

VARIOUS VOICES ON TURKEY-ARMENIA RELATIONS

This compilation of perspectives presents the questionnaires produced by an ongoing project of the Yerevan-based Analytical Center on Globalization and Regional Cooperation supported by Eurasia Foundation. The project aims to foster a stronger understanding of the perceptions on both sides. The differences of opinion among actors in the political and NGO communities of the countries regarding the relationship clarifies some faultlines while also offering prospects. The particular institutions represented have been selected by the editor to portray an array of opinions and each interview has been adapted, thus questions may not appear identical in each.

Republican Party of Armenia

The largest party in today's Armenian Parliament, holding all major posts in the government, as well as the Prime Ministry. The Chairman is Serzh Sargsyan, also Presidential candidate.

Interview conducted with: Council member Artak Zakaryan

How do you assess the current condition of Armenian-Turkish relations?

The Armenian-Turkish relationship is shaped by the following issues: the situation concerning the international recognition of the Armenian genocide; Turkey's wish to solve the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict in Azerbaijan's favor; the border being closed by Turkey unilaterally.

How would you characterize Armenian and Turkish official approaches to the establishment of relations between the two states?

Armenia wants to establish diplomatic relations with Turkey without preconditions and continues to make the appropriate moves in order to overcome the roadblocks and improve the relationships. Turkey continues the policy of setting preconditions for relations with Armenia, which is, of course, unacceptable.

From your point of view, is there a difference between the opinion of the Armenian society and the official approach?

In general, no.

In your view, how much will the recent Armenian approach of opening the border without preconditions contribute to the development of relations?

Although our economy has been showing high growth rates in recent years, opening the border with Turkey will also be helpful for our economy. But it will also be helpful for Turkey's border regions, for Turkey's economy. Therefore, there is mutual interest here. We have stated it clearly: we do not have any precondition. Turkey should be able to come to a conclusion about how it may play a more effective and constructive role in the region.

Which segments do you think benefit from the Armenia-Turkey border being closed? And which do you think are the losers from this situation?

The closed border damages Armenia and Turkey mainly in an economic way. This situation is useful mainly for Azerbaijan and Georgia, because they are getting into better regional positions – economically, in the area of communications, and politically.

What steps do you think should be taken by the two countries for the border to be opened?

In this respect, the Republic of Armenia has nothing to do, because first of all the

Republic of Turkey has to revise its policies, while Armenia's policy is reasonable for the world. The moves towards opening of the border should begin with establishing of diplomatic relations.

What will the economic, political, social and other gains of the two countries be by the opening of the Armenia-Turkey border?

In the economic sphere – mutually profitable cooperation and good opportunities for the development of Turkey's border regions. In the political sphere, the dialogue and cooperation may help to avoid drawing of separation lines within the region and their negative consequences.

What kinds of negative consequences can the opening of the border have for both sides?

During the initial period, Armenian industry may experience problems.

Where do you think the development of Armenia-Turkey relations should begin?

First of all, diplomatic relations; it is difficult to undertake consistent, goal-oriented actions without diplomatic relations.

Can cultural dialogue (such as the restoration of the Akdamar Church on Akdamar Island) contribute to the development of diplomatic relations?

Nobody should be mistaken by the restoration of the Holy Cross Church on Lake Van's Akhtamar Island by the Turkish government. It is significant that both St. Ejmiadzin and the Patriarchy of Antilias made it clear that they would not participate in the opening ceremony of the Holy Cross Church without a cross on it. However, even if the church now is used as a museum, that is an advantage for us. Maybe one day it will serve its primary mission.

Do you think the difference of religion between the two countries is an obstacle to the development of Armenia-Turkey relations?

I do not think that religious differences hinder the establishment of relationships between the two states.

Can civil society organizations and media play a role in the development of Armenia-Turkey relations?

The role and significance of these institutions mainly depends on being well-established in the two countries. In their activities, neither the media, nor the NGOs can avoid the existing obstacles. As long as Turkey continues to set preconditions, as well as the policy of denial of the genocide continues, it will be difficult to expect any significant accomplishment from the mentioned sectors.

Do you think that the pressure for the 1915 incidents to be recognized as genocide is an obstacle to the development of the relations between the two countries or is it beneficial?

Turkey's denial of the past is based not only on the possibility of having moral, economic, or territorial losses if the guilt is recognized, but also by the fear of undermining the national identity that has been based on denial for decades. It may lead not only to civil unrest, but also to large ethnic strife, which is considered dangerous for the state's unity in the present multiethnic reality. While pursuing the worldwide recognition and condemnation of the Armenian genocide and, in particular, its recognition by Turkey, Armenia considers it not just as restoration of historical justice, but also as a way of improvement of the atmosphere of mutual trust in the region and prevention of similar crimes in the future.

In your view, before the 1915 incidents, what was the nature of the relationship between Armenians and Turks; how influential were Armenians in the Ottoman Empire?

In the Ottoman Empire Armenians had significant influence in the cultural, scientific, economic (especially trade) spheres, and in craftsmanship. That period, of course, cannot be characterized only positively, because Ottoman Empire always had a policy of suppressing Christians, and especially Armenians, which was periodically accompanied by massacres and forced migration.

How much do the developments in the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia affect Armenia-Turkey relations?

The Turkish side often hints that although the Nagorno-Karabagh issue remains one of the preconditions in Armenian-Turkish relationships, it already is not viewed as the primary one. From the Armenian point of view, a revision of Turkey's biased policy on the Nagorno-Karabagh issue would contribute to improvement of the relationships and regional stability.

What is the effect of the state of Armenia-Turkey relations on regional development?

The unsolved conflicts have immediate negative effects on the development of regional cooperation. As a result of improvement of relations, the dangers of drawing separation lines in the region will be diminished and a beneficial atmosphere will be produced. Armenia has always advocated in favor of establishing an atmosphere of regional cooperation, forming a security framework, and establishing constructive relationships with neighboring states.

