

Armenia-Turkey Cross-border Dialogue in Light of the European Integration (2007-2008)
in the scope of
Armenia-Turkey Cross-border Dialogue and Cooperation (2006 - 2009) program

Recent EU accession talks with Turkey, as well as the inclusion of Armenia in the framework of the European Neighborhood Policy, have put additional pressure on the two countries to resolve their differences and improve relations with one another. Working with their Turkish partner the Marmara Educators Association, the Urban Sustainable Development Foundation sought to provide a short-term intellectually rigorous cross-border platform for youth activists and expert communities from Armenia and Turkey to discuss issues of mutual concern. In particular, the project partners conducted Vox Populi, interviewing random people on the streets both in Armenia and Turkey to reflect on the wider public opinion in the two countries with respect to the European integration processes and the prospects for improving the Armenia-Turkey dialogue and cooperation.

Answering a question ‘how do you see coexistence and cooperation of Armenians and Turks in one European family’ an Armenian respondent said:

“Both Turkey and Armenia still have a ways to go towards integration in to the European family. Our mentality is the same. Turkey’s European aspirations are positive move not only for Turkey but also for Armenia. We should try to be good neighbors and go forward as such”.

Vox populi was followed by a round table discussion in Istanbul between five Armenian and five Turkish youth, and a TV talk show in Armenia hosting two political scientists each from Armenia and Turkey. The talk show was broadcast by Loru Mig TV Company in Vanadzor, causing a spike in interest among viewers in that part of Armenia.

“I am sure that in the EU framework Armenia-Turkey relations will improve. My optimism is based on recent changes in Turkey. Today, Turkey makes significant efforts to improve its relations with neighboring countries Bulgaria, Syria, Greece. And doesn’t really matter if Turkey will eventually become a full member of EU or not, she will try to establish relations with Armenia. However, it will be much easier task in European framework,” said Jafer Ulu, an expert from Turkey, during the talk show in Vanadzor.

On the whole, the project examined the validity of the assumption that at some point the European aspirations of both Turkey and Armenia will diminish the historical and political differences between these two countries. In addition, the project explored the willingness and capacity of the younger generation to play a significant role in that process. The project was successful in establishing a basis for continued bi-lateral relations between the involved youth and expert communities of the two countries.