



International Center for Human Development
www.ichd.org

Armenia-Turkey Rapprochement and Related Concerns

A report on discussions held during regional
town hall meetings in the Republic of Armenia



International Center for Human Development

www.ichd.org

Armenia-Turkey Rapprochement and Related Concerns

**A report on discussions held during regional town hall meetings
in the Republic of Armenia**

The town hall meetings were conducted by the International Center for Human Development with the support of Eurasia Partnership Foundation through funding provided by the United States Agency for International Development.

Views and opinions described herein have been expressed by citizens participating in town hall meetings and do not necessarily reflect the views of International Center for Human Development, Eurasia Partnership Foundation or USAID.

CONTENT

| | |
|---|-----|
| CONTENT | 2 |
| Introduction..... | 4 |
| Methodology | 5 |
| Town Hall Meeting Format..... | 5 |
| Comparative analysis of town hall meeting results..... | 6 |
| Key Observations and Conclusions..... | 9 |
| Impact of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey | |
| ...on the process of international recognition of the Armenian Genocide..... | 9 |
| ...on the Armenian Cause and Armenian demands | 11 |
| ...on prospects of cooperation between Armenia and the Diaspora..... | 13 |
| ...on the economy of Armenia..... | 15 |
| ... on Armenia's comparative competitiveness | 16 |
| ...on business interests, influence and social justice | 18 |
| External players in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey | |
| Role of the Russian Federation | 171 |
| Role of the United States of America | 182 |
| Role of Georgia | 183 |
| Impact on relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan..... | 204 |
| Impact on the process of regulation of the Nagorno- Karabakh conflict | 205 |
| Role of Iran..... | 216 |
| Role of the international community | 227 |
| Additional themes in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey | |
| Initiative, responsibility and diplomacy..... | 249 |
| Perception of time, pace and prospects | 31 |
| Citizen participation | 33 |
| Crime, trafficking and migration | 34 |
| Education, culture and information..... | 36 |
| Internal politics of Armenia | 37 |
| Trust and stereotypes..... | 39 |
| European Integration | 41 |
| Rendering the Voting Results..... | |
| Impact of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey on the process of international recognition of the Armenian Genocide..... | 43 |

Introduction

In September 2009, in order to make heard the voice of the citizens of Armenia on the developments of relations between the Republic of Armenia and Turkey and the process of establishing diplomatic relations between two countries and to engage the general public in an active discussion on this issue of great public importance, the International Center for Human Development (ICHD) NGO with the support of Eurasia Partnership Foundation has initiated a series of town hall meetings in all ten marzes (provinces) of Armenia and in capital, Yerevan.

Previously, ICHD had used the format of town hall meetings to facilitate a number of discussions on issues of high public interest such as the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process and amendments to Armenia's Constitution. This format enables citizens representing different social groups to engage directly and effectively in discussions, express their views and opinions and voice their concerns.

Meetings involved 1200 citizens and were held in Artashat (Ararat marz), Yeghegnadzor (Vayots Dzor), Sisian (Syunik), Martuni (Gegharkunik), Ijevan (Tavush), Vanadzor (Lori), Gyumri (Shirak), Armavir (Armavir), Ashtarak (Aragatsotn), and Yerevan.

Discussions were structured around five potential scenarios of future developments in Armenia-Turkey relations developed by ICHD experts based on ideas, opinions and analysis published in the press (scenarios are described in detail in Annex 1).

Each town hall meeting including voting process by participants for what they thought was the most preferable and the most probable options. Summary results of the voting are presented in Annex 3.

ICHD's town hall meeting format captures ideas and suggestions voiced during discussions, to summarize and to analyze those and to present to the public and decision makers. All ideas voiced during town hall meetings are posted on the official web-site of ICHD at <http://www.ichd.org>.

As a result, conclusions and recommendations regarding the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey were developed through participation of citizens of the Republic of Armenia, their engagement in dialogue and debate.

It is a pleasure to thank those who made this Report possible such as the United States Agency for International Development for the financial support and the Eurasia Partnership Foundation. We would like to make a special reference to our focal points in the regions of Armenia. Without their corporation we could not have mobilized local experts and citizens. We also wish to thank those reporters and media specialists who have all covered the discussions throughout the entire campaign.

Special thanks should be given to Mr. Emil Sanamyan who edited the English version of the Report.

Methodology

Methodology of our approach consists of two parts. The first part of methodology represents the format of holding the town hall meetings and the second constitutes of tools for analysis of results.

Town Hall Meeting Format

The Town Hall Meeting format has been developed and applied by ICHD since 2005 in order to contribute to effective participation of citizens in the process of public decision making. This unique format of participatory democracy has been developed based on the experience of *America Speaks* organization, which has developed the basic methodology of this format and until now continues to apply it with great success in the United States.

Policy makers often find it difficult to assess opinions and perceptions of the majority of common citizens about different issues of great public interest. Moreover, citizens are also often left out from the process of public administration and do tend not to participate in public life. As a result, a vicious cycle that challenges democracy is sometimes established.

The course of town hall meetings provides for an environment of direct communication of the will and position of citizens on issues of great public interest to high level policy makers.

Each town hall meeting ensures diversity of opinions and balance in terms of political preferences by engaging hundreds of common citizens in the process, immediate and effective summarization of opinions expressed by citizens, as well as wide dissemination of the results of those discussions.

Comparative advantages of this format include up-streaming of the views on issues discussed, with none of the voiced ideas is ignored, effective participation, continuity of discussions, clear definition of priorities. Successful implementation of the format is conditioned by diversity of opinions around each table, engagement of decision makers at each stage, high quality of content, structure and course of the process, real changes resulting from the process.

The town hall meeting format is rooted in dialogue and exchange of opinions between citizens in contrast to speeches, Q&A sessions and presentations. Different groups of society take part in discussions around a table with equal voice. 10 to 15 people gather around one table and express their opinions on policies, funding, planning and other important aspects of decision making. If a separate discussion does not pose specific gender or age requirements to the target group of participants, then around each table and in the discussion hall in general a maximum equal composition of women, men and youth is ensured. A highly skilled facilitator leads the discussion process around each table, which ensures consistency of discussions focused on the subject matter, as well as application of democratic principals in the process of discussion. In order to ensure a sufficient level of awareness on the issue under discussion among participants they are provided with maximum detailed and balanced information on the issue.

Information technologies applied in the framework of this format enable to turn separate discussions taking place at each table into a joint discussion across the entire hall. Opinions and views expressed at each table are registered and sent to a unified database through a wireless computer network. Each table has one note keeper, who is to record each idea expressed by a participant and to send it to the main operator, who is in charge of ensuring timely display of received messages on screens visible to all participants. At the end of the discussion each participant is provided with an opportunity to vote for a well-formulated most preferable position by using a computer program.

It is of note that an entire group is able to reflect upon ideas and voices at different tables and to make his or her position heard to policy makers through the final voting process. The general position expressed by participants through the voting is summarized and presented after the voting process. Decision makers are actively engaged in the process by participating in discussions as well as responding to questions and comments at the end of discussions.

Organization of town-hall meetings requires (a) definition and clear formulation of the issue to be discussed, (b) collection of expert data necessary for discussion and formulation of alternative options, (c) sufficient program support, (d) availability of necessary computer equipment, (e) selection of discussion venue, ensuring necessary setting and adequate furnishing, (f) set up of the computer network, (g) availability of qualified facilitators and note keepers, if necessary through appropriate training, (h) raising awareness of citizens on issues to be discussed and ensuring presence of participants, (i) availability of technical support and service staff during discussions, (j) summarizing the results of discussions, (k) dissemination of information about the results of discussions among all stakeholders. Description of a common town hall meeting setting is depicted in Annex 4.

Comparative analysis of town hall meeting results

Methodology of comparative analysis of town hall meeting results ensures an indirect social dialogue over prospects of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey through comparison of attitudes and positions of common citizens across all regions of the country, hence through starting a mediated parallel dialogue (Annex 5).

The methodology of the comparative analysis relies on two components: (a) analysis of the results (messages) of the town hall meetings with an emphasis on raised issues and three main dimensions of knowledge¹, attitude² and perceptions, and (b) summary of expressed pro and con opinions (messages) over the suggested scenarios or discussed issues.

This approach ensures mediated debate and dialogue among citizens through summarizing of opinions (messages) voiced by them. In some cases debate or grievance is the only possible format. When people are engaged in debate or dialogue the parties try to exert necessary pressure or gain political support to advance their demands and perceptions. As the objectives of debate and dialogue are different both are important elements of the communications field. Unfortunately, often the balance between dialogue and debate is significantly leaning towards the latter.

The debate format dominated the public discourse due to many reasons such as (a) some are convinced that debate and opposition is the only path to making your voice heard, (b) according to many the dialogue model contributes to status quo or slow changes, (c) there are only rare examples of real and effective dialogue on community or general public levels, (d) there are no defined rules for methods other than debate, (e) the hostile attitude towards each other among different groups of society implies that communication among them should also be hostile, (f) debating is much more attractive and interesting than dialoging, and allows the debater to stand out, (g) debate and opposition have a function of talking-discussing, (h) in a debate people can be selective and choose to ignore things they do not like, (i) debating is easier, it is less risky and the debater is less vulnerable, (j) people like to speak on behalf of groups and not be on their own, (k) dialogue is perceived as means for melting and making melt, (l) there are fears that dialogue required concessions, (m) there are fears that in case of dialoging there will be need to assimilate and take the same position, (n) there are fears that confusion, feeling of vulnerability or understanding opinions of the other side makes

¹ **Knowledge** is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as (i) expertise, and skills acquired by a person through experience or education; the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject, (ii) what is known in a particular field or in total; facts and information or (iii) awareness or familiarity gained by experience of a fact or situation. Philosophical debates in general start with Plato's formulation of knowledge as "justified true belief". There is however no single agreed definition of knowledge presently, nor any prospect of one, and there remain numerous competing theories. (<http://www.oed.com>).

² An attitude is a hypothetical construct that represents an individual's degree of like or dislike for an item. Attitudes are generally positive or negative views of a person, place, thing, or event - this is often referred to as the attitude object. People can also be conflicted or ambivalent toward an object, meaning that they simultaneously possess both positive and negative attitudes toward the item in question. Attitudes are judgments. They develop on the ABC model (affect, behavior, and cognition). The *affective* response is an emotional response that expresses an individual's degree of preference for an entity. The *behavioral* intention is a verbal indication or typical behavioral tendency of an individual. The *cognitive* response is a cognitive evaluation of the entity that constitutes an individual's beliefs about the object. Most attitudes are the result of either direct experience or observational learning from the environment: (Breckler, S. J., & Wiggins, E. C. (1992). On defining attitude and attitude theory: Once more with feeling. In A. R. Pratkanis, S. J. Breckler, & A. C. Greenwald (Eds.), *Attitude structure and function*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum: pages 407-427)

the dialoging person less convincing, (o) there are fears that in case of engaging in dialogue the opponent may continue in a debate format and the dialoguer will lose, (p) many are not aware of the specificities of dialogue and do not know why it can be beneficial. For instance, many are not aware that they gain more convincing power when they let the opponents know that they had been heard.

