

TURKEY AND ARMENIA: OPENING MINDS, OPENING BORDERS

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TURKEY AND ARMENIA: OPENING MINDS, OPENING BORDERS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Turkey and Armenia are close to settling a dispute that has long roiled Caucasus politics, isolated Armenia and cast a shadow over Turkey's European Union (EU) ambition. For a decade and a half, relations have been poisoned by disagreement about issues including how to address a common past and compensate for crimes, territorial disputes, distrust bred in Soviet times and Armenian occupation of Azerbaijani land. But recently, progressively intense official engagement, civil society interaction and public opinion change have transformed the relationship, bringing both sides to the brink of an historic agreement to open borders, establish diplomatic ties and begin joint work on reconciliation. They should seize this opportunity to normalise. The politicised debate whether to recognise as genocide the destruction of much of the Ottoman Armenian population and the stalemated Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh should not halt momentum. The U.S., EU, Russia and others should maintain support for reconciliation and avoid harming it with statements about history at a critical and promising time.

Turks' and Armenians' once uncompromising, bipolar views of history are significantly converging, showing that the deep traumas can be healed. Most importantly, the advance in bilateral relations demonstrates that a desire for reconciliation can overcome old enmities and closed borders. Given the heritage and culture shared by Armenians and Turks, there is every reason to hope that normalisation of relations between the two countries can be achieved and sustained.

Internal divisions persist on both sides. Armenia does not make normalisation conditional on Turkey's formal recognition as genocide of the 1915 forced relocation and massacres of Armenians under the Ottoman Empire. But it must take into account the views of Armenians scattered throughout the global diaspora, which is twice as large as the population of Armenia itself and has long had hardline representatives. New trends in that diaspora, however, have softened and to some degree removed demands that Turkey surrender territory in its north east, where Armenians were a substantial minority before 1915.

Over the past decade, Turkey has moved far from its former blanket denial of any Ottoman wrongdoing. Important parts of the ruling AK Party, bureaucracy, business communities on the Armenian border and liberal elite in western cities support normalisation with Armenia and some expression of contrition. Traditional hardliners, including Turkic nationalists and part of the security services, oppose compromise, especially as international genocide recognition continues and in the absence of Armenian troop withdrawals from substantial areas they occupy of Turkey's ally, Azerbaijan. These divisions surfaced in events surrounding the assassination of Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink in January 2007. That the new tendencies are gaining ground, however, was shown by the extraordinary outpouring of solidarity with Armenians during the Dink funeral in Istanbul and a campaign by Turkish intellectuals to apologise to Armenians for the "Great Catastrophe" of 1915.

The unresolved Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh still risks undermining full adoption and implementation of the potential package deal between Turkey and Armenia on recognition, borders and establishment of bilateral commissions to deal with multiple issues, including the historical dimension of their relations. Azerbaijan has strong links to Turkey based on energy cooperation and the Turkic countries' shared linguistic and cultural origins. Ethnic Armenian forces' rapid advance into Azerbaijan in 1993 scuttled plans to open diplomatic ties and caused Turkey to close the railway line that was then the only transport link between the two countries. For years, Turkey conditioned any improvement in bilateral relations on Armenian troop withdrawals. Baku threatens that if this condition is lifted, it will restrict Turkey's participation in the expansion of Azerbaijani energy exports. While Azerbaijani attitudes remain a constraint, significant elements in Turkey agree it is time for a new approach. Bilateral détente with Armenia ultimately could help Baku recover territory better than the current stalemate.

Outside powers have important interests and roles. The U.S. has long fostered Armenia-Turkey reconciliation, seeking thereby to consolidate the independence of all three former Soviet republics in the south Caucasus and to support east-west transit corridors and energy pipelines from the Caspian Sea. Washington was notable in its backing of efforts that kick-started civil society dialogue between Turkey and Armenia. The Obama administration is working hard at repairing the damage done to U.S. relations with Turkey by the war in Iraq. Although Obama repeatedly promised on the campaign trail to formally recognise the 1915 forced relocation and massacres of Armenians under the Ottoman Empire as genocide, he should continue to steer the prudent middle course he has adopted as president. The U.S. Congress, which has a draft resolution before it, should do the same. At this sensitive moment of Turkish-Armenian convergence, statements that focus on the genocide term, either to deny or recognise it, would either enrage Armenians or unleash a nationalist Turkish reaction that would damage U.S.-Turkish ties and set back Turkey-Armenia reconciliation for years.

U.S. support for Turkey-Armenia reconciliation appears to be mirrored in Moscow. Russian companies have acquired many of Armenia's railways, pipelines and energy utilities and seek to develop them; Russian-Turkish relations are good; and Moscow is looking for ways to mitigate the regional strains produced by its war with Georgia in August 2008. If sustained, the coincidence of U.S.-Russian interests would offer a hopeful sign for greater security and prosperity in the South Caucasus after years of division and conflict. All sides – chiefly Armenia and Turkey but potentially Azerbaijan as well – will gain in economic strength and national security if borders are opened and trade normalised.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Government of Turkey:

1. Agree, ratify and implement a normalisation package including the opening of borders, establishment of diplomatic relations and bilateral commissions; continue to prepare public opinion for reconciliation; cultivate a pro-settlement constituency among Armenians; and avoid threatening or penalising Armenia for outside factors like resolutions or statements in third countries recognising a genocide.
2. Avoid sacrificing implementation of the normalisation package to demands for immediate resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and withdrawal of Armenian troops from occupied territories in Azerbaijan; and seek opportunities to show Baku that by easing Yerevan's fears of encirclement, nor-

malised Turkey-Armenia relations may ultimately speed up such an Armenian withdrawal.

3. Make goodwill towards Armenia clear through gestures such as joint work on preserving the ancient ruins of Ani, stating explicitly that Turkey will recognise and protect Armenian historical and religious heritage throughout the country.
4. Encourage universities and institutes to pursue broader research on matters pertaining to the events of 1915, preferably with the engagement of Armenian and third-party scholars; modernise history books and remove all prejudice from them; and increase funding for cataloguing and management of the Ottoman-era archives.

To the Government of Armenia:

5. Agree, ratify, and implement a normalisation package including the opening of borders, establishment of diplomatic relations and bilateral commissions; continue to prepare public opinion for reconciliation; and avoid statements or international actions relating to genocide recognition that could inflame Turkish public opinion against the current process.
6. Agree together with Azerbaijan to the OSCE Minsk Group basic principles on a Nagorno-Karabakh settlement; then start withdrawals from Armenian-occupied territories in Azerbaijan; and pursue peace with Azerbaijan in full consciousness that only in this way can normalisation with Turkey be consolidated.
7. Make clear that Armenia has no territorial claim on Turkey by explicitly recognising its territorial integrity within the borders laid out in the 1921 Treaty of Kars.
8. Encourage universities and institutes to pursue more research on matters relating to the events of 1915, preferably with the engagement of Turkish and third-party scholars; modernise history books and remove all prejudice from them; and organise the cataloguing of known Armenian archives pertaining to the events in and around 1915 wherever they may be located.

To the United States, Russia and the European Union and its Member States:

9. Avoid legislation, statements and actions that might inflame public opinion on either side and so could upset the momentum towards Turkey-Armenia normalisation and reconciliation.
10. Raise the seniority and intensify the engagement of the U.S., Russian and French co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group until Armenia and Azerbaijan reach

final agreement on Minsk Group basic principles for a settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

11. Back up Turkey-Armenia reconciliation with projects to encourage region-wide interaction, heritage preservation and confidence building; and support as requested any new bilateral historical commission or sub-commission, development of archive management and independent Turkish- or Armenian-led scholarly endeavours to research into aspects of the 1915 events.

Istanbul/Yerevan/Baku/Brussels, 14 April 2009

TURKEY AND ARMENIA: OPENING MINDS, OPENING BORDERS

I. INTRODUCTION

In 2008 Turkey and Armenia took substantial steps towards reconciliation that may soon lead them to establish diplomatic relations, open their closed border and begin addressing a range of bilateral differences including historical disputes. The clearest demonstration so far of rapprochement occurred on 6 September 2008, when Turkish President Abdullah Gül, on the invitation of his Armenian counterpart, Serzh Sarkisian, visited Yerevan to watch a football World Cup qualifying match between the two national teams. Since then barely a week goes by without senior officials meeting. Armenia and Turkey “have never been closer” to normalising relations, Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan declared in January 2009.¹ His assessment is largely shared in Armenia.²

The intensification of contacts started when President Gül sent an unusually supportive message congratulating President Sarkisian on his election in February 2008.³ While visiting Moscow on 24 June, Sarkisian hinted he would invite Gül and sent the invitation on 4 July.⁴ The two met for the first time on 6 July 2008 in Astana, at festivities to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Kazakh capital. In August 2008, after the Georgia-Russia war interrupted usual trade routes, Ankara lifted restrictions on Armenian use of Turkish airspace. The Turkish side formally accepted the invi-

tation to Yerevan only three days before the match.⁵ The visit lasted only six hours but the face-to-face talks followed up by frequent ministerial meetings took the relationship to a new level.⁶ Armenia allowed the Turkish president’s armoured car and security detail full access and unilaterally suspended its visa regime to facilitate the arrival of Turkish fans for the first ever match between the two national teams.⁷

Bilateral relations have been historically strained, and such improvements as there have been have occurred in fits and starts. As the Soviet Union was collapsing, Turkey on 16 December 1991 became the first country after the U.S. to recognise Armenia, and its ambassador to Moscow, Volkan Vural, who had already forged links with the Armenian Church, paid a ground-breaking visit.⁸ Turkey opened the railway between its border town of Kars and the Armenian town of Gyumri (formerly Leninakan/Alexandropol) and agreed to supply much-needed electricity. In 1992, Turkey led efforts to give Armenia a founding seat in an Istanbul-based

¹“I can easily say we have never come this close to a plan regarding the final normalization of relations with Armenia”. Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan, interview with NTV television (Turkey), 16 January 2009.

²“It’s very close”. Crisis Group interview, senior Armenian official, Yerevan, February 2009. Several ambassadors in Yerevan told Crisis Group they were very optimistic about progress.

³“In the run up to the election, we received the impression he’d be more pragmatic. We prepared a message of congratulations, with content, expressing some will to do something together”. Crisis Group interview, Turkish official, Ankara, February 2009.

⁴The two countries then engaged in discreet preparatory talks in Switzerland.

⁵“Gül was willing to go. Not all diplomats were happy about it. He got lots of letters telling him not to go. After such a traumatic relationship, could we start at a football match in front of 50,000 people? There was the security risk, the threat of provocations, opposition on both sides. One small incident could spoil everything”. Crisis Group interview, Turkish official, Ankara, February 2009.

⁶“It was a very good first meeting. They had their vodkas, the president had his orange juice. They didn’t get into detail, but in general their approach coincided ... there was understanding on many points”. Crisis Group interview, Turkish official, Ankara, February 2009.

⁷Another symbolic gesture was withdrawal of Armenia’s veto for Turkey’s full membership in the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), announced on the eve of the foreign ministers’ meeting in New York on 26 September 2008.

⁸“I was met with 40 cars, ministers, people with machine guns, a grand dinner. When I asked where people came from, they all said towns in today’s Turkey: Bursa, Van, Elazig. Often they even spoke Turkish. When I walked in the market, everyone had seen me on the local television; they all came up giving presents, talking in Turkish, asking me when the border would open”. Crisis Group interview, Volkan Vural, Istanbul, 24 February 2009.

regional grouping, the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC).⁹

The first president of Armenia, Levon Ter-Petrosian, engaged with Turkey and was “convinced of the need to normalise relations”. He sought to overcome negative attitudes, such as the media’s tendency to promote Turkey as a “threat to Armenia” and “years, if not decades of stereotypes and misunderstandings on both sides”.¹⁰ Ter-Petrosian also promised to counteract apparent claims on Turkish territory in the newly independent state’s founding documents.¹¹ But Turkey’s foreign ministry could not be convinced to establish diplomatic relations,¹² and in 1993, when the Nagorno-Karabakh war erupted,¹³ Ankara closed the Armenia rail link in an attempt to deter the rapid advances of Yerevan’s troops into Azerbaijani territory.¹⁴ In March of that year, Turkey announced it would inspect air-

craft flying over its territory to Armenia, allegedly to halt arms smuggling.¹⁵

During the following decade little positive occurred, though Turkey opened the air corridor between Istanbul and Yerevan in 1995¹⁶ and allowed free travel for Armenians. Up to 40,000 Armenian passport holders are now thought to be employed in Istanbul without work permits but with the toleration of the Turkish authorities.¹⁷ New strains appeared after the coming to power in 1998 of a hardline Armenian president, Robert Kocharian, who made international recognition of the country’s genocide claims a priority of its foreign and security policy, and the near-passage in 2000 of a U.S. Congressional resolution calling the 1915 events genocide. Turkey, which rejects the genocide label on historical grounds and for fear it will give rise to claims on territory and reparations, made it harder for Armenians to visit and suspended airspace clearance for Armenia-bound planes.

Visa restrictions were eased again in January 2002, but a real change occurred later that year, when the AK Party came to power and made cooperation in Turkey’s neighbourhood a foreign policy priority, advocating the use of soft power instead of military threats and “zero problems” with surrounding countries.¹⁸ Ankara now considers improved relations with Armenia a strategic opportunity,¹⁹ similar to its efforts to solve old conflicts in Cyprus and in Iraqi Kurdistan.²⁰ A series of six meetings was started in June 2003 between then

⁹ Azerbaijan was also given a seat. Since then, Armenia has opened a representative office in Istanbul in 2001. This has given Yerevan the opportunity to have a senior ambassador in Turkey accredited to BSEC headquarters. As talks have gathered pace since 2001, BSEC has proved a reliable platform allowing a steady flow of Turkish and Armenian officials to visit each others’ capitals.

¹⁰ Crisis Group interview, former senior Armenian foreign ministry official, Yerevan, November 2008.

¹¹ Ter-Petrosian told Ambassador Vural: “I cannot forget the past, but I don’t want to live with this past. I want to build a future for our children and grandchildren”. Crisis Group interview, Volkan Vural, Istanbul, 24 February 2009.

¹² “We had an initial meeting. Some sided with me. Some pointed to the Armenian constitution and declaration of independence [which hint at claims to Turkey’s territory]. Some wanted the Armenians to publicly distance themselves from the diaspora and genocide recognition. I said you can’t ignore the feelings of these people, but we can build new bridges that will get people to look at the past in a more objective manner. My point of view was found a bit daring. It never went to the political authority. We missed an opportunity. The Nagorno-Karabakh war started, Levon Ter-Petrosian lost credibility, and the Nagorno-Karabakh gang took power”. Ibid.

¹³ Armenia’s and Azerbaijan’s dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh, an Armenian-majority enclave surrounded by Azerbaijani majority territory, resurfaced in 1988. During a 1992-1994 war, about 25,000 people were killed, and ceasefire violations continue to cause casualties. The war resulted in the occupation of most of Nagorno-Karabakh and considerable adjacent Azerbaijani territory by ethnic Armenian forces; about 725,000 Azeris and 413,000 Armenians were forced from their homes. See Crisis Group Europe Report N°187, *Nagorno-Karabakh: Risking War*, 14 November 2007, p. 1.

¹⁴ While a significant part of the soldiers, equipment and funding came from Armenia proper, the advancing troops also included Karabakh Armenians and their resources.

¹⁵ Svante Cornell, “Turkey and the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh: a delicate balance”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, January 1998, p. 60.

¹⁶ The air corridor was closed between 1994 and 1995.

¹⁷ The figure of 40,000 was given by Prime Minister Erdoğan, as quoted in *Today’s Zaman*, 29 January 2009.

¹⁸ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye’nin Uluslararası Konumu* (Istanbul, 2001).

¹⁹ “For us, a Turkey-Armenia relationship is the missing link in the kind of Caucasus we would like to see”. Crisis Group interview, Turkish official, Ankara, March 2009. A senior Turkish official said that President Gül was seriously considering accepting Sarkisian’s invitation even before the events in Georgia. Crisis Group interview, Ankara, February 2009.

²⁰ In 2004, the AK Party reversed decades of Turkish stonewalling on a compromise Cyprus settlement. See Crisis Group Europe Report N°194, *Reunifying Cyprus: The Best Chance Yet*, 23 June 2007. In 2008-2009, Turkey normalised its long-fraught relations with Iraqi Kurdistan. See Crisis Group Middle East Report N°81, *Turkey and Iraqi Kurds: Conflict or Cooperation?*, 13 November 2008. A desire to be proactive in de-escalating conflicts prompted it in August 2008 to dust off a proposal for a Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform. All this built on strong rapprochements with Greece and Syria after 1999, countries against which it had nearly gone to war in 1997 and 1998 respectively.

Foreign Minister Gül and Armenian Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanian. “They had good chemistry, even if there was not much progress”, a Turkish diplomat said.²¹ Special ambassadors kept up a technical dialogue in Vienna, mainly on possible linked confidence-building steps.²² Some small moves were made, like the partial restoration of an Armenian church as a museum on Turkey’s Lake Van. But Sarkisian’s election and invitation to Gül transformed the nature of the talks.

Sceptics believe the football match invitation was a public relations move, perhaps made in the belief that no Turkish president would accept, to establish a peacemaking image after Sarkisian’s bitterly-contested election and the 1 March 2008 crackdown on the opposition that caused ten deaths.²³ But the foreign ministers, Ali Babacan and Eduard Nalbandian, followed up with new rounds of talks. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and President Sarkisian met at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2009.²⁴ Further ministerial and other high-level meetings involving the foreign, transport and energy ministers have been continuing since March within the context of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation organisation, of which Armenia is currently president. The Armenian president is due to visit Turkey for the October return World Cup qualifier.

Sceptics also argue Turkey wants only the appearance of a process in order to help it with the EU and to deflect a possible U.S. presidential statement or Congressional resolution recognising an Armenian genocide.²⁵ Such a resolution was introduced on 17 March 2009, and during the 2008 election campaign, President Obama, Vice-President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton all said that once in office they would use the

word genocide to describe Ottoman-era actions against the Armenians.²⁶

But Turkey and Armenia have a broad interest in improving their relations at this time. Armenia has long wanted an open border with Turkey, a natural trading partner, and the 2008 war underlined its dependence on a volatile Georgia to its north for the passage of 70 per cent of its imports.²⁷ Armenians would see normalisation with Ankara as a new opening to Western countries and a point scored against their rivals in Azerbaijan. For Turkey, reconciliation would increase the credibility of arguments that it does not need external pressure to address historical disputes with its neighbours, a position that could help stop international qualification of the 1915 events as genocide.²⁸ It would aid its EU membership bid, which is especially important this year, when Brussels will expect Ankara to live up to commitments to normalise relations with Greek Cypriots – something that will be difficult unless there is substantial progress on Cyprus conflict settlement.²⁹ A breakthrough with Armenia would give stronger arguments to those supportive EU policy makers who argue that Turkey is a responsible beacon of European values in the Caucasus and Middle East.

²¹ Crisis Group interview, Ankara, February 2009.

²² Crisis Group interviews, senior Armenian officials, Yerevan, February 2009.

²³ Crisis Group interview, leading NGO activist, Yerevan, February 2009.

²⁴ The meeting took place immediately after a highly emotional public argument between Erdoğan and Israeli President Shimon Peres and lasted only fifteen minutes instead of the planned hour. Turkish and Armenian officials give conflicting signals about how close they were to announcing a framework normalisation agreement, but in general both sides felt there had been a meeting of minds. Crisis Group interviews, Yerevan and Ankara, February 2009.

²⁵ “Turks are interested in the process, not actually opening the border ... lots of signals make me think that they are not serious about results”. Crisis Group interview, senior former Armenian official, Yerevan, February 2009.

²⁶ In a campaign statement on 19 January 2008 addressed to U.S. Armenians, Obama said, “the Armenian Genocide is not an allegation, a personal opinion, or a point of view, but rather a widely documented fact supported by an overwhelming body of historical evidence. The facts are undeniable. An official policy that calls on diplomats to distort the historical facts is an untenable policy ... as President I will recognise the Armenian Genocide”. See www.barackobama.com.

²⁷ “Forget wars. One single landslide would cut them off”. Crisis Group interview, European diplomat posted to Armenia, Istanbul, December 2008. Armenia’s third border, with Azerbaijan, has been closed since the early 1990s, awaiting a settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute. The fourth border with Iran offers few advantages.

²⁸ “If we can bring this to a good point in three to five months, in a way it will become irrelevant to take this issue to parliaments in third countries. After we have solved our problem with Armenia, both Armenia and we can say ‘none of your business’ to third countries”. Foreign Minister Ali Babacan, quoted in *Sabah* (Turkey), 10 September 2008.

