



Support to Armenia-Turkey Rapprochement Brief Quarterly Overview, Public Version

April - June 2012

With the official Armenian-Turkish diplomacy still suspended, the normalization process between the two countries continues to significantly depend on civil society exchanges and Track Two efforts. These efforts seek to sustain the momentum and build favorable attitudes inside the societies towards each other until the two sides can diplomatically reengage. With the unrest in the Middle East and the increasing focus on this region, the issue of Armenia-Turkey relations continues to remain low in the foreign policy agenda of Turkey. Due to the Genocide commemoration day on April 24, this month saw the usual increase in interest towards Armenia in the Turkish media. With the presidential elections coming up in Armenia in 2013 and Turkey's focus on the Middle East, no major changes are likely to occur over the next couple of years. What is more, with the centennial of the Armenian Genocide in 2015, Armenia is expected to focus its efforts on its worldwide recognition rather than making a move towards the establishment of diplomatic relations with Turkey, given that previous attempts were unsuccessful.

The highlights of the SATR activities in this quarter included the following:

- TESEV organized a coordination meeting of Turkish stakeholder organizations interested in Armenia-Turkey rapprochement, which was held in Istanbul on June 26, 2012. The meeting brought together 25 representatives of stakeholder organizations engaged in Armenia-Turkey dialogue. The views expressed at the meeting were collected and summarized in a three-page paper with recommendations, which was widely distributed among the Armenian and Turkish stakeholders and uploaded on the internet, specifically on the TESEV, EPF and SATR websites¹, and shared in social networks. A similar meeting was organized in Yerevan in April 2011. It involved Armenian stakeholders interested in Armenia-Turkey dialogue.
- UMBA facilitated the registration of the Armenian Transport Sector Employers Branch Union in order to encourage institutionalized cooperation between Armenia and Turkey in this area. The potential for creating a joint platform of Armenian and Turkish transport companies is also being explored. UMBA is also exploring the possibilities with the representative offices of Microsoft in Armenia and Turkey for the creation of a similar platform that would bring together IT sector representatives from both countries. Currently,

¹ The paper can be downloaded from: http://armturkdialogue.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/overview_partner-meeting-in-istanbul_june-26-2012.pdf

the sides are in the process of identifying and matching five representatives from each country. Upon selection, the participants will meet in Istanbul in September 2012 to discuss the potential for the creation of a joint platform.

- UMBA in close cooperation with Kars-based Serhat TV organized the 3rd Armenian-Turkish Business Conference in Kars, Turkey on June 15-16, 2012. Over 70 Armenian and Turkish businessmen participated in the third forum. Turkey was represented by businesses from Kars, Van, Mush, Diyarbakir, Istanbul, Malatia and Ankara. The conference created a forum to discuss possible areas of business cooperation between Armenia and Turkey, including joint productions between Serhat TV and the Armenian Shant TV, transportation of trout from Armenia to Turkey, setting up textile production in Armenia for export to third countries, possible acquisition of obsidian mines in Armenia, elaboration of an alternative route for freight-forwarding from Mersin to Yerevan, and others. Meanwhile, as a direct result of the 2nd Armenian-Turkish Business Conference in Yerevan, a dairy production was established in Isparta, Turkey. The company will primarily be producing cheese. In the future, the company plans to expand to other towns in Turkey, such as Izmir, Bolu and Artvin.
- YPC and the Department of Communications at Izmir University of Economics finalized and presented the quantitative data from the media monitoring at the media roundtable organized in Yerevan on June 4-5, 2012. According to the preliminary findings of the study, Armenia-Turkey relations and other topics related to Turkey continued to occupy a significant place in Armenian media coverage even in spite of the lack of progress in Armenia-Turkey official diplomacy, while in Turkey the number of references to the topic has been relatively limited. The distribution of attitudes observed in the media studied reflects disillusionment with the Armenia-Turkey normalization process and a lack of trust in the perspective of improvement in Armenian-Turkish relations. Based on the monitoring results, a final report, including interpretation of the data and recommendations for media, civil society, donors and other actors will be prepared and widely distributed over the next quarter.
- EPF and GPoT in consultation with YPC and Internews Armenia organized a bus tour for Armenian and Turkish journalists and bloggers from May 24 to June 6, 2012. Last year, a similar bus tour was organized by Internews Armenia, YPC and GPoT as part of the “Dialogue Building between Armenia and Turkey” supported by the US Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. A group of 18 journalists, accompanied by EPF and GPoT staff, traveled around Turkey and Armenia, visited historic and cultural sites, met representatives of the government, civil society, media, academia and think tanks and heard varying perspectives on Armenia-Turkey rapprochement. The bus tour offered a unique opportunity for the participating journalists and bloggers to establish human and professional relations amongst each other, to re-explore their own country and learn about the other country and to better comprehend the hurdles and the nuances associated with the Armenia-Turkey dialogue by meeting people on the ground. This allowed them to gain a more holistic idea of the diversity of the existing views on this issue. Articles published as a result of the trip stimulated discussion on Armenia-Turkey issues in the media.