Indeed engaging in dialogue cannot provide all remedies, however balancing between debate and dialogue is useful and helps in overcoming many issues in the process of communication and problem solution generated through debate. A more advanced level of dialogue can promote engagement of more people in the process. Dialogue enables to enrich the discussion through examples of personal experiences, to exchange worries, concerns and confusions. In this case more information is exchanged and better understanding is developed. The process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey is often based on misperceptions of the issue, wishes and priorities by the other side. As a result the initiative of resolution of the problem may get out of its track³.

Analysis implies comparative analysis of classified and grouped messages according to contrast-coherence ladder. (Annex 7): The stages of analysis are as follows:

Stage 1. During the **initial processing stage** recurring or technical messages were excluded, grammar and spelling in the entire text was edited.

Stage 2. During the **classification** stage messages containing personal or national insult⁴, which can be made available or analyzed in a framework of a separate study to reveal particularly negative attitudes and perception which, for instance, hinder normalization of relation.

Stage 3. Base on the classification of the issues expressed messages were classified by issues of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey (Annex 6), which were then summarized in the analytical table of Social dialogue. At this stage each message has been placed in the column of similar messages, including rational, irrational, emotional arguments. In the parallel column opposing arguments are placed. In some cases there are no opposing messages.

Stage 4. Base on dimensions messages expressed during the classification stage have been classified into three dimensions of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey (1) interests, position and intentions, (2) emotions, fears, concerns, and (3) values, stereotypes, convictions.

Stage 5. During the **synthesis** stage the classified messages and arguments were analyzed using the contrast-coherence ladder. At this stage the issues have been discussed in the prism of two axes (a) what impact will the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey have on different issues, and (b) what impact will different issues have on the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey. Weight and acuteness of perception of concrete attitude towards discussed issues were conditioned by diversity and multilayered nature of such expressions rather than frequency or number of expressions voicing attitude including rational, irrational, emotional etc. This means that each attitude has been valued to the degree of diversity of formulation through which it has been articulated or justified. Mechanical recurrence of formulations do not imply unconditional importance of the attitude, instead it may express, for instance, the wide-spread nature of existing stereotypes.

³ Doug Stone, Robert Ricigliano and Eric Collins. Conflict Management Group. 1993:

⁴ In the framework of this methodology insult is defined as expression or action that can cause emotional pain or may in some other way inflame passions of a person. Insult is a relative concept, as the feeling of it is often conditioned by specific values of an individual. In the framework of this methodology those expressions that have been freely circulated in Armenian and international media are not considered as insult.

Key Observations and Conclusions

Impact of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey on the process of international recognition of the Armenian Genocide

The Mount Olive prayer

The attitude of citizens towards normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey is largely conditioned by its potential impact on the process of the international recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

A significant number of citizens consider international recognition of the Genocide a pan-Armenian objective of exceptional importance. Vast majority of them reject any pre-condition or action implied by the process of normalization of the relations which could threaten the process of international recognition of the Genocide. Nevertheless, citizens understand that even if there are no implicitly defined pre-conditions those two processes are interconnected to a certain extent; hence they are concerned about possibility of speculations due to that interconnection.

At the same time, another group of citizens believe that international recognition of the Genocide should be viewed in the general context of national social, economic and political priorities. This group of citizens justifies their position particularly by social challenges, absence of prospects for recognition of the Genocide by Turkey, perspectives of demobilization and dissolution of the issue due to generation change, limited state resources to pursue international recognition of the Genocide, etc.

It is noteworthy that both groups of citizens agree that the processes of the Genocide recognition and normalization of relations between two countries should not be conditioned by each other and one of those processes should not be solved at the expense of the other. Expectations on this issue coincide. Citizens, in general, agree on precedence of political priorities over economic ones.

“Both” vs. “either one or the other”

In general, citizens think that both processes should run simultaneously and that they should not be mutually contradictory: progress in one should not happen at the expense of the other. Moreover, according to the general perception it is necessary to be as much as possible consistent and initiating in the process of the international recognition of the Genocide, meanwhile in the process of normalization of relations between the two countries it is necessary to be flexible and seek mutually acceptable and beneficial pragmatic political and economic solutions.

Three million diplomats on the open border

One group of citizens believes that in case of normalization of relations between two countries the process of the international recognition of the Genocide will be accelerated, even though acceleration may not have only a single desired outcome. Part of the citizens thinks that the process of normalization, the open border and frequent interactions will provide an opportunity to present the reality directly to the Turkish society “inside Turkey at the seaside, in the cities and villages ...” In their opinion each citizen of Armenia should become “a national ambassador” and “a preacher” upon “an internal call” and should persuade the Turkish society and prove that the Genocide had taken place; such an opportunity can be provided only through opening the border. This group of citizens is convinced that personal contacts will enable individuals and the society to engage in the process of the Genocide recognition and make the process more effective; meanwhile currently the entire burden of the recognition process is born by the state of Armenia and pan-Armenian institutions operating abroad. Citizens think that even at this stage of the process the Turkish policy of denial is becoming vulnerable, as silence, one of the main components of the internal political arsenal of its denial policy, is dissolving; and as a result of future interaction the issue will be discussed and circulated among the Turkish society more broadly and freely. One part of the society believes that it is necessary to criminalize

denial of the Genocide by law. Overall, this group of citizens considers the Genocide recognition to be the main aim, and the normalization of relations between the two countries as means to achieve that aim.

Bourgeoisie without homeland and unhealthy generation?

Citizens are concerned that the economic benefits of an open border will blunt the perception of the importance of the issue among citizens of Armenia and will push it down their agendas, as “a common Armenian trader” is not concerned about the issue of Genocide recognition. They also doubt about the capacity and convincing power of the Armenian youth to communicate the reality of Genocide to their Turkish peers.

The judge and the plaintiff

Another group of citizens thinks that normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey will hamper the process of international recognition of the Genocide and will slow down the recognition process. Citizens perceive the international community to be the judge of this process, and express concerns that normalization of the relations may be perceived by “the judge” as an alternative to the Genocide recognition and label the recognition activists as “interfering in the relations of the two countries”, turn the page of the Genocide recognition agenda and put out the wave of the recognition. According to the perceptions of the citizens eagerness of Armenia to start a process of normalization of relations between the two countries without pre-conditions may be speculated by Turkey for demanding silence from pan-Armenian institutions working on the international recognition of the Genocide. This group believes that tensions in relations between the two countries are more conducive to the process of the international recognition of the Genocide, hence the two processes are perceived as mutually exclusive.

The pan-Armenian and the universal

Part of the citizens consider international recognition of the Armenian Genocide to be not only a pan-Armenian but also a Universal cause, which is required for preventing similar crimes from happening. At the same time, citizens think that it is necessary to avoid the purely “Genocide-centered” international perception of Armenia. In their opinion, the successful course of the recognition process is conditioned by international pressure on Turkey.

Another group of citizens considers the Genocide recognition to be irreversible, and the speed of the process to prone to changes: in the process of Genocide recognition citizens give importance to the factor of moral “apology” as a condition for future peaceful coexistence of the two nations. They believe that the Genocide recognition will also have an impact on the Turkish identity.

Nevertheless, another group of citizens doubts about the objectives of the process of international recognition of the Genocide and asks “What if Turkey recognizes the Genocide? And what will we do afterwards?” This group of citizens thinks that the absence of clear objectives has a negative impact on the process and the efforts of Armenians to unite around the cause of recognition. In this situation another group of citizens considers the moral dimension of the Genocide recognition to be secondary and unimportant.

Overall all citizens agree that the Genocide denial has been and remains one of the political priorities of Turkey.

Two ends of the stick

Attitude of citizens is also contradictory towards the establishment of a sub-commission on history in the framework of bilateral intergovernmental commission. Part of citizens consider it unacceptable to examine historic facts of the Genocide in the framework of the sub-commission, as by discussing the painful page of history the fact of the Genocide as well as the appropriateness and rightfulness of the act of recognition of the Genocide by many countries and communities across the globe is questioned. Citizens also question the selection of historic, meaning mainly academic discussion format for intergovernmental discussions.

Moreover, citizens are concerned about the unnecessary politicization of historiography and prospects of emerging nomenclature historians.

Another group of citizens considers that in the sub-commission on history also the Armenian side will be able to prove once again with success directly to Turkey the historic fact of the Genocide and believe that the main challenge is preparedness and attitude of the historians instead of examination of the issue in a historical dimension.

Impact of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey on the Armenian Cause and Armenian demands

I have to see Ani before I die ...

The attitude of citizens towards the impact of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey on the Armenian Cause and Armenian demands is contradictory.

Part of citizens think that the open border and normalization of relations between two countries will contribute to unification of Armenians and the two homelands and to the objectives of the Armenian Cause in future. Open border is first of all viewed as passage to the territory of the historic homeland and the opportunity of interacting with the historic homeland is seen as a guarantee for reinforcement of the Armenian identity. Citizens believe that the poor condition in which the Armenian historic and cultural heritage is preserved in Turkey is partially due to the closed border, and when the border blockade is lifted those values will be treated in a more solicitous manner. Citizens consider that even if the Armenian Cause and Armenian demands do not come true they remain one of the main elements of the cornerstone of the Armenian dream.

Recognize the border and the integrity?

Another group of citizens thinks that normalization of relations between two countries endangers the Armenian Cause, and perceives the short-term mainly economic benefits of the process as hindrances on the way of national struggle of many centuries. Citizens are especially concerned about the issue of mutual recognition of the borders, which in their opinion is contradicting the RA Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.

Moreover, citizens think that the current concerns about concessions on Armenian demands result in pressures on Armenia by international power centers to which our country cannot confront. Pessimist citizens do not think that preservation of monuments in the territory of Turkey is realistic, either.

Wait my dear, wait

Some of the citizens distinguish between the issues of territorial integrity and recognition of borders and believes it is possible to establish diplomatic relations without giving up on territorial demands. This group believes that Armenia should refuse to accept the Kars Treaty; for them the process of Genocide recognition would be meaningless if it does not pursue objectives of territorial return. The effort aimed at international recognition of Genocide is not seen as an end in itself and its objectives are the restitution of lands and reimbursement of all economic and financial losses and in the pan-Armenian agenda territorial demands should successfully follow the issue of the Genocide recognition. This group of citizens believes that Armenians across the globe can return, establish themselves and invest in the historic homeland if provided with an opportunity.

Let's move to Sasun and Van

Large number of citizens is convinced that lands cannot be gained back with words; land is taken by blood and is watered with sweat, they say. They believe that even in case of Genocide recognition Turkey will not fulfill Armenian territorial demands. Military-political power of Armenia is seen as guarantee for fulfillment of territorial demands. They think that having a powerful state, which is able to protect legal rights of its citizens in a foreign country, is a minimal pre-condition for re-settling and living in historic lands. Citizens mention that the path of the Armenian nation is full of surprises and believe that considering the success of the Armenian nation during the Nagorno-Karabakh struggle, no prospects of more demands being fulfilled should be ruled out.

