TURKEY - ARMENIA RELATIONS

Within The Framework of EU

Boğaziçi University Center for European Studies Student Forum

5/12/2015
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GENERAL INFORMATION

• “Turkey – Armenia Relations within the Framework of EU” was held on Boğaziçi University, South Campus, Demir Demirgil Hall and consists of one day’s session on 12 May 2015.

• The language of the conference was English.

• The conference was open to any and all participants provided that they have applied for an invitation before the announced deadline.

• Before the event, we made discussions with Prof. Dr. Kemal Kirisci, Prof. Dr. Hakan Yilmaz, Prof. Dr. Mine Eder, Prof. Dr. Sevket Pamuk, Assoc. Prof. Emre Erdogan, Assist. Dr. Gul Sosay, Hrant Dink Foundation and DurDe Foundation.

• Speakers were Ahmet Unal Cevikoz who is the former Ambassador of Turkey to the UK, Cengiz Aktar who is Sabancı University’s Senior Scholar of Istanbul Policy Center, and Columnist on Taraf and Today’s Zaman, Sona Dilanyan who is Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation’s Deputy Director, and Noyan Soyak who is the Vice Chairman at Turkish Armenian Business Development Council.

• More than 40 students have participated to the event.
OUTLINE OF THE CONFERENCE

As the Student Forum of Centre for European Studies, we have decided to place an emphasis on the European Union integration process while approaching this important topic. EU in its Progress Reports underlines that the normalization process and the reopening of borders between Armenia and Turkey is a vital step. However, it would be quite restricted, had we not dealt with issues that are within the EU framework such as human and minority rights. With all these points at hand we have devised a conference schema based on four main debates:

1. **The analysis and discussion of the EU Progress Reports on Turkey-Armenia relations**
   - The perspective of the EU should be elaborated.
   - Speaker could be a member of the group from Brussels who worked on the issue or an academician with a background on this topic.

2. **The question of re-opening the borders from an economic perspective**
   - The prerequisite of Turkey for opening the borders is related to Azerbaijan - Armenia relations.
   - The economic side is related to the benefits that both countries would get from trade and there are joint Armenian - Turkish trade organizations working for this purpose.
   - The re-opening of borders would allow EU trade zone to have immediate access to Armenia. This is vital for EU because it would like to see Armenia in its influence zone rather than in that of Russia.
   - Speakers for this part can be of economy or business background so that the discussion will be much more focused on economic themes.

3. **The question of Armenian properties left after 1915**
   - This is a part of the historical debate on the ownership of certain lands/houses/churches by Armenians who had to leave them behind in 1915. From a human right perspective, this is an issue that needs to be resolved if Armenian - Turkish relations are to be normalized. This issue is also related to diversity and the perception of Turkey as a
country of Muslims which is historically inaccurate and needs to be challenged if the minorities in Turkey are ever to be seen as equal citizens.

4. The perception of both peoples on these issues
   • This is quite vital for the broader picture. Armenian issue is not just a historical debate. It has wider implications for the Armenian and Turkish public. While discussion all those above mentioned issues, one must mention the cultural dynamics and speculate on possible popular reactions and debates. The perspectives of citizens of Armenia, Turkey (those of Armenian descent especially) and also the Armenians in diaspora should be taken into consideration.
   • The speaker on this can be a social historian or a social scientist who worked on this topic and who is known to have access to all sides of the issue.
PROGRAMME OF THE CONFERENCE

“Turkey – Armenia Relations Within the Framework of the EU”

12 May 2015, Tuesday

Center for European Studies
Student Forum,
Boğaziçi University, Istanbul, Turkey

Venue: Boğaziçi University, South Campus, Demir Demirgil Hall

09.00 – 09.15: Registration

09.15 – 09.45: Opening Speech & Welcoming Remarks

Merve Tekgurler
Bogazici University CESSF Coordinator

09.45 – 11.15: 1st Session & Questions/Answers

Chair/Speaker: Ahmet Unal Cevikoz
Former Ambassador of Turkey to the UK

“The Analysis and Discussion of the EU Progress Reports on Turkey-Armenia Relations”