²⁹ See Crisis Group Report, *Reunifying Cyprus*, op. cit.

II. THE STATE OF NEGOTIATIONS

The recent Turkey-Armenian talks aim to secure a comprehensive normalisation of relations. A “package deal” is on the table: establishment of full diplomatic ties; opening of border crossings; and a new inter-governmental commission, including a sub-commission to address the “historical dimension”.³⁰ Once formally announced, the deal will need to be ratified by both countries’ parliaments. Ideally this package would be followed by agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan on the OSCE Minsk Group’s basic principles for a settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.³¹

For a long time, Turkey argued that its ability to reconcile with Armenia was hampered by Armenia’s efforts to pursue international recognition of the 1915 events as genocide³² and its refusal to withdraw from occupied Azerbaijani territory. Ankara has officially not lifted these conditions, despite unofficial indications of possible changes. Armenia’s foreign policy elite has long been ready to open the border without preconditions, meaning that it did not expect Turkey to acknowledge genocide before normalisation.³³ But popular

opinion in the country was largely disinterested in better relations until its old Turkish foe recognised genocide and stopped supporting Azerbaijan.³⁴ Here, too, there has been a shift. As an Armenian official put it, “currently, there is a new mood that normalisation of relations with Turkey is inevitable. [It is] no longer a zero-sum game, but is now a win-win scenario”.³⁵

While there is much agreement on the content of the package, the timing of unveiling and implementation remains key. Some analysts had anticipated that, in view of the long U.S. support for reconciliation, Turkey would make the package public during President Obama’s visit on 6-7 April or it would be done by Foreign Ministers Babacan and Nalbandian while in Istanbul for an Alliance of Civilizations summit on the same dates. This did not happen. A BSEC meeting on 16 April in Yerevan in which both foreign ministers expect to participate is another opportunity. Otherwise, the sides may wait until after 24 April, the day commemorated worldwide by Armenians as Genocide Memorial Day.

A. ESTABLISHING DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

The opening of diplomatic relations is the central part of the normalisation package. The countries may opt for ties below ambassadorial level at first or accredit ambassadors to Georgia as their initial representatives.³⁶ But there is no reason they could not quickly accredit ambassadors in each other’s capitals. With several tens of thousands of Armenian citizens now living and working in Turkey, Yerevan is particularly keen to have a consular presence.³⁷

According to Turkish sources, one issue holding up diplomatic relations has been Armenia’s reluctance to

³⁰“These will not be two-three month processes but long-term ones, as Poland and Russia have done”. Crisis Group interview, senior Armenian official, March 2009.

³¹The basic principles include: agreement on the non-use of force, international guarantees for any settlement, the deployment of international peacekeepers; full withdrawal of Nagorno-Karabakh forces backed by Armenia from six occupied districts around Nagorno-Karabakh and a special status for the “Lachin corridor” road between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as the return of displaced Azeris to all areas including Nagorno-Karabakh; an “interim” status for Nagorno-Karabakh and an agreement that Karabakh Armenians and Karabakh Azeris will have the right in a non-coercive environment to determine their future status in a vote. See Crisis Group Europe Report N°187, *Nagorno-Karabakh: Risking War*, op. cit., and Crisis Group Europe Report N°167, *Nagorno-Karabakh: A Plan for Peace*, 11 October 2005.

³²“Turkey has long been facing a systematic campaign of defamation carried out by Armenian lobbying groups....The activities of diaspora organisations are also supported by the Armenian state. It is known that Armenian diplomatic missions abroad carry out certain activities so that their allegations are recognized in national legislatures”. “Armenian allegations concerning the 1915 Events”, Turkish foreign ministry website, www.mfa.gov.tr.

³³“Armenia has never and will never set any condition for normalising talks with Turkey. [Genocide recognition is] not a precondition [but it is] an agenda item ... the genocide issue is our moral obligation to raise, to have it on our foreign policy agenda, but having it on the agenda and making it a precondition, these are two separate things”. Speech by then

Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanian, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Washington, 14 June 2004.

³⁴“Turkey has become a direct party to the Karabakh-Azerbaijani conflict” by virtue of its role as a “supporter of Azerbaijan, its military ally”. Vahan Hovannisian, ARF leader, interview with ArmInfo news agency, 18 September 2008.

³⁵Crisis Group interview, former senior Armenian foreign ministry official, November 2008.

³⁶If all goes well, the two countries plan to open a low-level mission, or, if that seems too risky, to accredit mutually each other’s ambassador to the neighboring Republic of Georgia. *Radikal* (Turkey), 17 March 2009. Armenian officials confirm this possibility. Crisis Group interviews, Yerevan, March 2009.

³⁷A senior Armenian official said Armenia would like the same liberal visa regime as Georgia has and to establish consular services there as soon as possible, for example to help Armenians in Turkish jails. Crisis Group interview, Yerevan, February 2009.

renounce explicitly any territorial claims on Turkey.³⁸ Ankara suspects Armenia would like to leave open the possibility of eventually advancing claims to lands in eastern Turkey, while it has long prioritised unambiguous recognition of the existing border in any normalisation process.

The Armenian government insists it does not contest the border as set out by the 1921 Treaty of Kars.³⁹ According to a senior Yerevan official, Armenia “has no *de jure* claims on Turkish territory.... Armenia continues to uphold the previous international commitments”.⁴⁰ Armenia views its status as one of the successor states to the Soviet Union and its accession to international bodies like the UN as implicit recognition of existing borders. In the Armenian view, it is Turkey’s closure of the border in April 1993 that violates Kars.⁴¹ According to a senior Armenian official, the sides intend to put remaining Turkish concerns to rest by including an article recognising existing borders when they sign the protocols on the establishment of diplomatic relations.⁴²

B. OPENING THE LAND BORDER

The 325-km land border was closed throughout most of the Soviet period. There are two main crossing points: the rail link between Kars and Gyumri and the Markara/Alican road bridge over the wide Araxes River near Yerevan.

³⁸ Aybars Görgülü, “Türkiye-Ermenistan İlişkileri: Bir Kısır Döngü” [“Turkey-Armenia Relations: A Vicious Circle”], Turkey Economic and Social Studies Foundation (Türkiye Ekonomi ve Sosyal Etüdler Vakfı – TESEV) Istanbul, 2008, p. 11.

³⁹ The treaty signed on 23 October 1921 by Turkey (represented by the Grand National Assembly) and the Soviet Republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia delineated the borders established by the Treaty of Moscow (March 1921) and was ratified in Yerevan. The Turkish army withdrew from some areas of the Caucasus, and the Soviet Union, which viewed the new nationalist rulers of Turkey as potential anti-imperialist allies, accepted the loss of large areas of what is now north-eastern Turkey.

⁴⁰ Crisis Group interview, Yerevan, February 2009.

⁴¹ “In order to ensure the continuance of relations between their countries, the Contracting Parties agree to take, in a common agreement, all the measures necessary to maintain and develop as quickly as possible railway, telegraphic, and other communications, as well as to assure free transit of persons and commodities without any hindrance. It is understood, however, that the entry and departure of travelers and commodities will be governed by the full application of all the regulations established in this regard by each of the Contracting Parties”. Article XVII, Treaty of Kars, 1921.

⁴² Crisis Group interview, Yerevan, February 2009.

The rail link opened in the 1980s, when passenger trains began to go both ways once a week.⁴³ Turkey stopped the service on 3 April 1993 as part of sanctions when Armenia captured the Kelbajar district of Azerbaijan.⁴⁴ No road link has been formally opened in modern times. Although the roads themselves exist, investment will be required to open up the two crossings, as well as significant capacity building and training of local officials to deal with customs, taxes, trade and border traffic for which there has been little preparation.⁴⁵ In addition, border security and border crossing, customs and tax agreements are needed as immediate steps. The negotiations would not only build trust and contribute to greater cooperation but would also deepen ties among local officials on both sides of the border.

Yerevan and Istanbul have had air links since 1995, with an interruption of several months in 2000-2001, when tension rose over the draft genocide resolution in the U.S. Congress. A further sign of improving relations would be for state-owned Turkish Airlines to fly between the capitals, as the Armenian carrier, Armavia, does.

C. BILATERAL COMMISSIONS AND HISTORY

A major difference between the Turkish and Armenian sides has been over what to call the events of 1915: a forced relocation order tragically accompanied by inter-communal strife and massacres (the Turkish view), or a planned genocide (the Armenian view).

Turkey has long sought to take the genocide issue out of international politics. “Genocide allegations are to be resolved by historians, not parliaments”, as Prime Minister Erdoğan put it.⁴⁶ In April 2005, Erdoğan wrote to then Armenian President Kocharian to suggest that the two sides submit the issue of what happened in 1915 to an independent commission of historians and

⁴³ Travellers had to change trains at the border due to different gauge tracks. After 1991, the railway also brought partly U.S.-financed aid to Armenia in wheat and other foodstuffs.

⁴⁴ Turkey viewed these sanctions as similar to those applied by the EU or the U.S. at various times against Milosevic’s Serbia, Castro’s Cuba or Saddam’s Iraq. See Sedat Laçiner, “Ermenistan sınır kapısını açmanın maliyeti” [“The cost of opening the Armenian border”], www.turkishweekly.net, 5 September 2005.

⁴⁵ “We will need infrastructure to develop them further. It will take time”. Crisis Group interview, senior Armenian official, Yerevan, February 2009. Managing the border opening and border crossing points will be key challenges for the Armenian authorities, requiring them to enhance “state efforts in customs, police and tax ... from day one”. Crisis Group interview, Jonathan Stark, CEO, Cascade Capita, Yerevan, January 2009.

⁴⁶ Statement to the press, 21 October 2004.

experts. Unusually, this was backed by Turkey's main opposition party, which in parliament joined the ruling AK Party to suggest that this be a "joint commission composed of historians from Turkey and Armenia, to open without any restriction their national archives, to disclose the findings of their research, which will also cover the archives of related countries, to the international public".⁴⁷

Most Armenians believe that a historical commission is a Turkish ploy to counter or delay genocide recognition. Kocharian wrote back to Erdoğan that "your suggestion to address the past cannot be effective if it deflects from addressing the present and the future...an inter-governmental commission can meet [only once diplomatic relations have been normalised] to discuss any and all outstanding issues between our two nations, with the aim of resolving them and coming to an understanding".⁴⁸

Another reason for Yerevan's past objection to such a commission was its view that no more historical proof of what happened is required. There is already recognition in many countries, and a commission might question the Armenian view of events, thus undermining a fundamental tenet of Armenians' self-identity.⁴⁹ A further reason for caution involves representation, since perhaps only one third of Armenians worldwide live in Armenia, but all feel strongly about the genocide question.⁵⁰ Some Armenians also consider that a commission would have to look at the decades before 1915 to gain an understanding of persecution and terror under the Ottoman Empire. A senior Armenian official suggested that a compromise would be a "dialogue on the historical dimension to examine historical facts and prepare recommendations".⁵¹

In June 2008, President Sarkisian signaled readiness to accept the Turkish proposal for a joint commission with a specific mandate to study the past events.⁵² Faced with criticism from domestic opposition, the diaspora and his coalition partner, the ultranationalist Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF),⁵³ however, he stepped back, once more insisting Armenia was only willing to discuss history within a general bilateral commission. In both cases, Sarkisian made any such discussion conditional on normalisation and reopening of the border.⁵⁴ The proposal currently being discussed is an inter-governmental commission with its subcommittees to look at all bilateral issues, including the historical one.⁵⁵ In any event, independent historians are already doing much to change mindsets through publications and conferences, notably in Turkey (see below). They should be encouraged and given funding to do more.

D. THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH LINK

Armenia believes normalisation with Turkey should be carried out unconditionally, with no connection to its dispute with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh.⁵⁶ Armenians tend to equate Turks and Azerbaijanis and see both as security threats. This perception was reinforced in previous years as Turkey's major stated precondition for opening the border and diplomatic ties

⁴⁷ Declaration by the governing and main opposition parties, Turkish Grand National Assembly, 13 April 2005.

⁴⁸ Letter from President Kocharian to Prime Minister Erdoğan, 25 April 2005.

⁴⁹ "A historical commission on the genocide is an insult to those who were killed". Crisis Group interview, Heritage faction parliamentary deputy Zaruhi Postanjian, Yerevan, February 2009.

⁵⁰ "Genocide is not only an Armenian issue but a pan-Armenian issue. [When we have proposed a genocide commission to the diaspora, they have said] this issue is legally not our business". Crisis Group interview, senior official, Yerevan, February 2009.

⁵¹ Crisis Group interview, senior Armenian official, Yerevan, February 2009.

⁵² On 24 June 2008, Sarkisian was quoted as saying, "we are not against the creation of such a commission, but only if the border between our countries is opened". Emil Danielyan, "Sarkisian signals support for Turkish genocide proposal", *Armenia Liberty*, 26 June 2008.

⁵³ Members of the ARF (Hay Heghapokhakan Dashnaksutiun), the main hardline nationalist party, are also known as Dashnaks. Ruzanna Khachatryan, "Dashnaks worried about Sarkisian support for Turkish-Armenian panel", *Armenia Liberty*, 30 June 2008.

⁵⁴ In a 9 July 2008 *Wall Street Journal* op-ed, Sarkisian called for "a commission to comprehensively discuss all of the complex issues affecting Armenia and Turkey". This was interpreted in conservative circles in Armenia and the diaspora as repudiation of his earlier agreement to a "historical commission". "President Serge Sargsian categorically rules out historians' commission for 1915", *The Armenian Reporter*, 13 November 2008.

⁵⁵ "We need to develop a common reading of history even if it takes twenty years". Crisis Group interview, senior government official, Yerevan, February 2009.

⁵⁶ "The normalisation of Armenian-Turkish relations should have no preconditions and it is with this mutual understanding that we have been negotiating with the Turkish side. Normalisation of the relations has no linkage to the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem and has never been a subject of negotiations towards the normalisation of Armenian-Turkish relations". Eduard Nalbandian, Armenian foreign minister, interview with Interfax, 6 March 2009.

with Armenia was withdrawal by ethnic Armenian forces from occupied Azerbaijani territories. Turkey also long helped to train and supply the Azerbaijani military.⁵⁷

Ankara has portrayed its linkage between Nagorno-Karabakh and normalisation as a quest for a broader regional settlement. Pointing to the negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan on Nagorno-Karabakh that are being facilitated by the Minsk Group of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Ankara argued that the opening of borders, free trade and economic cooperation between Armenia and Azerbaijan and similar steps between Armenia and Turkey should be part of a comprehensive process of conflict resolution. In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, this would include troop withdrawals, deployment of peacekeeping forces and return of displaced persons. It hoped this framework would make normalisation with Armenia possible while avoiding nationalist backlash at home and without burning bridges with Azerbaijan.

In the period since the September 2008 football talks, there has been debate in Turkey over this linkage. One commentator suggested Ankara no longer demands a prior Armenian withdrawal from occupied Azerbaijani territories before it agrees to reopen the mutual border, indicating instead it wants to see “some progress” or a “plausible plan of withdrawal”.⁵⁸ According to a member of parliament, the Turkey-Armenia border question and Nagorno-Karabakh “are parallel processes, and there is mutual reinforcement”.⁵⁹ A European diplomat said he thought that some in Ankara might be satisfied not by formal linkage but by “a sequencing of events to make sure it [Armenian withdrawal] happens”.⁶⁰

Most recently the Turkish position appears to have hardened. On 3 April 2009, Prime Minister Erdoğan said, “as long as this problem is not resolved it is not possible for us to adopt a healthy decision, but we have still taken certain steps as a preparation of the way, and we are trying to prepare the region for this development. We are talking to our Azerbaijani friends, our Armenian

friends, we tell Russia, France and the United States they should accelerate the work and conclude that work so they can facilitate our hand”.⁶¹

Progress on resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict would indeed enhance Turkey’s ability to normalise relations with Armenia. But the best that can be expected any time in 2009 is agreement on the basic principles currently being discussed within the framework of the Minsk Group’s mediation effort, led by its French, Russian and U.S. co-chairs. Despite mediators’ optimism about a possible breakthrough,⁶² there is a long-running stalemate over several issues, including the modalities of a plan to hold a referendum to determine Nagorno-Karabakh’s final status and the status and size of a possible corridor linking Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia in the Lachin district.⁶³ The situation remains precarious on the ground, with six killed on or near the ceasefire line during the first three months of 2009.

For Turkey, tying progress in relations with Armenia to a Nagorno-Karabakh breakthrough would thus halt the momentum towards reconciliation, be a return to its traditional positions and strengthen arguments that it is only using the promise of normalisation in its talks with Armenia to delay U.S. genocide recognition. Turkey should not allow its Armenia policy to be held hostage to the Nagorno-Karabakh stalemate. An open border could help break Armenian perceptions of encirclement by hostile Turkic peoples, making them less adamant about retaining the territories around Nagorno-Karabakh as security guarantees. It is important that Yerevan realise progress in bilateral relations will be sustainable only if it withdraws in due course from occupied Azerbaijani territory after a border opening with Turkey.⁶⁴ It should reach agreement quickly with Azerbaijan on Basic Principles, though once that important step is taken, it may take several years before it is possible to sign a comprehensive peace agreement,

⁵⁷ Turkey provides weapons, training and military equipment and modernises barracks. The aid is limited due to NATO commitments and the export restrictions of Western companies, which hold licences on most Turkish military production. Turkey agreed in 2008, however, to manufacture armoured personnel carriers, infantry fighting vehicles and small calibre artillery guns. See Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°50, *Azerbaijan: Defence Sector Management and Reform*, 29 October 2008.

⁵⁸ Hasan Kanbolat, “Turkish-Armenian border may open in 2009”, *Today’s Zaman*, 18 December 2008.

⁵⁹ Crisis Group interview, Ankara, 20 February 2009.

⁶⁰ Crisis Group interview, senior European official, Istanbul, January 2009.

⁶¹ Speech, Chatham House, London, 3 April 2009. See www.chathamhouse.org.uk/events.

⁶² Minsk Group co-chair Bernard Fassinier of France said Armenia and Azerbaijan “have never been so close to an agreement”. Speech in Vienna, 24 March 2009.

⁶³ Azerbaijan maintains that “the road, passing Lachin, should be open for the equal and mutual use of both parties ... [to] guarantee normal, safe and stable functioning of this transport communication”. “Once more about position of Azerbaijan on resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict”, *Today.az* (Azerbaijan), 15 May 2008, at <http://today.az/news/politics/44990.html>.

⁶⁴ “They have to do something. Maybe pull back from one square kilometre, a few villages, then announce a timetable. Even if they are lying”. Crisis Group interview, Hasan Kanbolat, director of the Middle East Strategic Research Centre (Ortadoğu Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi – ORSAM), Ankara, 23 December 2009.

establish a security regime with the deployment of international peacekeepers and carry out withdrawal of Armenian forces from Azerbaijani occupied territories.

III. THE BURDENS OF CONFLICTING HISTORIES

Modern Turkey and modern Armenia were both born of the convulsions produced by the First World War and its aftermath, in particular the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Armenian suffering was extraordinary even by the standards of the times, with some one million deaths in a short period as a result of the Ottoman actions that Armenians demand be recognised as genocide. Turkey rejects the term, which has potential legal consequences, and calls the events unplanned massacres with killings on both sides.⁶⁵ Both peoples bear scars and trauma from this period, and the unresolved nature of this history makes them feel still threatened by the other.

A. GENOCIDE OR GREAT CATASTROPHE?

Recent years have seen increasing convergence on the factual details of the 1915 events among independent academics and even officials of the two sides. Turks and Armenians agree that many Armenians died in the Ottoman Empire in the course of the forced relocations and massacres that occurred during the First World War – at least 300,000 according to Turkish official accounts, 1.5 million according to the official Armenian version. There is consensus that Armenian deaths resulted from a mixture of massacre, exhaustion and disease, with authors from both sides increasingly using the figure of one million dead.⁶⁶ Another sign of convergence is use of the term *Büyük Felaket* (“Great Catastrophe”) by Turkish intellectuals in their December 2008 Internet apology campaign (see below). While short of “genocide”, this is a translation of the Arme-

⁶⁵ Crisis Group is not a specialist in Ottoman or genocide studies, and its purpose is not to record a definitive history. Rather, Crisis Group has attempted to collect the arguments of different people about the many narratives and debates, put them in a contemporary political context and show where they influence Turkey-Armenia relations.