Not only for ever

Another group of citizens believes that the desired outcomes of Armenian demands is unrealistic, the current state of the country does not allow dreaming about restitution of lands. Meanwhile the prospect of strengthening Armenia is considered to be possible and necessary including through normalization of relations with Turkey.

One group of citizens considers the possibility of resettlement of Armenians on historic land to be unrealistic, even if the territorial demands are fulfilled, however they do not rule out that next generations may have a desire to live on those territories. These citizens point to the slow pace of settlement in Artsakh. They also mention that even today Armenian citizens utilize their territory inefficiently. In this case Armenian demands are seen as a burden for future generations. They are also concerned about the opportunistic invocation of the Armenian Cause and voicing of the Armenian demands in April and believe that those issues should permanently be on national agenda.

Kurdish Republic of Armenia?

In the context of the Armenian Cause and Armenian demands citizens also have contradictory attitude toward the Kurds inhabiting the current territories of the historic Western Armenia. They mention that the demanded territories is inhabited by a multimillion Kurdish community, which may pose serious demographic challenges for Armenia even if the territorial demands of Armenians are fulfilled by Turkey. Citizens consider that the prospect of a country cohabited by three million Armenians and multimillion Kurdish population will not be conducive to preservation and development of the Armenian identity.

Another group of citizens do not think that the multimillion Kurdish population pose a real threat for the Armenian statehood and considers the cohabitation of Armenians and Kurds possible and safe. Overall, citizens think that speculation of the Kurdish issue and its transition to the Armenian agenda is a challenge which emerges as a result of the Turkish politics.

A new ally or an old rival?

Part of citizens believe that a vast number of ethnic Armenians who have lost traces of their Armenian identity live in modern Turkey. They believe that it is necessary to awaken these people to their roots and use their potential for the sake of the Armenian nation. Citizens think that it is possible and necessary to utilize the Kurdish national liberation movement and cite one of the historic Armenian military leaders known to say "If the devil is the enemy of Persians, then he is my friend" and believe that Kurds living in Turkey have a positive attitude towards Armenians.

Another group of citizens considers Kurds to be rivals rather than allies in demands presented to Turkey and see the future of Kurds in the Northern Iraq. They think that when relations start growing between the two countries Kurds will create serious challenges not only for Turkey but also for Armenia.

Prospects of cooperation between Armenia and the Diaspora in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey

Complementary versus contrasting

Mosr citizens see a dual role for Diaspora in the decision making process in the course of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey: (a) advisory participatory process and the voice of the Diaspora should be definitely heard in the process of decision making and (b) responsibility for the decision taken. the Republic of Armenia, its civil society and the private sector should take into account opinions of the Diaspora Armenians when making decisions on normalization of relations between the two countries and should bear the entire responsibility for the decision taken. The above mentioned dual functions should not be contrasted and should be perceived as rather complementary. Moreover, the dimensions of policy making and implementation are interwoven. At the same time, decisions should be

made through an effective participatory process, which would also include participation of the Armenian Diaspora and its structures. It is noteworthy that the unnecessary speculations about the role and degree of engagement of the Diaspora in the decision making process on the normalization is believed to contribute to cleavage between Armenia and the Armenian Diaspora on economic, political and finally value dimensions.

No to division lines

Attitudes of citizens is unequivocal towards cooperation between Armenia and the Diaspora conditioned by the process of normalization of relations between the two countries: the process should not create division lines within Diaspora or worsen the existing divisions, including in political and spiritual arenas both between Armenia and the Diaspora, as well as among different groups of Armenians across the globe, it should not hamper in any way the natural course of development of cooperation between Armenia and the Diaspora, and finally it should not cause damage to the identity of Diaspora Armenians, central elements of value systems of whom are based on the memory of the Genocide victims and the pan-Armenian efforts to address the consequences of that disaster. In this sense the Armenian identity, especially in the communities of the Armenian Diaspora remains centered on the legacy of the Genocide.

Even though generally speaking citizens are for synthesis of interests of Armenia and Diaspora in the process of normalization of relations between the two countries, those interests sometimes collide, which means that there is a possibility for speculating on contrasting of those interests in the framework of both internal and external political processes.

Symphony on one string

Citizens' evaluations of the level of integration of Armenia and the Diaspora in the process of normalization of relations are significantly polarized and contradictory. Basically, the first stage of the regulation process has revealed the most vulnerable issues in the process of political decision making on issues of pan-Armenian importance and current roles within Armenia and Diaspora for implementation of those decisions. The opinions of common citizens point to issues adherent to political dialogue and cooperation between Armenia and Diaspora, including the dissatisfactory economic, political and social integration of the Diaspora and its pan-Armenian structures in the process of defining political priorities of the Republic of Armenia on pan-Armenian issues, as well as sometimes contradictory understanding and interpretation of those priorities.

The efforts of playing from a score about cooperation between Armenia and the Diaspora on pan-Armenian issues demonstrated that at least virtuosity of Paganini is required for playing a complicated diplomatic symphony on a one-string violin in order not to cut the string, hurt the fingers of the violinist and even be honored with applauses of the audience.

Participatory process, one responsible, agreed roles

Armenia needs elaborate principals and mechanisms of the Armenian Diaspora's engagement in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey. In this case the participatory decision making process should not be limited to advisory functions, decisions relevant for the corresponding actors should be taken collectively, hence the responsibility for those decisions should also be shared by the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian Diaspora.

In this sense, especially from the point of view of full-fledged engagement of different segments of the Armenian Diaspora, development of adequate decision making mechanisms is considered to be of a high importance. Such an approach will help prevent possible tensions between Armenia and the Diaspora. It will also help smooth over existing socioeconomic, political and ideological demarcation lines to ensure shared responsibility for joint decisions on distribution of roles.

“Render unto Caesar...”

In the process of normalization of relations between the two countries the effectiveness of cooperation between Armenia and the Diaspora is significantly conditioned by the degree of integration of the Diaspora and its Armenian structures in the internal political life of Armenia. In short and midterm perspective it is necessary to engage to a possible degree the Diaspora and the representative of its structures in the economic, political, cultural and spiritual life of Armenia.

It appears that current models and mechanisms of social cooperation including in the areas of business and benevolent activities do not fill the gap of Diaspora's direct engagement in the political life of the country. In addition to the fairly quick introduction of the institute of dual citizenship it is necessary to engage the pan-Armenian structures in national and local election observation missions, enlarged structure of the National Security Council, Public Council, scientific councils on Armenian studies or other issues of pan-Armenian importance. It is also necessary to apply the experience of the pan-Armenian trip initiative on any issue of pan-Armenian importance or resonance with an annual frequency.

Impact of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey on the economy of Armenia

Open border: new economic prospects

Citizens are not unanimous as to what economic and political opportunities and challenges normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey could bring about.

One group of citizens thinks that the open border primarily creates new opportunities for economic development of the country by providing an alternative convenient route to international markets, creating favorable conditions for transportation of goods and passengers, simplifying, regulating and overseeing the economic turnover with the neighboring country, activating the economic life in the border areas of Armenia, stimulating competition in the Armenian market, promoting productivity of local production by creating necessary pre-conditions and other means. Citizens who share the abovementioned position often blame many problems in Armenia's economy on the border blockade. In their opinion open border will enable Armenia to prosper economically and face many economic and political opportunities. Citizens also expect that normalization of relations between the two countries may activate economic engagement of Armenians living in Turkey in the trade balance between the two countries.

Ararat should be seen from both sides...

The other group of citizens believes that there are no prospects of significant economic gains in case of lifting the border blockade by Turkey and normalization of relations between the two countries. Moreover those possible gains are significantly less important than the challenges posed to the national security.

These citizens mention that the roads towards international markets through Turkey are not safe and secure. Others believe that due to absence of large regional transit projects the economic sum of the normalization process will be insignificant. Overall low expectations of economic interest lead to pessimistic and reluctant attitude towards the process: "Let us eat less, but be safe".

The spectrum of concerns is quite wide encompassing concerns about the quality of imported goods and food security, increase in the real estate market prices and decrease in availability of loans, gaps in legislative regulation for foreign investments, Turkey's protectionist policy favoring local exporters, hence aimed against Armenian exporters.

Citizens believe that the opportunities for trade opening us with open borders will fade in the shadow of problems existing in the country, such as corruption, monopolies, low efficiency of local recourse management, etc. Citizens who take this position also believe that nowadays already in Armenia the level of foreign direct investments is inappropriately low which is not due to the closed border, hence the opening of it cannot serve as a remedy.

Citizens also think that lifting the border blockade will not eliminate the dependency of our infrastructure from forging capital, so it does not have real implications for greater economic or political independence.

There are also concerns about integration into the Turkish economy and losing diversification of our economy, which may inappropriately increase Armenia's political and economic dependency from Turkey.

Citizens think that economic activation is impossible without definite cultural dialogue, and in order to be ready for such a dialogue it is necessary to be able to see the Mount Ararat from both sides.

So the crane will come...

Prospects for labor migration conditioned by the process of normalization is depicted by citizens mainly in dark colors. Citizens think that the Turkish labor is cheaper; hence the Armenian labor market would be threatened especially by the population of Eastern Turkey.

At the same time citizens believe that Turkey will become the market where the products of Armenian intellectual potential will be in demand, causing further drain of experts.

Issues of comparative competitiveness of Armenia in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey

The death of Kikos

Perceptions of citizens about the impact normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey can have on businessman in Armenia are contradictory.

According to a wide-spread opinion the most competitive Turkish goods will flood the Armenian market, and the Armenian producers will not be able to endure the economic competitiveness due to large volume of imports. As a result according to citizens the local products in Armenia will concede to imported ones, and local production to trade by further deepening the gulf of competitiveness, making the country economically dependent and posing challenges for national security.

This approach is justified by the citizens by lesser competitiveness of the Armenian economy in comparison to the Turkish economy, comparative less productivity of the technologies and high production costs, as well as relatively lower degree of market liberalization.

Concerns about degradation of the agricultural sphere and prospects of Armenian farmers being left without land are also often voiced. Moreover citizens express doubts about the prospects of exporting Armenian products to the Turkish market.

A look with two eyes

Another group of citizens see a number of possibilities for exporting especially to the markets of the Eastern Turkey. Products of chemical production, carpets, construction materials are often mentioned among opportunities to export goods and services to the Turkish market.

Prospect of reduction in prices of consumer goods is evaluated positively by citizens of Armenia who live in cities. They also believe that Turkish agricultural exports to Armenia will remain at a disadvantage because of the cost and time of transportation, and will not pose threats for the development of the Armenian agriculture.

Moreover opinions are voice that those Turkish products which have comparative advantage in terms of price and quality have already occupied their place in the Armenian market and are widespread in the country, so new challenges will not emerge in future.

Overall the optimists think that it is always easier to trade with more developed economies and Armenia should not be afraid of that.

I wish it was not me ... oops, you have fallen down

Citizens have different opinions about the prospects of compensating less competitiveness of local producers by additional state support in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey.

One group of citizens is convinced that in the process of normalization of relations between two countries Armenia should protect local producers, particularly on one hand setting strict customs, sanitary and quality certification regimes for importing of goods with Turkish origin and applying direct and indirect limitations. Armenia should also regulate the potential influx of the Turkish capital into Armenia and economic activities of Turkish businessmen in Armenia. And on the other hand the state should provide support to local producers through subsidizing the agricultural and food processing industries and applying other protective measures.