- On June 4-5, 2012, YPC organized a media roundtable entitled “The Role of Media at the Current Stage of Armenia-Turkey Relations: Dividing Societies or Bringing Them Together?” in Yerevan, which brought together journalists and media experts from Armenia and Turkey, specifically from Istanbul, Ankara and Diyarbakir. The bus tour participants also attended the media roundtable. The issues discussed at the roundtable included the current political situation and its implications for the media, issues of freedom of speech in both countries, the ways of improving media coverage and breaking existing stereotypes in the media. Preliminary outcomes of the media monitoring were also presented at the media roundtable. The forthcoming media roundtable will take place in Diyarbakir, Turkey in September 2012.
- On June 4, 2012, YPC and GPoT organized the Yerevan leg of the third Journalism Award Ceremony. Lilit Gasparyan, the special correspondent of Yerkir Media TV channel in Turkey, received the award for her documentary film on Armenian schools in Istanbul. The award is bestowed to Armenian and Turkish journalists twice a year for the most objective and professional media piece on an issue pertinent to Armenia-Turkey relations. The award ceremony for the Turkish winner Hilal Kaplan, columnist at *Yeni Shafak* for her articles “Our Honorable History and the Truth” and “Armenia: the Diaspora of Anatolia” was held at the Consulate of Great Britain in Istanbul on June 14, 2012.
- On April 12-13, 2012, the Armenia-Turkey Cinema Platform (ATCP) organized its next workshop for a group of 10 Armenian and Turkish young filmmakers, five per country, in Istanbul on the sidelines of the 31st Istanbul International Film Festival. The workshop resulted in another Armenian-Turkish co-production documentary project, “Grandchildren of Giaour... My Armenian Grandfather” by Devrim Akkaya and Josefina Markarian. The film was selected by ATCP to receive an award of USD 10,000 to support its production. The film is in line with the current tendency of surfacing the identities of hidden Armenians in Turkey, which has a new impetus thanks to similar initiatives. The film is expected to be completed in the first semester of 2013. The author of “Homeport” Helen Kurkjian won the Jury Special Prize. To increase public awareness about the ATCP and to cover cultural events in Turkey, three journalists from Hraparak, tert.am, and Hayastani Zrutsakits also attended the ATCP workshop and published articles about the ATCP, as well as topics of their interest identified in Istanbul.
- The National Association of Art Critics and Anadolu Kültür organized two conferences in Istanbul and in Yerevan in May and June 2012, respectively, as part of the “Sweet 60s – Sweet Confusion” project. The main aim of the project is to allow the societies of Armenia and Turkey to learn about major formative cultural productions of both societies, created in the 1960s, which laid the foundation for the ideas that helped to shape these societies today. A group of distinguished film experts and critics from Armenia and Turkey presented their papers during the conferences, followed by screenings of eight classic Armenian and Turkish films produced in the 1960s, including “The Triangle,” “Daddy,” “We are Our Mountains,” “Hello, It’s Me!” from Armenia and “My Prostitute Love,” “One Night Bride,” “Bitter Life,” and “Birds of Exile” from Turkey. The conference papers will be published in a tri-lingual booklet in September 2012.
- EPF and TOG continued to promote civic activism in Armenia and Turkey through their work with the Youth Banks. In April 2012, Armenian Youth Banks hosted a group of eight

young people from Turkey to share experiences on Youth Bank projects. The group visited the Youth Bank in Ararat, Kotayk and Lori regions and participated in community events in Nor Geghi village and Vanadzor. Thanks to the successful use of the Youth Bank model in Turkey, TOG has established four more Youth Banks, with their number reaching six in total, with 29 members to date. As of now, two Youth Banks are established in Istanbul, while the other four YBs are located in Selcuk/Izmir (western part of Turkey), Batman (southeastern Turkey), Samsun (north coast of Turkey) and Arhavi (north-eastern Turkey). Also, the Armenian and Turkish Youth Bankers set up a Facebook page with the 35 members regularly sharing videos, information and discussions about on-going projects and plans in Armenia and Turkey.