Are there regional issues where Armenian and Turkish interests converge?

There are unsolved conflicts and disputes between neighbors in the region. Comprehensive stability, security, communication, and economic cooperation frameworks have not been formed. Thus there is not able to be matching interests.

Are there global challenges on which Armenia's and Turkey's interests match? If yes, what are these issues?

Yes, there are, in the context of regional issues.

Do you think international institutions can have an effect on Turkey-Armenia relations?

The mediation for the improvement of Armenian-Turkish relationships began in 1995 and has been continued till now. The mediation underwent some changes, there were active phases, and there were also rather passive phases. In the recent two or three years assistance has become more consistent. There have been numerous occasions when representatives of the U.S. administration visited Armenia and Turkey. There have also been delegations from the Congress, and we welcome these because it is important on the regional level that the delegations from the Congress or the Department of State not only visit Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia but also become familiar with the relationships between Armenia and Turkey, as well as between Turkey and the South Caucasus, and try to have positive influence on the developments. A few more proposals have been added, in particular, the Lebanese and Canadian ones; and the most important is the European Union's mediation proposal and the EU's readiness to take responsibility. It is known that even before the New Neighborhood initiative the EU had a special envoy whose mandate included regional security in the South Caucasus, conflict resolution, as well as regional cooperation. In my opinion, that mandate should also include the relationships between Armenia and Turkey, or between Turkey and the South Caucasus as a main priority. We began to participate in the New Neighbors initiative, and the European Union can play very constructive and important role.

What is your attitude about Turkey's possible EU membership?

Turkey's drive towards EU membership must be welcomed, because it will make the country more predictable, and we will have an EU member neighbor. However, now it is still too early to talk about Turkey's membership, and there is a need to evaluate the negotiation process. On the way towards EU membership Turkey will have to make a great amount of reforms.

How would Turkey's EU membership influence Armenian-Turkish relations?

Armenia follows the negotiation process which derives from Turkey's wish to join the EU. In that process it is especially important to exclude application of double standards; removing the Turkish blockade of Armenia must be an important condition. This issue is especially crucial for Armenia's participation in the New Neighborhood policy.

Do you believe Turkey and Armenia consider each other as enemies today?

Not in a direct sense, but the nationalistic sentiments that emerge in Turkey from

time to time and Turkey's denial of the genocide issue regularly provoke suspicion and non-desirable reaction of the Armenian society.

How much time will it take for diplomatic relations to be established between Armenia and Turkey?

The solution totally depends on an appropriate decision of Turkey's political elite, for which, unfortunately, there is no ground yet.

The interviewer's name: Viktoria Abrahamyan,

Republican People's Party (CHP)

The oldest political party of Turkey and today's largest opposition party in parliament.

Name of the person interviewed: Ambassador Onur Öymen, Deputy Chairman of the Party, answering not on behalf of the party but in his personal capacity.

How do you assess the current condition of Armenian-Turkish relations?

Armenian and Turkish relations are not in a good situation. We tried to constitute good relations since the beginning. We established contact on technical and diplomatic levels. We saw Armenia's hard and accusatory manner against Turkey. It is unavoidable for us to take counter measures. There is no development in the Minsk Process and Armenia should leave occupied Azerbaijan territories.

What is your opinion about Armenian and Turkish governments' official approaches to the issue of establishing relations between two countries?

Turkey's attitude is clear. If our expectations from Armenia are fulfilled, relations will improve. There are serious problems such as Armenian documents that show some parts of Eastern Anatolia as being Armenian territory, and Armenia's occupation of Azerbaijan's territories.

In your opinion, is there a difference between the approach of the Turkish society and the official point of view?

I do not think that there is a difference. The Turkish society is sensitive about this subject. Besides, the Turkish society rejects the claims of genocide. And they support Azerbaijan and do not tolerate its occupation. In Armenia, neither the government nor the public has reacted adequately to the ASALA terrorist organization. ASALA members are free in Armenia and this situation is bothersome.

In your opinion, what is the reason for not establishing diplomatic relations until now?

The reasons are explained above. This completely depends on Armenia's attitudes. If Armenia declares that it is a good neighbor to Turkey and abandons the policies that I mentioned, establishment of relations is possible.

In your opinion, how much does the recent approach of the Armenian side about opening the border without preconditions contribute to the development of relationships?

Opening of the border depends on the solution of other problems.

In your opinion, who loses and who benefits from the closed Armenia-Turkey border?

There are always winners and losers. But states' pay attention to more important points while evaluating such issues. Issues that I mentioned have prior importance.

In your opinion, what measures should be taken by two states for opening of the Armenia-Turkey border?

There is no measure that Turkey should take, Armenia should take measures. Armenia should abandon its claims about the Turkish border and its genocide claims, should pull out of Azerbaijani territories, and should allow the internally displaced Azeris to return to their homes.

What negative consequences might the opening of the border have for the two sides?

If political provisions are fulfilled, there will be no negative consequences. Turkey is not trying to punish Armenia.

In your opinion, in which areas should development of Armenian-Turkish relations begin?

First of all, there should be mutual trust in the political level. Besides, Armenia should abandon its negative attitude against Turkey. It should discuss the genocide claim in units and commissions as it is done in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. Armenia should not make genocide claims an issue for political exploitation. It should not provoke various countries' parliaments with claims of genocide.

May intercultural dialogue contribute to the establishment of diplomatic relations (e.g., restoration of the Saint Cross Church on Akhtamar Island)?

These two issues, culture and politics, should be distinguished. Culture is outside politics and helps societies understand each other. The Turkish side does not aim to obstruct exchanges. But we do suspect that Armenia evaluates these from a political angle.

In your opinion, do the religious differences between the two peoples' hinder the establishment of Armenian-Turkish relations or contribute to it?

Religious differences are not an obstacle. Being of different religions, cultures, ethnicities or civilizations does not play a role. Turkey does not act on the basis of religious differences in its relations with Armenia nor with any other countries.

Our traditions are such that religious differences are met with tolerance.