As a phoenix will you raise from the fire?

Another group of citizens consider that normalization of relations and open borders will contribute to increasing the competitiveness of our country through healthy competition. Thus they believe that the state should not provide additional artificial guarantees to non-competitive branches of the economy, by hindering their natural development and limiting motivation for applying new technologies, innovations and raising productivity.

The essence of the philosophy of those who share the abovementioned opinions use the following expressions “die by falling or reincarnate through transformation”, “free market will solve all problems”, “the open border will make us be more competitive and offer cheap and quality goods”, “death or competitive free market.”

Moreover this group of citizens believe that the guardian “soldier” of our economy is the Armenian businessman who is able to compete with the Turkish economy integrated into the European trade zone and has the potential to “conquer the economy of the Western Armenia” in near future.

Attack is the best defense

Regardless of evaluation of competitiveness of Armenia’s economy citizens almost unconditionally believe that normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey will lead to activation of economic relations between the two countries to one extent or another. It is also evident that according to the perceptions of the citizens cross-border and regional transit projects do not seem to be far away.

However, according to the citizens the “areas of contact” between the two economies mainly pass through Armenia, so what state policy should be implemented to promote raise in competitiveness of our economy and to protect the rights and interests of our tax payers, the businessman and the consumers? It is necessary to abstain from creating “greenhouse” conditions for the businesses operating in the Armenian market, which will not only have a negative free competition and free market relations in the country but will also, hinder the development process of the competitiveness of our market.

However, Armenia should provide equal guarantees’ to the Armenian businessman to balance corresponding guarantees provided by Turkey. At the same time it is necessary to promote introduction of European quality standards, particularly corporative standards, in the Armenian companies. Moreover, it is necessary to introduce mechanisms of state support to exporters to Turkish and European markets.

Issues of business interests, influence and social justice in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey

Some challenges ...

Citizens link the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey to the issues of economic interests, competitiveness and social justice expressing those through their concerns or expectations.

One of the dominant concerns is that only “oligarchs”, this small but influential business elite of the society, will benefit from the process of normalization of relations between the two countries, meanwhile the common people will receive almost no benefits from the opening of the border and normalization of relations. There is another concern that the processes of normalization that will deepen further the social polarization and stratification of the society.

The fear of such extremely uneven distribution of the benefits of normalization of relations between the two countries is rooted in the monopolistic nature of the Armenian economy. Citizens think that opening of the borders and normalization of relations will lead to “pockets of a few people becoming fuller”, “big fishes becoming richer” or “easing the operations of the oligarchs.”

Hence, it is not surprising that citizen with such attitudes perceive negatively the entire process. So, on one hand citizens consider the abovementioned factors as obstacles in the process of normalization of relations between the two countries, on the other hand it is rooted in public perceptions that the normalization of relations will make things worse by making more acute the issues of economic competition and social justice among others.

Old Margara. New Sadakhlo?

At the same time a significant number of citizens expect that opening of the border and normalization of relations will help to reduce poverty in the country, rehabilitation of market economy, development of small and medium enterprises and most importantly promotion of economic competition. Citizens expect that competition will grow among businessmen who occupy dominant positions in the market.

In this sense influx of the Turkish capital into Armenia is seen as a positive factor if it promotes economic competition in the Armenian market. There is also an opinion that the current status of closed border is mostly beneficial for “the oligarchs” and businessmen who occupy dominant position in the market. Citizens who have this attitude expect that the middle class will benefit from opening of the borders and normalization of relations, especially in the competitive spheres of the economy.

From socio-geographical point of view comparative positive attitude towards normalization of relations between the two countries and opening of borders with an emphasis on opportunities and expected results in spheres of service and production is noteworthy in contrast to agricultural sphere, prospects of which are perceived as limited and potentially harmful. Such perceptions are especially prevalent in border areas of Armenia such as Gyumri and Armavir. According to our citizens if in case of open border and reduced import expenses if our businessmen will not be able or willing to make competitive offers in the Armenian market in regard with the imported goods, then establishment of a consumer goods trade “market” on the border of the town countries will become possible similar to Bagratashen-Sadakhlo market on border with Georgia.

“Political prisoner” business

Vast majority of citizens thinks that political interests in comparison with economic interests dominate the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey, and economic-business interests should be subordinated to the logic of political interests and fit in the framework of the political agenda. Citizens justify this position with the argument that in the process of normalization and shaping of relations between Armenia and Turkey business interests may become source of unnecessary political influence in the hands of Turkey or third parties.

It is noteworthy that such concern is justified by the “business does not recognize nationality, interest or income...” conviction. Moreover, Armenia’s business elite is not trustworthy or reliable for most of the Armenians from the point of view of understanding of national interests and loyalty. Furthermore, some think that the representatives of the business elite are mostly “denationalized.”

Overall, according to the perceptions of citizens business and national interests are contrasted in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey. At the same time, apparently our citizens understand that as in any other state in other state as well the business sector is the most influential sector of the society influence of which shapes state politics to a certain extend.

Unfortunately, role of the most influential group of society in the process of normalization of relations between two countries from the point of view of national interests is perceived as less desirable and less conducive, but also inevitable.

Economic support horses at full speed, political horse on a tiger

Citizens understand the interrelation between economic power and political independence of the country. Another group of citizens consider the business interests not only to be harmless for the national political priorities, but are convinced that exactly the business interests should take a lead in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey.

Supporters of this position justify their position first of all by its inevitability. Moreover, opinions are voiced that politics based solely on national ideology and ignoring business interest will lead to a deadlock in the process of normalization of relations between the two countries. Need for mutual investments are voiced to justify importance of economic and business interest as a result of which economic interests, markets and economic competition, as well as the security of the country will benefit. Moreover, cooperation and common business interests will facilitate the political dialogue.

There is also an opinion that normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey is conditioned neither by investments nor by internal political issues, and will have no significant influence on their dynamics. Citizens who share that position are convinced that issues of market economy, civil society and democratic governance in Armenia are largely conditioned by internal political developments.

All for the border, border for each

So, for ensuring balance between business and public interests, interrelation of economic and political process, establishment of social justice in the country in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey it is necessary to first of all create guarantees for barring monopolization of emerging economic opportunities of increased economic competition resulting in the process of normalization. Moreover, visibility of those guarantees should be widely promoted to change the non-conducive and negative attitude towards the issue.

At the same time, it is also necessary to engage businessmen in the process of developing such guarantees and publicizing them. Particularly, analysis on prospects of economic influence of the normalization process can contribute to formation of favorable public attitude, which could primarily be commissioned or carried out by big businessmen in Armenia.

Such analysis can cover possible dynamic of prices of imported consumer goods, industrial purchase of agricultural and industrial products produced in the country and possible mechanisms of organizing that process, including concrete obligations and mechanisms for local agricultural purchases by large companies.

It is necessary to define in legislation provisions on procurement for state needs to be done solely or primarily from local producers. It is also necessary to ensure regular coverage of positive or negative impact of business relations on the process of normalization of relations.

Role of External Players

Influence and the role of the Russian Federation in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey

Let that moment be blessed

Citizens' perceptions of interests of Russia in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey are quite contradictory.

Part of citizens believes that Russia is interested in normalization of relations between the two countries, and the interests of Armenia and Russia coincide in this process. So it is not surprising that citizens find Russia's influence in the region and active role in the process of normalization to be conducive and subject to encouragement. Extension of influence of the Russian Federation in the region and in the country is often perceived as a guarantee for ability to withstand Turkish influence. Citizens consider that Russia's dominant role is primarily conditioned by significant presence of the Russian capital in the infrastructures of the country, hence they believe that Armenia should compare its interests with the interests of the Northern super-power, or should at least make use of incidental coincidence of those interests, including in terms of projects on regional energy transit and communications.

Citizens think that it would not be possible to ensure normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey without consent and mediation of the Russian side, others believe that Russia is the real initiator of the process of normalization.

Citizens think that presence of a large Armenian community in Russia makes Moscow more attentive to Armenian interests.

Lenin and Ali

It is noteworthy that part of citizens are concerned about possibility of a significant role of Russia in the process of normalization of relations between the two countries, which morphs into a general concern and negative attitude towards the entire process.

Part of citizens considers normalization of relations between the two countries to be solely serving the economic interests of Russia at the expense of Armenian interests including if relations between Russia and Georgia deteriorate.

Contemporary attitude towards Armenians in Russia is contrasted with attitude towards Armenians in Turkey and evaluate the second one to be more favorable. Significant presence of Russian capital in Armenian infrastructure perceived by citizens to be another challenge, as it enables a third party pursuing its own economic and political interests to interfere in dynamics of development of relations between neighboring countries.

Citizens think that Russia is interested in a weak Armenia with strained relations with its neighbors. They expect that as a result of normalization of relations with Turkey and lifting the border blockade the political and economic dependency of Armenia from its Northern friend will lessen and it would not be able to have a significant role of a mediator in relations between Armenia-Turkey.

Moreover citizens believe that in the process of normalization Armenia should put forward pre-conditions and demand additional guarantees from Russia, taking into consideration the possibility of those interests not coinciding with the Armenian interests in future.

Citizens view collusion of Russian and Turkish interests to be a challenge for Armenian interests and are concerned about prospects of increased influence of Russia in the country and in the region as a result of the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey.

Citizens are also concerned about execution of Russia's military obligations toward Armenia in case of a possible military conflict between Armenia and Turkey and think that Russia has "sold" Armenian interests many times before.

Part of citizens believe that in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey the border should be controlled by the Armenian border authorities, meanwhile others consider the Russian border military units to be security guarantees for Armenia.

Influence and the role of the United States of America in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey

A Caucasian window

One group of citizens thinks that the current stage of the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey coincides with US interests of finding new ways and means of influence in the region. They think that as a result of this process US influence in Turkey will increase and Turkey's political monopoly of being the only bearer of the US influence in the regions will become weaker.

It is noteworthy that regardless of perceptions on coincidence or contradiction of interests of Russia and US in the process of normalization citizens think that Armenia should try to maneuver between the interests of the two super-powers and should try to benefit in any case. Citizens consider the position of the US in the process of normalization to be largely conditioned by the behavior of its partners, including the position of NATO.

In this sense citizens consider that the influence of US has a greater influence on Turkey. On one hand, it is very difficult for Turkey to "confront" the pressures of its senior partner related to the normalization issue, especially when understanding that as a result of this process the importance of cooperation between Turkey and US will decrease for its senior partner.

At the same time citizens think that Turkey has been and continues to be the most important partner of the United States in the region and US will not undertake any actions which can harm the interests of that country, including in the process of Genocide recognition.

Love normalization in yourselves, not yourselves in normalization

Citizens think that the factor of possibility of Genocide recognition enables the United States to influence the politics of Turkey in the process of normalization as well as to use the process of normalization for freezing the process of Genocide recognition.

Citizens consider the issue of Genocide recognition to be the concern of US citizens of Armenian descent and think that it should not be used to exert influence over Armenia-Turkey relations.