Cengiz Aktar
Sabancı University Senior Scholar of Istanbul Policy Center, Todays Zaman Columnist

“The Perception of Both Peoples on These Issues”

Sona Dilanyan
Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation, Deputy Director

11.15 – 11.40: Coffee Break

11.40 – 13.10: 2nd Session & Questions/Answers

Chair/Speaker: Ahmet Unal Cevikoz
Former Ambassador of Turkey to the UK

“The Question of Re-Opening the Borders from an Economic Perspective”

Noyan Soyak
Vice Chairman at Turkish Armenian Business Development Council

13.10 – 13.25: Closing
SPEECHES OF THE CONFERENCE

AHMET UNAL CEVIKOZ

Considerable amount of my career have passed in trying to normalize the relationship between Turkey and Armenia. Particularly within the ambassador period, we arranged several meetings in Erivan, Vienna, etc. to solve the problems. Turkey was the one the first countries which recognized Armenia, but recognition does not mean establishing the relation with it. Recognition is about jurisdiction but establishing relations is a political decision. Recognizing Armenia was the legal perspective of the situation.

The difference of opinions on the definition of the events is one of the important reasons of the lasting situation. It was genocide for Armenia. Turkey, on the other hand, have taken a legal perspective and advocated that there have to be a legal definition of “genocide” corresponding with what had happened. There is a definition of genocide which has accepted by EU and UN. However, recognition of genocide is another dimension; therefore, it should be approached in legal terms.

2007 - 2008 and the first months of 2009 was labeled as the golden age of Turkish foreign policy. These are the periods of protocols establishing a common commission interpretation of history. In 10th of October 2009, 2 protocols have been signed by both parties in Zurich. But they were blocked to be enforced by the parliaments of the both countries. My interpretation about these protocols is that during this normalization process Armenians and Turks have developed very strong mutual confidence and trust. Armenia, for the first time, thought that Turkey had serious intentions to develop relations. Today, they still see Turkey as a country trying to prevent the normalization process.

More than 20 countries accepted that the situation was genocide. Condolences to the families of decedents are attempts to prevent the tsunami that will come in 24th of April. However, from Armenian perspective, Turkish side was always taking some measures to preventing from the tsunami effect.
We have to establish civil organizations, make seminars for further normalization of the relations. A solution of current situation can only be built on where people contacts, open borders realized, when they come and visit they used to live as a “homeland”. Now it is not possible due to political reasons.

CENGİZ AKTAR

EU as an external pressure group dealt with the recognition of Armenian Genocide. EU Commission which is the most diplomatic of all EU organs has always been cautious while talking about the “genocide”. The Council does not talk about the external issues out of the 28 countries. But the individual countries have their own ideas. 15 out of 28 member states recognize the genocide which has something to do with bilateral relations. EU Parliament which is the most non-diplomatic of the EU organs is, on the contrary, behaving for the recognition of genocide.

In 1987, Turgut Özal put the official application for membership. Proposals by the Parliament included direct expression of the genocide. European Economic Community commenmorated both Armenian and Jewish Genocide. In progress report of Turkey towards full membership in 1999, the issue put forward again by the Parliament. 3rd reference was at 25 February 2001 with the European Parliament decisions. In 28 September of 2005, a proposal enshrines the recognition of Armenian Genocide as a prerequisite for the approval of any admission. Final reference at 15th of April was commented extensively by the media and in politics. It refers to all the past decisions and the UN Convention on the prevention and the punishment of the genocide and calls Turkey to recognize the Armenian Genocide. In 28th of November, within the corpus of the decision, public denial of the crimes of genocide carried about by a violence and hatred against a relevant group. The decision does not only recognize the genocide but also criminalize it. Not only relevant judicial body, but also European Court of Human Rights was endowed with the jurisdiction. There is the problem of freedom of expression in case of the denial or the condemnation of the genocide.
The good news is that the Turkish civil society has taken a totally different track by trying to understand what really happened. Memorials are the healthiest and the most sustainable dynamic development in Turkey. People do not case out of this issue any more. Learning about what happened happens now. Especially the young and the Kurds are ready to face the reality and even curious about it.

