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ПОЛИТОЛОГИЯ

Turkey-Armenia Relations After 2008

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Abstract.

The conflict between Armenia and Turkey is an important factor which hinders economic development, worsens the prestige and successful foreign policy of these two countries. However, year 2008 marked positive shifts in Turkey-Armenia relations which started with football diplomacy and therefore provided hopes that after tense past, it is possible to normalise relations. The aim of this study is to analyse development of relations between Armenia and Turkey after 2008 and the possibilities that relations can be normalised in nearest future.

Keywords: Turkey-Armenia relations; genocide; conflict; Nagorno-Karabakh.

Introduction

Turkey and Armenia more than a decade and a half hadn't had normal diplomatic ties and borders between these two countries remain closed. However in 2008 president of Turkey Republic Abdullah Gül received the invitation of Armenian president and went to Yerevan to watch football match between Armenia and Turkey. After this event, which was popularly called football diplomacy, leaders of Armenia and Turkey started secret negotiations in Switzerland with US, Russia and EU participating as mediators. This led to signing of Zurich protocols by which Turkey and Armenia committed to establish diplomatic ties and normalise relations. In order to do so, both countries not only had to adjust their foreign policy but also solve a lot of domestic issues, related to historical grievances, negative public opinion towards normalization of relations, nationalistic approaches and wrong perceptions.

Furthermore, 1915 events (Armenia claims that Turks are responsible for genocide) are important factor which defines tense relations between Armenia and Turkey. As year 2015 will mark 100th anniversary of these events, the need to resolve issues related to genocide allegations and to base relationships not on hostility and suspicion but on cooperation and trust will be more significant. Therefore this study delivers a timely contribution to our understanding of complex relations between Armenia and Turkey which developments might be crucial for ensuring stability and peace in the Caucasus region. First of all, in order to have clear view of conflictual state between Armenia and Turkey, historical circumstances are being described. Then analysis of development of relations between Armenia and Turkey after 2008 is being made by finding out the impact of football diplomacy and Zurich protocols, the importance of Armenian diaspora and

Russia towards Turkey-Armenia relations and identifying current trends between Turkey and Armenia.

Historical circumstances of conflict between Armenia and Turkey

Turkey and Armenia are neighbouring countries differing by its size, religion and culture, but what they have in common is shared history [1]. Majority part of Armenians lived under rule of different Turks governments up till 20 century. During the Ottoman rule the situation of Armenians did not differ from other ethnic minorities. Discords between Armenia and Turkey started during the First World War years when collapsing Ottoman Empire sought to suppress Armenian uprising in the territory of Eastern Turkey. It did so by forcibly deporting large part of Armenian population and that resulted in high numbers of victims. After Armenia reclaimed its independency in 1991, the events of 1915 no longer remain the case just between Turkey and Armenia but spread to international arena because Armenia started to seek genocide recognition in parliaments of various countries. Hence question of genocide recognition remains very sensitive subject and one of the most important obstacles to Armenia's rapprochement with Turkey. This question is highly related with ethnical, religious, cultural identity and historical memory, thus it encourages mutual mistrust and hostile political perceptions [2]. Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict is another important issue in which Turkey and Armenia are not able to reach a consensus. In the 90s between Armenia and Azerbaijan rose armed conflict and it ended with Armenia occupying 20 percent territories of Azerbaijan. This conflict was even examined in UN Security Council and it decided that Armenia should withdraw from occupied territories. However Armenia did not abide the resolution. As Turkey has close ethnical ties with Azerbaijan and is interested in its energy resources, it highly supports Azerbaijan in this conflict. Turkey closed its borders to Armenia during this Nagorno-Karabakh war and has not opened it till now. Many times highest Turkey's politicians have mentioned that it is impossible to normalise relations between Armenia and Turkey until Armenia get back occupied territories to Azerbaijan. Not less important circumstance of conflictual relations between Turkey and Armenia is the hesitation of Armenia to recognize its western borders with Turkey. In 1920 Armenia and Turkey signed treaty of Aleksandropol and in 1921 treaty of Kars. By these treaties Armenia acknowledged Turkey's territorial integrity. However, after collapse of Soviet Union Armenia hesitate to confirm these treaties and therefore has not officially recognised its borders with Turkey. Also article 11 of Armenian declaration of Independence states that "The Republic of Armenia stands in support of the task of achieving international recognition of the 1915 Genocide in Ottoman Turkey and Western Armenia" [3]. The fact that lands of Eastern Anatolia is called Western Armenia raises particular ambiguities and raises doubts whether Armenia does not have certain territorial ambitions. Turkey many times has announced that the recognition of its eastern borders by Armenia is the precondition to normalise relations.