Citizens think that normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey and establishment of peace and stability in the region will contribute to simplification of US-Turkish relations, as a result of which the process of the recognition of the Genocide by the United States will benefit in future.

Influence and the role of Georgia in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey

Escape from Metekhi

Citizens are convinced of the positive influence of the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey on the role of Georgia in the political and economic life in the region and Armenia.

Citizens think that neighboring Georgia not only benefits from the blockade of Armenia but also very often speculates on the fact that many Armenian goods are transported through Georgia. Citizens expect that lifting the blockade on

the western border of Armenia and availability of alternative routes to external markets will “make the hand suffocating Armenia’s throat” weaker.

Citizens also expect that the process of normalization will enable our country to escape the “hostage” status of Georgia’s unreliable and unpredictable foreign politics, and to occupy more beneficial trade position, which will make Armenian goods more competitive and the price of imported goods will decrease.

It is not surprising that citizens who have this attitude think that the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey is not beneficial for Georgia, and our neighbor is going to hamper the process of normalization between the two neighboring countries and is going to try and maintain its exceptional status of Northern gate and “life line” for Armenia.

Citizens do not rule out the possibility for Armenian-Georgian relations becoming more strained as a result of clash of interests of the two countries in the region, as well as due to internal and external political instability in Georgia, which pose challenges for economic and military-political communication routes of Armenia with the external world.

In this sense, the lack of trust among citizens toward the northern neighbor is particularly noteworthy and it may be due, in part, to recent controversies over Armenian churches in Georgia.

Ringing bells of Norashen

Citizens believe that normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey will contribute to the development of Armenians living in Georgia, preservation of their identity, preservation of Armenian cultural and spiritual values in Georgia, solution of current issues of Javakhk Armenians living in their historical homeland in favor of the latter as Republic of Armenia will have a possibility to build relations with the neighboring Georgia having more beneficial political and economic position.

At the same time, citizens think that as a result of Georgian state policy of promoting integration of Georgian-Armenians into the Georgian society the Armenian community in the neighboring country has become more powerful.

A look through Tumanyan’s eyes

Citizens think that there are no historical hindrances and complexes in the relations between Armenia and Georgia which are inherent to the relations between Armenia and Turkey and the comparatively high prizes of goods imported or exported through the territory of Georgia are primarily due to shortcomings of the Armenian economy and market.

“The frog is the big boss of the warm well; but when he came out of the well he was eaten by the dragon..”

Citizens believe that the initiation of the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey is partially a result of the strained relations between Georgia and Russia and the prospects of those relations deteriorating in the future.

Citizens think that deterioration of relations between Russia and Georgia is a serious challenge for the economic, military and political security of Armenia, which has been proven by the five-day Russian-Georgian war in 2008.

Moreover, according to citizens’ opinions strained Russian-Georgian relations enable Russia to increase its influence over Armenia through speculations of those strained relations.

Citizens think that the process of normalization of relations will primarily decrease Armenia’s vulnerability during a possible conflict between Russia and Georgia.

Impact of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey on the relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan

Wandering of the second head

Citizens are convinced that even though the Azerbaijani authorities and society currently have doubts are upset with the politics of “the second state” of the “one nation” overall the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey will not have significant impact on Turkish-Azerbaijani partnership, as the interests of those countries are greatly interrelated and the foreign policy of Azerbaijan is under the Turkish influence.

Citizens are concerned about prospects of linking the process of normalization between the two countries with the Karabakh conflict and incorporation of Azerbaijani interests in the process by Turkey. The protectionism of Turkey toward Nakhijevan is perceived by citizens as a sort of a ticking time-bomb.

Citizens think that lifting of blockade over the western border of Armenia by Turkey also means lifting of blockade for our eastern neighbor Azerbaijan opening its communication routes to the West and ensuring a land connection through Azerbaijan and Turkey in future and developing part of that communication, such as necessary infrastructure in the section between Armenia and Turkey nowadays.

Overall citizens think that it is inadmissible and very unbeneficial to “link” relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan with relations between Armenia and Turkey

Tail wags the dog?

Another group of citizens believes that in the framework of its external and internal political priorities (the Kurdish issues, EU integration, denial of Armenian Genocide, Arab world, etc.) Turkey pursues solely its own interests, with a mastery of a tightrope-walker it tries to postpone solutions to the most vulnerable or delicate issues at the expense of solving “explosive” or important issues if necessary by making concessions on less important issues.

It is not surprising that many citizens believe that Turkish politics is not hostage to Azerbaijani interests. One group of citizens think that normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey will contribute to normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan and opening of the border between the two countries why not even before final resolution of the Karabakh conflict.

Impact of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey on the process of regulation of the Nagorno- Karabakh conflict

Do not cross and you will not be crossed

Citizens consider realization of the self-determination right of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh and ensuring security of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh to be the exclusive priority of the pan-Armenian agenda and the greatest achievement of the Armenian nation.

Part of citizens think that the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey cannot have a significant impact on the process of regulation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as the regulation of the conflict is centered on the realized right of self-determination of the people of Artsakh rather than by the agenda of relations between Armenia and Turkey.

Citizens also think that even though these two process may impact each other to a certain extent they should not be interrelated and should remain in parallel lines without “crossing”, otherwise they may threaten the delicate process of peaceful regulation, destabilize the region, which in a condition of total crisis of trust may lead to challenges of armed conflict and full-fledged war in the explosive region.

Mediation or interference?

Another group of citizens believe that speculations over the Karabakh conflict by Turkish leaders in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey should receive a harsh response from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, including demands to the Turkish side to officially publicly rule out those speculations.

Citizens justify that position by the bias of Turkey in the process of regulation of the Karabakh conflict and express concerns that the process of normalization between the two countries may enter a deadlock due to non-flexible and harsh politics of Turkey in the process of regulation of the Karabakh conflict and incentives of Turkey to interfere instead of to mediate.

These concerns are justified by citizens by numerous declarations of the Turkish authorities that the Karabakh conflict is one of the pre-conditions of the process of normalization.

Less biased and more flexible?

Part of citizens believe that normalization of relations between the two countries will decrease the influence of Turkey over the process of regulation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as the main levers of influence, blockade and pre-condition of lifting the blockade, will disappear. Hence this group of citizens expects in future Turkey to be less biased and more flexible in the process of regulation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Moreover, citizens believe that normalization of relations between the two countries will make position of Armenia stronger in the process of regulation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Déjà vu

Another group of citizens has a counter position and considers the process of normalization of relations between the two countries to be harmful for the process of regulation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict due to intentions of Turkey to play bigger role and have more influence over the regulation process.

Citizens justify this attitude by opinions continuously expressed in the Turkish media and made available to the Armenian public. The role of Turkey is perceived to be definitely negative.

Moreover citizens fear that the process of regulation of the Karabakh conflict may have a negative impact on the relations between the two countries and thinks that Turkey which has already put Armenia in a blockade can do the same thing by challenging the international community or at the expense of mutual concessions on a different issue if necessary.

Influence and the role of Iran in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey

One thousand nights

Citizens think that the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey may include negative phenomenon and challenges, as evaluated by citizens, resulting in the opening of borders between Armenia and Iran after the Independence.

Citizens have particularly negative attitude towards acquiring or renting of real estate in Armenia by Iranian citizens and are convinced that the same scenario will repeat with Turkish nationals as well. Citizens mention the low quality of goods imported from Iran into Armenia and think that a similar influx of low quality and cheap goods is to be expected from Turkey if the blockade of the western border is lifted.

Also using the example of Iran citizens mention that open borders do not guarantee possibilities for doing business, living or acquiring estate due to existing limitations and obstacles.

The broom of the road

Citizens do not rule out the possibility of closure of the border with Iran if the region is destabilized due to its vulnerable nature; this would create unpredictable economic and political challenges for the national security of Armenia. As long as the nuclear enrichment program of the neighboring Iran raises concerns and doubts in the international community the border between Armenia and Iran is not very safe.

Citizens feel that the international community does not have a sufficient understanding of the challenges Armenia faces. Also citizens mention that even in such an explosive setting the southern routes have vital importance for our country and “such a life-giving pipeline is more preferable than several poisonous ones”.

It is noteworthy that citizens mention the importance of preserving of the southern and northern routes and consider that despite potential availability of cheaper western route economic and political security of Armenia and its independence is guaranteed not by borders but by their diversity and availability of alternatives. This approach is justified by the following philosophy: “Choice between opportunities of several bad paths is better than one good path”.

Influence and the role of the international community in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey

Boat with a haughty sail

Citizens have different opinions about the role of the international community in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey.

Part of citizens thinks that oversight of international institutions over the process of normalization is beneficial. Moreover, citizens are convinced that the process of normalization without mediation by the international community would end up in a deadlock. Citizens think that the initiation of the process of normalization partially belongs to the international community for which closed borders are unacceptable in the twenty-first century, the initiative more specifically belongs to world's power centers, super powers, current interests of which demand to normalize relations between the two countries, as Armenia and the region are now on the crossroads of their conflicting and contrasting interests.

It is noteworthy that citizens consider that in the process of normalization Armenia should try to compare its interests with the state interests of the super powers or at least take into consideration those interests from tactical point of view. Citizens think that if Armenia behaves in line with the interests of superpowers and the international community it can reach its goals even if the neighboring country is reluctant in some issues.

It is noteworthy that citizens believe that the process of normalization is beneficial first of all for Armenia and Turkey, and only then for the super powers. At the same time, citizens think that the interests of the super-powers should be perceived as objective external factor which should be wisely used to mitigate challenges posed by those interests instead of hiding from those and refusing to pursue pro-active foreign policy.

This attitude is justified by the following philosophy: “The interest of a foreigner is a wind. If you are afraid of the wind you should not go to the sea at all, instead you should lay on the beach. But then you will always stay on the beach.”

Gone with the wind

Another group of citizens has a different opinion and thinks that the superpowers and the international community should not interfere in the process of normalization of relations between two countries as those interests may be disastrous for our country and our nation. People who share this position believe that Armenia and Turkey should solve their problems on their own, without any mediation.

Citizens think that the international community is not able to solve the existing problems and mutual demands of the two countries; they may only temporarily silence those. Moreover, citizens think that the superpowers should force Turkey to lift the blockade of the border and make concessions as the normalization of relations is beneficial for the interests of the superpowers, hence Armenia should not make any concession at all during the normalization process.

This position is justified by visible pressure of superpowers on Turkey and beliefs that even if Armenia does not make any concessions political pressure on Turkey will persist and Turkey will be forced to make concession as “Only a bigger country has the greatest influence over a smaller country”. Nevertheless another group of citizens thinks that the international community will also pressure Armenia.

What do super-powers want?

One group of citizens think that the superpowers do not have significant interests in the process of normalization of relations or their interests do not coincide with the Armenian interests, as, for instance, in the case of purported plans of some superpowers to divide Turkey into different parts.

Another group mentions that the process of normalization of relations contrasts with interests of several countries in the region, such as Azerbaijan, Georgia and Iran. Citizens think that the process of normalization of relations may contribute to clash of interests of superpowers in the region as a result of which the interests of relatively weaker party will suffer, in this case the interests of Armenia.

