

BREAKING THE STALEMATE: TURKISH – ARMENIAN RELATIONS IN THE 21st CENTURY

The relationship between Armenia and Turkey has remained stagnant since Armenia became an independent state in 1991. Many non-governmental and supra-governmental organizations have attempted to influence this complicated relationship to no avail. Changes in official attitudes may reflect attempts at rapprochement, but more frequent and consistent interactions between people living in Armenia and Turkey will provide the best possible means by which these two neighbors might learn to live in harmony.

Rachel Goshgarian *

* Rachel Goshgarian is a Ph.D. Candidate specializing in Armenian issues at Harvard University's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences.

When the Republic of Armenia became an independent state in November 1991, Turkey gained a new neighbor. In fact, Turkey was one of the first countries to acknowledge the newly-independent Armenia, a state with which it shares a 268 km long border, although at that point no diplomatic relations were established between the two countries. Still, in the over fourteen years that have passed since then, no diplomatic relations have been established between Armenia and Turkey. Despite the absence of a formal relationship and despite the official closing of the Armenian-Turkish border in 1993, official attitudes between these neighbor countries have begun to evolve in the recent past, and particularly since the election of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The development of the official relationship between Armenia and Turkey has been influenced by official and unofficial diplomacy, by governmental and non-governmental actors and by internal and external pressures in and on both countries. Key issues that have defined the relationship between Armenia and Turkey are the differences in official positions regarding the history of Armenians and Turks in the early 20th century and the war over Nagorno-Karabagh.

Key external governmental players who have influenced discussion of these issues and, thus, the relationship between these two countries include: the European Union; the Council of Europe (of which both Armenia and Turkey are members); the United States of America and the Republic of Azerbaijan. Significant non-governmental actors who have impacted the dialogue surrounding these issues and/or the relationship between Armenia and Turkey include: the Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council; the now-disbanded Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Committee; and lobbying and grass-roots political organizations of the Armenian Diaspora.

While on an unofficial level, many of these external actors have attempted to alter the relationship between the two neighbors, on an official level the rapport has yet to evolve in any significant way. The border is still closed and diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey remain non-existent. Neither country seems ready to change its official line, although both countries pretend to encourage rapprochement. One might ask, who and what can break this stalemate?

Historical Differences and New Dialogue

According to Armenia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vardan Oskanian, the Republic of Armenia has never made any preconditions prerequisite to the establishment of diplomatic relations with Turkey. Still, the official stance of the Republic of Armenia is that a genocide of the Armenian people took place within the Ottoman Empire, beginning in 1915; and that this genocide should be internationally recognized.

The official stance of the Republic of Turkey has been denial that genocide occurred. Turkey has considered Armenia's opposing viewpoint amongst its reasons for not establishing normal diplomatic relations. Still, the change in Turkey's official attitude towards Armenia, especially since the election of Prime Minister Erdoğan, can not be denied. Prime Minister Erdoğan's letter to the President of Armenia Robert Kocharian, dated 10 April 2005 suggesting that a "joint group consisting of historians

and other experts” from both Armenia and Turkey review these historical issues is, perhaps, the best indication of an attempt at rapprochement. The letter was sent exactly two weeks prior to the Republic of Armenia's official commemoration of the 90th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide.

During an official conference on the topic of the Armenian Genocide in Yerevan on April 21 2005, Foreign Minister Oskanian said, “Armenia and Turkey must confront their histories. Individually and together. Armenia believes Turkey must put excuses aside and enter into normal relations with a neighbor that is neither going to go away nor forget its history.” Four days later, President Kocharian responded to Prime Minister Erdoğan's letter, calling for: the establishment of normal relations between the two countries without preconditions and the establishment of bilateral commissions to discuss all outstanding issues. While this exchange indicates an effort on both sides working towards rapprochement, a bilateral commission has not been established nor have the borders between the two countries been opened.

