

**SESSION 1.**

**DYNAMICS OF NATIONAL SECURITY ISSUES: ARMENIA AND TURKEY**

**REVIEW ON ÜNAL ÇEVİKÖZ'S PAPER  
"PERSPECTIVES FOR SECURITY AND STABILITY IN THE  
SOUTH CAUCASUS: THE ROLE OF NORMALISATION  
BETWEEN TURKEY AND ARMENIA"**

*Vahram Ter-Matevosyan  
American University of Armenia*

**The relations between Turkey and Armenia have been widely covered in the academic literature. It has been approached from many perspectives and it seems no dimension is left out from the discussions. However, as long as the two countries have no diplomatic relations and the land border between them remains closed, no effort should be spared to evaluate existing and emerging predicaments and find ways to move forward. From this standpoint, Mr. Ambassador's well written paper is yet another informed effort to look into the essence and prospects of normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations.**

The main objective of his paper is to evaluate recent transformations and the current debates in the Turkish foreign policy and how the prospects of normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations fit into that context. The paper provides a comprehensive picture of the origins of post-Cold war Turkish foreign policy in the South Caucasus and shares insights on its limitations. The author rightly argues: "Turkey's Caucasus policy fails to be comprehensive due to lack of diplomatic relations with Armenia". This claim, which constitutes one of the central arguments of the paper, sets the right context to construct the flow of analysis. Another central argument of the paper is certainly the identification of the main problem that has existed

between Turkey and Armenia for the past couple of years if not decades – “the lack of trust and confidence” between two governments. This not only hinders the process but also deepens the suspicion towards each other.

In addition to these focal points, the paper has also touched upon a number of other questions that require further discussions and clarifications. Of course, it is rather challenging to write a review for a paper the author of which has served in the Turkish foreign ministry for decades, who has been Turkey’s ambassador to a number of countries and, more importantly, who has hands-on experience on the Zurich protocols. On different occasions, I had the chance to discuss all these issues with Mr. Ambassador and he knows very well my position. However, here I have to reassert certain ideas that I have exchanged with him before.

In this review, I will touch upon a set of conceptual problems that exist not only in the paper under consideration but also in the literature that exists on Turkish-Armenian relations. Therefore, I intend to discuss three contentious issues: 1) the question of the closed border and its relevance to the conflict in Karabakh; 2) the need to disentangle the processes of normalization and reconciliation; 3) the importance of separating domestic considerations from the geopolitical context. The critical rethinking of these approaches will expand our understanding of the origins of the current deadlock.

The first issue is about the border closing date. Like many politicians, scholars, and journalists, the author also mentions a few times that Turkey closed the border with Turkey on April 3, 1993. This seemingly obvious assertion needs further clarification if not revision. First and foremost, it needs to be stated that it is somehow misleading to claim that the Republic of Turkey closed *the border* with Armenia in April 1993. The reality is that the interstate land border between Turkey and Armenia was never officially open in the first place; instead, the crossing points were open on demand and only for transferring the humanitarian relief from Canada and Europe to Armenia and for the operation of the Kars-Gyumri train, which had been crossing the Turkish-Armenian border even before the collapse of the Soviet Union. Moreover, between 1993 and

