

# Caucasus Edition

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## **A “Facebook Peace” for Nagorno-Karabakh**

by [Ian Cornell](#)

The first decade of the 21st century saw the “colored revolutions” pass by Armenia and Azerbaijan. In 2005, post-election demonstrations were suppressed before they got off the ground in Baku. In 2008, a potential revolution in Armenia was lethally put down following the presidential elections. Will the events in the Arab world, the much-lauded “Facebook Revolutions,” make their way to Yerevan or Baku? If so, what might be the effect on the conflict, and conflict resolution efforts, in Nagorno-Karabakh? Could the power of Facebook and other social media outlets trigger upheaval in the South Caucasus and create the first “Facebook Peace” in Nagorno-Karabakh?

### **Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Arab Spring**

Arguably, thinking that peace may stem from political unrest is unlikely, even counter-intuitive. However, as many political analysts speculate on the extent to which the Arab Spring will spread, it is worth considering the possibilities in Baku and Yerevan. To date, there have been rumblings in both capitals. The Armenian opposition, riding the Arab wave, held a protest on March 1, the three-year anniversary of the post-presidential election violence, and March 17. In both cases the government estimated that roughly 10,000 people were present (while the opposition puts the March 1 rally at 50,000) (Grigoryan, 2011). On both occasions, opposition leader Levon Ter-Petrosyan leveled a 13-point ultimatum at the government. Two similarly sized rallies were held in April. These demonstrations led to victories for the opposition including the release of political prisoners, a reexamination of the 2008 post-election violence and the reopening of Liberty Square (the popular and symbolic heart of the city/opposition movement). Despite these concessions and an increased dialogue, early presidential and parliamentary elections remain a dispute (RFE/RL, 2011).

In Baku, which historically has tolerated little-to-no opposition, small groups of young people have begun taking to the streets demanding political concessions. The first rallies were held on March 11. The event attracted dozens of young people from varying districts of Baku (RFE/RL, 2011). While the numbers seem small, it is a tremendous first step for Azerbaijani youth activists and opposition leaders. The actions so concerned the government that opposition youth activist Baxtiyar Hacıyev was jailed on what are largely believed to be politically motivated charges (RFE/RL, 2011).

Considering the implications for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict one can imagine varying, if somewhat unlikely, outcomes. The first, and sadly the most obvious, would be a further escalation of bellicose war rhetoric and possible violence. Ter-Petrosyan offered a chilling glimpse of this policy when he said that “the authorities can’t endlessly exploit the Karabakh issue and subordinate the resolution of Armenia’s internal problems to it” (RFE/RL, 2011). In this regard, it is imaginable that leaders would “refocus” the populations’ attention on the immediacy of security in Karabakh to divert attention from their domestic shortcomings. This has the added propaganda value of painting protesters and opposition leaders as unpatriotic. Such tactics are well documented in history and are not confined to undemocratic regimes. A similar technique is credited with Margaret Thatcher’s electoral success during the Falkland war.

A second scenario, however unlikely, is that a perceived or real threat of deep domestic instability could lead one side to make drastic concessions on Karabakh in order to focus on domestic issues. Historically, there is precedence. Russia withdrew from the First World War, and subsequently surrendered territory, in order to focus resources on its own internal upheaval. While there are obvious disparities between the rise of Bolshevism during World War I, and the ethnic conflict in Karabakh, the possibility exists. It is also important to realize that a total capitulation by one side does not mean sudden peace. Such a move would alienate populations’ and political leaders. The possibility of disillusioned groups ignoring calls from the center and continuing the fight would be as destabilizing as a full-scale resumption of fighting. Additionally, one must remember that the Soviet Union’s attempt to gain territory and influence lost during the First World War ushered in the infamous Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

Thinking about a third scenario, which admittedly seems equally unlikely, we can look to the possibility of a “Facebook Peace.” In a previous Caucasus Edition essay, Jale Sultanli (2011) argued that depending on the path of political developments youth will become agents of peace or inheritors and perpetrators of violence in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Could Facebook be the means that gives young people a platform for demanding a settlement in Karabakh? Political commentators are saying that this is exactly the process unfolding in the Middle East. Such a trend begs the question: Could the same happen in Armenia and Azerbaijan? Is a Facebook Peace possible for Karabakh? Will the next generation, slated to spend their youth in sniper sights on opposing sides of the line of contact, use social media to bridge the gap their political leaders cannot?

