Ter-Matevosyan called on Ankara to make a public statement before the centennial, taking the responsibility for the failure of *football diplomacy*, and “declare the end of the Zurich process and leave the resumption of the process of normalization of relations to much more convenient times and favorable circumstances<sup>14</sup>”.

The “much more convenient time” seems to have come after the failed coup attempt last July, followed by an unprecedented crackdown on political opposition, mass arrests and human rights violations in Turkey. Today, the Erdoğan administration is in a desperate need of improving its international image. In the new geopolitical circumstances, Ankara, will have to send a positive message to the international community, Washington in particular, that the failing policy of *zero problems with neighbors* would be given a new start. In this context, another attempt, real or imitational, to normalize bilateral relations with Armenia could become a convenient shortcut for Erdoğan and the AKP to fulfill their new political agenda.

Should such a scenario be brought to life, the international mediators must do everything to avoid the mistakes of the past. They would have to keep the two negotiation tracks, **normalization** and **reconciliation**, separated.

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid

**ՀԱՅ-ԹՐԻՐՔԱԿԱՆ ՀԱՐԱԲԵՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԻ  
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ԲԱՑԹՈՂՈՒՄՆԵՐԸ:**

Ամփոփում

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***Բանալի բառեր**՝ Հայաստան, Թուրքիա, կարգավորում, հաշտեցում,  
միջազգային միջնորդություն, օժանդակություն,  
հակամարտող կողմեր, խաղաղություն հաստատող քայլեր*

Հոդվածի բովանդակությանը հենվում է առաջարկվող գիտական նոր դիրքորոշման վրա, որը ենթադրում է միջազգային միջնորդության երկու ոլորտների՝ հայթուրքական հարաբերությունների կարգավորման (նորմալիզացման) և ժողովուրդների հաշտեցման գործընթացների պարտադիր տարանջատումը: Համապատասխան մասնագիտական գրականության վերլուծությունը աղերսվում է խաղաղություն հաստատելու գործընթացի երկու տարբեր հարթությունների՝ հակամարտող կողմերի միջև հարաբերությունների կարգավորման և ժողովուրդների հաշտեցման ջանքերին: Հայաստանի և Թուրքիայի դեպքում հաշտեցումը ենթադրում է երկու երկրների բանակցային գործընթացին քաղաքացիական հասարակությունների և հայկական սփյուռքի լուրջ և հետևողական մասնակցություն: Առանց քաղաքական նախապայմանների Հայաստան-Թուրքիա հարաբերությունների միջնորդված կամ ուղղակի

կարգավորումը դիտարկվում է որպես հաշտեցման գործընթացի արդյունավետ ընթացքի անհրաժեշտ գրավական: Սակայն հաշտեցման հիմնական դրույթների ընդգրկումը երկկողմ դիվանագիտական հարաբերությունների հաստատմանը վերաբերող արձանագրությունների տեքստում ոչ միայն արդյունավետ չէ, այլ կարող է միջնորդների ամբողջ ծրագրին խոչընդոտող գործոն հանդիսանալ: Սա այն կարևոր հանգամանքն է, որը հաճախ թերագնահատվում կամ ընդհանրապես անտեսվում է քաղաքական հակամարտության մեջ գտնվող երկրների միջև միջազգային միջնորդությանը վերաբերող մասնագիտական գրականության մեջ:

## МЕТОДОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ ОШИБКИ МЕЖДУНАРОДНОГО ПОСРЕДНИЧЕСТВА АРМЯНО-ТУРЕЦКИХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ

Резюме

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**Ключевые слова:** *Армения; Турция; нормализация; примирение; международное посредничество; содействие; стороны конфликта; шаги по укреплению мира.*

Настоящая статья опирается на новый академический подход, предлагаемый в контексте обязательного разделения двух аспектов международного посредничества в урегулировании армяно-турецких отношений.

- Формат нормализации включает в себя открытие армяно-турецкой границы и установление двухсторонних дипломатических без политических предусловий. Этими вопросами должны заниматься исключительно правительства обеих стран при соответствующем международном посредничестве.
- Формат примирения – беспристрастного обсуждения исторического прошлого с целью построения достойного общего будущего – должен быть задействован при совместном участии армянского правительства, общественных организаций и диаспоры с одной стороны и турецкого правительства, и общественности с другой.

Спонтанное объединение параллельных переговорных процессов: нормализации двухсторонних отношений и примирения между соседними народами является основной методологической ошибкой международных посредников армяно-турецкой футбольной дипломатии. Важность этого вопроса часто недооценивается или даже игнорируется в соответствующей специальной литературе.