1999, when the border was allegedly closed, some officials were still able to travel through the border gates, which again implies that the border was never legally open for 24-hour access and its two crossing points (Akhuryan/Doğu Kapı west of Gyumri and the Markara/Alican southwest of Yerevan) were accessible only when two parties agreed to use them for short-term objectives. To the best of our knowledge, there are no legal documents concerning the decision to open the border as such. This distinction between the border and crossing points is important because it defines the true meaning behind the border politics that ensued since then. Moreover, Turkey used the crossing points as leverages on Armenia as it delayed for months the delivery of humanitarian aid to Armenia. Even when shipping the wheat from its own reserves, that the European community had promised to replace, Turkey was doing it at a very slow pace and at a very high price. For instance, Turkey charged \$56 per ton in hard currency for transportation of wheat to Armenia, whereas the transportation of one metric ton of wheat from Russia to Armenia cost only \$2. As a result, Armenia was forced to deplete its foreign currency reserves to avoid bread riots. Armenia was not allowed to use the border-gates for exporting. Some petty traders and tourists were using the train to visit Turkey. Another evidence supporting the claim that there was no functioning border, in a conventional way of understanding, is the fact that in order for the citizens of Armenia to go to Turkey, they had to go to Tbilisi to obtain entry visas. Whereas, if they chose to enter Turkey from Georgia, they could obtain it on the Turkish-Georgian border.

This clarification has an important bearing on our discussion. On a more subtle level, one may rightly argue that in December 1991, when Turkey recognized Armenia's independence, Turkey had the chance both to open the border and establish diplomatic relations. Back then, the conflict in Karabakh was not in its active stage, and Turkey could open the border without reference to the situation in Karabakh. Turkey, instead, chose to do neither of them. This is to suggest that Turkey's policy of imposing a blockade on the Republic of Armenia started from 1991. In other words, attempts to connect the closing of the border-gates [aka-the

border] in April 1993 with the events in Karabakh aimed to please and support Azerbaijan when the latter lost the strategically important region connecting Karabakh and Armenia. Connecting the issues of Karabakh and the Turkish-Armenian border had political, symbolic, and also propaganda objectives. Furthermore, from that point onwards, analysts and politicians took this interpretation of Turkey into consideration without questioning its true intentions. The closing or opening of the border should be decoupled from the Karabakh conflict and be seen from purely bilateral perspectives. Therefore, once again, it needs to be stated that Turkey refused to open the border with independent Armenia from the early days on, hence, the claim that the border was closed in April 1993 is at least misleading.

The other issue that Mr. Ambassador discusses in the paper has to do with the Zurich protocols that were signed on October 10, 2009. Here I argue that during the Swiss facilitated negotiations, which led to the preparing and signing of two protocols, some methodological mistakes occurred. In this sense, what was left out from the discussion, however, was a set of crucial questions: Why sign two protocols when the whole purpose of negotiations, at least for Armenia, was to establish diplomatic relations? And: Why put two separate issues – development of diplomatic relations and reconciliation – into one basket, creating much confusion and inherent problems? The decision to bring these two documents together was a methodological flaw that cost the entire process dearly.

The crux of the problem has to do with the fact that bringing together the process of normalization and reconciliation carried a risk that the two parties were not capable of overcoming. It is beyond any reasonable doubt that normalization of relations and the establishment of diplomatic relations between countries that have a disputed past and a troubled present requires a completely different toolbox and set of policy initiatives than the process of reconciliation. Underestimation of these significant differences had serious implications for the entire process.

When starting the negotiations, both parties had different and sometimes diametrically opposed expectations for the process. For the Armenian side, it was crucial that Turkey would continue the negotiations

without any preconditions. The short-term goal for the Armenian side was to establish diplomatic relations with a hope to secure the opening of the border with Turkey, thereby removing the economic and communication blockade imposed on Armenia by Turkey since 1991. For the Turkish side, the objectives were quite different, as Turkey never concealed the true reasons for not establishing diplomatic relations and for not opening the border. Since 1991, the Turkish side has presented at least three reasons for not opening the border: Armenian Genocide claims and worldwide recognition campaigns should be ceased, the border disputes between Turkey and Armenia should be resolved once and for all, and the Karabakh conflict should be resolved. However, since 1993, the last reason started to dominate Turkey's list of preconditions, effectively pushing the first two into the background. This short explanation alone was sufficient to understand that two parties sought different objectives and hence pursued different strategies in attaining their goals. For the Armenian side, the normalization of relations came first, while for Turkey the reconciliation process was more significant. These different views were reflected in the two protocols and, instead of devising a short and plain document about the establishment of diplomatic relations, the parties took the most complex road by bringing together all the complications of their relations and putting them into two documents with multiple cross-references. Thus, the failure to disentangle normalization from reconciliation should be seen as a methodological error and one of the reasons for the current deadlock.