Could the legislative bodies of the two states contribute to the establishment of official relations?

Certainly. The Grand National Assembly of Turkey made a call, but there was not a positive response from Armenia. A new call can be made in near future.

What role can NGOs or media outlets play in the development of Armenian-Turkish relations?

The root of the problem should not be overlooked. The resolution of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, punishment of members of the ASALA terrorist organization, Armenia's abandonment of territorial demands from Turkey and genocide claims are the important issues. If these issues are solved, the media can contribute further.

In your opinion, does the fact that Armenia is pushing for the incidents of 1915 to be recognized as genocide serve as an obstacle to the development of Turkey-Armenia relations - or is it good for the relationship?

Certainly it is an obstacle. Armenia should read its own history and objective foreign sources. They should understand that some radical organizations have done a lot of damage to Armenia and that Turks died in 1915 too. Genocide claims in third countries should not be used as an instrument.

In your opinion, what kind of relations existed before 1915 between Turks and Armenians? What position did Armenians occupy in the Ottoman Empire and what influence did they have?

The Armenian community was a fundamental element of the Ottoman Empire. There was no discrimination since the Fatih Sultan Mehmet period. Armenians were respected just like the other communities and they also contributed to the Empire. There were eight Armenian ministers in the Ottoman parliament before 1915. They took top level missions. Moreover, the attendant of the sultan's personal treasure was also Armenian. Gangs like the Dashnaks were committing murder and causing uneasiness, damaging the relations of friendship and brotherhood. When one looks at the writings of foreign diplomats' of the time, one sees that Armenians and other non-Muslims were in an advantageous position compared to the Muslims in Istanbul, Trabzon and other places. One can conclude from such documents that there was no reason justifying the rebellion of the Armenians.

How does the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict resolution process influence Armenian-Turkish relations?

It effects relations very much. If the Minsk process accomplishes to reach a resolution, an important obstacle for the two countries will be removed. Turkey did everything it could for this process to conclude positively. But, the presidential election in Armenia left the issue hanging in the air.

What is the influence of the relations between Armenia and Turkey on regional development?

If the political problems are solved and relations develop to the level of relations with Georgia and Azerbaijan, it would be good. Development of relations will also be good for Armenia.

Are there any regional issues on which the interests of Armenia and Turkey overlap?

Cooperation would be possible in areas such as transportation, regional development, and pipelines. Had there been improvement on political issues, the passage of Baku-Ceyhan through Armenia was contemplated. But Armenia did not change its attitude and therefore lost a historical opportunity. Development of relations also contributes to improvement of relations with European Union.

Are there global challenges on which Armenia and Turkey have matching interests?

Development of Turkish-Armenian relations would positively contribute to world issues such as environment, global warming, closing of nuclear energy stations, east-west energy corridor, transportation lines and energy.

In your opinion, may the international organizations influence the improvement of Armenian-Turkish relationships?

It depends on Armenia's attitude. If it improves its attitude, there would be no need for international organizations. If Armenia thinks that it can find a solution by using international organizations, it is mistaken. It can't solve anything through this kind of pressure.

What is your opinion about Turkey's membership to the European Union?

Turkey has aimed for European Union membership for a long time, and every government should continue to work in this direction. However everything is not in the hands of Turkey. Some countries are delaying the matter and progress depends on them. This is not an issue of Turkey's one-sided effort.

How would Turkey's membership to the European Union influence relations with Armenia?

Turkey's membership would have a positive influence on relations with Armenia certainly. But this positive influence would be conditioned to the political and other issues. Besides, Turkey's European Union membership would be beneficial in the countries of the region developing relations with the European Union.

In your opinion, do Armenia and Turkey have images of enemy towards each other?

Turkey does not perceive any country as an enemy. If another perceives Turkey as an adversary, Turkey has the capacity to stand up to this.

Is there in your opinion a need to get rid of the “images of enemy”?

Certainly. But, if there is anyone who perceives Turkey as an enemy, their thought of bringing the strong country Turkey is to heel is a dream.

How much time is needed to establish diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey?

If Armenians take necessary steps there is no time needed. But time cannot solve these problems by itself.

Would you like to add something?

We feel friendship towards the Armenian people. We perceive nobody as enemy. Armenian people should stray away from the wrong thoughts that their politicians project.

Name of the interviewer: Çiçek Coşkun

Helsinki Citizens' Assembly - Vanadzor Office

The Helsinki Citizens' Assembly is an NGO which works on human rights, peace building and promotion of civic initiatives.

Interview conducted with: Arthur Sakunts, Head of the organization

How would you characterize the present state of Armenian-Turkish relations?

It is not proper to talk about relationships as such when there are no diplomatic relations. However, there are issues of mutual interest, which may be used for the assessment of the present state of relationships. First, Turkey's biased approach to the Nagorno-Karabagh issue (that is, diplomatic relations with Armenia will not be established until the occupied territories of Azerbaijan are liberated) is a ground for viewing it as a non-friendly state. On the other hand, free entry to Turkey for the citizens of Armenia, as well as the cooperation between Armenian and Turkish tour agencies allow Armenian-Turkish relations to be characterized as pragmatic and mutually advantageous. Finally, the dialogue within the Black Sea Economic Cooperation framework points to development in Armenian-Turkish relations. The Armenian-Turkish relations have not been shaped yet, they are partial and unpredictable.

What are your opinions about the official approaches of the Armenian and Turkish governments about establishing relations?

In short: too cautious. Both sides have been avoiding actions that would increase the tensions. So, the mutual tactics of safekeeping and avoiding harm has been the main characteristic of the official positions. At the same time, both sides occasionally made public statements demonstrating non-changing attitudes, which are not directed towards the establishment of a relationship.

From your point of view, is there a difference between the opinion of the Armenian society and the official approach?

Since the Armenian society is very diverse, I would not try to give a clear answer to such an unequivocal question. There is no difference between the opinion of the large part of the society and the official opinion. But there is also a relatively small segment, which has an approach totally different from the official one.