It is noteworthy that citizens consider the Armenian Genocide to be the result of clashing of interests of superpowers. Citizens who have such concerns consider the unsteady interests and roles of superpowers to be a challenge rather than an opportunity in the process of normalization of relations, which should be confronted.

Citizens believe that the challenges arising from the clash of interests of superpowers can be confronted better by Armenia if, besides the state, the civil society, business sector and the Armenian Diaspora get engaged as well.

Factors of initiative, responsibility and diplomacy in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey

A receipt of point of rest for Danko

One group has a positive perception of the role of political elite of Armenia in the process of normalization of relations between the two countries. This group of citizens welcomes the initiative of the President to address the issue and the responsibility the President has taken without ruling out possibility for making mistakes in this process.

Citizens consider expectant and reactive politics guided by “moving only when the knife reaches the bone” philosophy to be dangerous and favor more active and pro-active politics based on “moving forward step by step, instead of talking a lot” principal in the process of normalization of relation.

However, they mention that such politics demands consistent and flexible diplomacy. Vast majority of citizens want to see Armenia as “the dictating power” in the process of normalization of relations. Moreover, citizens believe that successes and benefits in foreign policy are conditioned by initiatives and course of reforms of state governance, economy and army.

Black cat is in the dark room

Citizens view the process of normalization of relations as an active manifestation of country’s foreign policy and an opportunity to increase the political rating and weight of the country in the arena of international relations.

Citizens think that the capacity of the Armenian diplomacy and Armenian statehood, compared to other countries including Turkey, should not be perceived as a justification for isolationist passive-awaiting-reactive politics.

Overall, citizens have a responsible attitude towards the process of normalization of relation and think that all Armenians should share responsibility for his or her actions or inactions in the process. Citizens think that the current generation and politicians are responsible for creating more favorable conditions for development of future generations.

Citizens believe that final regulations of the Armenian-Turkish relations require a generational change; however each generation has its role to play. They also expect that the normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey will influence in future on our mentality and desires the way now our mentality and desires influence the relations.

You may not find the promissory note, but you should look for it

Citizens think that there is no use in pursuing “ostrich politics” with strong opponents or partners. They think that the school of Armenian diplomacy and foreign policy will develop “through a game with a worthy opponent”, and “the winning or losing side may only be the one who plays and struggles for victory.”

Moreover, citizens think that while pursuing isolationist foreign policy third parties only pretend to be solving Armenia’s problems, the interests of Armenia are not taken into account and “the country that is not playing with its own conditions has to play by the conditions of others.”

It is noteworthy, that interests and participation of Turkey in the process is regarded by citizens as an opportunity to get concessions from the neighboring country. Citizens view the process as an opportunity for neighbors to discuss difficult issues “face to face.”

Moreover, citizens think that at the current stage of normalization of relation Armenia is a full-fledged participant of the process having real influence and significant role in the process, meanwhile one and a half decade ago during the blockade of the border Armenia did not have an opportunity to play any role or exert influence.

Citizens are convinced that negotiations are necessary to hold both with allies and opponents.

A step with a lame horse

One group of citizens considers the process of normalization of relations to be forced without any alternative by foreign powers and believes that our country can only get ready for the consequences with clenched teeth.

Another group of citizens finds the Armenian initiative of normalization of relations to be positive, however believe that the interference of third parties is harmful for the process and makes its consequences unpredictable.

Moreover, the process of normalization of relations is presented to citizens as an endless parade of one-sided concessions by Armenia.

More pessimistic citizens think that Armenia is not capable of making any independent moves in the process of normalization of relations and is “a soldier in someone else’s game” which “has ended up in the middle of a highway like a helpless child”.

A bear’s kiss for a rabbit

Another group of citizens think that participation of Armenia in the initiative of normalization of relations is not justified, and the blockade of the border is a one-sided political decision by Turkey, hence it should be solved by that one-side.

Citizens view the initiative to pose challenges for their security and have negative attitude towards the process of normalization of relations. Preservation of the status quo is considered to be possible and beneficial, as citizens find the EU pressure on Turkey to be crucial for lifting the blockade of the border.

Meanwhile, in their opinion, the process of normalization of relations is untimely the one that does not create opportunities and solely poses challenges. Basically, according to the opinions of citizens in the process of normalization of relations Armenia is facing a choice between the bad and the worse. It is noteworthy that citizens sometimes contrast living well and living secure.

A war around a round table

Citizens believe that “the weak is always guilty in front of the strong” principal overshadows the opportunities of the process of normalization of relations and directs public attention solely towards threats and challenges.

Prospects of Armenian diplomacy being defeated lays at the heart of all fears. The capacity of the Armenian diplomacy is depicted to citizens in unfavorable colors.

For instance, part of citizens thinks that the Foreign Ministry of Armenia has become “a tourist agency” due to its flawed human resource policy.

Armenian-Turkish relations are perceived by citizens as a war of brains, professional cadres are shaped during wars, and hence cadres for diplomacy are shaped during wars of brains. Citizens expect that the Armenian-Turkish “diplomatic wars” will give birth to “heroes of diplomacy”.

About the forest afraid of the wolf

Citizens probably overestimate the Turkish diplomacy by considering the knights of “soft pillows” to be powerful and beyond competition. The diplomatic power of the neighboring country is seen for our citizens as situational, however flexible and convincing.

The philosophy “if you cannot break the feast kiss it” is considered to make the Turkish diplomacy unpredictable and not trustworthy. Citizens believe that in order to confront adequately the Turkish diplomacy Armenian diplomacy should “be squint-eyed on one side.”

Factors of perception of time, pace and prospects in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey

For whom does the pointer of time rotate?

Significant number of citizens believes that the current year is most favorable for normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey. Citizens think that postponing normalization of relations and further preservation of the status-quo is not favorable for Armenia because “time does not work in our favor”. The later is the issue solved, they say, the weaker will be the position of our country in the geopolitical stage, and hence the outcome will be less favorable for Armenians.

Moreover, citizens think that preservation of status quo is not only not favorable from the point of view of development tendencies, but it also has a price to be paid now to the international community awaiting certain steps forward by the party that is not in favor of normalization of relations.

Citizens think of inaction as equal to defeat, as the current situation only weakens Armenia, meanwhile each action aimed at normalization of relation with all its threats creates an opportunity for favorable outcome and victory. This group of citizens thinks that the best moment for normalization of relations will always be “yesterday”.

Among their arguments citizens mention the urgency of shaping more favorable conditions for preserving Armenian identity and Armenian community in Turkey, ensuring a more favorable environment for dialogue and cooperation between generations of the two nations, as well as developing opportunities for Armenia to get out of deadlock and communicate fully with the world.

Citizens compare visible short term and midterm challenges adherent to the process of normalization of relations with unpredictable challenges of geopolitical developments in a long term perspective and conclude that the latter are more dangerous. Citizens think that we should “view the past from the window of the future” as in the process of European integration our country should not fall behind our neighbors.

Citizens conclude that the current time period is favorable for development and not realizing the opportunities offered by this moment would mean refusing to accept a vital resource necessary for possible future struggle for survival.

A false start?

Another group of citizens consider the initiative of normalization of relations to be untimely, as the status quo is favorable for Armenia and this issue may have better chances of being solved in favor of Armenia in the future. This group most commonly suggests that Armenia is not technically prepared for the process of normalization of relations.

For instance, citizens argue that long and thorough preparatory work should be carried out before the actual process of normalization of relations starts. At the same time citizens believe that now by agreeing with the main political provision of the process of normalization of relations Armenia will get stuck “in the swamp of tactical issues” in the future.

In general this group of citizens is ready “to wait as long as necessary, until the other side will accept the Armenian demands”.

Hurry up slowly

Vast majority of citizens is convinced that a rush in the process of normalization of relations may hinder the process in the future creating unfavorable and contradictory outcomes and new challenges. According to the perceptions of citizens the process requires adequate mutual steps and gradual establishment of trust.

Citizens expect from that stake-holders and mediators in the process of normalization display “prudent courage” and “courageous prudence”. Citizens think that the relations between the countries and the nations are more than cold, and the “cold water should be entered slowly” otherwise “the muscle may become sour and you may drown”.

Citizens think that mutual trust between two nations is not only the real and continuous precondition for not only the next steps, driving force and the means of the process but it is also one of the most important objectives of the process. Moreover, according to the perceptions of citizens, establishment of trust is possible only through “small victories.”

In case of gradually running out of the supply of mutual trust or its abrupt disappearance the process of normalization of relations may not only slow down, but it may as well get interrupted and turn its course around.

In this sense, it is important for the civil society of both countries to become “immune” towards political messages, the more vocal expressions of foreign policy of Armenia and Turkey towards internal political processes and third parties, which is considered to be the most significant challenge for trust. Also mutual trust is considered to be the only guarantee of the sustainability and irreversibility of the process of normalization of relations.

Citizens also think that the expectations of superpowers and their future pressures may force the authorities of both countries to rush and unnecessarily accelerate the process. Citizens are particularly concerned about threats of non favorable decisions for Armenians and the possibility of split between different layers of Diaspora Armenians resulting from a rapid process.

Moreover, citizens think that in case of a rapid process societies of the two countries will be deprived of an opportunity to participate in the process and be able to better understand it, hence any course of the process will be deprived of the support of the civil society leaving the responsibility only on the shoulders of the authorities, and partially the mediators.

In this case the last hope of the authorities of two countries will probably be on “durability of safety belts” and “reliability of breaks”.

Light through barbed wire

Prospects of the process of normalization of relations are contradictory in the perceptions of citizens. Part of citizens thinks that lifting blockade of the border by Turkey will become the turning point of the process and may make the entire process of normalization of relations irreversible.

Also, citizens note that the open border is only a check point in the middle of barbed wires. Citizens consider political and economic strength of the country to be the guarantees for Armenia’s security, meanwhile the guarantees and promises of neighbors and the international community is perceived in the context of political declarations.

It is interesting that according at least some citizens the neighboring country is an empire, which in future will be divided into parts, which is going to pose new challenges for Armenia.

Overall, citizens are optimistic and expect that in a long term all issues to be eventually solved, sustainable peace to be established in the region ensuring development and cooperation. But they also note that for a process may take decades of efforts to be eventually successful.

Closed open border

Another group of citizens is more pessimistic and is convinced that the process of normalization of relation is going to crash by colliding with many “underwater reefs”. For this group, the prospect of normalization of relations is perceived solely in dark colors.

Citizens are concerned that Turkey will only open the border, meanwhile the real process of normalization of relations will be put on hold and the two economies will not fulfill existing capacities.

Citizens fear that relations of two countries can become even more strained if the borders are opened. Moreover, according to a widespread opinion, lifting of blockade of the border will pose dangerous challenges for Armenia.

Citizen participation in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey

The voice of many, the voice of God

Citizens believe that the voice of civil society must be heard in the process of normalization of relations. Part of citizens think that authorities tend to listen to the voice of civil society and tries to take into consideration in the process of policy making and implementation. Moreover, this group thinks that the authorities cannot make steps in the process of normalization of relations without support of the majority of the society, as in that case they will be forced to bear the entire responsibility for the process and be accountable to each citizen.