⁶⁶ See Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* (New York, 2006); and Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (Oxford 2005). Ara Sarafian, Director of the independent London-based Gomidas Institute, believes one million may be correct; his analysis of the recent publication of Talat Pasha’s diaries indicates that the Ottoman state counted the official number of “missing” as 800,000-900,000. Ara Sarafian, “Talaat Pasha’s Black Book documents his campaign of race extermination 1915-17”, *The Armenian Reporter*, 14 March 2009. See also Sabrina Tavernise, “Nearly a million genocide victims, covered in a cloak of amnesia”, *The New York Times*, 9 March 2009.

nian *Mets Yeghern*, frequently used by Armenians to describe the 1915 events.⁶⁷

Among elites there also tends to be convergence on the basic narrative. On 24 April 1915, a day before the massive British-French assault on the Gallipoli peninsula south of Istanbul, the government closed Armenian political organisations in the Ottoman capital and arrested 235 Armenian intellectuals and leaders.⁶⁸ Most were killed, and 24 April is now the day Armenians and many others mark as Genocide Memorial Day. On 27 May 1915, the Ottoman Empire decided to forcibly transfer the bulk of Armenians in central and eastern Anatolia to new locations.⁶⁹ According to the Armenian foreign ministry website, this was followed by:

Massacres, deportations and death marches made up of women, children and the elderly into the Syrian deserts. During those marches hundreds of thousands were killed by Turkish soldiers, gendarmes and Kurdish mobs. Others died because of famine, epidemic diseases and exposure to the elements.⁷⁰

In Turkey, the language might be different, stressing Turkish losses in the same period, but few would dispute this outline,⁷¹ including that many died.⁷² As Abdullah Gül put it when foreign minister, “local hatred and

revenge feelings caused some attacks towards the convoys during the transfer process”.⁷³ A key difference in the two narratives is where to assign blame for the horrors. Many Turks accuse Armenians of being a kind of fifth column, supporting and being supported by Russia, Britain and France and intent on creating their own state in the heart of Anatolia. Most Armenians consider that the victims were loyal citizens, relocated or killed to make room for Muslim refugees from other parts of the disintegrating empire and make possible the creation of an ethnically pure Turkic state.

1. Legal definitions

The main area of disagreement is about whether the Ottoman government intended to kill the Armenians because they were Armenian, which is the key trigger of whether the events should be called a genocide, a term first defined by the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

That convention defines genocide as “any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) killing members of that group; (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group”.⁷⁴ An independent legal assessment of the applicability of the convention to the Armenian case, commissioned by the respected International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), concluded:

No legal, financial or territorial claim arising out of the Events [of 1915] could successfully be made against any individual or state under the Convention ... [but] the Events, viewed collectively, can thus be said to include all of the elements of the crime of genocide as defined in the Convention, and legal scholars as well as historians, politicians, journalists and other people would be justified in continuing to so describe them.⁷⁵

This opinion gave both sides something of what they wanted: the Turkish side was reassured that there could be no retroactive application of the legal sanctions of

⁶⁷The Armenian word *yeghern* specifically means “man-made catastrophe”, while the Turkish *felaket* is more general.

⁶⁸The exact figure is from then Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül, speech to Turkish Grand National Assembly, 13 April 2005. “I cannot explain [the arrests]. It’s a tragedy. There are some faults ... [the trouble is] that probably only one or two of the 550 members of the assembly know exactly what happened on 24 April”. Crisis Group interview, General (ret.) Haldun Solmaztürk, Ankara, February 2009.

⁶⁹The measure was “a defensive transfer [of] the Armenians who live in war areas to the Ottoman territories in the south”. Gül speech to Turkish Grand National Assembly, op. cit.

⁷⁰See “What is Genocide”, link under “Genocide” at www.armeniaforeignministry.com.

⁷¹“I don’t question what happened in eastern Anatolia. Many officers wrote about it in their memoirs. Many of their accounts were sympathetic to the Armenians...They probably knew that many would die [in the relocations]. But it was only to move them away from where they could assist the Russians...I personally believe they were killed by the local tribes ... everyone knew they had money on them...There is no evidence of [state] intent to kill. Turks are fierce in battle. But [the accusation of planned genocide] is too much”. Crisis Group interview, General (ret.) Haldun Solmaztürk, Ankara, February 2009.

⁷²“There was a lot of loss of life. We regret that. Most people can agree on this”. Crisis Group interview, Ibrahim Kalın, director, Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (Siyaset, Ekonomi ve Toplum Araştırmaları Vakfı – SETAV), Ankara, 19 February 2009.

⁷³President Gül, speech to Turkish Grand National Assembly, 13 April 2005.

⁷⁴www.un.org/millennium/law/iv-1.htm.

⁷⁵The study was done on the basis of a memorandum of understanding with the Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission in 2002. Available at www.ictj.org.

the convention in terms of reparations or territorial claims. The Armenian side felt justified in its assertion that the events of 1915 included all the elements of what today would be called a genocide. An element of doubt remained, however about the applicability of one of the four elements set out by the study.⁷⁶ Did the Ottoman government as such – as opposed to individual soldiers, officials or other actors – intend to destroy the Armenians in whole or in part because they were Armenians? The study found that:

The most reasonable conclusion to draw from the various accounts of the Events is that at least some of the perpetrators of the Events knew that the consequence of their actions would be the destruction, in whole or in part, of the Armenians of eastern Anatolia, as such, or acted purposively towards this goal, and, therefore, possessed the requisite genocidal intent.

But it added that “the crucial issue of genocide intent is contested, and this legal memorandum is not intended to definitively resolve particular factual disputes”.⁷⁷

2. The Armenian view of the 1915 events

The Armenian description and factual analysis of what happened differs from the Turkish in a number of areas.⁷⁸ The Armenian government claims the basic decision was actually taken by the Young Turk government well before the First World War, in 1911,⁷⁹ that 300,000 Armenian men were conscripted, disarmed, killed or sent to the front lines to be killed at Gallipoli; that the Turkish argument Armenians had time to prepare for relocation is not true; that “thou-

sands of women and children were raped”; “tens of thousands were forcibly converted to Islam”; and that a “phase of the genocide [is] the total and utter denial by the Turkish government of the mass killings and elimination of the Armenian nation on its homeland”.⁸⁰

Armenian scholars have focused on historical texts, such as the British parliamentary “Blue Book” series⁸¹ and the memoirs of U.S. Ambassador Morgenthau,⁸² to defend their description of events. Turkey officially repudiates reports of mass killings published by the allies or their representatives as little more than war propaganda. But studies by the independent Armenian scholar Ara Sarafian challenge this view, demonstrating how the British “Blue Book” used meticulous sourcing methods and withheld some information that was published separately and confidentially in 1916 to protect informants like U.S. consular officers and missionaries then still living in the Ottoman Empire. Similarly, Morgenthau’s published volume coincided with his private accounts and was based on substantial evidence that stands up to scientific scrutiny today.⁸³

Armenia argues that failure to recognise a genocide makes “possible the recurrence of new such crimes in the world”.⁸⁴ According to its national security concept, “Armenia aspires for the universal recognition and condemnation, including by Turkey, of the Armenian Genocide, and sees it both as a restoration of an historical justice and as a way to improve the overall situation in the region, while also preventing similar crimes in the future”.⁸⁵ Armenia officially portrays Turkish denial as a “phase of genocide”.⁸⁶ Turkey tends

⁷⁶“(i) The perpetrator killed one or more persons; (ii) such person or persons belonged to a particular national, ethnic, racial or religious group; (iii) the perpetrator intended to destroy, in whole or in part, that group, as such; and (iv) the conduct took place in the context of a manifest pattern of similar conduct directed against that group or was conduct that could itself effect such destruction”. See *ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ According to the website of the Armenian foreign ministry, www.armeniaforeignministry.com.

⁷⁹ The Committee of Union and Progress, a political organisation popularly known as the Young Turks, led a regime that seized power in the Ottoman Empire in a 1908 coup. It aimed at first to reform the empire on a multi-ethnic basis, but the experiment ended with severe defeats in the 1912-1913 Balkan Wars amid great loss of territory and the arrival of hundreds of thousands of Muslim refugees. In 1913, a triumvirate among the Young Turks led by Enver Pasha, Talat Pasha and Jemal Pasha seized power in another coup, led the empire into the First World War on Germany’s side and remained in power until 1918.

⁸⁰ Taken from “What is Genocide”, www.armeniaforeignministry.com.

⁸¹ James Bryce and Arnold Toynbee, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915-16: Documents Presented to Viscount Grey of Fallodon by Viscount Bryce* (London, 1916).

⁸² Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau’s Story* (New York, 1918).

⁸³ “Toynbee rejected strong material whose source he could not pin down. Just because it may have been useful propaganda does not mean it was untrue”. Crisis Group interview, Ara Sarafian, London, 2 March 2009. See also Ara Sarafian’s uncensored edition of *James Bryce and Arnold Toynbee, op. cit.*, and his *United States Diplomacy on the Bosphorus: The Diaries of Ambassador Morgenthau, 1913-1916* (Princeton and London, 2004).

⁸⁴ “The denial of the Genocide by today’s Turkey, twisting of the facts and the efforts to silence those who admit the fact of the Genocide, do not contribute to the stability in the region; moreover, they make possible the recurrence of new such crimes in the world”. Speech by President Robert Kocharian, 24 April 2006, Bulletin no. 2 (17), Armenian Embassy in UK, March-April-May 2006.

⁸⁵ www.mil.am/eng/index.php?page=49.

⁸⁶ See “Genocide” at www.armeniaforeignministry.com.

to underestimate the extent to which Armenians see “denial” as a threat.⁸⁷ Armenian nationalist discourse has woven together memories of 1915, the experience of forced expulsions from late-Soviet Azerbaijan, anti-Armenian violence in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Turkey’s long-standing denial of Armenian claims of a genocide as different expressions of the same anti-Armenian policies.⁸⁸

3. The Turkish view of the 1915 events

The Turkish response is multiple. At the deepest level, while increasing numbers of opinion-makers now publicly regret the deaths of very large numbers of Armenians during the First World War, Turks feel it is unjust to single out the Armenian tragedy when their own republic was built by the survivors of deportations, massacres and foreign invasions.⁸⁹ In the century to the foundation of the republic in 1923, at least two million and perhaps five million Muslims and Turks were killed as the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire came under attack and contracted to a quarter of their greatest extent.⁹⁰ Many Turks’ grandparents were born in now distant lands, fled with nothing and buried their traumas in silence. As then Foreign Minister Gül told the Turkish parliament in 2005:

It is correct that perhaps we have left some of the pages of our history vague. For example, during the last century of the Ottoman Empire, our next of kin who lived in the Balkans were forced to migrate from the territories in which they had lived for centuries. They faced massacres and other tragedies. There was the expulsion from the Caucasus to the

Ottoman territories. The hundreds of thousands of Turks or other Muslims who lost their lives during the First World War have not been spoken out about sufficiently in the world.... This is not due to a weakness. This has been done for a noble cause: by the establishment of the Republic ... it was assumed that a new page had been turned, and the succeeding generations should be brought up in the future, not with the sufferings of the past but with expectations of a bright friendship full of peace.⁹¹

Turkey disputes Armenian allegations on other levels. Officials and many intellectuals believe that there is no proof of overall Ottoman government intent to destroy all or part of the Armenian people because they were Armenian;⁹² that longstanding, specifically anti-Armenian planning of wholesale demographic change is unproven;⁹³ that the further from effective Ottoman control the events took place, the more Armenians were killed;⁹⁴ that the role of external powers like Britain, France and Russia in attacking the Ottoman Empire and provoking internal revolts should be taken into account; that the Armenians had taken up arms on the side of the invading Russian army in foreign-backed revolt;⁹⁵ that the Armenian claim of 1.5 million killed is overstated; that foreign legislatures’ interest in formally recognising the events as genocide is mostly a response to internal politics and pressure from the Armenian diaspora, not respect for the historical facts or even the records in their own archives; and that using the word genocide implies an unfair equivalence between the chaotic death throes of the Ottoman Empire and

⁸⁷ Crisis Group interviews, former senior Armenian foreign ministry official, Yerevan, January-February 2009.

⁸⁸ “[Lack of recognition] is a festering wound, an idea that something is going to happen to you. It’s one thing that fuels the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict”. Crisis Group interview, hard-line Armenian-American lobbyist, Washington, February 2009.

⁸⁹ This continued to modern times. In 1989, 350,000 ethnic Turks were expelled or fled in one year from communist Bulgaria to Turkey. Similarly, 725,000 Azeris lost their homes in the Armenian conquest of Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding areas in 1988-1992. “We do not deny that there have been tragic things ... what we say is that maybe Armenians suffered more than most, but how do you explain for instance that there’s hardly a Muslim left in Crete? The only focus [in the Ottoman Empire’s collapse] is on the great Armenian tragedy. Even the most rational Turk feels hurt by this”. Crisis Group interview, senior Turkish official, February 2009.

⁹⁰ An academic sympathetic to Turkey puts the figure at five million. Justin McCarthy, *Death and Exile: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821-1922* (London, 1996). More neutral scholars of the Ottoman Empire estimate the number at two million or more.

⁹¹ Gül, speech, op. cit.

⁹² Gül said approximately 1,390 people who harmed the Armenian convoys and disobeyed government instructions were tried and punished, showing it was unlikely the Ottomans intended to “annihilate the Armenians”. Ibid.

⁹³ “One has to establish a direct link ... that the demographic planning was a motive behind the policy. I’m very skeptical about this...it cannot explain the timing of the deportations. This demographic argument is in a way a substitute for a blueprint [of genocidal intent]”. German historian Hilmar Kaiser, interviewed by *Today’s Zaman*, 22 March 2009.

⁹⁴ Where “state authority was high”, attacks were “very limited”. Gül, speech, op. cit.

⁹⁵ The Armenians “stabbed the Ottoman Empire in the back”. Ibid. U.S. historian Bernard Lewis, a supporter of Turkey’s position that there was no evidence of intention to commit genocide, has said, “many Armenians viewed the Russians as their liberators ... in 1914, the Russians set up four big units of Ottoman Armenian volunteers, some of whom were well-known public personalities”. Statement in *Le Monde*, 1 January 1994. There is no evidence, however, for a common claim in Turkish media that as many Turks and Muslims died as Armenians.

the deliberately planned and six times more murderous Nazi holocaust of Jews and others in Europe.⁹⁶

Turkey also argues that no “Armenian policy” was uniformly applied. Killings took place under some Ottoman administrators, while others protected Armenians.⁹⁷ After the 24 April 1915 blow against the Armenian elite in Istanbul, Armenians in the empire’s two biggest cities, Istanbul and Izmir, were by and large not relocated in this period. Public vilification was not comparable to that orchestrated by the Nazis against the Jews. Some Armenians were not killed and were resettled away from the front lines, as the Ottoman forced relocation law stipulated.⁹⁸

4. Aftershocks and the ASALA murders

Armenia-Turkey relations continue to be overshadowed by the question of whether the Republic of Turkey bears legal responsibility for the misdeeds of the Ottoman Empire. Both Turks and Armenians sometimes appear to view modern Turkey as responsible for the empire’s acts in 1915 and sometimes not. Academics have no clear opinion.⁹⁹ The choice often appears to hinge on whether or not the maker of the statement wants to put history to rest.

Continuity from the Ottoman Empire weighs heavy on Turkish minds partly because of the possibility of Armenian claims on Turkish territory or for reparations and the question of ownership of large amounts of property abandoned by Armenians during the forced relocations (see below). In addition to modern Turkey’s different narrative about the events of 1915, this is one reason republican Ankara has chosen to defend Ottoman

actions in relocating the Armenians during the First World War.¹⁰⁰

On the Armenia side, 300 intellectuals who sent President Gül an open letter in November 2008 asserted that “denying the Armenian genocide” could end efforts at Turkey-Armenia reconciliation, since “the present Turkish state has inherited the responsibility for the act”.¹⁰¹ Former President Kocharian said, “Ottoman Turkey and its successor carry full responsibility for that crime”.¹⁰² But senior Armenian officials, seeking to reach out to Turkey, take a more nuanced view.¹⁰³

The perception of continuity has some dark consequences. Between 1973 and 1985, 45 attacks were carried out on Turkish targets, interests and diplomatic missions worldwide by Armenian terrorists, mostly associated with the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA), the Armenian New Resistance Organisation or the Armenian Genocide Justice Committee. The attacks, including one at Orly Airport in Paris that killed eight, resulted in 56 deaths, ten of which were of third-country nationals, and many more injuries.¹⁰⁴

That 30 of the dead were Turkish diplomats, their family members and diplomatic staff produced a serious impact on the foreign ministry, a relatively small institution of about 1,000. Flak jackets hung behind most diplomats’ doors, and a siege mentality took root that is still in evidence today, since diplomats who lived through that period are now in senior posts. A memorial stone dominates the entrance of the foreign ministry, several of whose conference halls are named after the murdered diplomats. ASALA was broken up in the mid-1980s,

⁹⁶The Armenian foreign ministry website, for instance, uses Nazi vocabulary in stating there was an Ottoman plan for a “final solution”. Diaspora organisations also equate the two. “If we sit down and talk today, it would be like Jews having a dialogue with Holocaust deniers”. Crisis Group interview, hardline Armenian-American lobbyist, Washington, 5 February 2009.

⁹⁷For instance, an Ottoman governor gave food and tents to arrivals at the reception camps in Deir al-Zor in today’s northern Syria, while a subsequent governor staged massacres. Crisis Group email communication, Ara Sarafian, director, Gomidas Institute, 20 March 2009.

⁹⁸Crisis Group interview, Ara Sarafian, director, Gomidas Institute, London, 2 March 2009.

⁹⁹“Turkey, as a new state, is not the successor state of the Empire in legal terms. But she did not (or could not) refuse the legacy of the Ottoman Empire such as the Empire’s debts and allegations concerning Armenian mass-killings”. Crisis Group email communication, Zühtü Arslan, constitutional lawyer, 25 March 2009.

¹⁰⁰A former Turkish ambassador contends it is unfair to search for someone to blame long after the perpetrators and their regime have passed away: “The Armenians sought a new culprit.... Turkey is to be held responsible for ‘genocide’ because it denies this”. Ömer Lutem, “Not only the Ottomans but also Turkey is being accused”, www.eraren.org, 28 April 2006.

¹⁰¹Published in Armenian in *Aravo*, Yerevan, 9 December 2008.

¹⁰²Speech by President Robert Kocharian, op. cit.

¹⁰³“There is perhaps a fear ... that they will be held responsible for those events. I cannot repeat this often enough: Armenians are able to distinguish between the perpetrators and today’s Turkey. But Turks themselves must be willing to do what is morally right and reject and denounce the crimes of the Ottoman Empire. Otherwise, today’s denial means implicit endorsement or acceptance of those past crimes”. Former Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanian, interview with Armenia TV, 24 April 2006.

¹⁰⁴The dead included citizens of France (four), Italy (two), Canada, the U.S., Sweden and Yugoslavia (one each). For details see Turkey’s culture ministry website, www.kultur.gov.tr, and follow links under “History”.

but no significant Armenian organisation or institution has ever voiced contrition for its actions.¹⁰⁵

B. TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY, RESTITUTION AND REPARATIONS

Turkish authorities and public opinion are worried that any recognition of the 1915 events as genocide would trigger a flood of territorial and financial compensation claims. Armenian diaspora leaders insist on leaving the issue of future territorial claims ambiguous,¹⁰⁶ as do some leaders in Armenia.¹⁰⁷ Individual Armenians are active in pursuit of territorial claims and reparations, with or without recognition of genocide.¹⁰⁸ In the words of Giro Manoyan, the ARF party's foreign policy spokesman, the "Armenian official position is that the issue [of territorial claims] is not on our foreign policy agenda. That means it can be on the agenda tomorrow".¹⁰⁹

Turkish sensitivities run deep due to the fact that U.S. President Woodrow Wilson promoted the idea that a large swathe of north-eastern Turkey should be granted

to a new Armenian republic after the First World War. This was part of the never-ratified 1920 Treaty of Sèvres by which the victors of that conflict sought to carve up the remains of the Ottoman Empire. The Turkish war of independence recovered the territory for the current republic, but Turks have never forgotten this Western ambition. A map of the promised "Wilsonian Armenia" hangs over the fireplace in the meeting room of the hardline Armenian National Committee of America's Washington DC office.

The issue also arises in Turkey partly because of an indirect reference to eastern Turkey as "Western Armenia" in Armenia's 1990 declaration of independence¹¹⁰ and the frequent use in official Armenian heraldry of the image of Mount Ararat, which was fixed within the Turkish republic by the Treaty of Kars.¹¹¹ Armenians have revered the peak since ancient times, and on clear days the mountain is the central feature of Yerevan's skyline.