What is your opinion about the reason why the two states have not established diplomatic relationships yet?

The first reason is the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict. Turkey was one of the first states that recognized the independence of Armenia; however, the existence of the conflict and its development could not be beneficial for the development of relationships. Second, because of the 1915 genocide Armenian society has a very negative attitude and distrust towards Turkey; the Soviet leadership did everything possible to aggravate these bad feelings. Such a starting point, followed by the policies of the Armenian authorities after 1998, could not shape the relationships in any favorable way. Turkey, in turn, has not shown a wish to improve relations with Armenia.

What are your opinions about the official approaches of the Armenian and Turkish governments about establishing relations?

There is important change in Armenia's official approach, which offers a good potential for the development of Armenian-Turkish relations. However, the same Armenian officials address the international institutions from the standpoint of the need to recognize the genocide, therefore their approach about opening the border without preconditions remains just a declaration, a diplomatic trick but not a meaningful move.

Which segments do you think benefit from the Armenia-Turkey border being closed? And which do you think are the losers from this situation?

First of all, it causes damage to Armenia and Turkey. Who benefits? Certainly, Azerbaijan and Russia. The latter has never demonstrated any initiative aimed to opening of the border. Azerbaijan is just interested in freezing Armenian-Turkish relationships. Iran and Georgia also get some benefits.

What steps do you think should be taken by the two countries for the border to be opened?

There is a need for more active contacts within the international institutions where Armenia and Turkey have membership, developing mutually beneficial ways of cultural and economic cooperation, organizing meetings between the representatives of civil society, scientific, and cultural institutions.

What will the economic, political, social and other gains of the two countries be if the Armenia-Turkey border is opened?

New opportunities for development would emerge in all mentioned spheres, the level of knowledge about each other would improve, the possibility of overcoming the numerous stereotypes would increase.

What kinds of negative consequences can the opening of the border have for both sides?

I do not expect such consequences, if the border would be opened on the basis of mutual agreement. Some problems common for any neighboring states may arise, such as trafficking, cooperation between criminals, smuggling, but such problems are unavoidable. There is one more concern, based on the fact that the bordering region is inhabited by Kurds; that is an issue for serious consideration.

Where do you think the development of Armenia-Turkey relations should begin?

As I already noted, in cultural cooperation, trade, journalists' cooperation, and contacts between the civil societies.

Can cultural dialogue (such as the restoration of the Akdamar Church on Akdamar Island) contribute to the development of diplomatic relations?

Certainly

Do you think the difference of religion between the two countries is an obstacle to the development of Armenia-Turkey relations?

No, the religious differences do not hinder the relationships between Armenians, on one side, and Iranians, Egyptians, or Syrians on the other side.

Can civil society organizations and media play a role in the development of Armenia-Turkey relations?

A very substantial role. It should be taken into account that both in Turkey and in Armenia the non-governmental sector and the media are under serious pressure. It may be suggested that the cooperation is one of the serious possibilities for the NGOs and media to solve common problems in Armenia and Turkey.

Do you think that the pressure for the 1915 incidents to be recognized as genocide is an obstacle to the development of the relations between the two countries or is it beneficial?

No doubt, that is an obstacle. If the other side (I mean especially the society) is not informed about the developments of 1895-1923, or has only biased information from one side, then they will see the debate on the issue as blackmail or at least will not understand it.

In your view, before the 1915 incidents, what was the nature of the relationship between Armenians and Turks; how influential were Armenians in the Ottoman Empire?

Since there was no Armenian state before 1915 next to the Ottoman Empire, it is possible only to speak about the relations between Armenians and Turks as peoples. In my opinion, before Russia's expansion to the South Caucasus and Georgia's loss of independence, Armenians in the Ottoman Empire had not been in danger of elimination. Moreover, in the Ottoman Empire there were Armenian members of the Sublime Porte (the government) and later in the Parliament; Armenians were involved in economic activities, especially in trade, artisanship, also banking; there were Armenian architects. Maybe the representation was not in proportion with their numbers, but this issue deserves additional non-biased research; if such research has been made, the society must be informed about the results.

How much do the developments in the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia effect Armenia-Turkey relations?

There is direct negative influence. But as I noted, Turkey's non-constructive approach towards the Nagorno-Karabagh issue and its resolution is one of the reasons.

What is the effect of the state of Armenia-Turkey relations on regional development?

I would say that there is no influence from the viewpoint of Turkish interests, but there is direct negative influence on the Armenian interest because Armenia is excluded from all regional projects in which Turkey is involved. And in general, because of the non-settled Armenian-Turkish relations regional developments cannot get into a perfect shape.

Are there regional issues where Armenian and Turkish interests converge?

Both Armenia and Turkey potentially have mutual interests in transport communication, as well as from the viewpoint of development of the border regions.

Do you think international institutions can have an effect on Turkey-Armenia relations?

Of course, they may influence; especially the Council of Europe, also OSCE and the European Union.

What is your attitude about Turkey's possible EU membership?

I favor it.

How would Turkey's EU membership influence Armenian-Turkish relations?

It would have positive influence, undoubtedly, because a democratic and developed neighbor state is the most important guarantee for security and development.

Do you think Turkey and Armenia view each other as enemies?

Yes, this is sustained in all possible ways by some media, political parties, and also by governmental structures.

Do you think the image of the other side being an enemy needs to be fixed?

Absolutely. There is a need to get rid of the perception of barbarity.

How much time will it take for diplomatic relations to be established between Armenia and Turkey?

I do not know about the time; when Armenia joins NATO, or when both Armenia and Turkey become EU members.

Would you like to add something?

Armenia and Turkey are neighbor states, and not talking and not having relationships with a neighbor is, at least, stupidity.

The interviewer's name: Karine Asatryan

ARI Movement

NGO established in 1994 with headquarters in Istanbul, aiming to increase volunteerism, promote participation of young people and contribute to the development of leaders of the future.