Official Positions concerning the Conflict in Nagorno-Karabagh

The Independent Republic of Nagorno-Karabagh is not officially recognized by any nation. Officially, this region encompassing 1853 square miles is still a part of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Armenia's position concerning Nagorno-Karabagh is that the people of Karabagh have a right to self-determination and that ultimately the region should be allowed to develop within “safe frontiers” and with a “permanent geographic connection to Armenia.”¹

Armenia's special relationship with Nagorno-Karabagh is impossible to deny. Robert Kocharian was elected President of Armenia for the first time in 1998 and then re-elected in 2003. Prior to 1998, he served as both Prime Minister (from 1992 to 1994) and President (1994 to 1997) of the Republic of Nagorno-Karabagh. Kocharian was born in Stepanakert, Azerbaijan and lived there until 1997 when he was appointed Prime Minister of Armenia. He was elected President of Armenia in 1998 despite the existence of constitutional laws (namely, Article 50 of Chapter 3 of the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia) preventing the participation of candidates running for the office of President who have not established 10-year residency in Armenia. American-born former Minister of Foreign Affairs Raffi Hovannisian was not allowed to register in the 2003 Armenian Presidential elections due to the very same constitutional regulations regarding candidates.²

The conflict over the region of Azerbaijan called Nagorno-Karabagh began in February 1988 when demonstrations in both Nagorno-Karabagh and in Armenia called for unification of the region with Armenia. These political issues slowly, but surely, escalated to armed conflict. During this same month of February, pogroms against ethnic Armenian Azerbaijani citizens were undertaken in Sumgait, Azerbaijan. By November of this same year, over 200,000 ethnic Armenians were

¹ President Robert Kocharian's Inauguration Speech at the Special Session of the National Assembly, 21 May 2000.

² Anoush Papazyan, “Kocharian wins second round amid allegations of fraud,” *Central Asia Caucasus Analyst*, 12 March 2003, http://cacianalyst.org/view_article.php?articleid=1147&SMSESSION=NO

deported out of Azerbaijan and over 200,000 ethnic Azerbaijanis were deported out of Armenia. In 1989, Azerbaijan began an economic embargo of the Nagorno-Karabagh region. In January 1992, Nagorno-Karabagh declared itself an independent republic. Consistent armed conflict with Azerbaijan followed until May, 1994 when a cease-fire was signed by military representatives of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabagh. Since that time, Armenia has occupied 20 percent of Azerbaijan's territory and Azerbaijan has continued its embargo on both Armenia and Nagorno-Karabagh. It has been estimated that over 1 million people have lost their homes (800,000 Azerbaijanis and 300,000 Armenians).³ Attempts have been made at reconciliation, including a promising set of meetings at Key West in 2001. Then, meetings between the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey took place in Reykjavik in May, 2002 and, again, in June 2004. But peace and stability have thus far proved an impossibility, even with the guidance of the Minsk Group of the OSCE which has been involved in mediating peace in the region since March, 1992.

Turkey's closing of its border with Armenia and then-president Süleyman Demirel's call for a trade embargo of Armenia in 1993 were seen by the international community as a direct result of Turkey's special relationship with Azerbaijan. Since that time, the Armenian border just 20 km from Kars has remained closed to trade and tourism and Turkey has not allowed aid destined for Armenia to pass over its borders. Turkey sees the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict, and Armenia's occupation of Azerbaijani land, as the principal obstacle to political stability, economic development and regional cooperation in the Southern Caucasus.

Potential for Official Policy Changes

The current political impasse in the relations between Armenia and Turkey is the result of two distinct approaches to diplomatic relations. Armenia will not back down from its positions regarding Armenian Genocide and its attempts to have this genocide recognized by an increasingly large international community (to date, 19 countries have accepted resolutions concerning the Armenian Genocide); as well as its economic, military and political support of the unilaterally-declared Independent Republic of Nagorno-Karabagh and its occupation of Azerbaijani territory, despite UN resolutions calling for its evacuation. Armenia's position is that Turkey should be willing to establish diplomatic relations with Armenia and then sort out differences of opinion regarding policy. Turkey's position is just the opposite; that is to say, Turkey has set up three pre-conditions to establishing relations with Armenia. These preconditions are: that Armenia abandon territorial claims on Turkish land and recognize the Treaty of Moscow (signed in 1921 by Russia and Turkey and delineating the current borders between Armenia and Turkey)⁴; that Armenia call off the campaign pursued by both the Republic of Armenia and certain Armenian Diasporan organizations which attempts to encourage Turkey and other countries to

³ Blanka Hancilova, "Peace Pending in Nagorno-Karabagh: Recommendations for the International Community," Policy Brief, Caspian Studies Program, May 2001.

⁴ Although Armenia has not signed the Treaty of Moscow, Armenia has not revoked its current borders with Turkey, as delineated by the Treaty of Kars. According to Minister of Foreign Affairs Vardan Oskanian, Armenia has no territorial claims on Turkey. Still, critics point to a reference to "Western Armenia" in Armenia's Declaration of Independence as problematic.

recognize the legitimacy of the Armenian Genocide; and lastly that Armenia drop its support of Nagorno-Karabagh and withdraw from occupied Azerbaijan.⁵

This is the static game of cat and mouse that has determined the state of official relations between Armenia and Turkey since 1991.