But Turkey mainly fears that claims on territory and reparations may arise from any recognition of the 1915 events as genocide.¹¹² Some believe formal genocide recognition could possibly give rise to civil class action suits.¹¹³ The deputy speaker of the Armenian parliament, an ARF member, filed a motion in 2008 for a resolution in the Council of Europe parliamentary assembly calling on Turkey "to make restitution appropriate for a

¹⁰⁵ ASALA's official goals were to win genocide recognition, reparations and territory from Turkey. "Understanding that the world did not want to recognise and remember [the killings of Armenians in 1915], they decided to take up the path of terror to remind the world of it". Crisis Group email communication, Armenian civil society activist, April 2009.

¹⁰⁶ "The loss of two thirds of our population, our cultural heritage, our economic self-sufficiency, our churches, these are the consequences borne on the Armenian side. There should be an equitable way to address those consequences. There's a difference between a conflict and a crime, and as far as we're concerned, there is a crime. Turkey should accept a dialogue on the consequences. You have to make an attempt to compensate for lives, for land, for property, for opportunity costs". Crisis Group interview, hardline Armenian-American lobbyist, Washington, February 2009.

¹⁰⁷ Former Armenian President Robert Kocharian said Turkish recognition of Armenian genocide claims would not result in Armenia laying out territorial claims but added "what legal consequences that [a genocide recognition] would have, is an issue for future presidents and future political officials.... We should now consistently struggle for the recognition of the Genocide. Regarding the second segment of that issue, the less we talk about it now, the better for us". See Harut Sassounian, "What did Kocharian actually say about demanding territories from Turkey?", *The California Courier*, 21 July 2005.

¹⁰⁸ "Our land claims are not based on genocide [and cannot be undone by opening the border]. Turkey is occupying Armenia [and defies] Armenian rightful claims to the territory of Western Armenia". Crisis Group interview, retired Armenian ambassador and historian Ara Papian, Yerevan, January 2009.

¹⁰⁹ "Dashnaks insist on territorial claims to Turkey", *Armenia Liberty*, 27 January 2006.

¹¹⁰ "The Republic of Armenia stands in support of the task of achieving international recognition of the 1915 Genocide in Ottoman Turkey and Western Armenia". Article 11, Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Armenia, 23 August 1990. However the declaration of independence was explicitly intended to be an interim document until there was a new constitution. The latter document, adopted on 5 July 1995, made no reference to "Western Armenia". It also stipulates: "The coat of arms of the Republic of Armenia depicts, in the center on a shield, Mount Ararat with Noah's ark and the coats of arms of the four kingdoms of historical Armenia". Mount Ararat was inside the Democratic Republic of Armenia (1918-1920), and its image was the central feature of its coat of arms. It was also the main symbol of Armenia in the Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Republic (1922-1936) and the Soviet Republic of Armenia (1937-1991).

¹¹¹ "Sometimes as a career infantry officer, I feel threatened. Any move that would show that [Armenia] is not interested in any territorial gains would be greatly beneficial. Even such a statement at the right level would do it". Crisis Group interview, General (ret.) Haldun Solmaztürk, Ankara, February 2009.

¹¹² "There is a suspicion that more would come, territory, reparations, this we can't swallow". Crisis Group interview, senior Turkish official, Ankara, February 2009.

¹¹³ Crisis Group interview, David Phillips, former facilitator, Turkey-Armenia Reconciliation Commission, New York, 3 February 2009.

European country”¹¹⁴ One of the draft resolutions that came closest to passing the U.S. Congress, House Resolution 596 in 2000, contained language that seemed to go further than simple recognition of genocide. In Section 2, Article 32, it commended the possibility of the “recovery of Armenian assets from the genocide period held by the Imperial Ottoman Bank”¹¹⁵.

But the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide does not allow retroactive claims against people or states.¹¹⁶ A lack of international support for such claims was underlined by the European Parliament in 1987, which resolved that “the present Turkey cannot be held responsible for the tragedy experienced by the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire and stresses that neither political nor legal or material claims against present-day Turkey can be derived from the recognition of this historical event as an act of genocide”.

Turkey’s former ambassador to Moscow, Volkan Vural, suggested in his personal capacity that Turkey’s parliament should restore citizenship to any Armenians or their descendants who were dispossessed or deported and offer symbolic compensation, such as long-term loans for those who want to return.¹¹⁷ A senior Armenian official said that individuals might make claims on Turkish territory, but politicians could not; and that the best kind of reparations would be non-monetary, such as free access for Armenia to Turkish ports.¹¹⁸

C. INTERNATIONAL GENOCIDE RESOLUTIONS

In the past decade, governments and legislatures of more than twenty countries, as well as a number of international organisations, have issued a variety of motions or statements recognising the events of 1915 as genocide.¹¹⁹ These include the parliaments of several of Turkey’s 27 fellow NATO members, of several of the 27 EU states, the European Parliament and the Russian legislature.¹²⁰ Prominent media increasingly assert without qualification that the events of 1915 were genocide, including, since 2004, *The New York Times*.

Leaders of Armenian diaspora organisations believe that their campaigns for legislative genocide recognition lie behind Turkey’s reassessment of its Armenian history over the past decade.¹²¹ Top Armenian officials agree.¹²² However, factors that have arguably been more important for this reassessment include access to credible new information as well as advancing democratisation in Turkey and its rising sense of security.

Previous legislative action has also had the effect of making Ankara block contacts with the country in question, fanning Turkish nationalism and souring public opinion against intellectuals who try to reassess the question.¹²³ Turkish resentment of outside pressure can result in delays, as it did in the convening of a key

¹¹⁴ Available under “Working documents” at <http://assembly.coe.int>.

¹¹⁵ Reparations could also lie behind Section 3, Article 1, calling for the U.S. to show “appropriate understanding” concerning the failure to enforce the convictions of Turkish officials by the 1919 tribunals.

¹¹⁶ “No legal, financial or territorial claim arising out of the Events could successfully be made against any individual or state under the Convention”. ICTJ study, op. cit.

¹¹⁷ “I regret these events have happened. I don’t think they should be labelled a genocide. But the amount of damage done is enormous, and we should apologise [although legally any compensation] would not be as a reparation”. Crisis Group interview, Volkan Vural, former Turkish ambassador, 24 February 2009. Vural said the same gesture was due to other minorities, such as ethnic Greeks forced to leave Turkey involuntarily during the republican period.

¹¹⁸ Crisis Group interview, Yerevan, February 2009.

¹¹⁹ Crisis Group interview, hardline Armenian-American lobbyist, Washington DC, February 2009. Lists available on www.anca.org/genocide/recognition.php, www.armeniaforeignministry.com and www.mfa.gov.tr.

¹²⁰ These include France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Cyprus, Lithuania, Sweden, Slovakia, Belgium, Greece and Austria. See Görgülü, “Türkiye-Ermenistan İlişkileri”, op. cit., pp. 20-21.

¹²¹ “If we had not raised the issue it would have died ... and if the U.S. president recognises the genocide, you’ll see a migration in the thinkocracy towards recognition”. Crisis Group interview, hardline Armenian-American lobbyist, Washington, February 2009.

¹²² “Ten years of international recognition of the genocide has helped Turkey come to terms with its past. Today [denial makes it] more and more isolated”. Crisis Group interview, senior government official, Yerevan, February 2009. “Genocide recognition around the world made public opinion start to ask questions. It opened the road for the intellectuals. Because of the recognition campaign, they get space from the government”. Crisis Group interview, Armenian diplomat, March 2009.

¹²³ “After our government passed the genocide recognition law, Turkey just didn’t talk to us at all for two years”. Crisis Group interview, Canadian official, January 2009.

academic conference in 2005.¹²⁴ Turkish officials fear a similar reaction could derail current efforts at Turkey-Armenia reconciliation.¹²⁵

Amid growing debate about the moral value of such legislation,¹²⁶ some countries have tried to avoid the controversy. The UK has said it does not believe genocide is a fair description of the events.¹²⁷ Israel also avoids the term.¹²⁸ France had a change of heart, when anti-denial laws multiplied after the passing of the Gayssot law in 1990 against denial of the Nazi holocaust.¹²⁹ Later legislation recognised Armenian geno-

cide and slavery as a crime against humanity (both 2001) and affirmed the beneficial effects of French colonialism (passed in 2005, struck down in 2006).¹³⁰ French intellectuals criticised the restrictive tendency.¹³¹ In 2008, the French government ruled out introducing to the senate a bill passed in 2006 by the lower house of parliament that would have penalised genocide denial and urged instead an end to all such memorial laws.¹³²

Those who wish to persuade Turkey that new attitudes are warranted need to recognise that information pushed by outsiders has little chance of achieving this, and that its citizens are more likely to accept the validity of information and arguments advanced by the country's own elites. As the Armenian-French commentator Michel Marian put it, "Turkey should find its own way to recognising its role".¹³³

¹²⁴ In this case Turkish nationalists stirred up the public reaction internally, but the effect was the same.

¹²⁵ Crisis Group interview, Turkish officials, Ankara, March 2009.

¹²⁶ "In Switzerland, you get prosecuted for saying that the terrible thing that happened to the Armenians in the last years of the Ottoman empire was not a genocide. In Turkey, you get prosecuted for saying it was. What is state-ordained truth in the Alps is state-ordained falsehood in Anatolia.... For people to face up to these things, they have to know about them in the first place. So these subjects must be taught in schools as well as publicly commemorated. But before they are taught, they must be researched. The evidence must be uncovered, checked and sifted, and various possible interpretations tested against it. It's this process of historical research and debate that requires complete freedom – subject only to tightly drawn laws of libel and slander, designed to protect living persons but not governments, states or national pride". Timothy Garton Ash, "The freedom of historical debate is under attack by the memory police", *The Guardian* (UK), 16 October 2008.

¹²⁷ Bulgaria, Denmark and Sweden have also explicitly rejected categorising the 1915 events as genocide, agreeing with Turkey that the issue should be left to historians. A UK government response in 2007 to an inquiry, while condemning the deaths, stated: "Neither this Government nor previous British Governments have judged that the evidence is sufficiently unequivocal to persuade us that these events should be categorised as genocide as defined by the 1948 UN Convention on Genocide, a convention which is, in any event, not retrospective in application". See www.number10.gov.uk/Page13999.

¹²⁸ "We reject attempts to create a similarity between the Holocaust and the Armenian allegations. Nothing similar to the Holocaust occurred. It is a tragedy what the Armenians went through but not a genocide". Shimon Peres, then Israeli foreign minister, interview by the *Turkish Daily News*, 10 April 2001.

¹²⁹ "Parliamentarians have said they'll avoid this kind of law ... these memorial laws are new, from the 1990s and 2000s, but the more we make laws, the harder it is to write history [not to mention possible hypocrisy relating to French issues] like slavery, colonialism and the role of the French authorities in the Jewish holocaust. The parliamentarians see it should be left to the historians". Crisis Group interview, Michel Braud, international secretary of the Socialist Party, Paris, November 2008.

¹³⁰ U.S. historian Bernard Lewis was sentenced under another law to a nominal fine and costs for arguing in a *Le Monde* interview that the word genocide was not applicable to the Armenian case. For the 21 June 1995 judgement (in French), see www.voltairenet.org/article14133.html.

¹³¹ "History must not be a slave to contemporary politics nor can it be written on the command of competing memories. In a free state, no political authority has the right to define historical truth and to restrain the freedom of the historian with the threat of penal sanctions". From the Appel de Blois, a signature campaign first published by French historian Pierre Nora in *Le Monde*, 11 October 2008.

¹³² The majority of the lower house had been absent when the bill passed, 106-19. "The duty of memory is not just to the past. We have responsibility to the future as well.... Turkey must lead the debate and reconcile itself with its past; but one cannot reconcile oneself on one's own. Furthermore, a new dynamic has emerged in favour of dialogue with Armenia...only this dialogue can heal the wounds of the past... the government [and] parliament should not legislate about history, something that it is up to historians to write and interpret". Statement by French Interior Minister Alain Marleix, 2 December 2008.

¹³³ Crisis Group interview, Paris, November 2008.

IV. EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

Even though ultimately Turkey and Armenia alone will decide whether and how to normalise their relations and address the past, they are influenced by the U.S., Russia and Azerbaijan. The U.S. has overall been very supportive of Turkish-Armenian reconciliation, but possible recognition of the 1915 events as genocide by Congress or the new president could well stall the talks and damage Turkey-U.S. relations. Russia has historically sought to limit Ottoman and Turkish influence in the Caucasus but today has excellent relations with both Armenia and Turkey and seems to at least tacitly accept better Armenia-Turkey ties and the opening of the border. Azerbaijan plays a special role and can affect the rapprochement because of the extremely close historical, cultural, political and economic ties it has with Turkey. The EU and its member states have little influence on the bilateral relationship.

A. THE CRITICAL U.S. ROLE

Armenian-Americans and their organisations are determined to achieve U.S. recognition of the events of 1915 as a genocide (42 state legislatures have already done so) and particularly the use by the U.S. president of that term in the annual 24 April statement. This year is considered particularly significant, because President Obama made forceful campaign pledges to recognise. But many presidential candidates have promised during campaigns to acknowledge an Armenian genocide and then have fallen back on circumlocutions. Ronald Reagan was the only serving U.S. president to use the term genocide, in an April 1981 speech, reflecting the strength of California's Armenian diaspora community.¹³⁴

There are signs that the Obama administration has decided to improve the Bush administration's mostly difficult relationship with Turkey. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton carried messages to Ankara in March that clearly signalled a desire to cooperate in the region. On 6 April Obama made Turkey the first Muslim-majority country he has visited as president and steered wisely between his past support for recognition of an Armenian genocide and his wish to build ties to Turkey and support Turkey-Armenia normalisation.¹³⁵ Turkey

would prefer almost any language from Obama short of the term genocide, including strong wording such as President George W. Bush employed in his first 24 April declaration, in 2001.¹³⁶

The U.S. Congress, where a resolution to recognise the Armenian genocide was once again introduced as House Resolution 252 on 17 March 2009, may be a different matter.¹³⁷ Supporters say the resolution is about enshrining a moral position, though this is not how it is perceived by Turks, who note that the Congress has never used similar language regarding the history of native Americans.¹³⁸ Instead of making Turks reconsider their history, such a resolution could be expected to reinforce nationalists' perception that their country is the victim of the story. Many Democratic Party legislators are not likely to deliberately confront Obama on the issue,¹³⁹ and support for such a resolution appears significantly less than when the last such attempt was made in 2007.¹⁴⁰ Turkey cannot,

those negotiations which are moving forward and could bear fruit very quickly, very soon. And so as a consequence, what I want to do is not focus on my views right now but focus on the views of the Turkish and the Armenian people. If they can move forward and deal with a difficult and tragic history, then I think the entire world should encourage them". Barack Obama, news conference, Ankara, 6 April 2009.

¹³⁶ "Today marks the commemoration of one of the great tragedies of history: the forced exile and annihilation of approximately 1.5 million Armenians in the closing years of the Ottoman Empire. These infamous killings darkened the 20th century and continue to haunt us to this day. Today, I join Armenian-Americans and the Armenian community abroad to mourn the loss of so many innocent lives. I ask all Americans to reflect on these terrible events". Statement, 24 April 2001.

¹³⁷ The latest version of the so-called "genocide resolution" introduced in the House of Representatives is H. Res. 252, introduced on 17 March 2009 by Rep. Adam Schiff of California. See www.thomas.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c111:H.RES.252

¹³⁸ "Is what happened to the native Americans genocide? I'd say it probably was. Have we, would we ever say it was genocide in Congress? No!" Crisis Group interview, U.S. senatorial staffer, Ankara, February 2008. The U.S. Senate passed a resolution in 2008 apologising to native Americans for mistreatment but offered no restitution. The Congress apologised for "grave injustice" during the Second World War internment of citizens of Japanese origin in the 1988 Civil Liberties Act and did offer restitution.

¹³⁹ "We don't want to put bombs in Obama's path". Crisis Group interview, Congressional staffer, Washington, February 2009.

¹⁴⁰ By April 13, 2009, H. Res. 252 had only garnered support from 93 House members, significantly less than the 217 required to pass and much fewer than the 212 sponsors who supported a similar measure in 2007. At its peak, the 2007 effort, embodied in H. Res. 106, had support from 227 House Members. However, concern that a vote in favour would harm, among other things, U.S. access to the base in İncirlik,

¹³⁴ House Resolution 596 introduced on 27 September 2000 quoted candidate George Bush in 1988 as referring to "an attempted Armenian genocide" and candidate Bill Clinton as referring in 1992 to "the genocide of 1915".

¹³⁵ "My views are on the record, and I have not changed views.... I want to be as encouraging as possible around

however, count on Obama to block the resolution, as previous presidents have done. Indeed, the administration has apparently warned Ankara that it will not directly obstruct such moves in Congress.¹⁴¹

Nevertheless, the U.S. has repeatedly faced the test of balancing domestic political pressure from Armenian-American voters with its strategic interest in Turkey. There is, of course, an intellectual argument against legislating controversial matters of historical fact and interpretation. The current draft resolution asserts, for example, that 1.5 million Armenians “were killed” or subjected to “systematic and deliberate annihilation”, which is not a consensus figure or terminology among independent historians. It also asserts that Ottoman leader Jemal Pasha was “a chief organiser of the genocide”, whereas there are independent historians, including some of Armenian descent, who now say he actually saved Armenian lives.¹⁴²

Given how close Turkey and Armenia are to a breakthrough in their long-troubled relationship and the positive momentum evident in Turkish society generally, it would also be an act of statesmanship for U.S. lawmakers to resist the arguments of diaspora hardliners and refrain from staking out a position on genocide at this time.¹⁴³ A new upsurge of Turkish nationalist pressure would be deeply counterproductive, probably forcing the Ankara government to pull back from the compromises in the normalisation deal and negatively

affecting the process of Turkey’s own coming to terms with its history.¹⁴⁴

The U.S. also needs to weigh the strong likelihood that official recognition of genocide would whip up anti-American sentiment in Turkey and could harm considerable U.S. interests.¹⁴⁵ For example, Turkey could feel compelled by public opinion to deny further use of Incirlik air base, the transit point for 70 per cent of non-lethal U.S. supplies to Iraq and over 40 per cent of non-lethal supplies to Afghanistan.¹⁴⁶ Turkish Airlines’ \$12 billion order for aircraft might be reviewed, as could be Turkey’s participation in the new F-35 Joint Strike Fighter and upgrading of its F-16 fighters. Likewise, the U.S. could expect less cooperation on Middle Eastern issues, such as Iran, Afghanistan-Pakistan and Syria-Israel, in all of which Ankara has become an active, respected player in recent years.¹⁴⁷

Finally Armenian-Turkish normalisation should prompt the U.S. to upgrade its commitment to the OSCE’s Minsk Group, including work to raise the seniority of the U.S., Russian and French co-chairs, and to push for a final settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The real risk of renewed conflict continues to threaten Caucasus stability and international access to Caspian energy, but experience shows that the direct involvement of high-level officials including presidents – such as the clinching of the Moscow declaration in 2008 by

caused members to withdraw support, effectively scuttling the bill. For the first time, too, no resolution has been introduced in the Senate, where the move has never had majority support.

¹⁴¹ Crisis Group interviews, U.S. officials, Washington, March 2009.

¹⁴² German historian Hilmar Kaiser suggests Jemal Pasha was “the one person who saved most Armenians in World War I ... sometimes when he saw abuse of Armenian deportees, he just let the official be hanged on the spot”. Interview with *Today’s Zaman*, 22 March 2009. An independent Armenian scholar credits him with protecting up to 200,000 Armenians who arrived in western Syria. “They did not waste away or get massacred, as in Deir al-Zor and Mosul”. Crisis Group email communication, Ara Sarafian, director, Gomidas Institute, 20 March 2009.

¹⁴³ The chief of the Armenian parliament’s foreign affairs committee, ARF member Armen Rustamyan, wrote on 19 March 2009 to his U.S. counterpart, Howard Berman, that “I am confident that the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by the United States not only would not hamper, but on the contrary will contribute to the prospects of a thorough dialogue between Turkey and Armenia”.

¹⁴⁴ “If it passes, Turkey will do nothing for Armenia”. Crisis Group interview, leading Turkish commentator, Ankara, February 2009.

¹⁴⁵ When Canada’s parliament and prime minister endorsed the genocide label in 2004, Turkey froze political dialogue with its NATO ally for two years. Crisis Group interview, Canadian official, Istanbul, January 2009. A freeze on official visits and an end to French participation in defence contracts followed a similar resolution in the French National Assembly in 2001.