## **A Facebook Peace?**

Sadly, the majority of the sites concerning Nagorno-Karabakh are dedicated to hardening historical narratives, spreading propaganda, and solidifying hate. Whereas Facebook may be a convenient way to promote rallies and join opposition forces, it does not appear to be a constructive platform for group dialogue on contentious and emotional issues, at least in the Karabakh case.

These assertions are based on the results of Facebook searches on May 15, 2011 using the phrases “Karabakh,” “Armenia Azerbaijan,” and “Karabakh Peace.” The following charts show the ten most popular Facebook pages based on the number of “likes.”<sup>[1]</sup>

<b>FACEBOOK Page Title</b>	<b>Sympathy</b>	<b># of “Likes”</b>
Nagorni Karabakh is the Territory of Azerbaijan	AZ	9,480
Recognize the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic	ARM	8,823
I bet I can find 100.000 people who believe Karabakh belongs to Azerbaijan	AZ	6,091
Do Not Recognize the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic	AZ	6,558
Karabakh – The Original Azerbaijan Region!	AZ	4,914
ARTSAKH (Karabakh)	ARM	4,594
Karabakh is Azerbaijan	AZ	3,015
Petition Against “Winds of change in Nagorno Karabakh” on Euronews	AZ	1,923
Karabakh	AZ	1,714
KaRabakh iS ours	ARM	1,531

Fittingly there appears to be parity between the two largest groups of opposing sides. After that there is a larger number, of sites and likes, which are pro-Azeri. This is likely explained by the position of Azerbaijan vis-à-vis Nagorno-Karabakh. In any case, the total number of “likes” is not particularly illuminating. In fact, compared with conflicts elsewhere the numbers are rather small. The page “Third Palestinian Intifada,” a page dedicated to the Palestinian cause against Israel, has over 338,000 likes.<sup>[2]</sup> Again, this might not be an accurate comparison as the conflict, in its current state, has dragged on longer and is globally more widely followed than Karabakh. However, the presence of this site does show the potential of Facebook to attract followers to one side of a conflict.

In relative terms the amount of support for these pages is revealed when compared to pages dedicated to conflict resolution and peace:

<b>FACEBOOK Page Title</b>	<b># of “Likes”</b>
Peaceful Solution in Nagorno Karabakh	459
Colorful Karabakh	128
Peace between ARMENIA and AZERBAIJAN	56
Peace for Armenia and Azerbaijan	58
Kavkaz Pride and Peace: Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan	36
Peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia	24
Nagorno Karabakh conflict resolution	19

<sup>[3]</sup>

The most popular page, with 469 “likes,” has fewer “likes” than the 18th most popular page dedicated to conflict perpetuation. Simply put, when it comes to conflict dialogue Facebook is more commonly used to publicly promote nationalist propaganda than peace and reconciliation.

## ***Is Facebook a Forum for Conflict Dialogue?***

The above data feeds into a larger argument about the overall utility of Facebook as a political tool. Aside from the above statistics, there are three key characteristics of Facebook which may make it unsuited to act as a forum for peaceful group interaction: Lack of space for serious and thoughtful commentary, the presence of third-party participants, and the ability for anonymity.

For the millions of politically non-motivated Facebook users the brevity of “status updates” or wall posts allow them to express a simple emotion, announce a location, or congratulate a friend on his birthday. For users entering the “political” world, the same function allows them to take part in the dialogue on a subject of which they may have limited interest or knowledge. On Facebook, any user can post their favorite political argument, or viral rant, and add a one-line endorsement (or often a sophomoric collection of acronyms). This allows young “revolutionaries” at universities in Europe and the US to fight for a “cause” that they have only heard of, but little understand. In these cases the message boards of Facebook are filled with unconstructive, ignorant, and often extremely violent content which can unfairly be attributed to a community’s official position.

A similar, and equally dangerous, trend is the bandwagon effect, or participation of third-party participants. Azerbaijanis in Istanbul and Armenians in Glendale can affect the dialogue without worrying about the direct repercussions. Like Diaspora communities, politically active Facebook participants use either the Armenian or Azerbaijani side as a proxy for their own political objectives. Examples include Turkish nationals joining pro-Azeri pages to discredit Turkish-Armenian rapprochement. Conversely, anti-Islamic actors from Europe and the US, venting their frustration towards Muslims globally, can use pro-Armenian pages. Such a trend can be observed in the popularity of the site “Third Palestinian Intifada.” At the time when the *New York Times* printed an article about the site, it had roughly 240,000 members. Forty-eight hours later the number of followers had increased to 338,000. It is clear that a great deal of the support for the site is based on its newfound global popularity and not on a sudden rise of anti-Israeli or pro-Palestinian feelings among Facebook users. However, such participation can put the issues out of context and complicate the political situation.