Organizations of the Armenian Diaspora

The Armenian Diaspora, and in particular its lobbying organizations in the United States and grass-roots political associations in Europe, have attempted to insert themselves in the middle of the already complicated relationship that exists between Armenia and Turkey. While these organizations are continuously perceived as fulfilling the goals of the Republic of Armenia, often times these organizations act with their own goals in mind, sometimes it would even seem with disregard for the impact their actions might have on the real political situation in the Republic of Armenia.

The goal of lobbying groups in the United States such as the Armenian Assembly of America and the Armenian National Committee of America is to influence American foreign policy on issues of importance to the American-Armenian community. These issues include: the improvement of U.S.-Armenian relations; the improvement of U.S. relations with Nagorno-Karabagh; and Armenian genocide recognition. American-Armenian lobbying groups have no official ties to the Armenian government and often times align themselves with the more nationalist elements of political life in Armenia proper. Despite the fact that the Armenian-American lobby acts within the realm of its own interests as representative of an American-Armenian constituency, these organizations are accepted as actors in the relationship between the Republics of Armenia and Turkey. In fact, in 2000 the government of Turkey instituted a visa requirement for citizens of Armenia only after Armenian-American lobbying groups encouraged discussion of Armenian genocide recognition in the U.S. Congress.⁶ The goals of the Armenian Assembly of America and the Armenian National Committee of America have not changed significantly since 1991 and there has been no effort on behalf of either of the organizations to improve Armenian-Turkish relations despite the changing notion in Armenia itself that improved relations with Turkey could benefit the country both economically and strategically. In May 2005, the American-born former Minister of Foreign Affairs and current leader of the opposition movement in Armenia Raffi Hovanissian stated, "It is this very relationship between Turkey and Armenia and their constituencies that is the key to creating a brave new region where the interests of all players converge to form a single page of security and development."⁷ Also, the France-based Collectif Vigilance Arménienne Contre Le Négationnisme, for example, opposes Turkey's acceptance by the European Union while Armenia, itself, encourages Turkey's ascension.

⁵ Asbed Kotchikian, "Border Politics: the geopolitical implications of opening the Turkish-Armenian Border," Working Paper of Armenian International Policy Research Group (AIPRG), January 2005, p. 3.

⁶ Burcu Gültekin, "The Stakes of Opening the Armenian-Turkish Border; the Cross-Border Contacts between Armenia and Turkey" French Institute of Anatolian Studies, Research Program on Turkey-Caucasus, October 2002, p.3.

⁷ Raffi Hovanissian, "State of the State Address," Yerevan, 30 May 2005.

The Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission

The formation of Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission (or, TARC) was announced on July 9, 2001. The group, comprised of six Turkish members and four Armenian members, held meetings in Vienna prior to the public announcement of the commission's existence. The U.S. Department of State had a hand in organizing the effort and the chairman of the commission was an American diplomat, David Phillips. The goal of the commission was the improvement of Turkish-Armenian relations and its ten members included significant political players in Armenia and Turkey. Both Armenian and Turkish governments were aware of the existence of the commission prior to its public announcement. Still, once the announcement was made, the commission faced a great deal of criticism from many elements in Armenian society, and particularly from the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (or, Dashnaksutyun). The Dashnaksutyun was particularly critical of the commission's original attempt to skirt the issue of the Armenian genocide. The original goal of the commission was to improve relations and not enter into discussion of historical issues. In a statement released after the announcement of the commission's existence, the Dashnaksutyun said, "Nobody is allowed to circumvent the issue of Turkey's recognition of the Armenian Genocide under the guise of 'reconciling' the two nations, which jeopardizes the process of the international recognition of the Genocide. There can be no reconciliation without the recognition of the historical truth."⁸

On July 12, 2002, the Memorandum of Understanding requesting legal analysis of genocide claims was written by the Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission. And on September 10, 2002 presentations were made by members of TARC seeking an objective and independent legal analysis regarding the applicability of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide to events which occurred during the early twentieth century in the Ottoman Empire. A few months later, the legal analysis entitled "Applicability of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide to Events which Occurred during the Early Twentieth Century" was prepared for the International Center for Transitional Justice.⁹ On April 14, 2004 after meetings concluded in Moscow, TARC announced that it had made recommendations to both the government of the Republic of Armenia and the government of the Republic of Turkey regarding Turkish-Armenian relations and that its activities would cease. While the establishment of such a committee was promising for the future of Armenian-Turkish relations, it is not clear whether or not this committee had any real impact on the relationship between the two countries.

The Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council

The Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council was established in May, 1997 in Istanbul and Yerevan. The council is co-chaired by Arsen Ghazarian and Kaan Soyak. The council calls itself the "only link between the Armenian and Turkish public and private sectors" and the "only Turkish Armenian joint institution in the world." The council encourages interactions between Armenian and Turkish

⁸ Haroutiun Khachatryan, "Armenian-Turkish Reconciliation Commission Encounters Skepticism," *Eurasianet*, 10 September 2001,

<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav091001.shtml>.

⁹ This legal analysis can be read at: <http://www.tarc.info/ictj.htm>.

businessmen and attempts to influence Turkish and Armenian foreign policies for the betterment of trade relations between the two countries. The significance of this council is that it has withstood time and that it continues to attempt to improve relations between the two countries based upon the foundation that economic ties between the countries would benefit both countries.

The European Union

Since Turkey became an official EU candidate in 1999, and particularly since the current government was elected in 2002, Ankara has pushed ahead with reforms that few had previously thought possible. Still, critics point to Turkey's closed border with Armenia as a hindrance to its potential membership. The borders of all EU member states are open, without exception. Some European institutions and countries have called both for Turkey's opening of the Armenian-Turkish border as well as its recognition of the Armenian Genocide during negotiations regarding Turkey's potential acceptance into the EU. On December 14, 2004 French Foreign Minister Michel Barnier said that France would request that Ankara recognize the "tragedy" of the Armenians.¹⁰ On December 15, 2004 the European Parliament called on the European Commission and the European Union Council to demand that Turkey recognize the historical reality of the Armenian Genocide, and open its border with Armenia.

Still, even after this request was made by the European Parliament, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said, "Turkey does not bother about the Armenian genocide. Genocide allegations are to be resolved by historians, not parliaments." Again, in late September 2005 (prior to the October 3 opening of Turkey's EU membership negotiations), the European Parliament stated that it considered Turkish recognition of the Armenian genocide to be a prerequisite for accession. Armenian politicians are hopeful that European pressure will encourage Turkey to change its official position towards Armenia. Foreign Minister Oskanian explained, "Of course we would like to see Turkey become an EU member... we'd like to see Turkey become an EU member so that our borders will be open, so that our compatriots and Turkish scholars will speak more freely about Genocide."¹¹

Whether or not the official stance of the Republic of Turkey has changed regarding the validity of the Armenian Genocide, the support voiced by both Prime Minister Erdoğan and Opposition leader Deniz Baykal of the conference which finally took place in late September at Bilgi University on "Armenians during the Collapse of the Ottoman Empire" indicates a more open environment in Turkey for the discussion of this issue.

When the border between Armenia and Turkey was closed in 1993, the railroad lines that traveled from Kars to Gyumri to Tblisi stopped running. Currently efforts are underway to construct a new railway line that would run from Kars to Akhalkalak, thus bypassing Armenia. On October 20 2005, President of Armenia Robert Kocharian met with EU Foreign Policy Chief Javier Solana in Prague. Solana said,

¹⁰ Jean-Christophe Peuch, "EU: France Says Turkey Must Recognize Armenian Atrocities Before Joining EU," (RFE/RL), 14 December 2004, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2004/12/32cd76e7-83e5-4510-b2bb-53d041d63ca8.html>.

¹¹ Speech by Minister of Foreign Affairs Vardan Oskanian, 21 April 2005.

“We talked about Armenia's border with Turkey. We will do everything possible. The more the Armenian-Turkish border is opened the better. In that case there will be no longer the need to have this new railroad.” Whether or not Solana's opinion will have an impact on construction of the railroad is unclear. It is clear, however, that he is not alone in his support of the re-opening of the Kars-Gyumri-Tblisi railway. It appears that many elements of both Turkish and Armenian societies would like to see the Kars-Gyumri-Tblisi railway line re-opened.

