

# **Turks and Armenians to rebuild historic bridge on border**

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Armenia and Turkey are cooperating to reconstruct a 10th-century bridge on the Akhuryan River despite the faltering of the process of political reconciliation between the two countries, Hurriyet reported.

The Akhuryan River establishes the border between Turkey and Armenia; the ruined bridge that once spanned it had one foot in each country. The Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey, or TEPAV, initiated the effort to reconstruct the bridge, which is on the historic Silk Road. The project is supported by both Turkish President Abdullah Gül and the Yerevan administration, and is said to be looked upon favorably by members of the Armenian diaspora as well.

Built by the Armenian Kingdom, the defunct bridge connotes the lack of economic and political ties between the two countries, but its reconstruction could symbolize a new era in bilateral relations, the source says.

TEPAV President Güven Sak first approached Armenian Prime Minister Tigran Sarkisian and Deputy Culture Minister Arev Samelyan about the project. Gül, who has been interested in the effort since he was first informed about it in February 2009, was briefed on the current situation Friday following the visit of a TEPAV delegation to Yerevan.

According to TEPAV officials, there is an urgent need to have a set of creative and genuine confidence-building steps in the relationship between Turkey and Armenia.

"It is important to strengthen the momentum. The positive impact of the political reconciliation on society should be reinforced," said one official from TEPAV, which has also been active in projects to bring Palestinians and Israelis together. "Symbolic steps will give visibility to the political will. These steps should increase the contacts between the two peoples and enable them to open the borders in their mentalities."

Such steps should also aim at preparing the economic infrastructure of the South Caucasus, the official added.