Finally, the relative anonymity of Facebook, a value to community organizers in the Middle East, allows users to spread inflammatory rhetoric without responsibility or recourse. The page, “Genocide of Azerbaijan...F... YOU ARMENIA” (123 members) illustrates this point, and the above two. This name alone is the worst Facebook has to offer. However, it is still present and viewable to the casual Facebook user. Secondly, the page proclaims to have “no administrator left.” Conveniently, someone was able to set up this hate-filled page and then abandon their affiliation, while the content remained and flourished. Finally, there are the wall contributions from Azeris and Armenians alike. One post from a young Armenian, seemingly from outside the region, questions the existence of the “Azerbaijani Genocide,” but claims that if it in fact did happen she was “glad.” Sadly, the young people that contribute to these pages so flippantly are contributing to a wider dialogue.

## ***The Silver Lining***

Accepting a friend request from your “enemy” or liking a page dedicated to conflict resolution is an act of courage for a young Azerbaijani or Armenian. It is also an act no one can blame them for avoiding. One can imagine the social stigma (and possible violence) a young person may face for publicly supporting “the other side.” Therefore, admittedly, the use of likes and membership are a limiting measurement in gauging Facebook’s role in the Karabakh conflict. Consequently, this paper has largely focused on the “measurable” downside of Facebook as a platform for group discussion.

However, there is the private side of Facebook which opens the possibility for constructive people-to-people connections.

Recently, an NGO hosted a youth conference in Tbilisi involving members of the three South Caucasus countries. The conference was similar to many others that bring small groups of Azerbaijanis and Armenians together in “neutral” Georgia. I do not know whether these young people returned home and immediately “friended” all of their new acquaintances (as is the usual protocol). However, Facebook will still provide them with a medium to communicate. Should they fail to exchange e-mail addresses (for fear of publicly doing so), Facebook provides them with a message option. And, whether publicly “friends” or not, they can still follow each other’s lives, view some photos, and see that their daily routines (school, friends, football, and family) are really not that different.<sup>[4]</sup> While this may not have the immediate or dramatic effect on society we have witnessed in the Middle East, it is still an important foundation.

## Moving Forward

Internet freedom is integral to free speech, and thus a building block for democracy. Similarly, to traditional forms of speech, Facebook comes with a nasty downside. The shortcomings of Facebook are microcosms of the Internet at large. However, Facebook’s growing popularity and new sense of “legitimacy” following its role in the Arab Spring are cause for reflection. As governments and activists support Internet freedom (as they most undoubtedly should) there needs to be respect for the negative, particularly in conflict situations, as well as the positive attributes.

Speaking recently about opposition activity in Baku, US Ambassador Matthew Bryza (RFE/RL, 2011) issued the following statement:

“As regards [to] the general issue of Internet activism, I can tell you that President [Barack] Obama [and] Secretary [of State Hillary] Clinton see the Internet as a key player in the future of democratic debate and discourse, and the rapid growth of Facebook and other social-media sites in Azerbaijan is providing citizens with a new opportunity to discuss the issues facing this society. We want to see a fully open Internet space, without restrictions.”

The conflict and ongoing negotiations in Karabakh are major issues facing Azerbaijan and Armenia. Therefore, it is important for those of us interested in a peaceful and constructive conclusion to the Karabakh conflict to think about both the opportunity and threats posed by Facebook and other social media outlets.

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[1] These assertions are based on the results of Facebook searches on May 15, 2011 using the phrases "Karabakh," "Armenia Azerbaijan," and "Karabakh Peace." For each search the top 100 matches were examined. A list of all pages that related to the conflict (as opposed to the Karabakh Football Club, for example), which had more than 50 "likes" or "members" was compiled. Many of the sites that appeared in one search appeared in one of the two others. In all, 65 pages that related to the conflict were identified. Of the 65, six are related to peace, and 59 are dedicated to solidifying nationalist positions.