Interview conducted with: Ural Aküzüm, Chairman.

How do you assess the current condition of Armenian-Turkish relations?

The relationship is in a crisis. There needs to be initiatives for the future.

What are your opinions about the official approaches of the Armenian and Turkish governments about establishing relations?

Recently the Turkish government has pursued an open policy with regard to the archives. It will contribute to dialogue if the Armenian government pursues similar initiatives.

Do you think there is a difference between the approach of the Turkish society and the official perspective?

No, the Turkish society is considerably irritated by the so-called genocide claims. And the government is making efforts to clarify the situation and eliminate the blurry and vague aspects.

Why do you think that diplomatic relations were not able to be established to date?

The reason is that neither side has been able to openly take the necessary steps.

In your view, how much will the recent Armenian approach of opening the border without preconditions contribute to the development of relations?

The wish to open borders is a positive development however the opening of the border will not really bring much economic benefit to Turkey. After the political ambiguity is lifted these kinds of approaches will be able to contribute more to dialogue between the two countries.

Which segments do you think benefit from the Armenia-Turkey border being closed? And which do you think are the losers from this situation?

Trade between Turkey and Armenia takes place over Georgia and Iran. The border being closed benefits the neighboring countries. Even more significant though is that the closed border serves the interests of the Armenian diaspora which benefits from Turkey-Armenia relations being bad. Those who defend dialogue are the ones that loose.

What steps do you think should be taken by the two countries for the border to be opened?

The so-called genocide claims need to be clarified by a jointly established independent research commission. The ambiguity of the situation and the fact that a solution is left only to the initiative of politicians are obstacles to any dialogue between the two countries. Concrete and open steps need to be taken on this issue in order to make progress in the opening of the border.

What will be the economic, political, social and other gains of the two countries by the opening of the Armenia-Turkey border?

Economic links increase integration in the globalizing world. The time spent on problems will be shifted to investments. The bonds between the two countries can get stronger and collaboration on economic, social and political issues can be developed.

What kinds of negative consequences can the opening of the border have for both sides?

There will not be any negative consequences of the opening of the border to Turkey or Armenia. The countries through which trade is currently conducted will loose this potential.

Where do you think the development of Armenia-Turkey relations should begin?

Firstly, political problems need to be overcome. And then progress in economic and social areas can follow.

Can cultural dialogue (such as the restoration of the Akdamar Church on Akdamar Island) contribute to the development of diplomatic relations?

Yes. Such steps demonstrate that the cultures respect each other and portray a green light for further dialogue. Both sides need to take more such steps.

Do you think the difference of religion between the two countries is an obstacle to the development of Armenia-Turkey relations?

Turkey is a country where different cultures and religions have been able to co-exist and it is a country that has been able to integrate with the world. Turkey has intense relations with the predominately Christian Europe, Jewish Israel and the Muslim Middle East. The fact that Turkey and Armenia are of different religions has neither positive nor negative effect on dialogue.

Can civil society organizations and media play a role in the development of Armenia-Turkey relations?

NGOs and media can open alternative channels for dialogue. The commonalities between the two societies can be emphasized and joint projects can be developed.

Do you think that the pressure for the 1915 incidents to be recognized as genocide is an obstacle to the development of the relations between the two countries or is it beneficial?

For one side to be putting pressure for the recognition of the unpleasant experience the two nations experienced in the past makes the other party face negative judgment and leads to the closure of dialogue channels. In order to clarify the issue and establish a joint dialogue, it is important to try to establish an objective commission made up of representatives of all involved sides (researchers, historians, politicians etc).

In your view, before the 1915 incidents, what was the nature of the relationship between Armenians and Turks; how influential were Armenians in the Ottoman Empire?

In the Ottoman state, the Armenians were seen to be the most trustworthy segment of the people. This is why the Armenian community was the one from which the most Sadrazam's (deputy of the Sultan) came.

How much do the developments in the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia effect Armenia-Turkey relations?

This issue is first and foremost a problem between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Turkey's position is that Nagorno-Karabagh belongs to Azerbaijan. If dialogue between Turkey and Armenia were to increase, it would have a positive effect on the resolution of the Karabagh issue.

What is the effect of the state of Armenia-Turkey relations on regional development?

Turkey is the strongest state in the region. Armenia is a developing country. If the two were to solve their problems with each other and could act in coordination, this would contribute to the economic and political stability of the region.

Are there regional and global issues with regard to which Armenia and Turkey have similar interests?

Energy and other resources as well as security in the region.

Do you think international institutions can have an effect on Turkey-Armenia relations?

First the two countries need to take positive steps. Upon this foundation, international institutions can play a role in developing dialogue and creating concrete projects.

What is your opinion about Turkey's EU membership?

Turkey has taken important steps towards membership. The EU will need Turkey due to its aging population, the prediction that after 2050 there will be difficulties regarding social security (retirement, health expenses etc), and the rising need for workers and markets for increased production. The globalizing world makes the EU need Turkey more, and Turkey need the EU more. If this relationship is pursued on the basis of a win-win paradigm, it will be beneficial for the larger world as well.

How do you think Turkey's EU membership would affect Turkey-Armenia relations?

A more prosperous Turkey will clearly provide more opportunities for its region.

Do you think Turkey and Armenia view each other as enemies?

In a military-sense there is not a perception of the other side being an enemy but political problems create an obstacle for the establishment of political dialogue. Both countries need to pursue a more open and pro-dialogue approach.

Do you think the image of the other side being an enemy needs to be fixed?

From Turkey's perspective, there is no perception of Armenia as an enemy. There is no such image. A widespread opinion in the Turkish society is that the Armenian diaspora insistently pursues claims about so-called genocide and has an aggressive attitude which they do not understand. If this continues, an image of being enemies might be born.

How much time will it take for diplomatic relations to be established between Armenia and Turkey?

This is an ambiguous issue. It depends on when both countries take positive steps regarding dialogue.

