



Overview

"Support to Armenia-Turkey Rapprochement" (SATR) Project Turkish Partners Coordination Meeting

The Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation ([TESEV](#)) organized a half-day coordination meeting on June 26, 2012 at the Swedish Consulate in Istanbul. The event brought together 25 stakeholders from Turkey including the main Turkish partners of the [SATR](#) project, civil society actors who were involved in the rapprochement process between Armenia and Turkey, donor organizations and members of the media. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the current stage of Armenia-Turkey projects, their achievements and failures, possible future projects and ways to increase the efficacy of such activities. The working language was Turkish and the event was followed by a networking reception.

Initially, each participant described their specific experience with Armenia-Turkey projects as well as the content of their activities. The event was then devoted to open discussion, where participants floated ideas for future projects and collaboration, problems and difficulties associated with current projects as well as issues that need to be tackled in order to increase the impact and efficacy of the ongoing/future projects.

Presentations of the first session offered an ample opportunity for all participants to learn of past and ongoing projects. TEPAV are currently analyzing economic and monetary relations between Armenia and Turkey through a project that looks at how intergovernmental relations are translated into economic relations between the two countries. Anadolu Kültür has been responsible for arts, literature and culture programs and have successfully organized film screenings, a number of photography workshops and exhibits and musical performances like that of Turkey-Armenia Youth Symphony Orchestra. Anadolu Kültür also initiated an Armenia –Turkey Cinema Platform in collaboration with Golden Apricot International Film Festival. Toplum Gönüllüleri Vakfı explained their work with a specific target group, namely youth. Supported by USAID, their project has been bringing young people and school children together with the aim of deconstructing prejudices and creating new bonds and ideas since 2011.

In addition to the projects mentioned above, talks and panels have been organized by a number of different institutions. TESEV organized meetings and panel discussions in partnership with the Friedrich Naumann Stiftung and universities such as Izmir Dokuz Eylül

University and Adana Çukurova University in different cities throughout Turkey. TESEV also arranged workshops on writing policy papers in Ankara and Istanbul in collaboration with the Yerevan-based ICHD. Further roundtables were also organized by GPoT in partnership with Yerevan Press Group. In order to raise awareness and build up on existing ties, a number of trips took place. Examples include TESEV's study trip to Armenia, GPoT's Turkey –Armenia Media Bus tour and journalist exchange trip in May 2012. Last but not least, in order to grasp the issue in a comparative manner, Yerevan Press Club and Izmir Economy University have conducted a content analysis of media reports that appeared in national mainstream newspapers at times when Turkish-Armenian relations were considered to be tense on both sides.

In the second session, participants discussed the following:

- A road map for future in Armenia-Turkey projects. What could be done to establish better coordination and collaboration among civil society actors?
- Concrete achievements and failures so far
- Ideas for future projects and collaboration

Non-state actors' efforts towards the normalisation of relations are of paramount importance; with the lack of official relations between Armenia and Turkey, civil society organizations from both sides are fulfilling an important task. Football diplomacy was a crucial turning point in Track I activities and had a positive impact on Track II - many of the most important ongoing civil society projects between Armenia and Turkey are the fruits of the post-football diplomacy period. In other words, the official process triggered by football diplomacy has accelerated and facilitated civil society collaboration as well as increased the number of dialogue channels among journalists, academics, businesspeople and students. In other words, this positive development opened a path towards improving people-to-people relations, a fundamental necessity for the normalisation of Turkey-Armenia relations. However, discussions demonstrated that a communication and dialogue lacks among those civil society actors from Turkey engaged in Turkey-Armenia relations. Almost all participants underlined the necessity to create an effective mechanism of communication among those doing similar work. One related remark was related to the scarcity of academic cooperation. Apart from very few student exchanges, almost no contact or collaboration between academic circles in both countries exists.

Media projects were discussed at great length during the meeting. Participants mentioned that the Turkish and Armenia media are quite different from each other in terms of size and areas of interest. In Turkey, news related to Armenia-Turkey relations receives little coverage whereas in Armenia, Turkey is a very popular topic. Turkey makes the Armenian headlines due to the genocide issue and lately because of the historical rapprochement process. As such, an asymmetry exists between both sides. Journalist exchange projects offer an interesting case

study. Most of the participants mentioned that it is difficult for senior journalists to attend trips that are longer than couple of days and thus junior reporters or interns attend these activities; the impact of such projects is therefore lessened as high level participation tends to attract more media coverage. Participants also noted that Turkish journalists that visit Armenia tend to report a brighter picture in their news after such trips, whereas journalists from Armenia attend towards a more negative approach. According to discussions, one of the primary reason for this might be that when Armenians visit Turkey they face what they've lost in the past, whereas for Turks Armenia is a foreign country with lots of familiar symbols, traditions and cultural elements.

The establishment of a mobility fund that would support young people, journalists and experts was suggested by workshop participants. Such a fund would offer larger groups of people the chance to visit Turkey or Armenia and support bilateral professional development opportunities. It would also increase the number of bilateral contacts and the efficiency of Armenia-Turkey initiatives. While no concrete mechanism was discussed during the event, the idea was embraced by all the participants.

Another important issue that was discussed during the event was the desperate need to establish dialogue channels between Turkey and the Armenian Diaspora. The Armenian Diaspora is perceived quite negatively in Turkey and the conception of Turkey among the Diaspora is often shaped by the genocide issue. Such perception is perpetuated among the youth in both Turkey and Armenia. In this context, it would be safe to say that there is a mutual lack of trust both in Turkey and within the Diaspora. Not only does this alienate the corresponding party but it also means that mutual social perceptions cannot avoid being overshadowed by the past due to an almost complete lack of interaction between both sides. So the two civil societies should develop new projects that will contribute to the reversal of the current conception.

On the other hand, some participants mentioned that including the Diaspora into this already complicated puzzle would not enable the normalisation of Armenia-Turkey relations. Majority of the participants thought that in the long run, the rapprochement between the Diaspora and Turkey is a must for the establishment of societal reconciliation. 2015 was also discussed during the workshop. Participants underlined that Turkey does not seem ready neither for the opportunities nor challenges of 2015. In Turkey, the Armenian Diaspora's 2015 preparations are expected to raise tensions in Armenia-Turkey relations but the potential opportunities for rapprochement including the establishment of new initiatives between Turkey and the Diaspora are often overlooked.