Before commenting on the results, a note on methodology and of warning is necessary. First, this is not a scientific study and is not presented as such. Currently, there is no formal procedure for qualitatively and/or quantitatively measuring Facebook content. To add to the challenges, Facebook is a fluid medium, where content constantly changes. For searches the common English spelling of "Nagorno-Karabakh" was used. Therefore, spelling variations like "Karabagh" and "Qarabagh," and pages in Armenian, Azeri, Russian, and Turkish, are not included. Also, there was no search of "Artsakh." However, quick searches using these terms were conducted and the results are largely similar to those of the English variation. Therefore, the search results, while not scientific, offer a legitimate sample of material regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict on Facebook.

[2] As of March 27. This site was featured in a *New York Times* article titled "Ethical Quandary for Social Sites." The article reports that the Israeli government officially requested that it be removed from Facebook. In response, Facebook administrators reviewed the content and deemed that it did not violate company policy by directly promoting violence, and would therefore not be removed. As of March 27 when the article was printed, the site had "over 240,000" followers. On March 28, this author found the site to have had almost 100,000 more.

[3] You'll note that the "at least 50 likes" rule was exempted to build a larger list.

[4] Dependent on the level of security established on individual Facebook accounts.

# Turkey's Nagorno-Karabakh Conundrum

by [Nigar Goksel](#)

## Instead of an introduction

Turks involved in Turkish-Armenian dialogue initiatives often face indiscriminate criticism from a range of Turkish and Azerbaijani peers and acquaintances. The arguments usually are based on a form of reciprocity: “My great-grandmother was orphaned in Van by revolutionary Armenians; this side of the picture needs to be part of the debate,” “You should instead be talking about the recent ethnic cleansing of Azeris,” or “There is less freedom of speech in Armenia.”

My argument is that this is not about reciprocity. Turks coming to terms with the atrocities committed against innocent Armenians in the late years of the Ottoman Empire is an end in itself. Turkey should provide utmost freedom of expression to those who want to explore this history, whether or not Armenia provides such freedom to its own citizens. Turkey should respect and restore the cultural heritage of the Armenian communities in Anatolia whether or not the Armenians do the same for Azeri or Turkish heritage. If it annoys Turkish nationals that Armenians speak more about Turkey's democracy deficits than their own, then they should give them less to talk about by focusing on overcoming the deficits. Turkey's benchmarks should be European standards, to be able to lift itself and its neighbors out of the grip of the past.

But in trying to maintain this outlook, I have been demotivated by the reaction of Armenian participants in Turkish-Armenian reconciliation platforms when I try to explain the effect of Karabakh both on hearts and minds, and on Ankara's political expediency calculations. A look is shot at me across the room as if I am politically incorrect, or worse, a fascist: “This is not an issue Turks can be concerned with. Furthermore, Azerbaijanis started it, their ‘evacuation’ was not ethnic cleansing, it was a security measure. The status quo is fine, we need to all move on and look to the future.” Such articulation has stunned me in its familiarity with what I hear from Turkish nationalists about 1915. [i]

Trying to compare past tragedies or current policies is groundless and unconstructive, but I have come to realize that normalization in this region is a dialectic process. Try as we may, none of us can evolve alone; we need to evolve together, and it will not be overnight.

## Karabakh math

In the past few years expectations that Turkey “normalize” relations with Armenia “unconditionally” — meaning open its land border and establish diplomatic relations without expecting any progress in the solution of the Karabakh conflict — have increasingly surfaced.

The argument goes that normalizing relations with Armenia will give Turkey leverage over Armenia, moderate Armenian hardline perspectives about Turks by breaking age-old stereotypes, and, since an open border will be viewed as an Armenian victory, empower the Armenian leadership in its domestic setting to make the necessary compromises to solve the Karabakh conflict. Turkey leveraging a closed border to pressure Armenia has not delivered results in 18 years and there is no reason to believe it will. Therefore, the only viable change in the region that could inject a positive dynamic, make Armenia less reliant on Russia, and score a victory for the West, is Turkey opening the border with Armenia. (Among a segment of Turks this argument is also supplemented by the assumption that Turkey can fend off genocide recognition if it opens the border with Armenia without further ado).