The interviewer's name: Ekin Urcan

Armenian National Movement

A liberal political Party in Armenia which was the largest political force after the collapse of the Soviet Union and governed until the late 1990s.

Interview conducted with: Gegham Nazaryan, Member of the Board of the ANM

How would you characterize the present state of the Armenian-Turkish relationship?

Bad, only a state of war would be worse.

How would you characterize Armenia and Turkey's official approaches to the establishment of relationships between the two states?

Not satisfactory.

From your point of view, is there a difference between the opinion of the Armenian society and the official approach?

Yes, there is a large difference, as it should be in any country where the elections are rigged habitually.

What is your opinion about the reason why the two states have not established diplomatic relations yet?

There are several important reasons; the main one is the preconditions that the two sides have put forth. Turkey yields to Azerbaijan's pressure, and Armenia's incumbent authorities made the recognition of the genocide one of the pillars of Armenia's foreign policy.

How much does the recent approach of Armenia about opening the border without preconditions contribute to progress in the relationship?

It would have been much better if the Armenian authorities had adopted this approach nine years ago. Certainly, abandoning the preconditions should facilitate the beginning of a dialogue between the two states.

Who suffers and who benefits from the closed border between Armenia and Turkey?

The closed border benefits only those who do not welcome an improvement of the Armenian-Turkish relationship. There are such forces in Turkey, in Armenia, as well as in Azerbaijan. Some use the closed border for additional profits. It is obvious that the closed border harms Turks (especially those living in the regions bordering Armenia), as well as Armenians.

From your point of view, what steps should be taken by the two sides for the opening of the border?

First, all preconditions should be abandoned. Genocide recognition must not be essential for the two states' relationship. Armenia's and, most importantly, Turkey's authorities must demonstrate their will not to let other states exploit the genocide issue as an instrument for their own interests. It is also important to activate the contacts between Armenian and Turkish intellectuals and artistic communities.

What would the two sides gain from opening the border (in economic, political, cultural, social, and other spheres)?

The opening of the Armenian-Turkish border would contribute to the development of a normal relationship between the two states. The two states would economically benefit. It is no accident that the inhabitants of Turkey's eastern provinces are impatient about the opening of the border. The opening of the border and the establishment of a normal relationship will certainly have positive consequences in other spheres as well.

What negative consequences may the opening of the border have for the two sides?

It is ridiculous to talk about any negative consequences. Any normal state must have open borders with its neighboring states; what kind of problems do states with open borders have with each other?

From your point of view, in which areas should the development of the relations between the two countries begin?

We believe that after normalization of the relations, there is no area that should have special priority. A close relationship should be established in all spheres. For this to happen, diplomatic relations need to be established and the border should be opened.

Can cultural dialogue contribute to the establishment of diplomatic relations (e.g., the restoration of Aktamar's Holy Cross Church)?

If the two states' leadership does not have political will, such moves can not contribute. Organizing joint concerts or the restoration of historical and cultural monuments like Ani temples can not play any role in the establishment of diplomatic relations.

Can two states' legislative bodies contribute to the establishment of official relations?

Of course, they can. The legislatures' activity may contribute to an open and frank discussion about all disputed issues, to the opening of borders and establishment of diplomatic relations.

What role can non-governmental organizations and the media play with regard to the two countries' relations?

They need to explain to the people that nobody will benefit from hostility, and that Armenians and Turks do not spend days and nights thinking about exterminating each other. The media and NGOs must create an atmosphere of trust, something that is not being done at the present or is being done at a low level. Quite the contrary, very often they provoke anti-Turkish or anti-Armenian sentiments.

Do you think the 1915 Armenian genocide recognition issue contributes to the development of Armenian-Turkish relations or serves as an obstacle?

Certainly it is an obstacle and it would be right to remove the genocide issue from the agenda of Armenia's foreign policy. However this of course does not mean that Armenia itself does not recognize and condemn the genocide.

In your view, what was the state of Armenian-Turkish relations before 1915, what positions did Armenians have in the Ottoman Empire and what influence did they have?

We know that Armenians had a serious standing in the Ottoman Empire and participated actively in country's political, social, and cultural life. Here a question arises: what third party was interested in the expelling of Armenians from the country. I think that Turks should find the answer to this question and condemn the events of 1915.

From your point of view, how does the process of the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict influence Armenia-Turkey relations?

Negatively. Turkey should abstain from conditioning the normalization of Armenia-Turkey relations to progress on the Nagorno-Karabagh issue. For example, if Armenia demanded that Turkish troops withdraw from Cyprus for Armenia to normalize relations with Turkey this would not be comprehensible or acceptable.

What is your attitude about Turkey's possible EU membership?

We think that Armenia will only benefit if one of its neighbors joins the European Union.

How would Turkey's EU membership influence the Armenian-Turkish relationship?

The EU-Turkey relationship may not have any influence on Armenian-Turkish relations. We do not think that Turkey would open the border with Armenia or establish diplomatic relations because of pressure. We believe that Turks themselves without any pressure will recognize that they have to establish friendly relationships with Armenia and open the border.

In your opinion, do Armenia and Turkey have images of each other as enemies?

Unfortunately, there are images of enemy. Because constructive forces in both countries have not succeeded in establishing an environment in which Armenians and Turks could stop seeing each other as enemies.

In your opinion, is there a need to get rid of the image of enemy?

Of course, there is such a need because the image of enemy will never allow normal relations between the two states to be established, even if there are diplomatic relations.

How long time it would take to establish diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey?

For establishing diplomatic relations, first of all, two states' leadership must show political determination, which is absent today. But if there is such determination, diplomatic relations will be established within a very short time, as neither Armenian nor Turkish society does object establishing of diplomatic relations between two neighbor nations.

Liberal Democratic Party

The Liberal Democratic Party, since its founding in 1994, has not been able to receive the 10 percent of national votes required to enter the Turkish Parliament. Liberalism is a relatively new concept in Turkey, the existence of LDP is important as such.

Interviewed: Cem Toker, Chairman.