The most active citizens think that harmony of approaches of the authorities and the civil society on this issue may even stipulate the fate of authorities in power. Also, according to a wide-spread view the comprehensive “record library” of the public opinion will enhance Armenian diplomacy with additional flexibility in the process of negotiations for normalization of relations.

Hearing with the mouth?

Another group of citizens believe that the authorities are not going to take into account the opinion of common people and are going to make decisions based on their own views and group interests. This group sees attempts of making the voice of the public heard solely in the context of manipulation and influencing peddling.

They are particularly concerned about biased coverage of group discussions through publications and programs of mass media. Moreover, this group of citizens thinks that people do not always express openly and frankly their own opinions on the process of normalization of relations during open public discussions.

Overall for this group of citizens the communication between the authorities and the public over the process of normalization of relations seems to be one-sided and asymmetric, more akin to propaganda.

“It is necessary that each servant learns to make the state ...”

Part of citizens believe that the process of normalization of relations is a national and state as well as pan-Armenian issue and has all Armenians have a role to play in that process, hence the voices of all segments of the society should be heard.

Another group of society thinks that the opinions of diplomats, economists, historians and other experts are important in the process of normalization of relations, whereas “the common people” such as doctors, teachers, taxi drivers should not have a say, or even if they do, then their opinion should not be influence decision-making on the issue.

Citizens justify this perception by absence of traditions and culture of engaging in public discussions on important issues. These citizens see only limited value in public discussions on issues of great public importance.

The issues of crime, trafficking and migration in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey

Labor abroad, or services inside the country?

Citizens are concerned with potential shift in migration flows as a result of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey. They are concerned by prospects of both out-migration as well as migration into Armenia.

Some of the citizens think that new routes more favorable for migration will be made available and numbers of Armenians migrating outside of the country, including labor migration to Turkey, will increase as a result of the normalization of relations. This group is particularly concerned about the “brain-drain” from Armenia.

Another group of citizens think that when borders are opened the out-migration from Armenia will decrease due to positive economic developments resulting in normalization of relations. Moreover, citizens believe that the open border will make the process of repatriation to Armenia easier.

Another group of citizens expects a significant influx of Turkish nationals into Armenia if the border is opened.

Others do not anticipate a significant increase in migration flows from Turkey into Armenia, pointing to similar dynamics of migration flows between Armenia and Iran, current possibilities for immigration of Turkish nationals and migration flows, etc. Citizens think that educational services offered by Armenia can be attractive for the youth of the eastern, mainly Kurdish populated provinces of Turkey.

Some citizens are concerned that shifts in migration flows may lead to tangible demographic changes, meanwhile others are convinced that no “threat” is posed to Armenia’s demography.

Rape of the Sabin women

Citizens think that the normalization of relations will in one way or another influence the phenomenon of trafficking. Citizens are concerned that in case of open borders the volume of trafficking from Armenia into Turkey, especially trafficking in women and exploitation of prostitutes will increase.

Vast majority of citizens also think that establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries and availability of consular service will greatly contribute to protection of rights of Armenian citizens in Turkey.

Viruses san frontier

Citizens are concerned about the prospects of increase in crime, especially increase in volumes of animal theft in case of open borders. Citizens are also concerned about food safety and public health issues. Issues which are particularly problematic are prospects of increase in animal disease rates in cross-border zones due to the low level of animal vaccination in Turkey.

Citizens think that lifting of blockade on the border and increase in volume of turn-over of travelers may lead to increase in certain diseases in Armenia, such as the AHINI virus (“Swine flu”).

Blooming barbed-wires

The process of regulation and the open border is perceived by citizens to be posing new challenges for combating terrorism in our country. Citizens think that in case of open borders the issue of trans-border movements of armed groups of the Kurdish liberation movement and associated issues will become a pressing problem.

Another group of citizens considers the open borders to be additional guarantee for the security of the country and believes that the current border resources create good basis for combating terrorism. The migration regulation system in Armenia, however, should be strengthened and functional from legal-regulatory as well as institutional aspects.

Armenia is not prepared, most probably, for influx of refugees and asylum seekers, even Turkish nationals. This issue is becoming more important in the context of EU integration of Armenia.

Price of the land

Citizens believe that the issues of acquiring real estate, land, buildings, by Turkish nationals in Armenia and Armenian nationals in Turkey should be regulated.

Citizens of Armenia are on one hand concerned about the national legislation allowing long-term land lease in our country, on the other hand the citizens are concerned about limited possibilities to acquire estate, including land, in Turkey.

Role of education, culture and information in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey

Two-sided education

Citizens think that education has a very important role in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey. Moreover citizens believe that many issues related to the normalization of relations should be solved through education.

For instance, incorporation of the issues of the international recognition of the Armenian Genocide and the Armenian Demands in the value system of the coming generations and the pan-Armenian agenda is possible only through proper incorporation of this issue in the educational system. Overall citizens give importance to education, particularly to patriotic upbringing, in the context of development of Armenian-Turkish relations.

It is noteworthy that citizens are concerned about the issue of Armenian-Turkish mixed marriages and for the prevention of the latter citizens give importance to family and community upbringing. At the same time prospects of cooperation between the two countries should also be addressed through education.

Citizens particularly think that some of Armenia's schools should offer the teaching of Turkish language, which would be necessary for effective communication with the neighboring country.

Awareness campaign based on facts

Citizens believe that the public needs to be more aware about the process of normalization of relations, the numerous opportunities and challenges, and potential consequences.

Lack of awareness about national legislation and international legal documents, including the Treaty of Kars, is particularly evident. Moreover, citizens think that greater awareness will help deal with challenges while making more effective use of available opportunities.

Citizens believe that the coverage of the process is nearly as important as the actual process. Citizens also give importance to the tactics of raising awareness of the international community about issues of concern to Armenia.

For instance, one of the important elements of the process, the blockade of the border by Turkey should be properly presented to the international community, otherwise an impression has been created that Armenia is also responsible for the blockade.

Citizens are convinced that balanced and impartial coverage will significantly increase trust of the public towards political leaders, as well as their initiatives and the actual process of normalization of relations.

Citizens think that media has a central role to play in raising public awareness. But they also note that in their public speeches politicians rarely present arguments for their positions and often stick to emotional and value-based rhetoric.

It is noteworthy that in such situation diversity of opinions without proper argumentation does not allow citizens to get oriented and “create a chaos in the heads of people”. So, citizens demand quality and timely coverage of the process.

Should we recognize each other?

Some citizens are convinced that the process of normalization of relations will help to properly present facts and historic evidence about the Armenian Genocide, as well peculiarities of the contemporary Armenian identity to the current generation of Turkish nationals who are deprived until now of a possibility to receive direct information from Armenia.

Overall citizens believe that open border and more frequent interactions will contribute to mutual understanding of the two nations, socio-cultural relations, shaping of common interests and positions, modification and eradication of stereotypes, dispelling of numerous concerns, and spreading of the culture of peace.

If you wish for peace, prepare for peace

In the process of normalization of relations citizens give importance to the cultural factor. Current culture of mutual animosity makes the challenges of the process of normalization of relations more pronounced and limit emerging possibilities for development.

For instance, formally in Armenian culture there is a negative attitude toward elements of Turkish, as well as Mediterranean culture, including music, lifestyle, fashion and traditions. At the same time by being under the influence of Turkish and Mediterranean culture Armenian culture has incorporated many elements of it.

Citizens think that an open land border is not challenging from cultural point of view, as the “spiritual border is open for a long time”. However, citizens think that expansion of the presence of Turkish culture in Armenia is inevitable as interactions increase. Citizens are particularly concerned about the impact on the young generation.

On one hand, citizens wish to see a transition for the culture of “conflicts” to cultural dialogue at the same time expecting integration of the new healthy elements of cultural transformations into the mainstream of the Armenian culture. This is expected both from the Armenian and the Turkish societies.

Armenian citizens believe that the contemporary Turkey continues the Genocide of the Armenian culture forcing “Turkification” in its territory, which included a wide arsenal from denial politics and particularly “de-Armenization” of cultural and historic monuments to animosity toward Turkish-Armenians. This leaves some citizens skeptical about prospects for cultural dialogue.

Factor of internal politics of Armenia in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey

A head without a horse

Vast majority of citizens doubt about the capacity and knowledge of political powers, including the ruling political coalition, to fully pursue national interests of Armenia, to effectively lead the process, to compare group interests with public interests or if necessary to subordinate the first to the second, moreover to form national consensus in the process of normalization of relations.

It is not surprising therefore that most citizens do not have great expectations from the authorities in the process of normalization of relations and do not expect unexpected successes from the political leaders in Armenia.

It is noteworthy that in this situation of crises of trust towards the political establishment citizens believe that national values and ideology run contrary to universal democratic values and liberal ideology.

This view derives from the extent of interrelations between big business circles with the political elite and the fact that citizens tend to perceive businessman as de-nationalized elements “without homeland and nation”.

This attitude is transposed and ascribed to those institutes where big business and their private interest in directly presented, including Armenia’s National Assembly and Government.

In the atmosphere of such perceptions it is difficult for citizens to see “patriotic and self-devoted” persons among Armenian statesmen. Moreover, as a result of such attitude citizens often feel estranged from authorities, which are not viewed as a “unifying power” or at least do not perceive themselves as part of the “power of the majority”.

Fashionable face, worn out lining?

Citizens think that various social, economic, political and public administration problems inherent to the country hamper the process of normalization of relations and weaken the position of the Armenian side during the current and future negotiations.

Citizens find that internal and external political processes are greatly interrelated, which means that it is impossible to pursue effective, coordinated and acceptable foreign policy without having similar effective and participatory internal policies. Even the best diplomacy is not able to fill in the gaps which emerge as a result of poor public administration.

Moreover, citizens believe that numerous challenges of the process of normalization of relations are conditioned not by the process but exclusively by internal political issues: shortcoming of internal policies of the authorities of the country and the attitude and behavior of society towards those shortcomings.

Citizens think that in such a case stumbling in foreign policy may lead to political instability. Strengthening of internal policies, increasing effectiveness of governance and making governance more participatory will make the position of Armenia stronger both in the process of normalization of relations and in international arena in general.

Six songs by five people

Citizens are not satisfied not only by the content of the internal political processes but also by the format. Segmentation of existing political powers into more than 70 political parties, low levels of political dialogue and debate, inability of political powers to orient the society conditions Armenia’s foreign policy in the process of normalization of relations and weakens the capacity of the public to engage in cultural dialogue with the other side.

Factor of trust and stereotypes in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey

Right to blow on the yogurt of the one who gets burnt from drinking milk

Citizens are clearly aware and list many stereotypes associated with the relations between Armenia and Turkey, use them as arguments in the process of normalization of relations between the two countries, as well as mention the need and ways of overcoming them.