Dead Ends and Breaking the Stalemate

While the Armenian and Turkish governments seem to be unwilling to change their official stances, thus suspending Armenian-Turkish relations in a veritable freeze-frame, people on both sides of the border have begun to clamor for change. The primary issue of interest to Armenians and Turks on both sides of the border is the potential opening of the Armenian-Turkish border. The opening of the border is of interest to Armenian citizens, ranging from the most powerful of Yerevan's entrepreneurial elite to the unemployed man living in Gyumri. In Turkey, as well, many elements of society would like to see the border between Armenia and Turkey open. Since as early as 1998, the President of Kars Chamber of Commerce Mehmet Yılmaz called for the opening of the Armenian-Turkish border. “We want to open the border -- it will mean jobs for everyone. Armenians will visit Kars to shop for foodstuffs and textiles,” Yılmaz said.¹² An association of businessmen in Eastern Anatolia continues to support the opening of the border. The Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission also supported the opening of the border. “The city is dying,” one of TARC's Turkish members, Üstün Ergüder, was quoted as telling TARC Chairman David Phillips after visiting Kars, a town near the Armenian border, in 2003.¹³ President of Armenia's SIL Group (one of Armenia's most important business conglomerations) and MP Khachatur Sukiasyan (better known by his nickname “Grzo” in Armenia) has also advocated the opening of the border with Turkey. In June 2005 Sukiasyan said, “After the opening of the border gates, we may have an opportunity for joint growth and development...Let us act together to make this region grow. There are problems even between the brothers. The most important problem between us is the opening of borders. We are neighbors, let us act as neighbors.”¹⁴ It is well known and accepted in Armenia that high rates of unemployment in the city of Gyumri, still recovering from the 1988 earthquake, make the opening of the border with Turkey a very welcome prospect.

¹² Jolyon Naegele, “Caucasus: Burden Of History Blocks Turkish-Armenian Border,” (RFE/RL), 28 July 1998, <http://www.rferl.org/features/1998/07/F.RU.980728135300.asp>.

¹³ Emil Danielyan, “Turkey Nearly Opened Armenian-Turkish Border in 2003,” EurasiaNet Insight, 4 February 2005,

<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/pp020405a.shtml>.

¹⁴ Tuncay Kayaoğlu, Fatih Uğur, “I Will Defend the Opening of the Border and You Will Say there is no So-Called Genocide,” *Zaman*, 12 June 2005, <http://www.zaman.com/?bl=international&alt=&hn=20589>.

While Armenia's official line has not changed, perhaps the realization that Armenia's current policies have led Armenia to be physically excluded from the Baku-Ceyhan pipe-line; potentially physically excluded from the newly-proposed Kars- Akhalkalak railway line; and under embargo from both Turkey and Azerbaijan and, thus, limited in terms of its economic development has led to current movements in internal politics. Former commander of the armed forces of Nagorno-Karabagh Samvel Babayan announced the creation of a new political party "Dashink" (Alliance) on November 10, 2005. Babayan, who signed the cease-fire between Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabagh in 1994 has suggested that lands should be returned to Azerbaijan with the ultimate goal of regional peace.¹⁵ Babayan has also suggested that Armenia build peaceful relationships with both Azerbaijan and Turkey.

While more protectionist elements in Armenian society fear the opening of the border with Turkey, Minister of Defense Serge Sarkisyan recently dismissed any such fears. Sarkisyan explained, "I do not see any great threats, but if there are such, they cannot be compared to the profit which we may derive. Let us recall how ten-twelve years ago they were puffing up the subject of threat in connection with the intensification of relations with Iran. They used to allege that the Iranians would come here and buy everything in Armenia, that the Iranization of the population would take place, etc. But nothing happened."¹⁶

If the border between Armenia and Turkey were to open, it can only be assumed that economic benefits for both Armenia and the eastern regions of Turkey would be great. While studies have been undertaken with differing results, the general consensus is that people living on both sides of the border would benefit from such an opening.

Who and What can Change the Current Status Quo?

A rotating professorship of Armenian studies should be endowed by the Republic of Armenia at either Bosphorous University or at Koç University. And a rotating professorship of Ottoman studies should be endowed by the Republic of Turkey either at the American University of Armenia or at Yerevan State University. The professorships would be endowed in perpetuity, but the professors would rotate out after two years. These professorships should not necessarily be held by historians of the early 20th century. The historians chosen to fulfill these two year positions would act as intellectual ambassadors. An Armenian historian of the Ottoman period working in Istanbul, for example, would be able to enlighten his/her Turkish students about Armenian contributions to the development of the first Ottoman constitution. Or about Armenian religious life in Tokat, Amasya and Sivas in the 15th century. While an Ottoman historian of the 18th century, for example, could inform students in Armenia about Yerevan's sharia courts. Or simply give an overview course about the Ottoman Empire. Academicians in Armenia and in Turkey are taken

¹⁵ Haroutiun Khachatryan, "Armenia: Former Karabagh Military Leader Takes to Politics," *Eurasia Insight*, 6 December 2005, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav120605.shtml>.