This important dimension should be taken into account in all future initiatives that will bring the leaders of the two nations to the negotiation table. The reasons for the lack of official relations between Turkey and Armenia have different facets and layers. Some of the existing problems may be addressed through official documents, some may be solved through mere contacts between two nations and by better knowing, each other and some may remain unsolvable for some time to come. Hence, Turkish-Armenian relations should be separated from Turkey-Armenia relations. The officials from both countries should retake the hard and arduous road of normalization of official relations, and leave the reconciliation process

to societal actors: scholars, artists, and civil society members of the two nations. The states can facilitate the reconciliation but, given the sensitive nature of relations, should not direct the process. The lessons of the Zurich protocols should not be ignored.

Geopolitical dynamics should also be constantly revisited when the future of Armenia-Turkey relations are discussed. Although it seems that the relations between Turkey and Armenia have been exclusively a bilateral issue, there is little doubt that certain countries keep having an impact on the process. The influence of these countries sometimes is visible, whereas more often their real impact remains unclear. Azerbaijan and Turkey keep working closely on multiple of issues related to Turkey's relations with Armenia, the Armenian Genocide, and Diaspora as well as on problems related to the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh. Mr. Ambassador also discusses examples of how Azerbaijan was able to demonstrate resistance to a number of initiatives which aimed to advance the relations between Armenia and Turkey or between two societies. Turkey, in turn, keeps referring to Azerbaijan and its concerns regarding the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh as important preconditions to expect any progress in the relations between Armenia and Turkey. It remains a big question though, how tangible is the actual influence of Azerbaijan on the relations between Armenia and Turkey? Notwithstanding the rhetoric deriving from the logic of the much-acclaimed "one nation, two states" formula, on many occasions the Turkish leaders have been ambivalent about Azerbaijan and its actual role in the equation. Therefore, Turkey's refusal to normalize relations with Armenia should be seen solely from Turkish perspective without a need to drag Azerbaijan into the picture. Based on this, it can be argued with certainty, that Turkey's ruling establishment and especially its foreign policy architects abused the influence that Azerbaijan had on building bilateral relations between Armenia and Turkey. In public statements, the Turkish ruling party has overestimated, hence inflated the actual weight of Azerbaijani demands concerning Turkey's relations with Armenia. European diplomats, who were part of the Zurich process, repeatedly mentioned that they found Turkish backpedaling based on

Azerbaijani resentment as insincere and contrary to the spirit of the negotiations. Some Turkish diplomats also alluded to that fact that Azerbaijan's political leadership knew quite well all the details of the negotiation process between Armenia and Turkey as they were informed on a regular basis. Those who kept the Azerbaijani leadership updated recall no visible resentment against the process because, as they have told the Azerbaijan's leadership, the normalization of the relations between Armenia and Turkey would positively affect the Karabakh problem also. The paper under review also follows that line of argumentation.

The second tier of countries, which can both positively and negatively influence the normalization process between Armenia and Turkey, include Russia, USA, France, Germany, Georgia and the EU as an organization. Between 2005 and 2009, a number of countries were engaged in a process, which was coined "Football diplomacy". The USA had a leading role in it, and, with Obama's election to the presidency, the process received additional boost. When the negotiations were leading towards the signing of the protocols, a number of other countries came forward to support it including Switzerland, which has been hosting and facilitating the negotiation process from early on, Russia, USA, France, EU etc. After the signing ceremony of the protocols was over, it was time to act and support the parties to ratify them and move to implementation. It was exactly at that time that, albeit for different reasons, both Armenia and Turkey needed external support. Thus, the countries, which were present during the signing ceremony, left the process early enough, except USA, assuming that both parties would stay committed to the mutual agreements, time and efforts they spent on the process and move on. However, it turned out to be quite a long and tenuous road, which left the normalization process in disarray, with no positive developments in sight. Therefore, the normalization prospects between Armenia and Turkey need unconditional support from global and emerging powers, international organizations, think-tanks etc. Expecting that the President of France, Fr. Macron, as Mr. Ambassador claims, can be of any help is a good proposition. Leaders of Scandinavian countries and Benelux can also assume such role.