Despite these harsh historical circumstances both countries showed particular level of political will which started with football diplomacy and led to signing of Zurich protocols.

Football diplomacy and Zurich protocols

Till year 2008 Armenia and Turkey had not had any relations in the official level. Breakthrough started with so called football diplomacy when newly elected Armenian president Serzh Sargasyan invited Turkey's president Abdullah Gül to watch football match between national teams of Turkey and Armenia. This was the first time than modern Turkey's president visited Armenia. Armenian nationalist held demonstrations, by which they required their president to stand firmly and do not give up genocide allegations. However, we can understand that Armenia was ready for dialogue and to do some concessions through symbolic means. Armenian Football federation removed the image of Mountain Ararat (which belongs to Turkey) from its logo. In his turn, Armenian president visited Turkey after one year during second match between Turkey and Armenia. Therefore football diplomacy helped to break stagnation in Armenia-Turkey relations and to stride first steps towards normalization of relations.

Football diplomacy provided base for negotiations between Armenia and Turkey in non-official level with US, EU and Russia participating as mediators. This led to signing "Protocol on Establishment of Diplomatic Relations" and "Protocol on Development of Relations" by Ministers of foreign affairs of Armenia and Turkey in Zurich. These protocols envisaged to exchange

ambassadors in order to improve diplomatic relations and to re-open the borders. However, Turkey and Armenia have to abandon their precautions. Turkey should not use Nagorno-Karabakh as a precondition and Armenia will not insist on recognizing of genocide allegations by Turkey. Armenians have different opinion towards Zurich protocols. Some Armenians welcomed it because of economic opportunities but others and diaspora were greatly against it because they thought that protocols did not fully address the issue of genocide. When time came for Armenian parliament to ratify the protocols, Armenian president declared that he suspends the recognition of Zurich protocols. This happened because Turkey itself had not ratified the protocols and did not submit to normalize relations without any precondition. Turkey was reluctant to ratify protocols because of Azerbaijan's pressure. Thus Turkey related ratification of protocols with Nagorno-Karabakh issue, which means that until Armenia does not reach agreement with Azerbaijan, Zurich protocols will not be ratified. Despite the fact that countries agreed to normalize relations without any preconditions, Turkey let Armenia to understand that it will not normalize relations until Armenia solve Nagorno-Karabakh issue, give up genocide allegations and recognize eastern border of Turkey.

So football diplomacy and Zurich protocols were important starting points towards normalization of relations but as later events showed, it was naive to think that these would be enough to sustain normal diplomatic relations. Armenian diaspora has a big impact towards Armenia Turkey relations therefore it is worth to analyze its activities.

Armenian diaspora

Armenian diaspora is very influential not only in formatting foreign policy of Armenia but also in parliaments of third countries. It is worth to mention that population of Armenian diaspora is bigger than Armenians living in Armenia. A lot of Armenians are living in US, Russia and France. These countries are important actors in international arena. Big part of Armenian diaspora has citizenship of other countries and right to vote. So it is natural that diaspora has influence towards decisions makers. This is particularly seen in countries like US and France, where Armenian lobbies are increasingly active. Despite the fact, that majority of diaspora is long living outside Armenia, it has not lost its national identity and is resistant to assimilation. Big part of Armenian identity is the notion that they suffered from Turks [4]. Having in mind that Armenian diaspora has been seeking genocide recognition, it was not smart to think that after signing Zurich protocols it would agree to give up genocide allegations. This is because issue of genocide is integral part of Armenian diaspora. Armenian diaspora is the main actor which maintenance genocide allegations and escalate this theme. If for Armenians living in Armenia rapprochement with Turkey would be beneficial in economical and political terms, conversely Armenian diaspora would loose the main factor of its legitimacy [5]. That's why it is against Armenia's rapprochement with Turkey and establishment of diplomatic ties.

Year 2015 will mark 100th anniversary of 1915 events. It is no doubt that Armenian diaspora will use this anniversary and will become more active in order to promote genocide recognition in international arena. Lately Armenian diaspora more often release statements in which it is calling the Armenians and the diaspora to unite and to create a strong political front to promote Genocide recognition and reparation [6]. Therefore, the activities of Armenian diaspora are highly adverse to Turkey and make aggravate bilateral relations. As 100th anniversary of 1915 events is forthcoming there are high chances that increasing activities of Armenian diaspora in seeking genocide recognition will hinder the development of relations between Turkey and Armenia or even make them worse. The influence towards the relations of these two countries also has Russia, which is an important player in South Caucasus region.