How do you assess the current condition of Armenian-Turkish relations?

Unfortunately relations today are mutually destructive and do not reflect the century-long close and good neighborly relations.

What are your opinions about the official approaches of the Armenian and Turkish governments about establishing relations?

As far as has reflected to the societies, both countries are uncompromising and non-conciliatory. Turkey ties this issue to the Karabakh issue and indexes its Armenia policy to Azerbaijan. The hardliner administration in Armenia, on the other hand, strains relations by taking the genocide claim to international platforms through the Armenian diaspora. The Turkish society's perception is that Armenia has demands for concessions from Turkey without any will to reciprocate. It is not clear what Armenia would do to reciprocate its demands for Turkey to: "open the border, lift the embargo, initiate diplomatic relations, and recognize genocide."

Do you think there is a difference between the approach of the Turkish society and the official perspective?

Generally no. There is a minority in Turkey who believe Turkey's relations with Armenia should be independent of Azerbaijan. However, we do not see a difference between the official approach and public opinion about allegations of genocide.

Why do you think that diplomatic relations were not able to be established to date?

Due to Kocharian's hardline approach and the pressure of Azerbaijan on Turkey.

In your view, how much will the recent Armenian approach of opening the border without preconditions contribute to the development of relations?

We also believe that the border should be opened without preconditions. However a climate in which this can be justified to the Turkish people needs to be brought about. It is not easy to convince the Turkish public to accept this while the Armenian diaspora is constantly pushing parliaments around the globe to pass genocide recognition resolutions. We believe the border should be opened despite such diaspora activities though.

Which segments do you think benefit from the Armenia-Turkey border being closed? And which do you think are the losers from this situation?

The beneficiaries are those who benefit from the tension and also those who want to see Turkey pressured in the international arena. The losers are the people living in the border provinces of Turkey and the entire society of Armenia.

What steps do you think should be taken by the two countries for the border to be opened?

It has to be ensured that opening the border is not perceived as a concession by Turkey. The perception of it as such needs to be changed. Steps need to be taken to remove the reactionism among the public. The issue needs to be presented not as a political one but as an economic one for Turkey and a humanitarian, human one for Armenia.

What will be the economic, political, social and other gains of the two countries by the opening of the Armenia-Turkey border?

Commerce across the border and interaction between people will significantly contribute to solving political problems. This is why Turkey should open the border without preconditions. It should not be forgotten that 'where people and products cannot cross the border, soldiers will.'

Where do you think the development of Armenia-Turkey relations should begin?

It seems there has been a holy intervention here, as both countries are in the same

group of the 2010 World Cup eliminations. This coincidence is a great opportunity for both countries to positively orient their people.

Can cultural dialogue (such as the restoration of the Akdamar Church on Akdamar Island) contribute to the development of diplomatic relations?

Yes, but such dialogue should not only take place behind closed doors among a limited number of people, it should reach a large number of people through the media.

Do you think the difference of religion between the two countries is an obstacle to the development of Armenia-Turkey relations?

Unfortunately, the spread of nationalist-conservative opinions across the globe after 9/11 was multiplied in Turkey for various reasons and plays a negative role in the development of relations. I think it is better to put aside religious differences at a time when political reconciliation is being pursued.

Can the parliaments of the two countries play a role in the development of official relations?

As a firm believer in democracy I would argue that first there needs to be rapprochement between the people and the formation of public opinion. For example the common man in Turkey needs to know how a child's life in Armenia is affected because the border is closed. Legislative organs may be necessary to initiate these politics but I believe civil society activities will be more effective in attaining results.

Can civil society organizations and media play a role in the development of Armenia-Turkey relations?

Before political institution's initiatives, nongovernmental institutions may play a much more effective and convincing role.

Do you think that the pressure for the 1915 incidents to be recognized as genocide in an obstacle to the development of the relations between the two countries or is it beneficial?

It certainly is an obstacle.

In your view, before the 1915 incidents, what was the nature of the relationship between Armenians and Turks; how influential were Armenians in the Ottoman Empire?

I can answer both these questions as I have learnt and have not heard otherwise to date. As far as I know relations were harmonic and based on mutual tolerance and respect of the peoples, there were influential Armenians both at the state level as well as in arts and crafts, commerce and other areas.

How much do the developments in the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia effect Armenia-Turkey relations?

This is one of the two key problems that has deadlocked relations so far. This issue prevents Turkey from moving.

What is the effect of the state of Armenia-Turkey relations on regional development?

Unfortunately countries in the region do not, or are unable to, benefit from their unique energy resources, geopolitics, human resources, the entrepreneur spirit of their peoples, and their historical ties for of futile reasons.

Are there regional and global issues with regard to which Armenia and Turkey have similar interests?

I will answer briefly as a liberal democrat. According to my and my party's belief the sole mission of state administrators is to put their egos, complexes, and emotions aside and channel all their energy to increasing the freedoms, rights, welfare, justice, and happiness of their people. It will be in the interest of all of us to cooperate against repressive regimes which try to spread contrary ideas in the region.

Are there regional issues on which Armenia and Turkey have joint interests?

You can evaluate my reply to the previous question in a global context as well. Struggling together for values we believe in and against threats to our freedom is in our interests.

Do you think international institutions can have an effect on Armenia-Turkey relations?

Certainly, however they can have merely 'an effect'. The only real condition that will lead to our relations developing is demand coming from our people and politicians who can create a conducive environment.

What are your views about Turkey's EU membership prospects?

The EU is a civilizational project and Turkey must take its place in this project. However, an image and trust problem towards the European Union has come about within the Turkish society. This image problem has led the reform process in Turkey to stall. Turkey should continue with the reforms as if it were going to join the EU tomorrow.

How would Turkey being an EU member effect Turkey-Armenia relations?

I think the problems between Turkey and Armenia are not related to the criteria of membership. For this reason, I do not think EU membership would eliminate the problems between the two countries.

Do you think that these days Turks and Armenians see each other as enemies?