¹⁴⁶ Crisis Group interview, former Ambassador James H. Holmes, President of American Turkish Council, Washington, February 2009. “If the government does not close down Incirlik Airbase, the people will do so. That is not what I would like to see, but that is what a careless U.S. administration will see. Turks won’t let the Americans label our forefathers as “genocide perpetrators” without any historical insight and then continue to fly over this land”. Kerim Balci, “Pre-emptive gestures in Turkish-Armenian-Azerbaijani Triangle”, *Today’s Zaman*, 24 March 2009.

¹⁴⁷ Using the word genocide “will damage U.S-Turkish relations, and have a tremendous impact on Turkish domestic politics. The Turkish government will not be able do things that [the U.S.] may ask it to on a long list of issues – Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran... It’s easy to incite hatred. What is happening between Ankara and Yerevan will be gone”. Crisis Group interview, Ibrahim Kalin, director, Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research, Ankara, 19 February 2009.

Russia's President Medvedev – can bring the two sides toward agreement.¹⁴⁸

B. CONVINCING AZERBAIJAN

For years, Turkey-Armenia normalisation has been complicated by Turkey's close relationship with Azerbaijan and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Armenia's withdrawal from occupied Azerbaijani territories has long been Turkey's major stated precondition for opening the border and establishing diplomatic relations with Armenia, while Yerevan has complained that Turkish policies are a "hostage" to its relations with Azerbaijan.¹⁴⁹ Opinion makers in Turkey increasingly question Azerbaijan's veto on Turkey's opening of the Armenian border, saying this stance has brought no sign of settlement in Nagorno-Karabakh. However, Ankara's many interests in that country mean that it is doing its best to convince Baku that normalisation with Armenia is best for all parties.

1. Turkey shuffles priorities

The special relationship with Azerbaijan is based on strong trade relations, shared oil and gas pipelines and a sense of a common destiny in an ethnic, cultural and linguistic Turkic world.¹⁵⁰ Turkey found in Azerbaijan its most active partner in the initial flush of enthusiasm for the Turkic idea after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.¹⁵¹ The political element of this Turkic togeth-

erness has faded,¹⁵² but Turkish officials and public opinion still feel their default position should be to support Azerbaijan. Pressure also comes from an Azerbaijani lobby, based on establishment nationalists, some of whom have strong trading ties to Baku.

However, after fifteen years of loyally keeping the border closed, many in Turkey believe the time has come for a new approach.¹⁵³ Even back in 1992-1993, Ankara defied Azerbaijan to open supply lines to Armenia. A leading AK Party member of parliament said, "the Azeris are not happy. But we've told them the current status quo is not sustainable. We told them not to rely on the closed border as a permanent tool in their negotiation process".¹⁵⁴

The situation was radically different at the onset of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, when Turkey was one of the few countries to openly give Azerbaijan political, financial and diplomatic support.¹⁵⁵ Even then Süleyman Demirel, the prime minister, favoured a cautious policy so as not to escalate tensions with Russia or estrange Turkey from its NATO allies. The government came under pressure, as hundreds of thousands demonstrated in the streets demanding intervention on behalf of Azerbaijan after ethnic Armenian forces killed several hundred Azeri civilians in an attack on the Nagorno-Karabakh town of Khojaly in February 1992.¹⁵⁶ In May, after attacks against the Azerbaijani

¹⁴⁸ The Moscow declaration of 2 November 2008 brokered by Russian president Dmitry Medvedev came as the first document on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict signed by Armenia and Azerbaijan since the 1994 ceasefire. Although lacking specific prescriptions for solution of the conflict, the sides pledged "political settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict based on the principles of international law and the decisions and documents approved within this framework" and taking into consideration the OSCE proposals on basic principles made in Madrid in November 2007.

¹⁴⁹ "Your [Turkey's] resistance to open relations with Armenia is not based on the existence of our shared historic problems. Rather, relations between Turkey and Armenia are being held hostage to Armenia's own conflicts and tensions with Azerbaijan". Vardan Oskanian, then foreign minister of Armenia, speech in Istanbul, 2002. See www.armeniaforeignministry.com/speeches.

¹⁵⁰ "The relationship with Azerbaijan is as important to us as the relationship with the EU". Crisis Group interview, Turkish official, September 2008. Independent states with Turkic majorities are Turkey, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan; significant Turkic minorities live in at least another dozen countries.

¹⁵¹ The first government of Azerbaijan in 1992-1993 was led by Abulfaz Elchibey, an enthusiast for Turkic links.

¹⁵² There are regular meetings of officials of Turkic states, but these are rarely at the ministerial level and have not involved significant participation of the leaders for more than a decade. Turkish businessmen have a large presence in Baku and other Turkic capitals, and Turkey maintains strong bilateral relations with all five other Turkic majority states.

¹⁵³ "We have to distinguish between our bilateral relations and Nagorno-Karabakh. We should establish diplomatic relations and open borders. We've given [Azerbaijan] a long time. Their relations with Armenia are much deeper than ours. Turkish public opinion has a special relation with Azerbaijan, but we shouldn't have got ourselves in this position". Crisis Group interview, former Ambassador Volkan Vural, Istanbul, 24 February 2009. "Baku should realize that it can no longer take Turkey's partnership as a given, as it used to be for years". Hasan Kanbolat, "Turkey, Armenia to open border gates", *Today's Zaman*, 10 March 2009.

¹⁵⁴ Crisis Group interview, Ankara, February 2009.

¹⁵⁵ After Azerbaijan asked for the last ex-Soviet troops to leave in 1993, Armenia remained a key ally of Russia in the Caucasus. Iran was suspicious of Azerbaijan, because of both its own large Azeri community and competition with Turkey. The U.S., influenced by the Armenian diaspora, imposed sanctions on Baku that were only lifted ahead of the Afghanistan war in 2001.

¹⁵⁶ Svante Cornell, "Turkey and the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh", op. cit., p. 60. See also Suzanne Goldenberg, *Pride*

exclave of Nakhichevan, Turkey threatened Armenia with retaliation, reminding it of the Treaty of Kars,¹⁵⁷ but showed little intention of getting involved on the ground.¹⁵⁸ Russian Marshal Yevgeny Shaposhnikov, chief of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) armed forces, had already warned that “third party intervention in the [Nagorno-Karabakh] dispute could trigger a Third World War”.¹⁵⁹

Major energy pipelines opened in recent years from Azerbaijan via Georgia to Turkey remain a solid basis for strategic partnership with Azerbaijan.¹⁶⁰ That country is also a bridge for Turkey’s outreach to Turkic republics of Central Asia in competition with Russia and Iran. Ankara does not want to endanger these economic and geopolitical interests by normalisation of ties with Armenia¹⁶¹ and has kept Azerbaijan informed about the initiative. Senior officials often fly to Baku after talks with the Armenians.¹⁶² Turkey also organised a trilateral meeting with the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers in New York on 26 September 2008.

During his recent visits to Baku, Foreign Minister Babacan reportedly sought to reassure officials that rapprochement with Armenia would not be carried out to the detriment of Azerbaijan’s interests. During the World Economic Forum in Davos, Prime Minister Erdoğan met on 29 January with Azerbaijani President İlham Aliyev before meeting Armenia’s Sarkisian.

Afterwards, he declared, Turkey “will never abandon Azerbaijan in settling the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict”.¹⁶³

2. Azerbaijani worries

Azerbaijan disputes the idea that normalisation before Armenia withdraws from its occupied territory would be helpful.¹⁶⁴ It fears that the opening of the Turkish-Armenian border would end Yerevan’s isolation, thus costing it major leverage in the Nagorno-Karabakh talks.¹⁶⁵ An Azerbaijani author wrote in 2005 that if Turkey reopens the border without first agreeing with Baku, “it will either delay the peace deal – or push Azerbaijan into the corner. The strategy and wish of Armenian policy makers is to drive a wedge between the two brotherly states”.¹⁶⁶

Initially, Azerbaijan’s reaction to Turkey’s rapprochement with Armenia was muted and confused, since there was no consensus on the new policy’s content, motives or implications. The football match between the Turkish and Armenian national teams was watched with interest mixed with disapproval of Gül’s friendly tone in his meeting with Sarkisian.¹⁶⁷ Officials avoided comment, however, on a visit that Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov called a Turkish internal affair.¹⁶⁸ The president’s foreign policy aide said immediately afterwards that “it would be wrong to give a precise,

of Small Nations: The Caucasus and Post-Soviet Disorder (London, 1994), p. 54.

¹⁵⁷ The status of Nakhichevan as part of Azerbaijan is set out in that treaty. The small exclave is bordered by Armenia to the north and Iran to the south and is linked to Turkey by a narrow strip of land in the west.

¹⁵⁸ Hugh Pope, *Sons of the Conquerors: The Rise of the Turkic World* (New York, 2005), p. 62.

¹⁵⁹ Shaposhnikov’s statement came days after Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan signed the CIS Collective Security Treaty on 15 May 1992, providing for mutual military assistance in case of external intervention. *Financial Times*, 1 July 1992.

¹⁶⁰ The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum natural gas pipeline are in operation. A future expansion of Azerbaijani natural gas exports could one day feed the EU-backed Nabucco pipeline to Europe.

¹⁶¹ “It could be hard to settle Turkey-Armenia relations at the bilateral level alone”. Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan, quoted in *Sabah* (Turkey), 10 September 2008.

¹⁶² Gül’s 6 September Yerevan visit was followed by a 10 September visit to Baku with a message of Turkey’s unchanged support for Azerbaijan (“let nobody have doubts about that”). J. Bayramova, “Gül flew in to Baku for *iftar* [dinner]”, *Zerkalo* (Azerbaijan, in Russian), 11 September 2008. Similarly, Babacan visited Baku on 1 December 2008 and 8 February 2009, following meetings with his Armenian counterpart on 24 November 2008 (Istanbul) and 7 February (Munich).

¹⁶³ “Turkish prime minister: We will never abandon Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh settlement”, *Day.az* (Azerbaijan, in Russian), 29 January 2009.

¹⁶⁴ “The Azeris are putting pressure on Turkey wherever they can”. Crisis Group interview, U.S. official, Washington, February 2009. “The US has maintained sanctions against Cuba and Iran for years. Why can Turkey not do the same against aggressive Armenia?” Crisis Group interview, Azerbaijani official, Baku, February 2009.

¹⁶⁵ “If the border opens before Armenian forces have withdrawn from occupied Azerbaijani territory, this will be against Azerbaijan’s national interest. We have passed on our view to the Turkish leadership”. Elmar Mammadyarov, foreign minister of Azerbaijan, statement to ANS television, 3 April 2009.

¹⁶⁶ Adil Baguirov, “Political and economic dilemma over Turkey’s border and embargo of Armenia, implications vis-à-vis Azerbaijan”, *The Journal of Turkish Weekly*, June 2005.

¹⁶⁷ There was no reaction when Turkey won, 2-0, unlike previous victories by Turkish football teams that caused spontaneous celebrations in the streets of Baku.

¹⁶⁸ “Elmar Mammadyarov: Azerbaijan positively assesses the initiative on establishment of a cooperation platform in the Caucasus”, *Day.az* (in Russian), 4 September 2008.

radical and concrete position. This [visit] is a sensitive step. We need to wait".¹⁶⁹

Subsequent approving comments from some influential pro-government deputies indicated that they at least considered that a good Turkey-Armenia relationship might offer some advantages.¹⁷⁰ A Turkish commentator close to the process said Ankara policymakers felt that the highest echelons in Baku, early on at least, shared the hope that a breakthrough could help end the stalemate over Nagorno-Karabakh.¹⁷¹ Indeed, in Armenia, a leading NGO director said a greater sense of security in Armenia would well lead to braver Nagorno-Karabakh compromises.¹⁷²

A few liberal Azerbaijani voices even argued that after rapprochement with Armenia, Turkey could mediate in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and counterbalance Russian support for Armenia.¹⁷³ Armenia has always rejected any Turkish mediation until such time as it has "a very equal relationship between Armenia and Azerbaijan".¹⁷⁴ Indeed, some commentators believed the Turkish move was part of a broader Western attempt to draw Armenia out of the Russian sphere of influence.¹⁷⁵ After the August 2008 fighting in Georgia, others felt Moscow's rising profile in the region would

make its Armenian ally even less inclined to compromise.¹⁷⁶

President Gül's visit to Russia on 12-15 February 2009 prompted further controversy in Azerbaijan, where some thought Turkey was playing into the hands of Moscow, its biggest trading partner.¹⁷⁷ Others worried that in its attempts to move closer to the EU and become a regional power, Turkey might sacrifice Azerbaijani interests. When the Turkish government blocked an opposition parliamentary resolution that would have recognised as "genocide" the February 1992 Khojaly massacre, in which Armenian militia killed an estimated 600 Azeri civilians, Azerbaijan felt cold-shouldered, even though the bill was withdrawn because Turkey rejects from principle all parliamentary resolutions that label historical events as "genocide".¹⁷⁸

Turkey could well lose Azerbaijan's trust if it opens the border with Armenia in defiance of Baku. Azerbaijani newspapers are riddled with headlines displaying both frustration with Turkey and confusion about how to react.¹⁷⁹ A senior official from the presidency on 19 February voiced the first open criticism of Ankara's failure to confirm or deny media reports that it had delinked Nagorno-Karabakh from bilateral normalisation with Armenia.¹⁸⁰ Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev cancelled a planned visit to Istanbul for an Alliance of Civilizations summit on 6-7 April, sending a low-profile delegation instead. Revealing the extent of his unease with Turkish policies, he resisted phone calls from Turkish President Gül, Prime Minister Erdoğan and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the latter of whom reportedly offered a separate meeting with Presi-

¹⁶⁹ "Authorities did not elaborate whether Gül's visit was agreed with Azerbaijan", *Yeni Musavat* (in Azeri), 7 September 2008.

¹⁷⁰ Speaking in December 2008, a ruling party deputy, Mubariz Gurbanli, said "the relations between Turkey and Armenia must develop, since the Karabakh conflict has to be solved....In my viewpoint, development of relations between [these] countries will provide an impetus for security and peace in the Caucasus". "Mubariz Gurbanli: relations between Turkey and Armenia must develop", *Day.az* (in Russian), 12 December 2008.

¹⁷¹ Crisis Group interview, Turkish newspaper commentator, Ankara, September 2008.

¹⁷² "Closed borders destroyed trust in our neighbors and diminished our confidence about our own security. Open borders would certainly mean greater flexibility in how Armenians view their security, and maybe even greater compromises. At the end of the day, security is a key, if not the key element, for any Nagorno-Karabakh solution". Salpi Ghazarian, director, Civilitas Foundation, Crisis Group interview, February 2009.

¹⁷³ Crisis Group interview, Zardusht Alizade, political expert, Baku, March 2009; I. Bayandurlu, "Turks are playing a 'geopolitical' football with Armenians", *Zerkalo* (Azerbaijan, in Russian), 6 September 2008.

¹⁷⁴ Crisis Group interview, Armenian diplomat, March 2009.

¹⁷⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Azerbaijan commentators, Baku, February-March 2009.

¹⁷⁶ A popular Azerbaijani daily wrote: "In present conditions, Armenia will hardly agree to compromises. Most probably, it will assume a wait-and-see position towards the conflict, apparently until the question of the 'lord' of the South Caucasus region is settled". J. Bayramova, "Gül flew in to Baku for *iftar*", *Zerkalo* (in Russian), 11 September 2008.

¹⁷⁷ For instance, "Turkey helps Russian return to the South Caucasus", *Zerkalo* (in Russian), 14 February 2009.

¹⁷⁸ "AKP-Armenia secret agreement shapes up", *Yeni Musavat* (Azerbaijan, in Azeri), 25 February 2009.

¹⁷⁹ For instance: "Can Turkey take the path of betrayal?", *Kaspi*, 13 February; "Suspicious concerning Ankara's position are rising", *Sherg*, 17 February; "We don't have reliable allies", *Zerkalo*, 18 February; "A treacherous plot exists", *Yeni Musavat*, 26 February; "Turkey abandons Azerbaijan?", *Yeni Musavat*, 3 March; "What are we going to do if Turkey opens the border with Armenia?", *Yeni Musavat*, 11 March.

¹⁸⁰ "Inter-state love affairs create problems", *Zerkalo*, 20 February 2008. The critical comments were by Ali Hasanov, an official dealing with domestic issues, suggesting they were for domestic consumption and not necessarily a consolidated official position.

dent Obama in an effort to persuade him to attend.¹⁸¹ On 7 April, Azerbaijani governmental and opposition parties declared in a rare joint statement that the opening of the Turkish-Armenian border as long as Azerbaijani territories remain occupied “is nothing more than justification to Armenia’s aggressive policies, Armenian genocide claims and actions aimed at increasing regional tensions”.¹⁸²

Azerbaijani officials have strongly criticised Turkey in contacts with third parties.¹⁸³ In talks with a European official, the president threatened that if the EU and U.S. pushed Turkey to normalise with Armenia without preconditions, there would be “enormous consequences” for Shahdeniz natural gas.¹⁸⁴ Azerbaijan, which signed a memorandum of understanding with Moscow about unspecified volumes of gas sales on 27 March, may sell to Russia what the Europeans are counting on to at least partially fill the proposed Nabucco trans-Turkey natural gas pipeline. But it is not clear that the indirect threat to Turkey is meaningful, since serious differences with Ankara on commercial terms and on how much gas Turkey can retain have already caused a two-year delay in expansion of the Shahdeniz field.¹⁸⁵ On top of that, Shahdeniz may not have enough gas to fill Nabucco.¹⁸⁶

In an attempt to quell Azerbaijani criticism, the Turkish embassy in Baku and Erdoğan made parallel statements on 19 February 2009. The embassy said Turkey conducted a “continuous and comprehensive exchange of opinions” with Azerbaijani counterparts on its policies towards Armenia.¹⁸⁷ Erdoğan insisted “there is no dif-

ference between positions of Turkey and Azerbaijan on [the] Nagorno-Karabakh conflict”.¹⁸⁸ As indicated above, Prime Minister Erdoğan was even more explicit on 3 April 2009: “As long as this problem [Armenian occupation of Azerbaijani land] is not resolved, it is not possible for us to adopt a healthy decision”.¹⁸⁹ As Turkey comes closer to signing an agreement with Armenia, it appears to become more conscious of the dominant position in Baku and seek ways to reduce concerns, including by arguing that its normalisation with Armenia may ultimately speed up resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It has also sought more international support, and after his visit to Turkey in April, President Obama called Azerbaijani President İlham Aliyev from Baghdad to underline U.S. support for Turkey-Armenia normalisation as a route to a Nagorno-Karabakh settlement.¹⁹⁰

C. THE ROLE OF RUSSIA

In an apparent change of approach, Russia is quietly supporting Turkey-Armenia reconciliation.¹⁹¹ It was in Moscow that President Sarkisian made his first public hint about inviting Gül to the Yerevan football match.¹⁹² This is a rare example of a policy in the South Caucasus where Russia and the U.S. seem to share a common goal. Previously, Russian reactions to improvement in the bilateral relationship were lukewarm at best. The closed border was seen as helping Russia maintain dominance over Armenia and as securing the old Cold War border, backed up with a military alliance in which Armenia was very much the junior partner, a base in Gyumri and Russian guards on the Turkish border and supervising international entry points like Yerevan airport.¹⁹³

A major reason for Russia’s change is its strategy to use improved relations with Turkey to keep the U.S., EU

¹⁸¹ Zeynep Gürçanlı, “Even Obama promise did not persuade” (in Turkish), *Hürriyet*, 7 April 2009; also, E. Veliyev, “Barack Obama arrived in Turkey” (in Russian), *Zerkalo* (Azerbaijan), 7 April 2009.

¹⁸² “Parties represented in Azerbaijan’s Milli Majlis [parliament] have adopted a statement against the opening of the Armenian-Turkish border” (in Azeri), Azeri Press news agency, 7 April 2009.

¹⁸³ Crisis Group interview, U.S. official, Washington, February 2009.

¹⁸⁴ Crisis Group interview, senior European official, Istanbul, January 2009.

¹⁸⁵ “Ironically, Gazprom seems to be offering better terms than Turkey now does to Azerbaijan”. Vladimir Socor, “Shaking down the Turkic brother? Turkey’s AKP government obstructs Azerbaijan’s gas outlet to Europe”, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 16 March 2009.

¹⁸⁶ Shahdeniz’s first stage pumps eight billion cubic metres of natural gas per year; Nabucco ideally needs an additional 30 billion cubic metres. “Turkey-Azerbaijan gas transit dispute poses problem for Nabucco”, *Platts Commodity News*, 12 March 2009.

¹⁸⁷ “Turkish embassy in Baku issued a statement”, *Yeni Musavat*, 20 February 2009.

¹⁸⁸ “Erdoğan: there is no difference between positions of Azerbaijan and Turkey on Nagorno-Karabakh” (in Russian), 1st News.az, 19 February 2009.