Impact of Russia towards Turkey-Armenia relations

Because of its geopolitical isolation, Armenia is forced to cherish close relations with Russia. It seemed that during war between Georgia and Russia, Armenia seriously considered option to integrate towards western economical and security structures but finally it remained in Russia's influence sphere. In 2010 countries signed Russian-Armenian defence agreement by which Armenia allowed Russian army to stay in a country till 2044. This not only increased Russia's ability to manoeuvre in the region but also raises the speeches that Turkey and Armenia are not able to solve their problems without Russia. Armenia also decided that instead of participating in

EU eastern partnership it will take a part in Customs Union led by Russia. Russia is also particular protector which allows Armenia to maintain 20 percent of territories occupied from Azerbaijan. Turkey and Azerbaijan, which are stronger states by military means than Armenia, are deterred from military action due to possible interference of Russia.

Russia wants to remain important player in South Caucasus region. Russia-Georgia war showed that Russia will no longer remain passive observer but will be ready to protect its interest and to compete for influence in the region with Turkey and US. The fact that Russia agreed towards Armenia's rapprochement with Turkey was tactical step, seeking to raise tensions in Turkey's relations with Azerbaijan. But in the long term good relations between Armenia and Turkey are not beneficial for Russia because in that case Russia's influence towards Armenia and South Caucasus region by economical and military means would decrease. Understanding this, Russia will try to keep Armenia in its influence zone and will be against closer Armenia's relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan.

Current trends

Despite some positive shifts which happened after 2008, in essence Armenian-Turkey relations have not changed. Turkey still has not re-opened its borders to Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has not been solved, countries have not exchanged its ambassadors and Armenia has not give up genocide allegations. Furthermore from the latest actions of these countries it is hard to see any signs that situation can improve tangibly. Conversely, as 100th anniversary of 1915 is forthcoming increasing activities of Armenian diaspora and Armenia's officials will only provoke negative reaction from Turkey.

That Armenian diaspora raises territorial pretensions and questions of reparations, is not a surprise for Turkey. But lately similar rhetoric is being heard from highest officials of Armenia. Despite that Serzh Sargsyan looked positive in improving Armenia's relations with Turkey, his particular statements raises doubts about that. For instance in one meeting with students, one student asked him, would ever Armenia get back its West territory and Mount Ararat. Sarkisyan answered that it depends from young generation because his generation did its job by taking back Karabakh [7]. In 2013 Armenia's Prosecutor General Aghvan Hovsepyan made a statement in which he urged lost Armenian territories to be returned and material compensation for victims of genocide [8]. If president statement happened in non-official environment, these allegations by prosecutor general were first territorial claim to Turkey, expressed in official level. So it is understandable that Ministry of Foreign Affair of Turkey released the statement condemning the allegations. So as we can see from the rhetoric of officials, relations between Turkey and Armenia remain tense. It is also hard to expect the improvement of normalization process in nearest future. In following two years there will be elections of all levels in Turkey. It is likely that in order to save votes from nationalistic supporters Turkey will not give up its preconditions to normalization process [9]. Furthermore as 100th anniversary of 1915 events is forthcoming the pressure from Armenian diaspora and nationalists to government of Armenia not to do any concessions will only increase. In this context it is hard to identify the possibilities of rapprochement between Armenia and Turkey in a nearest future.

Conclusions

There were wide range of historical issues which disturbed peaceful coexistence between Armenia and Turkey. The issue of genocide without any doubts is the main subject of controversy between Armenia and Turkey. Conflict of Nagorno-Karabach and with it related Turkey's closed borders to Armenia only increased tense relations between these countries. And because of Azerbaijan pressure it is very hard for Turkey to make constructive decisions. Armenia's hesitation to acknowledge Eastern borders of Turkey, only makes Turkey more suspicious about Armenian territorial claims.

Despite particular rapprochement in 2008 Armenia and Turkey failed to solve the conflict and normalize its relations. The obligations set in Zurich protocols were not fulfilled. It is also unlikely that Armenia and Turkey can do it in the near future As 2015 will mark 100th year anniversary of 1915 events, there are high chances that Armenian diaspora will mobilize and will seek genocide recognition in international level more actively. Meantime Russia wants to keep Armenia in its influence zone, so it will be against Armenia's rapprochement with Turkey and

Azerbaijan. Also in the following two years there will be an elections of all levels in Turkey, so politicians in order not to loose votes from nationalistic supporters will be reluctant to come closer with Armenia It is likely that that tensions between Armenia and Turkey will rise and will add to instability and fragile peace in the Caucasus region.

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