- In April 2012, ICHD and GAYA organized a three-day joint networking meeting of 20 political, business and civil society young leaders, including women leaders from Turkey and Armenia in Yerevan. The participants discussed issues related to cross-border cooperation, sought out ways to reframe existing issues as opportunities for mutual benefit, examined the impact of culture and perception on decision-making during uncertainties, and developed a draft outline of an action plan for possible joint activities. In the subsequent days, the participants met with representatives from academia and civil society, as well as visited sites of interest in Yerevan. The training resulted in the cultivation of an informal network of young leaders in politics, business and civil society in Armenia and Turkey that enhanced their skills in confidence building, and engaged them in practical work through identifying joint activities in various areas.
- In June-July 2012, ICHD and GAYA organized a five-day training on stereotypes, designed for journalists and bloggers in Yerevan and Ankara respectively. The purpose of the training was to deepen the understanding of the role of stereotypes and the power of media in reinforcing negative stereotypes, and to mitigate stereotypes in new media coverage of Armenia-Turkey relations. It is anticipated that with increased awareness of the importance of the media in establishing tolerance and confidence between the two societies, as well as practical knowledge and skills of conflict management and fighting stereotypes, the participating journalists and bloggers will contribute to reducing bias in media coverage of Armenia-Turkey relations.
- EPF launched armturkdialogue.net, the SATR website, in mid-May 2012. Approximately 1,800 unique visitors, primarily from Armenia and Turkey, followed by the US, Germany, Russia, Georgia, Hungary, Australia and Argentina have visited the website. The website seeks to serve as a “one-stop shop” for information about the SATR project, other Armenia-Turkey confidence building initiatives and Armenia-Turkey relations in general. Meanwhile, the number of members of the “4th Wave: Armenia-Turkey” group on Facebook continued to grow, albeit not very fast, reaching 317 by the end of June 2012. In May-June 2012, two *Article 27: Freedom of Expression* TV talk shows were aired on Yerkir Media TV Channel addressing correlation between democratic processes in Armenia and Turkey and Armenia-Turkey relations, and the role of media in Armenia-Turkey relations respectively. Up to 6,000 viewers in Armenia alone watched each show.
- EPF in cooperation with Aris Nalci from Istanbul-based IMC TV invited journalists Tugba Tekerek from *Taraf* and Fehim Taştekin from *Radikal* to cover the April 24 commemoration event in Yerevan, Armenia. The journalists participated in several key events preceding the

commemoration day, such as the lecture on “Why Armenian Genocide Deniers Are Wrong” delivered at the American University of Armenia by prominent human rights lawyer Geoffrey Robertson, and the traditional torchlight procession organized by a variety of youth groups, including the youth wing of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaksutyun) Party. The journalists also visited the Genocide Memorial and the Museum-Institute on April 24, 2012, and had a brief interview with the Director of the Museum-Institute Hayk Demoyan. Through the articles² produced as a result of the trip, certain segments of the Turkish society learned how April 24 was commemorated in Armenia.

- The SATR project was further promoted with the relevant offices in the EU and expert communities as a result of the joint trip of Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan from EPF and Osman Kavala from Anadolu Kültür to Brussels, Belgium in June 2012. The purpose of this two-day trip was to inform the relevant offices of the EU about the SATR project, present and discuss the large-scale work that the civil societies and businesses are doing in the situation where the state level dialogue is frozen, as well as to receive new ideas and views for the follow up of the project. Over the next quarter, a similar trip will be organized to the U.S, specifically Washington D.C. and Los Angeles, in an attempt to present SATR to relevant U.S. government officials, representatives of the Armenian and Turkish Diasporas, academia and think tanks.
- On May 24, 2012, EPF in cooperation with the Pecha Kucha Night license holders in Yerevan and Istanbul organized the second Pecha Kucha Night, this time in Istanbul. The event brought together a group of 10 professionals from creative industries to present new ideas, creative solutions, and innovations³, as well as to network. Over 100 guests attended the event, including the participants of the Armenia-Turkey media bus tour, representatives from the Turkish partner organizations, regular Pecha-Kucha Night guests in Istanbul, and others. The Pecha Kucha Night has proven to not just be an effective confidence-building tool, but also an opportunity to create professional and personal ties that can potentially grow into long-lasting partnerships and friendships.

USAID, the Armenian Consortium Members and Turkish partners support Armenia-Turkey rapprochement by facilitating engagement between civil society groups, establishment and development of business partnerships and regional professional networks, and enhanced understanding between the people, for peace and economic integration in the region. The contents of this report are the sole responsibility of the Consortium and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

² <http://www.taraf.com.tr/haber/nerogutyun.htm>, <http://www.taraf.com.tr/haber/kars-taydilar-simdi-neredeler.htm>, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetayV3&ArticleID=1085974&CategoryID=81>.

³ The presentations can be found at <https://vimeo.com/34solo>, while the information about the speakers is available at <http://34solo.wordpress.com/>.