Intensification of Turkish-Armenian civil dialogue, the questioning of official narratives about Turkish historical benevolence, Turkey's new foreign policy bent on normalizing relations with its neighbors, and Turkish-Armenian diplomatic initiatives that did not publically link to the Karabakh factor seem to have raised expectations about the viability of this prospect. Various voices in Turkey can also be heard advocating "unconditional normalization," such as liberal intellectuals in Turkey who are inherently pitted against (ethnic) nationalists and the traditional Turkish state due to their human rights activism and record of challenging state taboos and ethnocentric conceptions, as well as their having been victim to state repression in the past.

While it is healthy to have diverse arguments about Ankara's Karabakh consideration, or any other policy, there is a risk that false expectations be created. It is therefore worthwhile to assess why Ankara has kept its land border with Armenia closed.

From fall 1991 onwards throughout the course of the Nagorno Karabakh war, pressure from the Turkish public on Ankara to protect Azerbaijanis from Armenian advances was immense. Opposition parties cashed into public outrage, accusing the Turkish governments of the early '90s of standing by impotently.<sup>[ii]</sup> Pictures of displaced Azeri families flooded the press, bringing protestors onto the streets across Anatolia. Armenian mobilization against Azerbaijan was viewed as misplaced revenge against Turkey for 1915, feeding into a sense among many Turks of being not only a "concerned party" but also a "responsible party." This *solidarity* was ironically perpetuated by Armenian perceptions of the oneness of Turks and Azerbaijanis. Conceptions and maps of "Greater Armenia" advocated by Armenian nationalists also include provinces in Eastern Anatolia ("Western Armenia"), fueling a sense of shared threat of Armenian irredentism.

Turkey's efforts to generate international intervention to end the war failed to yield results, stirring resentment in Turkey. Finally in April 1993 when Kelbajar — which lies outside of the disputed Karabakh enclave — fell to Armenian forces, Ankara cut off the ongoing negotiations with Armenia to establish diplomatic relations and open the joint border. While Karabakh's break from Azerbaijan might have been grudgingly tolerated by Ankara, advances beyond that were seen as an act of aggression.

While joining the war on the side of Azerbaijan had been officially ruled out,<sup>[iii]</sup> depriving Armenia of an outlet that supposedly would provide economic livelihood as well as political legitimacy was the only available leverage Turkey had at its disposal. In Azerbaijan, Turkey's solidarity was crucial, and to date Turkey's *solidarity* by keeping the land border sealed is deemed critical for Azerbaijan's national interests.

For almost two decades, these ethnic dividing lines have been entrenched further through the Turkish and Azerbaijani diasporas, which joined forces on a cluster of issues against Armenian diaspora groups. The results were benefits in energy and construction deals offered by the Azerbaijani side to Turkish counterparts, mutual public opinion sympathies, and regional strategic power play considerations. Dissecting Karabakh-related solidarity from other dimensions of the relationship is practically impossible.

With the situation on the ground between Armenia and Azerbaijan not having changed despite negotiations moderated by the Minsk Group, today Turkey continues to try to level the playing ground by bringing up the urgency of a solution in high-level international platforms and holding out the carrot of opening the land border with Armenia.<sup>[iv]</sup> Otherwise, it is assumed that Armenia would have no reason to compromise at the negotiating table with Azerbaijan. Moreover, if Turkey were to open its border now, it would strengthen Armenia's hand at the expense of Azerbaijan and, by reducing the likelihood of an agreement between the two, would thereby increase the likelihood of Azerbaijan feeling the need to resort to war, and strike a blow to regional stability and prosperity. If Armenia agrees to the basic principles that have been negotiated by the Minsk Group, both Turkey and

Azerbaijan can open their borders with Armenia, and a win-win dynamic will ensue. And if Armenia chooses instead not to compromise, the losses Turkey will incur by the continuation of the deadlocked status quo are less than the risk of strategic and political fallout for a Turkish government opening the border unconditionally.

Despite Turkey's new foreign policy priorities, the scale in terms of strategic and domestic political calculations has not tipped. While arguments for opening the border have increased, arguments against it have gained strength for various reasons, such as:

- Azerbaijan's potential role in catapulting Turkey into an energy hub and providing economic opportunities for Turkish businessmen has increased.
- Baku has become more skillful in reaching out to and influencing Turkish public opinion, and effecting Ankara's maneuver space indirectly.
- Ankara's vocalized claim of standing by the victims in its neighborhood has grown stronger (articulated both for Palestinian causes and Azerbaijan, rather regularly).