Overall the citizens mention that the existing stereotypes seriously hamper the process of normalization and development of relations. The fact that numerous stereotypes of “uneducated Turk is an uneducated animal, an educated Turk is an educated animal” have been transformed into numerous phobias is a matter of concern. Some of the fears expressed include: “they will poison the water, they will buy us and deprive us from our economy,” “they will spread into Armenia and will propagate themselves, will marry our girls and will flood the country with homosexuals, will degrade out generations.”

Other widespread stereotypes of the Turkish identity is as hostile, violent, unreliable, untrustworthy, intriguing and treacherous, and one that is unable to change and persists.

It is noteworthy that the stereotypes about Turks and the attitudes of citizens are closely linked with the attitudes toward the “Turks” of the Azerbaijan, basically citizens do not differentiate between the two.

At the same time, there are almost no noticeable stereotypes related to religion.

A view under the view of the Mountain

Some citizens think that normalization of official relations will not lead to normalization of relations between two nations and a visible perspective of mutual trust will not be formed. Moreover, citizens are convinced that economic and political interrelation will also not contribute to normalization of relations between two nations as those relations are darkened by the un-recognized fact of the Genocide and “the memory of loss of historic lands”.

It is noteworthy that citizens justify such attitude by the official Genocide denial politics of Turkey, its educational and cultural policies which contribute to formation of an image of an Armenian enemy or at least a deserving victim in the past and present.

It is the image of the unrepentant perpetrator that gives birth to most of the stereotypes. Such stereotypes become more grounded when they are kneaded with the bile of personal experiences.

For instance citizens mention that normal trade relations with the Turks may become strained in one second when a conversation about the Genocide or the Armenian demands starts. Moreover, citizens are convinced that it is practically impossible to have a debate or dialogue on those issues in the neighboring country.

Such attitude logically directs the citizens towards new stereotypes, such as “we will accept them, but they will not accept us”. And the visible border line between the two countries the biblical mountain is not a symbol of friendship now according to the perceptions of citizens, it is rather a constant reminder of a loss that has not been respected, pain resulting in that and a monument calling for revenge for the victims of the Genocide.

Eternal interests

It is noteworthy that the process of normalization of relations is perceived to be means of overcoming stereotypes. Citizens mention fear against possible aggression of the neighboring country, among the most characteristic stereotypes, and mention that mutual interactions will contribute to overcoming of the internal fear and strengthening internal freedom.

It is noteworthy that citizens first of all mention internalized stereotypes when talking about those including the complex of national superiority and exclusiveness, feeling of eternal and irreversible loss. Citizens mention that positive stereotypes about the neighboring nation may help overcome negative stereotypes.

More often there are images of a trustworthy trade partner of the neighbors. Citizens think that not all interactions should include political components, especially when there are groups within two nations that do not have or ignore those values and stereotypes in their value systems.

Citizens mention that an adequate more balanced attitude towards the neighbors, avoiding “eternal friends and eternal enemies” classification and establishing relations based on interests will contribute to the process of normalization of relations.

Let the other side believe it!

All streams of the abovementioned stereotypes and the rivers of fears that have nourished those fall into the sea which is currently in stagnation and is turning into a swamp of distrust.

It can be noted that there is a serious crises of trust towards the neighboring country among citizens of Armenia. The distrust is primarily and mostly toward the Turkish state. It is noteworthy that most of the voiced stereotypes prove

that point: distrust towards the statehood, its institutions and only then towards the nation or the society: “Turks are not going to fulfill what they will sign up to ... it has always been the case through the history”.

The distrust has not only been crystallized in the stereotypes of people, but it is also looking for arguments and frequently manages to find them. Contradictory messages often voiced by the Turkish political elite and statesmen only pour oil onto the fire of distrust by concretizing the stereotypes and fears of the Armenian society.

Visible demonstration of official politics of Turkey in the spheres of education and culture are viewed by citizens as expression of its current anti-Armenian politics. The consistent politics of the Turkish state in relations with its Eastern provinces, the Kurdish issue, long-term blockade of Armenia, and the Northern Cyprus also support the existing stereotypes.

Citizens make a logical conclusion that the modern Turkish state is not ready to normalize relations with its neighbor and no serious progress is to be expected. Even lifting of blockade on the border is viewed by citizens as a temporary tactical step of the authorities of the neighboring county with “conspirator” aims.

Also, it is noteworthy that citizens believe that Turkish interests are based on the ideology of pan-Turkism and always and necessarily contradict the Armenian interests. Some citizens doubts about the potential normalization of relations between two societies pointing out that both societies are not yet full-fledged democracies hence “palace wars” will always hinder “office peace”.

Factor of European Integration in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey

European Union on the banks of river Araks

Citizens think the processes of normalization of relations and European integration of the region are interrelated along several dimensions.

For instance, some citizen thinks that EU membership of Turkey would contribute to development of relations between two countries and convergence of societies with similar values. EU member Turkey would have committed to protect human rights and follow norms of international law, according to the opinions of citizens, would have to make more careful choices between military-political and socioeconomic tools while building relations with its neighbor.

Moreover, citizens think that it will not be easy for a member of European customs zone to pursue protectionist commercial-economic politics towards its neighbor.

Citizens believe that Turkey needs normalization process with Armenia to satisfy EU's demand that it normalize relations with its neighbors, including Armenia. Significant group of citizens considers this factor to be the main motive of the Turkish politics in the process of normalization of relations.

Big in a Large?

Another segment of citizens considers EU integration and membership of Turkey to be a challenge for Armenia's security. Citizens think that growing Turkish element in Europe is dangerous in itself, as it creates an opportunity for Turkey to significantly influence European foreign politics.

In this case the voice of EU member Turkey will gain more weight in the European foreign politics.

Also citizens do not rule out possible weakening of the European integration vector in the Turkish foreign policy and new challenges emerging from that.

Iron of the European integration and the regional folds

Citizens give importance to the influence of the process of normalization of relations on the process of European integration of Armenia. Citizens think that normalization of relations with Turkey will increase political weight of our country on the European scale and the Armenian economy will become more accessible and attractive for investors by “becoming closer to Europe.”

Citizens also think that the process of normalization of relations with the neighboring country and European integration of Armenia do not have any immediate prospects, however the last could contribute in a renewed way to the process of normalization. This group of citizens views Turkey as “a garret-window to Europe”.

Caucasian dialectics – integration of integration

Finally, citizens discuss the process of normalization of relations from the point of view of European community. Citizens are convinced that Europe is interested in shaping a peaceful and stable region. Citizens believe the European vision of the regions is “united Caucasus”. So, citizens believe that the successes of the process of integration of the region in Europe is first of all conditioned by the process if integration of countries within the region.

Rendering the Voting Results

Impact of normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey on the process of international recognition of the Armenian Genocide

The mount olive prayer

THM participants voted for six different scenarios. Four of the scenarios presumed establishing relations and opening the border between Armenia and Turkey versus the status quo scenario. Another scenario was “against all scenarios” which can also be described as a vote against current developments of Armenia-Turkey relations.

The THM voting session had two parts: voting for the “dream scenario” and voting for the most realistic scenario. Voting results reveal the contrast between what people consider as a “dream scenario” and what they expect in the reality.

Thus, majority of participants (50.3%) voted for the scenario which results in both economic and political gains for Armenia. However, only 9% of participants believe that this scenario is realistic.

Largest proportion of participants (33%) find more realistic a scenario that brings about no economic changes but de-blocks the Armenian-Turkish border without any political losses for Armenia in terms of the Genocide recognition and matters related to historical/legal land issues.

However, combining the voting results in terms of political gains/losses provide yet another view.

In this case 43 % of voters see future development within the scenarios where the Armenia borders are open in cost of recognition of the Genocide and other political losses and 42% see it without any political losses for Armenia. Such 50/50 results of “optimists” and “pessimists” show uncertainty about possible future development in political arena.

Combined voting results of what people want also shows preference of political aspect of Armenia-Turkey relations. While 50.3 % of participants voted for the scenario with economic and political gains, 18.7% voted for a scenario with political gains without any economic changes in Armenia.

At the same time scenarios that would provide economic gains for Armenia as a result of border opening receive the least number of votes. So, economic factors do not seem to be the top priority for THM participants in Armenian-Turkish relations.

However, the only shared voting result between “dream” and “reality” was gathered for establishing relations and opening borders, while status quo and possible other scenario received reasonably less votes in both voting processes. Thus, the majority of participants does not want affairs to remain the same and do not believe in the status quo.

Overall, participants expect a positive outcome of the process of Armenia-Turkey rapprochement. However, it seems unclear to people what will be the results in terms of possible political gains and losses.

At the same time, overwhelming majority of participants “dream” about an outcome that would bring political gains for Armenia and care less of economic benefits the process may bring.

Possible scenarios of development of Armenian-Turkish relations

Voting question: "Which scenario do you prefer?"

| Scenarios | ASHTARAK | ARMAVIR | ARTASHAT | GYUMRI | DILIJAN | YEGHEGNADZOR | HRAZDAN | MARTUNI | SISIAN | VANADZOR | YEREVAN | TOTAL |
|--------------------------------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|--------------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|--------------|
| Silent De-blocking | 0 | 5 | 9 | 1 | 9 | 0 | 2 | 7 | 2 | 4 | 7 | 46 |
| Open Border between Debtors | 25 | 22 | 19 | 26 | 16 | 14 | 24 | 15 | 7 | 18 | 48 | 234 |
| All Quiet on the Western Front | 12 | 8 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 9 | 20 | 9 | 15 | 3 | 30 | 112 |
| Unknown Winner, Unclear Prize | 9 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 9 | 15 | 53 |
| Knight's Move | 18 | 29 | 63 | 49 | 72 | 44 | 59 | 50 | 76 | 51 | 118 | 629 |
| Against all | 39 | 29 | 5 | 9 | 9 | 2 | 12 | 10 | 8 | 5 | 49 | 177 |
| TOTAL | 103 | 94 | 103 | 87 | 114 | 69 | 118 | 92 | 114 | 90 | 267 | 1,251 |

Voting question: "Which scenario in your opinion is more realistic?"

| Scenarios | ASHTARAK | ARMAVIR | ARTASHAT | GYUMRI | DILIJAN | YEGHEGNADZOR | HRAZDAN | MARTUNI | SISIAN | VANADZOR | YEREVAN | TOTAL |
|--------------------------------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|--------------|
| Silent De-blocking | 14 | 24 | 8 | 10 | 19 | 8 | 24 | 19 | 11 | 12 | 68 | 217 |
| Open Border between Debtors | 43 | 20 | 33 | 34 | 53 | 25 | 9 | 21 | 31 | 36 | 87 | 392 |
| All Quiet on the Western Front | 7 | 17 | 10 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 11 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 23 | 87 |
| Unknown Winner, Unclear Prize | 24 | 9 | 39 | 20 | 23 | 20 | 19 | 26 | 43 | 29 | 47 | 299 |
| Knight's Move | 0 | 11 | 8 | 9 | 14 | 3 | 10 | 3 | 28 | 7 | 10 | 103 |
| Against all | 15 | 9 | 4 | 8 | 3 | 4 | 9 | 6 | 10 | 4 | 35 | 107 |
| TOTAL | 103 | 90 | 102 | 86 | 113 | 63 | 82 | 78 | 128 | 90 | 270 | 1,205 |