Enemy is a heavy word. One should see them as siblings who have serious and sensitive disagreements, feel mistrust towards each other, yet have strong historical ties.

Do you think that we have to get rid of the image of each other as the enemy?

As a person who has had tens of dearest friends since primary school who are of Armenian origin and who condemned Hrant Dink's murderer with the harshest words possible, and one who went to his funeral, I can not accept the word enemy, ever.

How much time will be necessary for diplomatic relations to be established between Armenia and Turkey?

The process will start as soon as realistic and constructive administrations that set their priorities more realistically come to power. As far as I know, our relations were more positive than today at the time of Ter-Petrosyan.

Do you have anything to add?

I hope your work will contribute to the re-establishment of our historical closeness and the elimination of the disagreements between our countries.

Agos Newspaper

Established in 1996, Agos is a Turkish-Armenian weekly newspaper based in Istanbul.

Interviewee/representative of the institution: Aris NALCI, Managing Editor

How do you assess the current state of Turkish-Armenian relations?

If you are referring to Turkey-Armenia relations, it is futile to talk about this because there are no diplomatic relations between the two countries. However, if I have to make an evaluation I would say that the initiatives for diplomatic dialogue on both sides are overshadowed by miscommunication. Both countries want normalization of relations but fail to understand each other.

What are your opinions about the official approaches of the Armenian and Turkish governments about establishing relations?

Today, it is thought that around 30 thousand Armenian citizens live in Turkey. Neither the Turkish nor the Armenian government confirms this because the majority of these people live in Turkey as illegal immigrants. Turkish diplomats constantly state that Armenia needs to take certain steps for the initiation of diplomatic rela-

tions while Armenian President Kocharian and Foreign Minister Oskanyan constantly repeat that they are open to dialogue. However both sides turn a deaf ear to calls. Perhaps the reason for miscommunication is because there is no diplomatic correspondence. The only official Armenian representation in Turkey is the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Business Council, which neither has the capacity nor the authority to contribute to the dialogue between the two countries.

Do you think there is a difference between the approach of the Turkish society and the official perspective?

The steps in the field of art and civil society are beyond the diplomatic impotence. Many Armenian artists visit Turkey and Turkish groups visit Armenia for cooperative art activities. In addition many civil society organizations have already established dialogue and work together.

Why do you think that diplomatic relations were not able to be established to date?

Both countries have high expectations from each other. Both are trapped in the past at the expense of missing the present and so they are failing to abide by modern politics.

In your view, how much will the recent Armenian approach of opening the border without preconditions contribute to the development of relations?

I firmly believe this will contribute to the process however I do not believe the importance of such developments are sufficiently understood by Turkey.

Who do you think benefits from the closed boarder between Armenia and Turkey; who loses?

Everyone loses. The winners are the smugglers and the authorities at the customs who are bribed for the smuggling of goods from Turkey to Armenia.

What to you think are the appropriate steps needed to be taken by both governments for the opening of the boarder?

It might be fruitful for both governments to sit around a table without any preconditions and demonstrate the initiation of dialogue to their publics.

What will be the economic, political, social and other gains of the two countries by the opening of the Armenia-Turkey border?

Economically, there will certainly be development in the Eastern region of Turkey. Businessmen in the border region will be able to avoid high taxes and smugglers, and will be able to sell products to Armenia at a lower cost. This is important for the Armenian people whose purchasing power is weak. I believe social interaction will make it easier for the historical problems to be solved.

What kinds of negative consequences can the opening of the border have for both sides?

There will not be any negative outcome. How many countries do you think can remain sore towards their neighbor.

In which areas do you think the development of Turkey-Armenia relations should start?

As I pointed out above, relations have already started in the fields of art and civil society. However, the start of diplomatic relations is very important for the development of relations further.

Do you believe cultural dialogue (as the restoration of the Akdamar church on Akdamar Island) will contribute to the development of diplomatic relations?

I think the proper usage is “Aktamar” or “Akhtamar”. The name of the island is “Akhtamar” but the church’s name is Surp Haç. Even the municipality in the region uses this name. Of course such initiatives help dialogue. The attitude of Gagik Gyurciyan (Armenian Deputy Minister of Culture) towards Turkish diplomats was telling to Armenians; through the live coverage of the event a message of brotherhood was sent to Armenia.

Do you think the difference in the religious beliefs in Turkey and Armenia contributes or hampers the relations between the two countries?

This does not hamper relations.

Can the legislative organs of both countries play a role in the development of official relations?

Most definitely.

Do you believe that the pressure from Armenia for the recognition of the 1915 events as Genocide hampers relations or will contribute to the development of relations between the two countries?

This hampers relations. However it’s not something that cannot be surpassed. I believe this attitude of the Armenian government may be surpassed by forming good relations with the Armenian public and leaving a positive impression on them.

How do you think the relations between Turks and Armenians were like before the 1915 events? How were the Armenians positioned in the Ottoman Empire, how influential were they?

Armenians in the Ottoman Empire were considerably active both at the state level and the civil level. In terms of literature and cultural productivity, Istanbul was a very important center for Armenian literature.

How much does the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan affect Turkish-Armenian relations?

There is a direct affect. If the Karabakh conflict is resolved Turkish-Armenian relations will definitely improve.

What is the affect of Turkish-Armenian relations on regional development?

Considering the regional trade routes, it is clear that there is a large commerce potential.

Are there regional issues where Armenian and Turkish interests converge?

Black Sea and Middle East

What do you think about Turkey's membership to the EU?

I believe this would be a very positive development.

How will Turkey's membership to the EU affect Turkish-Armenian relations?

In the case of membership the affect will be positive.

Do you believe Turkey and Armenia consider each other as enemies today?

“Enemy” is too harsh a word to define the relationship between Turkey and Armenia. Prejudism exists though, yes.

Do you think this enemy perception needs to be escaped?

Most definitely.

How much time is needed to establish diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey?

Diplomatic relations must be established the right away.

Name of interviewer: Ekin Urcan.