The main driving force behind Turkey's solving problems with its neighbors is to lift obstacles to the country becoming a regional power. However, without a solution to the Karabakh problem, Turkey can hardly increase its traction in the Caucasus. An open border between Turkey and Armenia in itself will not bring about an "open" region, regional stability, or economic opportunity. While Turkey assumes it can never compete with Russia over influence or strategic economic assets in Armenia, it is concerned by the prospect of also pushing Azerbaijan closer to Moscow by delinking Karabakh from the opening of the Turkish-Armenian border.

Turkey has reaped benefits from Baku by leveraging the "sacrifice" it makes by keeping its border with Armenia closed. As long as the Karabakh deadlock continues, the Armenian-Azerbaijani border is closed, and risk of war between these two countries exists. The economic or security gains of an open Turkish-Armenian border cannot compensate for the economic, political, and strategic blow that Azerbaijan's reaction would incur.

Furthermore, increased familiarity with Armenian positions has also made it known to Turkish observers that an open border with Turkey is not going to inhibit the drive for genocide recognition among Armenians worldwide (nor should it, arguably). With these reasons, coupled with the consideration of domestic political fallout, the costs outweigh the benefits.

Nevertheless, many holding official seats in Ankara arguably seek a "face saving" change that can give Ankara reason to normalize relations with Armenia, otherwise opening the border without any compromise on the Armenian side would amount to acknowledgement of a failed policy for 18 years. Moreover, having recently reaffirmed at the highest level that the border with Armenia will not open if nothing changes on the Karabakh deadlock, reversing this policy is ever more complicated.

In short, Ankara does not have incentive to delink full normalization of relations with Armenia from progress in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Given this situation, pressuring Turkey to open its border with Armenia only exacerbates the problem by inciting a backlash.

## **Sweeping Karabakh under the rug**

Armenia categorically dismisses any Turkish role in the Karabakh dispute. Ankara supposedly ceded to this demand during the most recent bilateral diplomatic initiative in 2009, by maintaining what was referred to as "constructive ambiguity" regarding whether a step towards resolution of the Karabakh conflict was a condition to normalization with Armenia. Though the protocols did not mention Karabakh, over time it became increasingly obvious (and was stated openly by various Turkish

authorities while simultaneously being denied by Yerevan authorities), that the ratification of the protocols would be indexed by Ankara to progress on the Karabakh negotiations front.<sup>[v]</sup> In other words, the two processes would be “synchronized,” supposedly creating a win-win dynamic: empower the Armenian leadership with the victory of an open border with Turkey, and ensure that Azerbaijan was not abandoned with its losses. Arguably, Ankara overestimated its hand (or the maneuvering space of the Armenian leadership) by considering it could deliver victory on these two fronts at once. In October 2009 at the signing ceremony of the protocols, the disjoint surfaced. Though the protocols were signed, their ratification is off the agenda and the process has stalled. Meanwhile, Ankara’s ambiguity regarding the relevance of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution struck a blow to the trust of Yerevan and Baku alike.

In the Turkish-Armenian civil society reconciliation sphere, projects and discussions are almost always designed in a way as to exclude analytical assessment of the Azerbaijan/Karabakh factor, whereas the Karabakh deadlock is the main consideration for holding up the official normalization process.

Participants selected from the Turkish side are regularly of the relative minority who share their Armenian counterparts’ criticism that Ankara’s policy has been “taken hostage” by Baku. They are in this sense often out of touch with the “Turkish street” and with Ankara’s strategists. From an ideological and professional perspective, this divide in Turkey is understandable. And it is also more convenient to plug Turkish liberals of this conviction into Turkish-Armenian dialogue projects: it is hard enough to talk about sensitive Turkish-Armenian history without having to deal with additional controversy. Having Turkish and Armenian counterparts united in their criticism of Baku and Ankara may have aided dialogue in the first decade of increased civil society exchanges; however, that may no longer be necessary or constructive.

Openly addressing the concerns of a wider Turkish audience and taking into account Turkey’s strategic conundrum will help adjust expectations in Armenia that Ankara can be pressured into disregarding Azerbaijan. This should be taken into account not only in the “Phase 2.0” of civil society exchanges but also in rhetoric of official Ankara. For informed debate about their options, it should be clear to both Baku and Yerevan what level of progress in the Nagorno-Karabakh negotiations would satisfy Ankara’s concerns. Lack of transparency on this issue merely leaves the field open to speculation and conspiracy theories.