¹⁸⁹ Speech, Chatham House, London, 3 April 2009. See www.chathamhouse.org.uk/events.

¹⁹⁰ Obama “reaffirmed U.S. commitment to a strong relationship with Azerbaijan and to supporting progress toward a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The President also underscored the importance of Turkish-Armenian reconciliation, which will lead to greater peace and security in the region”. White House press release, 7 April 2009.

¹⁹¹ Moscow is “interested in a relaxation of tension”. Crisis Group interview, Russian diplomat, Yerevan, November 2008.

¹⁹² See official transcript on www.president.am, 24 June 2008.

¹⁹³ “Turkish forces moved up to the border. That’s why we allowed Russians to have a base”. Crisis Group interview, Armenian diplomat, New York, February 2009.

and other “extra-regional powers” away from the South Caucasus.¹⁹⁴ Moscow also seeks to further isolate, marginalise and surround Georgia.¹⁹⁵ Baku’s frustrations with Ankara may likewise give Russia a new opening in Azerbaijan. But Russia can also benefit directly if there is access to Turkey from Armenia. It needs a transit route to supply its military base in Gyumri, and its companies now control or own key parts of Armenian infrastructure, including mobile phone firms, energy production and distribution, pipelines and railways. An open border and free trade between Turkey and Armenia would increase the value of these holdings. According to a senior Russian diplomat in Armenia, Russia sees an open border as adding potential for “investing in the Armenian economy, access to new markets and, for Turkey, a mutually advantageous exchange”.¹⁹⁶

V. PUBLIC OPINION

Armenian-Turkish reconciliation is not only an elite-driven process; public opinion in both countries is also ready for it. Two thirds of Turks supported President Gül’s Yerevan visit.¹⁹⁷ According to a think tank director in Ankara, “there’s a lot about the visit on opposition websites; it’s a domestic political football, but public opinion is ready. They’re saying, open it [the border] and be done with it. It’s a question of timing, not preparation”.¹⁹⁸ In Armenia support for a border opening even without a Turkish recognition of an Armenian genocide has grown to more than half of the population.¹⁹⁹ Even the once fiercely anti-Turkish Armenian diaspora now has a more nuanced approach.

After the pioneering work of the Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission (TARC) in 2001-2002, more than a dozen unofficial track two projects have aimed to improve relations. These have included joint concerts,²⁰⁰ joint art exhibitions, student exchanges,²⁰¹ a

¹⁹⁴ “Last year’s August crisis showed how important it is that all countries in the region cooperate when such threats arise, and also indicated that we are able to deal with such problems independently, without the participation of extra-regional powers”. President Dmitry Medvedev, statement after meeting President Gül, Moscow, 13 February 2009. See, “Press statements following the Russian-Turkish talks”, www.kremlin.ru.

¹⁹⁵ “Russia goes along with the reconciliation to undermine Georgia and to improve their dialogue with Turkey. Their \$500 million investment in Armenian railways is also useless without the line to Turkey opening up. But it’s probably not in their [strategic] interest in the long term”. Crisis Group interview, European diplomat posted to Armenia, Istanbul, December 2008. The opening of the border could reduce Georgia’s importance as a key transit route in the South Caucasus, but even if the border with Turkey opens, Armenia will have no direct link to Russia that does not pass through Georgia.

¹⁹⁶ Crisis Group interview, Russian diplomat, Yerevan, November 2008.

¹⁹⁷ One poll found that 69.6 per cent of Turks thought Gül’s visit successful; 62.8 per cent believed that Turkey should develop political and economic ties with Armenia. Metropoll, 8 September 2008.

¹⁹⁸ Crisis Group interview, Hasan Kanbolat, director, Middle East Strategic Research Centre (Ortadoğu Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi – ORSAM), Ankara, 23 December 2009.

¹⁹⁹ Online poll by A1+ television showing 54.8 per cent supported opening the border without preconditions, while 27.9 per cent said Turkey should recognize an Armenian genocide first and 11.7 per cent did not want the border open at all. A1+, 6 April 2009. This indicates an evolution in thinking since a poll three years earlier (May 2006) showing 42 per cent in favour of unconditional opening was conducted by the International Republican Institute, Baltic Surveys Ltd./The Gallup Organization and the Armenian Sociological Association, with funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID); a poll showing 39 per cent for unconditional opening and 57 per cent against was conducted by the Gallup Organization, the Armenian Sociological Association, USAID and the International Republican Institute in August 2006.

²⁰⁰ In an early initiative, Lalezar, a Turkish folk music group, was sponsored to perform in Istanbul and Yerevan with Richard Hagopian, an Armenian-American who does traditional Armenian music. ARF hardliners failed to disturb the first concert in Yerevan, in 2001, with a stink bomb. The next year Hagopian impressed Turks with his fluent Turkish and warm personality. When the U.S.-, UK- and Norway-funded Eurasia Partnership Foundation brought the multi-ethnic Kardeş Türküler band to Yerevan in December 2008, more guests arrived from Turkey than had flown in for the football game in September.

²⁰¹ In August 2005, for instance, the Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly sponsored 24 university students from Armenia and Turkey to attend a ten-day seminar in Antakya.

youth summit,²⁰² the shared *Turkish Armenian Women's Magazine*, reciprocal visits between think tanks to meet officials on the other side and an exhibition of Turkish photographers' photos of Yerevan and Armenian photographers' photos of Istanbul. These projects have achieved varying success, but each has broadened public support for the recent diplomatic progress.²⁰³

Academics are already tackling historical issues on their own, meeting in Yerevan in October 2008 for a workshop on "History and Identity: Building Bridges for Dialogue and Understanding". They agreed to start work on a book in Armenian and Turkish to tell the story of how ordinary people remember their interconnected past.²⁰⁴ In March 2009, more than 30 Armenian and Turkish NGOs met in a major conference in Yerevan, still overshadowed by the 1915 events and lack of clear political direction but agreeing on the need for unconditional normalisation of ties.²⁰⁵

A. TURKISH INTELLECTUALS APOLOGISE

The increase in official dialogue, track two diplomacy, significant trade and the ease of personal travel have already done much to erode the once strong taboo in Turkey on all matters pertaining to Armenia and Armenians. This taboo is still reinforced by actions against freedom of expression, but even these are becoming less frequent. There are indications that the only Article 301 case relating to the Armenian question – the prosecution approved by the justice minister in 2008 of left-wing writer Temel Demirer for an outspoken speech affirming a genocide and Turkish state responsibility – may be dismissed.²⁰⁶

Indeed, Turkish thinking about the Armenian question has opened up remarkably. As recently as the 1980s, the horrors of 1915 were never publicly mentioned. The first-ever workshop of Turkish and Armenian historians was held in 2000 in Chicago. In 2005, Turkish scholars forced the discussion centre stage at an Istanbul conference, "Ottoman Armenians during the Demise of Empire: Responsible Scholarship and Issues of Democracy".²⁰⁷ Art shows honoured the Armenian community's memory, with a November 2005 exhibition of Ottoman-era postcards revealing just how prominent a part Armenians played in life through schools, villages and monasteries.²⁰⁸ Leading writers have produced novels with Armenian themes critical of the official narrative. The nationalist, mass-circulation paper *Hürriyet* has quoted Atatürk as disapproving of the 1915 massacres and their perpetrators.²⁰⁹

Each liberalisation has been contested at some level. A die-hard group of right-wing nationalist lawyers prosecuted Turkey's Nobel laureate novelist Orhan Pamuk in 2005 for "insulting the republic" through comments to a Swiss newspaper about "a million Armenians killed in this land". Another major writer, Elif Shafak, was put on trial for "insulting Turkish identity" in a novel that lamented the gap in national life left by the disappearance of the Armenians in 1915. But each time, the debate keeps moving forward. The ruling AK Party rewrote Article 301 in April 2008 to help ward off such meretricious prosecutions. Indeed, the nationalist lawyers involved are now themselves in

²⁰² In November 2008, a Black Sea Youth Summit held in Istanbul by the Ari group and German Marshall Fund of the U.S. brought together fifteen young people from five countries, including Armenia, to discuss ways to address regional problems like poverty, education, corruption and prejudice.

²⁰³ An Armenian former TARC member said the early effort at track two diplomacy was an important "milestone in Armenia's view of Turkey" and can be seen as "a key step toward what we see today in terms of Armenian-Turkish talks". Crisis Group interview, Yerevan, January 2009.

²⁰⁴ Supported by the Armenian branch of the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association, the title will be: "Remembering Together: Moments of Shared History of Turks and Armenians".

²⁰⁵ Organised by the Civil Society Development Centre and Civil Society Institute. For details see www.csi.am.

²⁰⁶ Speaking at the funeral of Hrant Dink, Demirer had said, "we are living in a country that conspires to kill those who shout out the truth. Hrant was not only murdered because he was Armenian, but because he told the truth about the genocide.... Those who do not commit crimes [by breaking Penal

Code Article 301 and bearing witness] against this murderous state are also murderers". Bianet news portal (Turkey), 9 February 2009. The justice ministry must approve any prosecution under Article 301 of the Penal Code for the crime of "denigrating the state".

²⁰⁷ The conference was led by nine professors from three of Turkey's best universities, had an advisory committee of another twenty top academics, and a further 60 scholars gave papers and chaired panels. "This all-Turkish big-do signaled to the entire Turkish public that the 'crème de la crème' of Turkish scholarship did not buy the nationalist version and was no longer willing to be cowed. Things have never been the same since. Witness the official acceptance of the inevitable, and the ebbing out of all the 'so-called genocide' talk". Crisis Group email communication, Halil Berktaş, a leading academic, 29 March 2009.

²⁰⁸ "Dear Brother", the catalogue of the exhibition, was published in Istanbul in 2005.

²⁰⁹ In the Turkish parliament in April 1920, for instance, he described the events of 1915 as a "vileness of the past". Quoted in Aysel Hür, "The Turk is nothing without the Armenian, the Armenian is nothing without the Turk", *Taraf*, 31 August 2008.

jail or in court on charges of being part of the Ergenekon conspiracy against the government.²¹⁰

The real turning point was the January 2007 murder of Armenian-Turkish journalist Hrant Dink, a well-loved member of Istanbul's intellectual elite, by a gunman working for a nationalist gang.²¹¹ At least 100,000 persons walked through city streets behind his coffin, many carrying a placard declaring "We are all Armenian". Much recent sensitivity stems from the Istanbul elite's deep shame at this murder, particularly after evidence of state negligence and possible complicity came to light. A leading intellectual, Murat Belge, said Turkey must address its past: "The ghosts are not buried. They are in their cupboard, rattling their chains".²¹²

Information of all kinds is now available, a huge change from the past.²¹³ The state archives are far more open than before,²¹⁴ despite some scepticism about what is there.²¹⁵ Since 2005, and especially in the past year, the phrase "so-called genocide" has been steadily dropped from official statements, state television reports and schoolbooks in favour of "the events of 1915".²¹⁶

²¹⁰ See Crisis Group Europe Report N°197, *Turkey and Europe: The Decisive Year Ahead*, 15 December 2008, p. 12.

²¹¹ When leading Turkish columnist Hasan Cemal laid a wreath at the genocide memorial in Yerevan in September 2008, he expressed deep regret for the tragedy of 1915 and said he was doing it mainly for Hrant Dink. Cemal's grandfather was Jemal Pasha, an Ottoman leader during the First World War who was assassinated by an Armenian in Tbilisi in 1922. *Nouvelles d'Arménie* (France), October 2008.

²¹² Crisis Group interview, Istanbul, 18 December 2008.

²¹³ "I had heard and knew nothing about the Armenian story until I arrived in Manchester to do my undergraduate studies. Our school history books were not very informative on the events of 1915. I stumbled on the subject in the Manchester Central Public Library. After that I sat there in the stacks, reading everything I could find". Crisis Group interview, Üstün Ergüder, leading Turkish academic, Istanbul, January 2009.

²¹⁴ "If there is a problem, it's immediately addressed and resolved. That's all you can ask for. Turkey has gained a lot of credit with its new archive policy, and it will gain more credit if the present government would support the archives more strongly with additional funding". Interview with German historian Hilmar Kaiser, *Today's Zaman*, 22 March 2009.

²¹⁵ "The question of 'access' is one thing, and the nature of the collections is something else. All important resettlement records associated with 1915-1916 are unavailable in Turkey. Also, the archives have a partisan stance on the Armenian issue, which is apparent by their 'there was no Armenian Genocide' publications". Crisis Group email communication, Ara Sarafian, director, Gomidas Institute, 24 March 2009.

²¹⁶ The Armenian Research Institute (Ermeni Araştırmaları Enstitüsü – ERAREN), directed by former Turkish ambassador Ömer Lütem, says this is in line with a 2005 National Security Council decision to use more moderate language with neighbours and the 2005 philosophy of "leaving the

Turkey state radio and television started a daily hour of Armenian-language broadcasting in April and also plan Armenian-language television content. Lines like the following are no longer extraordinary in the liberal press:

Can we convince the world that we didn't do these alleged things? Forget the world, can we convince ourselves?... The genocide word is not just a legal word to describe the events of 1915, it is also used [by Armenians to describe] the systematic dismissal, denial, exclusion and hostility aimed for [the past] 90 years at the Armenian community, its culture, history, state, diaspora and people.²¹⁷

Turkish bookshops can stock a volume with a title like *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* in English and Turkish versions, alongside those presenting the opposite view.²¹⁸ In January 2008, the respected İletişim publishing house printed a book detailing the actions of Talat Pasha, an Ottoman leader during the First World War and main organiser of the 1915 Armenian policy, with the suggestion that "this study shows the importance of studying the great disaster [suffered by the Armenians] instead of denying it".²¹⁹ No legal action has been taken against the 2009 publication of Talat Pasha's private diaries and documents, showing that he had minutely supervised the relocation of 935,367 Armenians, of whom he counted 90 per cent as "missing" by 1917.²²⁰ It has been described by an Armenian scholar as "probably the single most important document ever uncovered describing the destruction of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire in 1915-17".²²¹

Just as striking has been an apology campaign initiated by some 200 Turkish intellectuals in December 2008 and signed by 29,500 people online.²²² Their petition

matter to historians". "Daily Bulletin" (in Turkish), www.era ren.org, 23 January 2009.

²¹⁷ Ayşe Hür, "The Turk is nothing without the Armenian", op. cit.

²¹⁸ Taner Akçam, "A Shameful Act", op. cit. For a critique of this book from a Turkish nationalist perspective, see *Review of Armenian Studies*, no. 13-14, Ankara, 2007.

²¹⁹ In the book *Ermeni Meselesi Hallolunmuştur* (The Armenian Issue is Solved), which was reprinted four times in its first month, author Taner Akçam says, "call it whatever we want – forced relocation, massacre, genocide - as long as we have not been able to develop a narrative that is able to understand the pain that has been lived through, to condemn the murders committed for whatever reason against people because of religious or ethnic differences, we will not be able to take reliable steps towards a solution of the problem".

²²⁰ Murat Bardakçı (ed.), *Talat Paşanın Evrak-ı Metrukesi* ["The Papers Talat Pasha Left Behind"] (Istanbul, 2009).

²²¹ Ara Sarafian, "Talaat Pasha's Black Book", op. cit.

²²² www.ozurdiliyoruz.com (meaning: "we apologise").

stated: “My conscience cannot accept indifference to or denial of the Great Catastrophe that Ottoman Armenians suffered in 1915. I reject this injustice, and for my own part, I share the feelings and pain of my Armenian brothers and sisters, and I apologise to them”. The diplomat who led the first early 1990s contacts with Armenia also says an apology is in order.²²³

The apology campaign was criticised to varying degrees by Prime Minister Erdoğan, the Turkish Armed Forces general staff, a group of conservative retired diplomats and nationalist newspapers.²²⁴ A rival site called “I am waiting for an apology”, which mixed a strong anti-Armenia message with anger against Israel and Kurdish nationalist militants, claims to have nearly four times as many signatories, but has the backing of only 39 minor nationalist associations, small provincial union branches and non-mainstream academics.²²⁵ When a Turkish newspaper revealed that in 2008 the education ministry had distributed to schools a propaganda film in effect blaming Armenians for anything that happened in 1915, the government recalled it.

Turks have also begun to discuss the Armenians who stayed behind. When lawyer Fethiye Çetin published a memoir in 2004 about her discovery that her grandmother was one of eight Armenian girls taken off a forced relocation march to become domestics and later wives in a small eastern town,²²⁶ it sold 9,000 copies within a year and became a set text in at least one university.²²⁷ The survival of the old Armenian popu-

lation as forced converts to Islam in today’s Turkish nation state may be more widespread than is often supposed, one reason that discussing it is so conflicted and painful. A top political party official in a formerly major center of Armenian population (Diyarbakir) said he was sure two or three families out of five had an Armenian grandparent.²²⁸ A new film on the Armenians of Turkey included an interview with “Kurds” in the east who were Armenians who had been converted to Islam on what they said was the threat of death.²²⁹ When Osman Okkan, the Germany-based Turkish director of the film, was asked what had left the greatest impression on him, he said:

Watching the scenes run before my eyes again and again in the editing room, I found that I kept thinking more and more about the hundreds of thousands, no, maybe millions of people in Turkey today who are living the paradox [of being both Armenian and also Turkish or Kurdish], and having to deny this double identity.²³⁰

B. DEBATES IN ARMENIA

Popular change in Armenia may be less dramatic, but polls (see above) now show fairly strong support for opening the border even without Turkey recognising an Armenian genocide. The hardline ARF’s parliamentary faction sees no need for Armenian concessions to reopen the border, since Turkey closed it in the first place and could easily do so again.²³¹ However, among a segment of the younger generation that came of age in the post-independence period, there is optimism and hope. A young female member of the ruling Republican Party said:

There is a real chance to bridge the divide between Turkish and Armenian youth....[The Turkish intellectuals’ apology campaign is] evidence of the need for knowledge, an honest attempt to examine the past by each side, a two-way advantage that offers a first step toward moving faster and closer to other issues such as opening the border and normalising relations. The petition may also open the door for young Armenian and Turkish people to be able to come together and discuss many issues as a way to

²²³ “I would actually apologise. Of course, one would debate under what circumstances.... I would apologise to the Greeks too [for an anti-minority Istanbul pogrom in 1955]. These events do not reflect well on Turkey. We don’t approve. We empathise with those forced to leave. We see them as siblings ... [we should apologise] for the suffering. This is what a state like ours should do”. Volkan Vural, former Turkish ambassador, interview with *Taraf*, 8 September 2008.

²²⁴ Erdoğan said, “personally I do not accept their campaign, nor take part in it. We did not commit any crime, why should we apologise?... This would only serve to muddy waters and disrupt our peace. It would reverse steps taken thus far”. www.hurriyet.com.tr/english/domestic/10591369.asp?scr=1. President Gül adopted a softer line, characterising the campaign as private expressions of freedom of speech, while adding that “looking at the consequences and the latest debates, I don’t think that it has made a positive contribution”. Interview with *Today’s Zaman*, 2 January 2009.

²²⁵ www.ozurbekliyorum.com (meaning: “I am waiting for an apology”).

²²⁶ Fethiye Çetin, *Anneannem* (Istanbul, 2004), translated by Maureen Freely as *My Grandmother* (London, 2008).

²²⁷ For an account of the rediscovery by Turks of their long-secret Armenian origins, see Ayşe Gül Altınay, “Türkiyeli Ermenilerin yeniden keşfi”, *Bianet* news portal, 1 October 2005.

²²⁸ Crisis Group interview, senior AK Party official, Diyarbakir, October 2008.

²²⁹ “Murder File Hrant Dink”, ARTE, March 2009.

²³⁰ Osman Okkan, speech at Bilgi University campus, Istanbul, 20 March 2009.

²³¹ “Turkey ... must now take the next step toward normalizing relations with Armenia”. Crisis Group interview, Ani Avetisyan, ARF staffer, Yerevan, December 2008.

break down stereotypes and build a new future of neighborly relations.²³²

Armenians are taught about their historic enmity with Turkey and Azerbaijan but nevertheless share the same cuisine, enjoy Azerbaijani music and engage in large-scale trade with Turks. Even though the border is closed, Turkish television is easily watched from Yerevan. Resorts like Antalya on the Turkish riviera have become new holiday destinations. The Turkish intellectuals' apology campaign caught attention. A Yerevan intellectual said he was "surprised" that the Armenian issue had fostered such vibrant debate among the Turkish elite. "It's a move forward... It's encouraging that it is also an important issue for some Turks".²³³

Genocide recognition may not be as high a priority for those in Armenia as it is for the diaspora.²³⁴ Turkey would, however, make a mistake to think this means it can avoid dealing with the issue.²³⁵ Most people living in Armenia today descend from grandparents forced in 1915 to flee Ottoman towns now in Turkey.²³⁶ Hundreds of thousands visit the genocide memorial outside Yerevan annually on 24 April.