On the other hand, nowadays the international system goes through a challenging period of thorough revision. The primary actors, who might be interested in establishing diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey, are dealing with problems elsewhere, which are different in scope and urgency. Hence, Armenia-Turkey relations are pushed to the backstage of the international relations with no prospects bringing it back to the forefront. Tellingly, Turkey also goes through a challenging period where its future is determined for the next few years if not decades. With the expanding tide of censorship, suppression of free speech and jailing of journalists, left wing and liberal intellectuals, the number of supporters of the Armenian cause is drastically decreasing. Winning over new supporters is becoming a daunting task for those who care about the normalization, hence, the Turkish leadership does not feel the urgency to deal with Armenia and the Armenian question.

*At the end of the paper, the author engages in an interesting discussion about the prospects of normalization by discussing five scenarios. Two of them are worthy of separate consideration: Turkey's domestic transformations and Armenia's possible choices. According to the first claim that Mr. Ambassador proposed, in view of the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections in 2019, it is unlikely that Turkey's ruling elite makes any initiatives toward normalization of relations because it "would risk losing authority and being exposed to criticism before the critical elections". This view is certainly interesting, however, it needs elaboration and the best way to do so is to ask a question: "For how long the election circles are going to determine Turkey's policy towards Armenia?" Furthermore, the paper claims that any bold moves can come from "a self-confident and authoritative executive leader". The next question that may want to pose is "how much self-confident and authoritative should the current leader be in order to make any step toward Armenia?" I guess the answer to that question should be sought in the opposite direction. The more democratic is Turkey, the higher the chances for any bold moves. Only in these circumstances, one can engage in open discussion about Turkish-Armenian relations when the voice of dissent is*



not silenced, when there are checks and balances, when the word "Armenian Genocide" is not banned in the Turkish parliament, when free speech is not punished, when journalists are released from prison. More importantly, the authoritarian leader may close the border as abruptly as it was opened.

The second and last point is the Armenian context. A few days ago, in his UN speech, Armenia's president has clearly laid the road-map for the protocols and gave Turkey a new deadline for doing any tangible moves - March 1, 2018. He declared the protocols "futile" and not reflecting the existing realities. Hence, there is less likely, as the paper claims, that Armenia will take "a bold step forward ... ratifies the protocols". Armenian president statement can be interpreted as a final and hopeless gesture not only to Turkey but also to the international community.

It is widely known that Armenia's gradual withdrawal from the process took some 7 years now. In April 2010, after "the reasonable timeframe", which was mentioned in the protocols has passed, the Armenian president decided to suspend the process of ratification in the parliament. The next turning point was in February 2015 when the president of Armenia decided to withdraw the protocols from the parliament's agenda. Thus, Sargsyan's last statement is the third, and hopefully, the last reminder to Erdogan about the importance to making his mind.

To conclude, the fruitless process of "football diplomacy" did not change the status quo, as Turkey keeps its border with Armenia hermetically sealed. Moreover, the situation became more strained and complex as the parties became increasingly distrustful of one another's intentions and policy preferences. Diplomatic communications between Turkey and Armenia have effectively broken down, with no hopeful perspectives in sight. As a result, the relations between two countries have only deteriorated since the failure of the Football diplomacy. The lack of understanding on many key questions has effectively diminished any trace of the minimal trust developed during the "football diplomacy".