## **Conclusion**

Debating Turkish-Armenian history with a critical mind, less ethnic stereotyping in the press, cultural exchanges and NGO projects, mutual visits and the like have countless benefits.<sup>[vi]</sup> They do not, however, tip the balances of political calculus in terms of Ankara lifting the Nagorno-Karabakh conditionality. Rapprochement will fall short of “normalization” if the Nagorno-Karabakh conundrum — with both its tactical and emotional dimensions — is swept under the rug.

Though Turkish liberal intellectuals are taking the lead, as they should, the budding trend of acknowledgement and empathy in Turkey will be limited in its ability to spread to a critical mass, and thus limited in its effect on Turkish policymaking, if it cannot spur the development of more liberal thought among Armenian counterparts.

To build lasting mutual trust on a wider level that can translate into “normal relations,” Turkish and Armenian intellectuals will need to unite around positive democratic values and principles, such as in support for pluralism and freedom to challenge nationalist narratives, and not *against* a third party, creating new stereotypes.

Less Armenian hostility against Turks is also good for Azerbaijan, particularly if — given the attributed sameness — it can lead to more Armenians able to conceive living with Azerbaijanis again.

Rather than alienating Turks who are working to forge dialogue, Azerbaijani counterparts should try to understand both the deeper significance of these efforts for Turkey, and the potential it can unleash for the region. That being said, the potential of Turkish-Armenian reconciliation to transform the Caucasus will depend on whether it can trigger new intellectual and political paradigms in Armenia — and eventually filter into the debate about Karabakh, too.

The challenge today is to channel the momentum of Turkish-Armenian civil dialogue in such a way that it contributes to the breakdown of ethnic stereotypes, maturation of democracy, and evolution of identity conceptions in Armenia and eventually Azerbaijan, too. This requires long-term, smartly targeted intellectual investment, abandoning the feel-good quick fixes that promise overnight change, but do not deliver. The peoples of the Caucasus — being the knot that it is — will drag each other down until they can all look at their own dark pages critically.

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[i] The participant Turkish seasoned reconciliation enthusiasts usually either roll their eyes because they are tired of hearing the Azerbaijan factor in Turkey, or brace themselves for expected tension in the room.

[ii] Texts from the Turkish press of the time are available in the MA thesis of Yakup Hurç titled “The Karabag Policy of Turkey.” Department of History Institute of Social Science University of Kahramanmaraş Sütçü Imam, 2008.

[iii] The reasons of ruling out military intervention are elaborated in detail in Svante Cornell, *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, in *Turkey: Azerbaijan’s Only Ally*, Department of East European Studies, no. 46, Uppsala University, 1999.

[iv] The latter by now has a mostly symbolic meaning. Though the land border is closed, there are flights twice a week between Istanbul and Yerevan, visas can be obtained upon arrival by both countries’ citizens, and land transportation, including trade, is conducted primarily via Georgia.

[v] Nigar Goksel, *The Rubik’s Cube of Turkey-Armenia Relations*, UNISCI, May 2010.

[vi] For an analysis of Turkey’s genocide debate as well as a manual of NGOs that work on rapprochement, see [http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=322&debate\\_ID=2](http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=322&debate_ID=2)

## **ABOUT JOURNAL OF CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION**

The Journal of Conflict Transformation is an independent online publication that provides a forum for scholars, practitioners, policy analysts, starting researchers and bloggers to analyze as well as discuss the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and issues related to it. The purpose of the publication is to contribute to sustainable resolution of the conflict by expanding scholarship on the subject and encouraging diverse perspectives and analysis.

The Journal welcomes contributions from established researchers and is also committed to include the voices of emerging analysts and writers within the peace process. This inter-disciplinary online publication accepts scholarly and analytical articles, as well as reflective writings, that contribute to the better understanding of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Armenian-Azerbaijani relations and suggestions for improvement of the peace process and positive transformation of inter-societal relations. The articles can analyze the conflict as a whole or any factor that potentially has implication for the conflict and/or its resolution from the perspective of political science, economy, sociology, anthropology, social psychology, collective memory studies, comparative history, ethnic conflict, identity-conflict, conflict resolution, peace studies, mediation and facilitation, conflict transformation and comparative case studies.

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