Turkey sometimes points to the relatively recent vintage of broad, strong Armenian demands for genocide recognition as justification for dismissing their sincerity. Armenian intellectuals, however, attribute this to the trauma of the experience, the disorientation of the survivors in the diaspora and their wish to adapt to their new host countries. In the early Soviet Republic of Armenia, as in 1920s Turkey, the ruling positivist ideology sought comfort in a glorious future, not the past. The early Soviet regime executed several Armenians on charges of nationalism, making remembrance of history a taboo. Change began at the 50th anniversary in 1965, when a first mass demonstration was allowed in Soviet Armenia. Calls at that time were for both "our territory" and "justice". Over time the demand for terri-

tory has faded, but the demand for justice through genocide recognition remains.²³⁷

C. TRENDS IN THE DIASPORA

The diaspora, dominated by the hardline ARF,²³⁸ has long focused on the goal of realising Woodrow Wilson's post-First World War promise of Turkish territory for an independent Armenian state.²³⁹ It probably outnumbers the population of Armenia by roughly two to one, counting between three and six million people, principally in the U.S., Russia, France and Lebanon.²⁴⁰ As in Armenia, the diaspora began to turn its attention towards genocide recognition at the 50th anniversary in 1965. Seeing the prosecution of Nazis for war crimes long after the Jewish Holocaust had a further encouraging effect. The ARF, however, changed to a step-by-step strategy over time, seeking first recognition of the genocide, then reparations and only subsequently territory. Historically, justice through genocide recognition also appealed to those in the diaspora who were born in and fled from parts of today's Turkey, not Soviet Armenia, and who had no wish to move to the communist Soviet Union.

Some in the diaspora or cooperating closely with it accuse the ARF of using the genocide issue to browbeat diaspora Armenians into giving money and solidarity

²³² Crisis Group interview, Yerevan, December 2008.

²³³ Crisis Group interview, Dr Ruben Mehrabyan, Yerevan, January 2008.

²³⁴ "Genocide recognition is sixth or seventh on the list of priorities in Armenia". Crisis Group interview, European diplomat based in Yerevan, Istanbul, December 2008.

²³⁵ "On one side there is a people living in difficulty [in Armenia], on the other there is a diaspora, with nothing to worry about, which has set up shop in Europe, in America. These two groups have different agendas". Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan, quoted in *Sabah*, 10 September 2008.

²³⁶ While "most Armenians in Yerevan are eagerly expecting an opening of the border, for us, the Armenian genocide is a vital issue", Crisis Group interview, Dr Reuben Mehrabyan, Yerevan, January 2008.

²³⁷ Crisis Group interview, Armenian-French commentator Michel Marian, Paris, November, 2008.

²³⁸ The ARF was founded in 1890. With a left wing-nationalist ideology, it has long campaigned for an independent Armenia, recognition of a genocide and restitution from Turkey. While claiming the strongest presence of any party in the diaspora, it usually has around 10 per cent support in Armenia. Its candidate won 6.2 per cent in the February 2008 presidential election. The ARF is legendarily tough. "We have a real difficulty with the Dashnaks. There is a kind of blackmail. They say that if you want to see us, you have to accept our conditions". Crisis Group interview, Michel Braud, international secretary, Socialist Party, Paris, November 2008.

²³⁹ "Until the 1960s, [the Treaty of] Sèvres was the answer to everything. Only later did the communists begin to seek recognition of genocide". Crisis Group interview, Armenian-French commentator Michel Marian, Paris, November 2008.

²⁴⁰ Officially, 3.2 million people live in Armenia, but the true figure may be as few as two million. In both Russia and the U.S., Armenians are thought to number at least one million, and in France, about 400,000. Diaspora numbers are uncertain because of a high degree of assimilation and political groups' tendency to overstate them. Diaspora organisations sometimes claim 20,000 Armenians live in the UK, for instance, but only 200-300 vote in church elections. There is an Armenian church in Manchester, where a community arrived in the 1870s, but the community itself has been absorbed into the wider population. Crisis Group interview, Ara Sarafian, director, Gomidas Institute, London, 2 March 2009.

to the ultra-nationalist cause.²⁴¹ The issue remains the main uniting bond and for many is what makes it possible to continue to identify themselves as Armenians.²⁴² New trends are emerging, however, since the establishment in 1991 of an independent state. “There are now multiple voices in the community. Self-identification has moved away from just genocide. Young people found it boring and feel no need to worry about the genocide every day. They prefer to think about positive things like ‘we have a state’, ‘we won the war in Nagorno-Karabakh’ ... ‘we have war heroes’”.²⁴³

A readiness to engage in dialogue with Turkey is evident in some parts of the diaspora.²⁴⁴ The outreach of ordinary Turks to the 60,000-strong Armenian community in Turkey after Hrant Dink’s murder and especially the internet apology campaign made a positive impression. Armenian writers and intellectuals, mostly French but including Canadian film director Atom Egoyan, launched a signature campaign in January 2009 to say “thank you in reply to the apology campaign ... a [Turkish] initiative based on words addressed to the Armenians for the first time”. In two months, the initial 66 signatories were joined by 84 more from around the world.²⁴⁵ A commentator argued that “the

diaspora wants justice, but does not know what form it should take”.²⁴⁶

In the U.S., however, a leading lobbyist dismissed the Turkish apology campaign as “not a sign of any significant change within Turkey” and criticised the “so-called apology” for failing to use the term “genocide”.²⁴⁷ According to another Armenian-American lobbyist, opening the border before Turkey accepts Armenia’s view on genocide would be disastrous: “We can’t make peace while covering up things that are not said, leaving infected abscesses, or allowing the opening so Turkey can make itself more acceptable to Western democracies”.²⁴⁸

Ara Toranian, the editor of the Armenian magazine *Nouvelle Armenie* and a former spokesman for the ASALA assassins of Turkish diplomats, said he personally thought the ARF no longer expected to achieve territorial concessions and reparations.²⁴⁹ He aims for genocide recognition and focuses on French legislation to criminalise denial.²⁵⁰ An Armenian-American lobbyist said, “I can no more walk away from the genocide than cut off a limb”. If Turkey and Armenia normalise their relations, responsibility for agreeing on any consequences of the historical record will fall to Ankara and Yerevan. As the Armenian-American lobbyist put it, “the world will look to the two governments to sort it out. We [in the diaspora] are not going to be able to have a seat at the table”.²⁵¹

²⁴¹ “The Dashnaks raise the whole issue to keep raising money”. Crisis Group interview, David Phillips, former facilitator, Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission, New York, 3 February 2009. The ARF is not necessarily representative of the entire diaspora. “The maximalists are still the most heard, but they have diverged from the diaspora mainstream. Some, the more artistic ones, want to be able to go back to Turkey, to have Turkish friends, to restore Armenian monuments in Turkey”. Crisis Group interview, Armenian-French commentator Michel Marian, Paris, November 2008. Michel Braud, international secretary of the Socialist Party, agreed: “It’s very difficult to feel the Armenian diaspora. We have to deal much too much with the [radical] margins”. Crisis Group interview, Paris, November 2008.

²⁴² “After recognition of the genocide, the Armenian consensus falls apart”. Crisis Group interview, Armenian-American lobbyist, Washington, February 2009. Several officials and independent experts in Yerevan noted that without the genocide, many diaspora Armenians have little with which to identify themselves as Armenians, having lost their language and religion and taken on their new countries’ cultures. Crisis Group interviews, Yerevan, February 2009.

²⁴³ Crisis Group interview, Armenian diplomat, March 2009.

²⁴⁴ “[Some formerly radical groups] are now much softer. They realise they have to play by the rules of the [lobbying] game and that the Armenian government has real responsibilities. Everyone is growing up”. Crisis Group interview, former Armenian official, Washington, February 2009.

²⁴⁵ For full text, see <http://repondre.wordpress.com>. See also Guillaume Perrier, “Turcs-Armeniens, le temps du dialogue”, *Le Monde*, 20 February 2009.

²⁴⁶ Crisis Group interview, Armenian-French commentator Michel Marian, Paris, November 2008.

²⁴⁷ Crisis Group email communication, Armenian-American activist, December 2008.

²⁴⁸ Crisis Group interview, hardline Armenian-American lobbyist, Washington, February 2009.

²⁴⁹ Toranian said a peace park on Mount Ararat and return of the ancient ruins of Ani would make everyone happy, but did not expect it. “I was a spokesman for ASALA. I was a hardliner. But it’s no longer a question of money, or getting back territory, it’s about human dignity. What we want is that this Armenia should be livable for people ... that the threats disappear. Nobody wants territory. Only Nagorno-Karabagh. This is enough for Armenians”. Crisis Group interview, Paris, 25 November 2009.

²⁵⁰ “It’s indispensable. I’m not against Turkey in the European Union, I’m against a negationist Turkey in the European Union”. Crisis Group interview, Ara Toranian, editor, *Nouvelles d’Armenie*, Paris, November 2008.

²⁵¹ Crisis Group interview, Armenian-American lobbyist, Washington DC, 6 February 2009.

VI. THE WAY FORWARD

A. THE ECONOMIC DIVIDEND

One benefit of normalisation would be economic, mainly for Armenia but for Turkey too. Since 1991, business has often provided the much needed push for reconciliation. A group of Armenian diaspora figures and Jewish-Turkish businessman İshak Alaton made the first attempt to break the ice with a (never completed) project to rehabilitate the Turkish Black Sea port of Trabzon and open a new supply route to Yerevan.²⁵² Today about twenty companies jointly founded by Turkish and Armenian businessmen operate, trading indirectly through Georgia and Iran. The value of Turkey-Armenia trade has risen to at least \$120 million in 2007 from about \$30 million in 1997.²⁵³ According to a study, opening the border could more than double this to \$300 million.²⁵⁴ Sales of Armenian electricity to Turkey were agreed in principle during Gül's visit.²⁵⁵ Involvement of Turkish subcontractors in the potential construction of any new Armenian nuclear power plant would reduce costs and encourage cooperation.²⁵⁶

²⁵² Although they thought they had official political support, defensive nationalism in the Ankara establishment and media quickly sank the project. "The leaders met all of us, approved the project, then got frightened by the press and lied about it....on just one day, 29 February 1992, there were thirteen newspapers and 27 articles attacking me. It wouldn't happen today". Crisis Group interview, İshak Alaton, Istanbul, 25 February 2009.

²⁵³ Crisis Group interview, Armenian official, New York, February 2009. The International Monetary Fund estimated a rather lower bilateral trade figure of €54 million (\$65 million) for 2005, 96 per cent of which was Turkish exports to Armenia.

²⁵⁴ Estimate from Kaan Soyak, director, Turkish Armenian Business Development Council (TABDC), interview with *Today's Zaman*, 16 February 2009.

²⁵⁵ The Brussels-based Turkish company Unit Group signed a memorandum of understanding for Turkey's purchase of electricity from Armenia during President Gül's Yerevan visit. It does not know, however, when this can start due to political problems and permit and other technical arrangements that need to be completed. Crisis Group telephone interview, Unit Group official, Istanbul, 20 March 2009. Armenia's energy minister, Armen Movsisian, said he hoped to start selling 1.5 billion kw/hours of electricity annually "as soon as possible". "Armenia Report", Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (REF/RL), 20 March 2009.

²⁵⁶ Prime Minister Sarkisian says in principle a Turkish company could bid on the \$5 billion tender. *Ibid.*

1. A new impetus for landlocked Armenia

The closed border has raised Armenia's transport costs and made it largely dependent on expensive, low capacity and vulnerable rail and road connections through Georgia and its Black Sea ports.²⁵⁷ An open border would lower these costs and increase flexibility. Potential savings from removal of the embargoes and opening of the railway line are variously estimated to range from \$75 million to \$300 million. While access to Trabzon would be a useful strategic complement to Georgia's port of Poti, Turkish Mediterranean ports like Mersin are even more desirable, since cheaper, large ocean container carriers can use them.²⁵⁸ Increased choice in trade routes would also reduce Armenia's dependence on Russia.

Opening the Turkish border could boost foreign direct investment in Armenia by lowering perception of its risk and isolation.²⁵⁹ Electricity from existing and planned new plants would find a ready market in eastern Turkey. It is estimated that Armenian exports could rise between 18 per cent and 50 per cent,²⁶⁰ and heavier industries would become more viable.²⁶¹ In the medium term, one calculation is that 4,800 new jobs would be created, while real GDP would rise 2.7 per cent and real disposable income 1.8 per cent.²⁶² A new border industrial zone has already been delineated near the railway inside Armenia that could offer

²⁵⁷ Armenia has adapted by focusing on light industries like jewelry and cut stones. In 1995, it restarted its nuclear power plant, closed after the 1988 earthquake. Yerevan has seen a boom in construction and other activities. Still, villages have been left without jobs, water or gas. One third of the population lives below the poverty level. Crisis Group interviews, current and former Armenian officials, Washington and Yerevan, February 2009.

²⁵⁸ "The Closed Armenia-Turkey Border: Economic and Social Effects, Including Those on the People; and Implications for the Overall Situation in the Region", European Parliament Policy Department External Policies, August 2007.

²⁵⁹ "Armenia has one of the highest external conflict risk ratings...in the top 10% most risky countries of the world during 1999- 2005". King Banaian and Bryan Roberts, "The Impacts of Conflict Risk Reduction on the Armenian Economy", conference on "The Economic and Social Consequences of Opening the Armenian-Turkey Border", Yerevan, 13-14 January, 2007.

²⁶⁰ "Study of the Economic Impact on the Armenian Economy from Re-Opening of the Turkish-Armenian Borders. Implications for External Trade", Armenian-European Policy and Legal Advice Centre (AEPLAC), Yerevan, Armenia, 2005.

²⁶¹ Burcu Gültekin, "The Stakes of Opening the Turkish Armenian Border", French Institute of Anatolian Studies, Research Program on Turkey-Caucasus, October 2002.

²⁶² "Study of the Economic Impact on the Armenian Economy", *op. cit.*

Turkish manufacturers the possibilities of exploiting U.S. trade benefits, including textile quotas that are not close to being filled, and of bypassing high taxes on domestic Turkish exports to Russia.²⁶³ If the border with Azerbaijan is opened as well, Armenia could become a genuine regional trading partner and transit country, and the size of its economy could double.²⁶⁴

Not all Armenians want the border with Turkey to open. Ashot Yeghiazarian, an academic, believes the economic benefits are “exaggerated”.²⁶⁵ Jobs in machinery and equipment, wood, paper, mining, chemical and other industries might be lost.²⁶⁶ Tatul Manasarian, an economist, argues there is danger of the “sharp deterioration of Armenia’s food security and invasion of the Armenian markets by Turkey’s agriculture and light industry”. Much local business is controlled by ten major clans, whose vested interests might be damaged by change to existing patterns of trade. “Anyone who is not an oligarch supports [the border opening] as an absolute necessity, ... [but] the oligarchs feel threatened by the competition”, said Yerevan-based investor Jonathan Stark.²⁶⁷ The ARF fears an end to the blockade would result in “a flood of cheap Turkish products” and dependence on Turkey’s more advanced economy.²⁶⁸

2. A boon for eastern Turkey

Opening up to Armenia could entail more economic risks for Turkey than benefits. Armenia’s total trade volume of \$4.7 billion is barely one tenth that of Azerbaijan, and its economy cannot make a significant impact on Turkey’s \$142 billion exports and \$205 billion imports.²⁶⁹ Yerevan markets are already saturated with Turkish goods from indirect trade through Georgia and Iran. Some in Turkey, therefore, have suggested that opening the border only makes sense within the

context of a full regional south Caucasus development plan, including Russia and Iran.²⁷⁰

Still, the border opening would boost small businesses and develop the economy of depopulated and sometimes isolated eastern border towns like Kars, Iğdır, Trabzon and Erzurum, where Turkish traders have long been unhappy about delays at Georgia’s busy border and high transportation costs.²⁷¹ In Kars, more than 100,000 signatures were collected from people supporting an open border with Armenia as a step toward opening the Caucasus at large.²⁷² Communities in Kars and Iğdır particularly want to sell dairy products, fruits and poultry across the border.²⁷³

The fine, ancient Armenian churches, the ancient Armenian capital of Ani and other heritage sites just over the border in Turkey could boost tourism, attracting tours not just from Armenia but also from wealthy members of the diaspora and other foreign tourists.

B. BEYOND OPENING THE BORDER

At the same time as Armenia must reassure Turkey it has no territorial claims, Turkey needs to respond to Armenia’s concerns about the many religious and secular buildings and monuments in areas where Armenians lived before 1915.²⁷⁴ This is in Turkey’s self-interest, since, as noted, they are a significant tourist attraction. The three-year restoration of the tenth-century Armenian church on the island of Akdamar (in Armenian,

²⁶³ Crisis Group interview, Kaan Soyak, co-chairman, Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council, Ankara, 2 April 2009.

²⁶⁴ Burcu Gültekin, “The Stakes of Opening the Turkish Armenian Border”, op. cit.

²⁶⁵ Ashot Yeghiazarian, “Prospects of Armenian-Turkish Economic Relations”, Yerkir Online, 18 July 2003.

²⁶⁶ “Study of the Economic Impact on the Armenian Economy”, op. cit.

²⁶⁷ Crisis Group interview, Yerevan, December 2008.

²⁶⁸ “After-effects of open border with Turkey discussed”, Armenpress News Agency, 30 September 2004; Atom Markarian, “Transport minister hopes for open border with Turkey”, “Armenia Report”, RFE/RL, 4 February 2004.

²⁶⁹ Azerbaijan’s overall trade is \$39.8 billion, of which \$32.3 billion is exports. The trade figures are taken from the “World Factbook”, Central Intelligence Agency, and are from 2008.

²⁷⁰ Sedat Laçiner, “Türkiye-Ermenistan İlişkilerinde Sınır Kapısı Sorunu ve Ekonomik Boyutu” [“The Border Issue in Turkey-Armenia Relations and its Economic Dimension”], *Ermenistan Araştırmaları*, no. 6 (2002).

²⁷¹ Transport adds 50 per cent to the cost of local products to Armenia, more than double the usual additional cost. In 1996, some 30 enterprises in the Trabzon Free Zone wrote to Turkey’s foreign ministry to complain about “improper passage fees” collected by Georgia. See Burcu Gültekin, “The Stakes of Opening the Turkish Armenian Border”, op. cit.

²⁷² “Doğukapısı açılışın!”, campaign launched in 1996, kent haber.com.

²⁷³ Sema Kalaycıoğlu, “Exploring Complementarities between Turkey and Armenia for Regional Cooperation: Potentials and Challenges”, conference on “The Economic and Social Consequences of Opening the Armenian-Turkey Border”, op. cit.

²⁷⁴ “Improving the state of the Armenian heritage would improve the climate”. Crisis Group interview, Armenian-French commentator Michel Marian, Paris, November 2008. It would also foster support in Armenia, whose officials have raised the heritage issue in Europe. A motion was introduced at the Council of Europe parliamentary assembly on 25 January 2008 by Raffi Hovannisian, deputy speaker of the the national assembly, and signed by 26 parliamentarians but never discussed.

Aghtamar) in Lake Van that ended in 2007 was a good example of such an initiative, though Armenian officials say it did not go far enough.²⁷⁵ Involving Armenian experts would minimise international criticism as Turkey proceeds with restoration work on Ani, whose remarkable monuments and churches from the fifth to the twelfth centuries stand just inside the border.²⁷⁶ The site could be made directly accessible from Armenia by a footbridge over the Arpachay River or special facilities for tour buses coming via a future Gyumri-Kars road.²⁷⁷

The Turkish education ministry and provincial administrations should be encouraged to broaden teaching about the Armenian contribution to Turkish history. “Genocide museums” in eastern Turkish cities that portray 1915 events as entirely about Armenian massacres of Turks should be closed or fundamentally transformed. The policy of not mentioning the Armenian origin of buildings on official signs should also be changed.²⁷⁸ Yerevan should be included in Turkish weather reports. Another step to popularise normalisation in Armenia would be to fully open Mount Ararat to all climbers, including those of Armenian parentage.²⁷⁹

If and when the border opens, local administrations on both sides of the border should proactively encourage cross-border activities to build on what civil society has already achieved, including links between

schools, businesses and tourism agencies. Indeed, the above steps could be taken even if the border is not officially opened.