¹⁶ Interview with Marina Mkrtychyan, *Golos Armenii*, 9 September 2005.

seriously and often are interviewed by the press and invited to politically oriented conferences and the like. If the two governments endowed such chairs, these professors could participate as respected individuals in discussions concerning Armenia and Turkey. They would not represent the views of the Armenian or Turkish Republics; they would simply be inserted, as individuals, into the intellectual life of one country or the other as respected academics. This sort of interaction would provide a source for more profound communication between Armenians and Turks. And would allow for the press of Armenia and Turkey to report on similar issues, without constantly focusing on either Genocide or Azerbaijan. These academicians would serve as a bridge of communication, finally allowing for Turkish and Armenian histories to speak to each other, something very necessary for the development of relations between these two countries whose peoples share an indisputably intertwined past.

The governments of Armenia and Turkey should also consider following a program such as that organized by the Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in South East Europe. That is to say that the two governments should consider sponsoring a research team composed of international scholars working together to gather books of sources on the issues involved in the history of Anatolia's early 20th century. These source books would be published in Armenian, English, Greek, Russian and Turkish and should involve all the events in particular provinces, how they were governed, the chain of authority and so on, and not just events considered as related to 'genocide'. The introduction to these books would state clearly that the aim is to understand the period, not to blame Turks today for the actions of their ancestors. The research period would be limited to a five-year time-frame. During this time frame, the government of Armenia would agree not to promote genocide recognition in exchange for complete access to the Ottoman archives by researchers working on the project. This research program would be monitored by the OSCE or the EU, such that any breach of contract (either in the archives in Istanbul or by the Armenian government) would be dealt with by a third party.

During this five year period, different countries would hold conferences on the topic of what actually happened from 1915-21 in the Ottoman Empire. These conferences would be held in: Athens, Brussels, Istanbul, Venice and Yerevan. The conferences would be organized by the EU or the OSCE; researchers working on the project would be the presenters; and entrance would be open to the public.¹⁷

The governments of Armenia and Turkey should also sponsor music festivals in major cities in Armenia and Turkey featuring Armenian and Turkish bands playing together. If the two governments together sponsored concerts featuring, for example: Sezen Aksu, Kardeş Türküler, the Armenian Navy Band, and Bambir in cities like Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir, Gyumri, Vanadzor and Yerevan with the goal of increasing cultural awareness, it can only be assumed that such concerts would have a great impact on popular opinion.

¹⁷ I credit my colleague, Yannis Carras, Ph.D. candidate (Kapodistrias University of Athens), for suggesting that Armenia and Turkey follow this confidence-building research project together, a method of reconciliation patterned after the Committee for Democracy and Reconciliation in the South East Europe.

On April 24, 2005 the Republic of Armenia commemorated the 90th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. That night, the Avant Garde Folk Music Club in Yerevan held a concert. The Club was founded by Arto Tunçboyacıyan. Tunçboyacıyan was born and raised in Turkey. Musician and songwriter, he is the brother of Onno Tunç a musician of Armenian descent who was so well integrated into Turkish society that he has come to be known as one of the father's of modern Turkish popular music. In front of an audience filled with important businessmen and political figures including opposition leader Raffi Hovannisian, Tunçboyacıyan spent the first hour directing his Armenian Navy Band through a series of songs that sounded like lamentations. People cried. And drank. After the band took its standard fifteen minute break, Tunçboyacıyan returned to the stage with a Turkish friend at his side. Tunçboyacıyan talked about the book “Anneannem” and asked his Turkish friend to speak. To an audience of over 200 people, a Turkish man expressed himself in his native tongue as Tunçboyacıyan translated into Armenian. The Turkish author did not use the word genocide. All he said was that being in Armenia felt like being at home. The audience gave him a standing ovation. The second half of Tunçboyacıyan's concert was filled with excitement and happiness. People danced and laughed. It was as if a great weight had been lifted.

The official relationship between Armenia and Turkey has not changed since Armenia became independent in 1991. Despite non-governmental and supra-governmental attempts to influence this relationship, it simply has not changed. It is only with continued interpersonal interaction and historical reflection that these two peoples, who share a complex set of cultural ideals and, yet, who have been separated by political circumstances for so many years will be able to confront their shared past, present and future.