**SONA DİLANYAN**

What society thinks about conflicts? Discourses are regulated by media and governments. Socio-psychological structures are one of the bases of many of the conflicts. Gross generalizations on what Turkey, Armenia and Diaspora consist of mislead public opinion. Huge division exists especially among diaspora. This is because the risk of homogenizing them. Diasporas in different countries have different perceptions. This causes a non-homogeneous group to debates.

Under-representation and even non-representation is the problem of many minorities. For example the Armenians of Turkey as a non-state actor do not have an official representation and they are highly excluded from the process. Armenians in US is also another example. There is no way of knowing whether they really agree or disagree with the policies. It is not easy to know also what Diasporas really think (what their approaches are) because of heterogeneity and non-representation.

In this discussion, there is the paradox of homeland. For most of the people in diaspora, the idea of homeland goes between Turkey and Armenia because most of them are from Anatolia.

In terms of attitudes on the impact of border opening on the economy, 70% with higher education is positive in Armenia. To show the social dimension of the opening of the border we can say that approval rate of the women marrying with Turks is very low. 94% disapproved and thought that this is awful. In other words, people’s approach to opening border is positive but surveys show that more than 90% disagree for a marriage between a Turkish and Armenian People are okay with economic benefits of the opening borders.
Misbalances on the number of women saying “no idea” or do not want to response shows an inconsistency. It is about 25% in Turkey and considerably lowers in Armenia. Because it is highly emotional, prioritized issue in Armenia. 40% of the people in Armenia said they have learned about 1915 events before the age of 10. One can imagine how intense the emotions and perceptions there.

NOYAN SOYAK

After founding the Turkish- Armenian Business Development Organization we have known that we should not talk about the genocide in the first place. He believes that we should not be talking about genocide but business can improve the relations.

The border is closed for the commercial trade since the establishment of the Armenia. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkish-Armenian border has been closed for trading. Trade through Georgian contact persons is only possible way. The activity started with the business conferences, direct interaction. Regional business meetings were held because we thought that opening the border was not enough. What do we lose as Turkey? What do they lose? Energy, Tourism, Transportation (an existing railway between Kars and Armenia that has not been used more than 20 years), etc. In terms of tourism, there are 2 or 8 million guaranteed tourists. 100 million diaspora people are visiting Anatolia once a year. By just opening the border Van and Kars may benefit from these mass of guaranteed tourists. Living conditions in the East, the role of women, social- economic situations may change in the East. I believe that the opening of the border will improve the gender issue in Turkey. In terms of energy, there is no regulation or customs for trade. Therefore; we may not be able to make a trade even if the borders could be opened.

I believe that business is one of the important aspects of conflict resolution. Turkish foreign policy put itself into the corner with its Azerbaijan policy. In my opinion, the improvement of the relations with Armenia would not hurt the benefits of Azerbaijan. We would be able to support our view by an ambassador in Armenia.
Boğaziçi University CESSF Conference on

Venue:
Boğaziçi University, South Campus, Demir Demirgil Hall

Date & Time:
12 May 2015, 09:30 - 13:30

SPEAKERS:

Ahmet Ünal Çeviköz
Former Ambassador of Turkey to the UK

Prof. Dr. Cengiz Aktar
Sabancı University Senior Scholar of Istanbul Policy Center, Today's Zaman Columnist

R. Noyan Soyar
Vice Chairman at Turkish Armenian Business Development Council

Sona Dilanyan
Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation, Deputy Director

POSTER OF THE CONFERENCE
USEFUL SOURCES


- https://books.google.com.tr/books?id=1jyuqt_DDycC&pg=PA89&lpg=PA89&dq=Turkey+armenia+european+union&source=bl&ots=Dr-t7x094V&sig=9wjiKjBoYiPY18cOxsJiMZQAOq&hl=tr&sa=X&ei=ogFVZLVC8z5aKrBgPgB&ved=0CBcQ6AEwADgK#v=onepage&q=Turkey%20armenia%20european%20union&f=false

- http://www.repairfuture.net/index.php/tr/