C. COMING TO TERMS WITH HISTORY

Since elevating the suggestion to the highest level in 2005, Ankara has championed the idea that a historical commission should sort out the events of 1915. There is merit in anything that helps both Turkey and Armenia find closure on the issue. Turks are frustrated that their side of the story is not given credence. Armenians are frustrated that their suffering and losses are not adequately acknowledged in Turkey. Judicial satisfaction has been limited to the 1919 tribunals in British- and French-occupied Istanbul, which handed down some judgements on Ottoman officials but could enforce few of them.

It is expected that a treaty establishing diplomatic relations between Turkey and Armenia would create inter-governmental commissions to examine all outstanding issues. This would put some of the responsibility for achieving closure on the two states. Historians of the Ottoman period, however, point out that they would have a difficult time agreeing on what is truth, since many have made their living from disagreeing with each other.²⁸⁰ An experienced facilitator believes an historical commission would not solve anything, since “they [historians] will always bring evidence to buttress their own arguments”.²⁸¹ Armenians also worry that Turkish historians cannot be objective, because they fear Turkish law may still penalise public genocide references as an insult to the state.

²⁷⁵ Crisis Group interview, senior official, Armenian foreign ministry, Yerevan, February 2009. The Turkish authorities did not allow a new cross to be installed on the steeple, however, viewing the building as a museum, not a place of worship.

²⁷⁶ An Armenian report, “The Rape of Ani: the Turkish ‘restorations’”, accuses Turkey of rebuilding the city walls in a way that destroys the historical fabric, neglecting archaeological aspects and using inappropriate heavy machinery, including bulldozers and shovel excavators, and untrained labourers. Another problem is inadequate supervision, allowing in local treasure hunters, who have dug up several areas and broken tomb stones. See www.virtualani.org. Turkey has acknowledged sub-standard work but says much damage was done by dynamite from Armenian quarries on the opposite river bank. *Yeni Şafak*, 15 February 2009.

²⁷⁷ The measure would be a tourism boon for Armenia and to Turkey’s economic advantage. Security concerns in the relatively isolated areas would be minimal.

²⁷⁸ Currently one kind of sign simply reads: “From the Christian era”.

²⁷⁹ Diplomats say climbers with Armenian names, even those with European or North American passports, have been denied participation in official Turkish groups climbing Ararat. Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Istanbul, March 2009. No formal regulation bars climbers of Armenian descent, but “based on security considerations, the gendarmerie reserves the right to deny permission [to certain individuals]”. Crisis Group telephone interview, Turkish official, Iğdır, Turkey, March 2009.

²⁸⁰ “A bilateral commission on historical facts ... tends to put historians in the position of judges of history, not a very desirable/possible thing, and one that looks more like politicians wishing to dump the hot potato on historians or, worse, planning to manipulate them... both sides have spent decades exposing their ‘evidence’. Unless someone comes up with some earth-shattering information previously unknown to all, any compromise is bound to be political, rather than historical”. Crisis Group email communication, Edhem Eldem, Istanbul, December 2008.

²⁸¹ “The historical commission can’t solve anything. Historians aren’t there to agree on truth. The key is that a third party join them and have access to archives worldwide, to evaluate primary sources and agree a book on shared history on Turkish-Armenian culture”. Crisis Group interview, David Phillips, former facilitator, Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission, New York, 3 February 2009.

A Turkey-Armenia initiative for a historical commission thus might be ineffective, or at least delayed,²⁸² so the governments should individually consider winning credibility by encouraging more broad-based historical research. Education ministries should work together to overcome prejudiced narratives in schoolbooks. Institutions could do much more to sponsor research focused primarily on critical aspects of what happened and histories of particular locations. To improve the credibility of such work to the other side and outside world, all should strive to commission projects that include contributions from Armenian, Turkish and third-country experts.

There is already support for more research in Turkey.²⁸³ As foreign minister, President Gül spoke of the need to better catalogue the Ottoman archives.²⁸⁴ A leading Turkish-American suggested that Ankara could seize the moral high ground by announcing an end to expensive commercial lobbying against the Armenian diaspora in Washington and using the funds to finance research instead.²⁸⁵ With the Turkish ambassador to the U.S. spending as much as two thirds of his time and

political capital fighting battles over 1915,²⁸⁶ Turkey could only gain from putting the issue to rest.²⁸⁷

Studies of the 1915 period are more advanced on the Armenian side, but there are still blank spaces. A full and transparent catalogue of Armenian archives worldwide would be useful. Just as Armenians can be dubious about access to Turkish archives, Turks are convinced that Armenians are holding something back. A possible area of study, one that both sides have politicised, is the role of Armenian nationalist rebels in the Ottoman Empire.²⁸⁸

Without prejudice to diplomatic representations of the Armenian point of view, it would help the process if Armenia as a state did not provoke the Turkish side with genocide recognition campaigns during the reconciliation process.²⁸⁹ Within the context of supporting mutual reconciliatory moves, Armenian condemnation of the decade of ASALA attacks on Ankara's diplomats and others would also have a major impact on Turkish public opinion.

Many Armenians are convinced that the only way they can get Turkey to recognise genocide is through outside pressure.²⁹⁰ But as the Turkish parliament put it, "those who think it is possible to impose on Turkey to rebuild its history on a one-sided and misleading assessment of propaganda material through a campaign of intense international pressure ... are totally mistaken".²⁹¹ Progress will not flow from outright

²⁸² "It's cynical. A state-to-state commission means trying to isolate it, make it amenable to pressure". Crisis Group interview, Ara Sarafian, director, Gomidas Institute, London, 2 March 2009. A leading Turkish commentator said any official commission would be like a "dummy variable" on both sides of a mathematical equation that can disappear without its value ever needing to be known. In his view, compromise on the genocide issue is too explosive for either public and so is destined to be set aside quietly after the overall normalisation is announced. Crisis Group interview, February 2009.

²⁸³ "A lot of Turks are curious about what really happened. A commission would be healthy. We need it for ourselves". Crisis Group interview, AK Party official, Ankara, 20 February 2009. A commentator close to the ruling AK Party suggested Turkey unilaterally form a commission withan openly inviting Armenians. "This move will not only evidence our sincerity and courage in the international arena, but also prevent this heartrending and dangerous division among ourselves". Abdülhamit Bilici, "Let us set up our own historical committee independently of Armenians", *Zaman* and *Today's Zaman*, 20 December 2008.

²⁸⁴ "Necessary archive work has not been carried out in time to enlighten world public opinion about the truth. Or the desired level of service could not be rendered due to a lack of the necessary infrastructure or classification. Outside Turkey, this situation has led to the formation of a belief as if Turkey was hiding something". Gül, speech, op. cit.

²⁸⁵ Crisis Group interview, Osman Bengur, first Turkish-American candidate for Congress, Washington, February 2009. In 1996, there was movement in Congress to reduce aid to Turkey by its estimated lobbying costs of \$3 million annually until it recognised an Armenian genocide and took steps to honour its victims. This never became law, however.

²⁸⁶ Crisis Group interview, pro-Turkey lobbyist, Washington, February 2009.

²⁸⁷ "The objective should be cathartic, not a finding, a process by which things slowly move ahead. Turkey should stop waiting for Armenians to say 'yes' and just get on with it. They need to let Turks know that something bad happened that has to be accounted for". Crisis Group interview, leading U.S. lobbyist for Turkey, Washington, February 2009.

²⁸⁸ "Most Ottoman Armenians were peasants, not politicised, and felt bound to the patriarchate. They were a minority, scared of local tribes; as a rule they were not fighters. The role of revolutionaries in part is romantic theory on both sides, amplified as part of national history. There are no proper social histories. They are all ideological....for instance, there's a huge difference between 1920s Armenian literature on 1915 and today's narrative". Crisis Group interview, Ara Sarafian, director, Gomidas Institute, London, 2 March 2009.

²⁸⁹ "This is important for us. We can't deal with a country constantly working against us at an international level". Crisis Group interview, senior Turkish official, Ankara, February 2009.

²⁹⁰ Crisis Group interviews, governmental and non-governmental representatives, Yerevan, February 2009.

²⁹¹ Declaration by the governing and main opposition parties, Turkish Grand National Assembly, 13 April 2005. "We have a process now where we are confronting the dark side of his-

dismissal of the other side, as some Turkish and Armenian diaspora organisations tend to assume.²⁹² If it seeks to engage and convince Turkey, the Armenian side will have to explicitly offer to research and discuss the context of and alleged inconsistencies in its narrative leading up to, during and after the 1915 events.²⁹³

Similarly, Turkey would be wise not to renew the old policy of blanket denials of any Ottoman fault. An Armenian diplomat pointed out that “Turkey has done very little to win an Armenian constituency”.²⁹⁴ Turkish officials should fulfil all obligations to treat Armenian-Turkish citizens equally, since anything less is immediately publicised and viewed in Armenia as a reason not to trust Turkey, including on matters like the resolution of disputes over past republican Turkish confiscations of Armenian property.²⁹⁵ Some in Turkey suggest that above all the Turkish side should simply empathise more with Armenian viewpoints. According to former Ambassador Vural:

This is not a problem that can be solved by historians. It’s for politicians to solve ... what happened

in the past has created a psychology, an insecurity, a fear, a trauma....we’ve put ourselves into a dead end. First we behaved as if nothing happened. Now we say “yes, there was something. But [the killing] was two-sided”. I don’t know where these debates will go tomorrow. But on the psychological plane, there are things we could do. What’s important is to have an approach that shows we aren’t insensitive to pain and are able to empathise.²⁹⁶

tory ... imposing things will undermine the whole enterprise. It will marginalise the debate. You’ll just be left with a group of intellectuals apologising to Armenia”. Crisis Group interview, Ibrahim Kalın, director, Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (Siyaset, Ekonomi ve Toplum Araştırmaları Vakfı – SETAV), Ankara, 19 February 2009.

²⁹² “It has surface appeal, that there are two sides to the story. But that’s the equivalent of having a debate over whether the earth is flat or a plea bargain. A lung association would not debate with a tobacco company. That doesn’t work for us”. Crisis Group interview, hardline Armenian-American lobbyist, Washington, February 2009.

²⁹³ Leading Turkish academic Halil Berktay said external demands for immediate genocide recognition “generates a strong reaction and plays into the hands of the [Turkish] militarist-nationalist establishment. It is not good communications strategy; it is unable to get the Turkish public to listen. It transforms the whole debate into a polarisation between ‘genocide recognition politics, Armenian nationalist style’ and ‘genocide denial politics, Turkish nationalist style’. Unfortunately various sections of the Armenian/diaspora public find this objection very difficult to understand”. Crisis Group email communication, 29 March 2009.

²⁹⁴ Crisis Group interview, New York, February 2009.

²⁹⁵ When the Republic of Turkey was established by the Lausanne Treaty in 1923, Ankara promised to protect the rights of non-Muslim minorities like the Armenians, but “implementing Lausanne became the exception to the rule, not infringing it”. See “Bir ‘Yabancı’laştırma Hikâyesi: Türkiye’de Gayrimüslim Cemaatlerin Vakıf ve Taşınmaz Mülkiyet Sorunu” [“A Story of ‘Foreigner’isation: The Problem of Non-Muslim Community Foundations and Real Estate in Turkey”], Turkey Economic and Social Studies Foundation (Türkiye Ekonomi ve Sosyal Etüdler Vakfı – TESEV), March 2009.

²⁹⁶ Volkan Vural, interview with *Taraf*, 8 September 2008, confirmed in Crisis Group interview, Istanbul, 24 February 2009.

VII. CONCLUSION

There are many strong platforms in Turkey and Armenia for the current reconciliation process: the engagement of intellectuals in finding new common ground, the willingness of officials to discuss new ideas and the positive approach of public opinion. New trends are apparent in the Armenian diaspora, and the process has the support of outside powers like the U.S., EU and Russia. The next steps – diplomatic relations and open borders – can immediately create new constituencies invested in a peaceful future for Turks and Armenians and more prosperity in both countries. Armenia should take courage from the way Turkey has proved its sincerity in seeking strong relations with its neighbours by beginning normalisation with Iraqi Kurdistan, supporting settlement talks in Cyprus and President Gül's decision to visit Yerevan. Turkey should be emboldened by the public support in both countries for that visit and step up its efforts to convince Armenia of its sincerity and respect for the history and heritage of Armenians in Anatolia.

The rewards for Turkey of simply acting transparently to close the historical file are great. Just as the Armenian issue can poison many unrelated areas, a perception of readiness to deal with the past honestly would strengthen its arguments in additional domains. Reconciliation with Armenia would do much to underline the sincerity of its EU ambitions and add new credibility to its rising profile as an energetic regional power. Armenia should be clear-eyed that even if Turkey compromises by delinking the opening of the border from Nagorno-Karabakh withdrawals, any further normalisation will be unsustainable if there is no progress in its disputes with Azerbaijan. All – Armenia, Turkey, Azerbaijan and the region as a whole – will sacrifice growth and security if the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains frozen indefinitely.

New realism in Armenia and a new trend to reach out to Turkey in some parts of a still conservative diaspora are also encouraging. Those Armenians who re-

main unconvinced of the merits of a conciliatory approach should consider what it is that most of their brethren really want. If it is the old goals of punishment, reparations and territory, the unedifying story of the last 90 years should be enough to convince them that this is a dead end. International genocide resolutions over the past decade have pushed Turkey to seek ways to defend itself and thus given it an incentive to seek normalisation with Armenia, but, even among academics willing to apologise for past wrongs, such resolutions show little sign of making Turkey accept the genocide label.

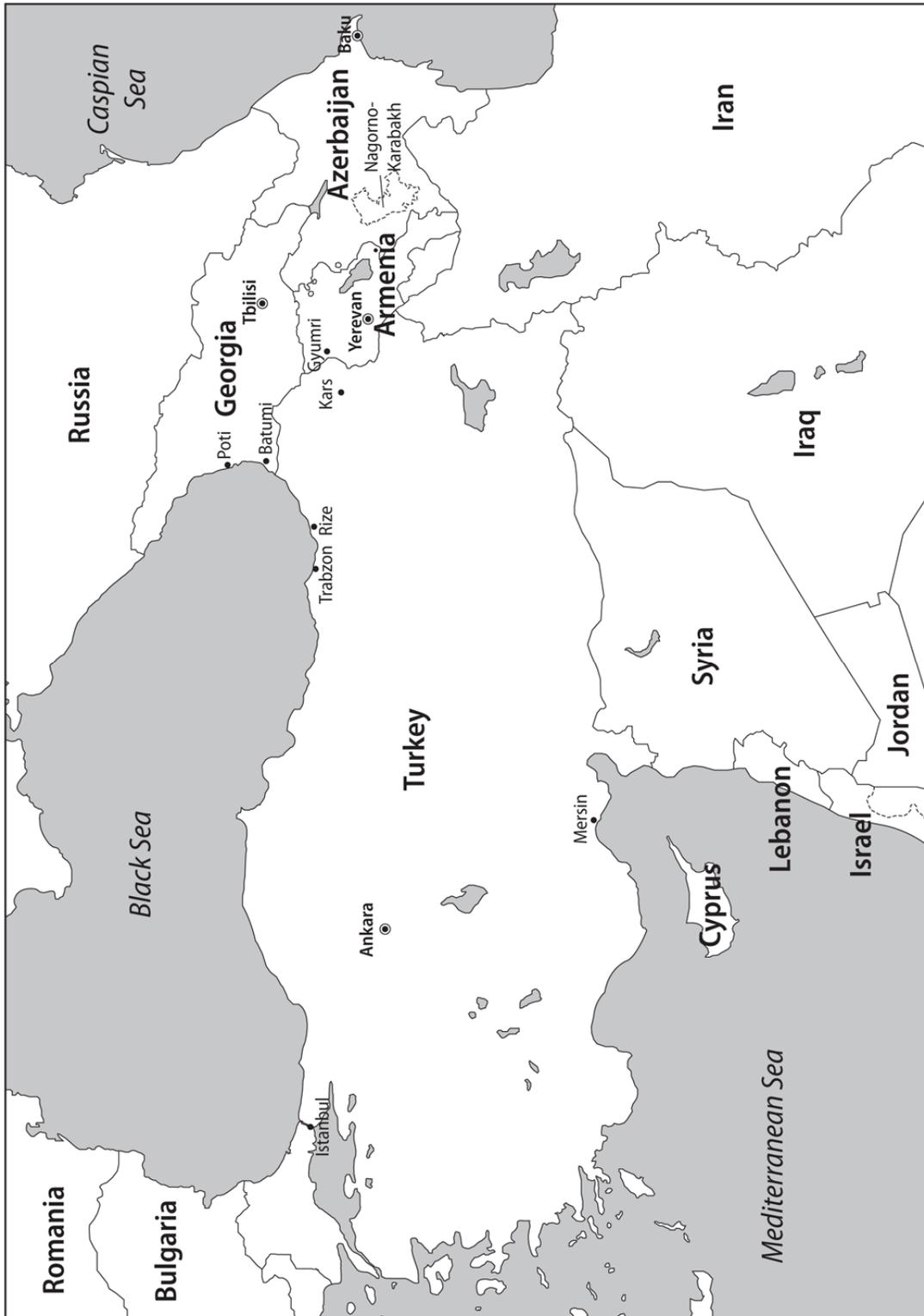
If, however, Armenians' goal is Turkish acceptance of their view of what happened in 1915, this will only happen if Turks themselves are convinced of the factuality of Armenian and others' arguments. That in turn is dependent on Turkey's belief that it is not acting under threat, that territorial claims will not be advanced, and also that Armenians show some understanding of Turkish historical grievances. Armenians should realise that honest academic study to establish a common set of facts is the only process through which Turkish intellectuals can work to fill the gaps in their country's public record, and consequently they should take part in that process.

Politicians in third countries should do all they can to bolster mutual confidence. They should weigh carefully the balance between pleasing domestic constituents and the damage that can be done to progress in international relations. They should reassess the fashion for parliaments to pass political judgement on other countries' histories, not least because those same institutions rarely are as outspoken about dark episodes in their own national pasts. Armenian and Turkish civil society and academics are moving towards common understanding of what happened as the Ottoman Empire collapsed and should be helped in their endeavours. But there also needs to be a focus on the present and the future, which can be demonstrably improved by the steps currently being taken by both Turkey and Armenia.

Istanbul/Yerevan/Baku/Brussels, 14 April 2009

APPENDIX A

MAP OF TURKEY AND ARMENIA



APPENDIX B

CHRONOLOGY OF TURKEY-ARMENIA RELATIONS

1800-1923: Ottoman Empire collapses to one quarter its size under onslaught from Russia, Britain and France and new Balkan states, forcing many Turks and Muslims to fall back on the land of modern Turkey. Between two and five million Turks and Muslims die in massacres and forced deportations.

1890-1896, 1915-1920: Massacres and uprisings involving Armenian Christians of the Ottoman Empire, mainly in what is now central and eastern Turkey. These included a massive First World War relocation of Armenians starting on 24 April 1915, during which about one million persons were massacred or died of disease. Armenians and many others describe this as the Armenian Genocide.

1921: Turkey, Soviet Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia sign Treaty of Kars, establishing peace and today's borders between Turkey and south Caucasus states, including Armenia.

1973-1985: Armenian terrorists kill 30 Turkish diplomats and diplomatic staff and 26 others in 45 attacks around the world, seeking Turkish recognition of an Armenian genocide, reparations and territory.

1991: Turkey becomes second state to formally recognise Armenian independence. Railway line open since 1980s between Kars and Gyumri begins to carry U.S.-financed wheat to Armenia.

1988-92: Hostilities break out in Nagorno-Karabakh, an ethnic Armenian enclave within Azerbaijan. Main fighting begins 1992. By ceasefire in 1994, ethnic Armenian forces occupy at least one eighth of Azerbaijan.

1992: Turkey ensures that both Armenia and Azerbaijan join Istanbul-based Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation.

1993: As ethnic Armenian forces advance into Azerbaijan, Turkey closes railway line that is its only transport link with Armenia.

1995: Turkey opens air corridor over its territory to Yerevan.

1998: Robert Kocharian elected president of Armenia, makes genocide recognition a central part of his foreign policy.

2000: Draft U.S. House of Representatives Resolution 596 calls on President Bill Clinton to use the term "genocide" in characterising the 1915 events. Last-minute intervention by Clinton, arguing that it would damage U.S.-Turkish relations, causes the bill to be withdrawn. Turkey protests by briefly imposing tougher visa restrictions on Armenians travelling to Turkey.

2001: Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission (TARC) is established in Geneva aiming to improve relations between Turkey and Armenia. Bilateral civil society projects blossom.

2008: Turkish President Abdullah Gül visits Yerevan upon invitation by Armenian President Sarkisian to attend an Armenia-Turkey World Cup qualifier football match.

APPENDIX C

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