

# Diaspora and Türkiye-Armenia Relations

## *Diaspora ve Türkiye-Ermenistan İlişkileri*

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*International  
Relations, Türkiye,  
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### ABSTRACT

*The problems experienced in relations with Armenia have continued to exist for many years as the most important issue on the agenda of Turkish foreign policy and still continue to do so. Many factors that prevent the normalization of relations between Türkiye and Armenia can be put forward. However, narrowing down the topic in this study, the role of the Armenian opposition and the Armenian diaspora will be examined. The article argues that the Armenian diaspora negatively affected the normalization process in relations, which was intensified both in general and especially in 2022. The qualitative research method was used regarding the subject matter. Document review and interview methods were used as tools to obtain information and data. With in the scope of the interview, Gürsel Demirok, the former Head of the Middle East Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was interviewed. Also an interview realized with former Undersecretary of State Onur Öymen. Both interview was conducted in 2019. Since the interview was conducted in 2019, ethics committee approval was not required. The issue was discussed from the perspective of liberal theory. Theorists of the liberal theory are based on the use of diplomacy and negotiations in solving problems between countries. According to liberals, trying to solve problems through military methods and conflict brings many problems. Solutions in which all parties gain to a certain extent are preferred from the perspective of liberal theory.*

### Anahtar Kelimeler:

*Uluslararası  
İlişkiler, Türkiye,  
Ermenistan,  
Diaspora,  
Muhalefet.*

### ÖZET

*Bu çalışmada Türkiye ile Ermenistan arasındaki ilişkilerin neden normalleşemediği sorusuna cevap aranmıştır. Konuya ilişkin çalışmaların daha çok tarihçiler tarafından yapıldığı görülmektedir. Bu çalışmada konu uluslararası ilişkiler perspektifinden ele alınmıştır. Tarihsel bir yaklaşımdan ziyade problemin nedenleri analiz edilmeye çalışılmıştır. Sorunun nedenlerine ilişkin olarak Ermenistan muhalefeti ve yurt dışındaki Ermeni diasporası'nın rolü irdelenmiştir. Makalenin argümanı Ermeni muhalefetinin siyasi kazanımlar için taraflar arasındaki sorunları kullandığı şeklindedir. Çalışmada esas itibarıyla doküman incelemesi yapılmıştır. Ancak araştırmaya derinlik kazandırmak amacıyla uzman diplomatların görüşlerine de yer verilmiştir. Bu kapsamda emekli diplomatlar Gürsel Demirok ve Onur Öymen ile görüşülmüştür. Görüşme 2019 yılında gerçekleştirilmiştir. Görüşme 2019 yılında yapıldığı için etik kurul onayına gerek görülmemiştir. Görüşülen emekli diplomatlar yapılan mülakatların bilimsel çalışmalarda kullanılacağı konusunda bilgilendirilerek onayları alınmıştır. Konu liberal kuramın bakış açısıyla ele alınmıştır. Bu yaklaşımda çatışma ve güç kullanımından ziyade diplomasi esastır. Sorunlar askeri çözümlerden ziyade müzakereler yoluyla çözülmeye çalışılır. Liberal kuramın teorisyenleri tüm tarafların kazanım sağlayacağı çözümlerin doğru çözümler olacağını ileri sürerler. Liberal kuram teorisyenlerine göre tek bir tarafın kazanımlar elde ettiği çözümler sağlıklı ve uzun vadeli olamayacaktır. Liberallere göre ayrıca askeri çatışmaların ekonomik ve insani boyutu üzerinde önemle durulması gereken bir husustur. Ulaşılan bulgular konunun müzakereler yoluyla çözümlenmesinin doğru olacağı kanaatini yaratmıştır. Ermeni muhalefetinin geçmişe vurgu yapan yaklaşımları sorunun çözümünü zorlaştırmaktadır. Çalışmada ulaşılan sonuçlar probleme ışık tutar niteliktedir. Araştırmanın konuyla ilgili uzmanların ve diplomatların doğru noktaya bakmalarına katkı sağlaması beklenmektedir.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

It can be said that many attempts have been made to solve the problems between Türkiye and Armenia and to ensure a rapprochement. However, it is possible to state that the most remarkable of these are the initiatives carried out in 2009, which can be called the 2009 Spirit.

The rapprochement between Armenia and Türkiye dates back to 1992. This rapprochement was realized within the framework of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation established at that time. By bringing Azerbaijan and Armenia together within this structure, an appropriate basis was tried to be provided for the settlement of the problems between the parties through dialogue. Here, it is assumed that the relations between the states will develop in parallel with the development of the relations between the societies. For this purpose, a Turkish-Armenian Cooperation Organization was established for the first time. Regarding finding a solution to Turkish-Armenian relations that could not be found and put on a healthy basis in the 2000s, US Secretary of State H. Clinton put in a lot of effort. H. Clinton wasn't the only one making an effort. In his speech in Baku on May 17, 2009, the Prime Minister of the period, R. T. Erdoğan, emphasized that the agreement reached with Armenia was not against Azerbaijan and that Türkiye was always on the side of Azerbaijan and tried to eliminate the discomforts in this regard in a sense. President Abdullah Gül also paid a visit to Armenia due to a football match in the same period. This behavior of A. Gül has gained a great appreciation and praise all over the world (Bağcı, 2019,s.176). The Zurich Protocol, which is expected to normalize relations between the two countries and is seen as a historic step, was signed on October 10, 2009, with the efforts of Hillary Clinton. However, there were problems with ratifying and implementing the protocols in the parliaments of both countries. Armenia announced that it suspended the protocols in the same year. It is seen that the Armenian diaspora, which is based in the United States, plays an important role in the failure to implement these protocols. Two organizations form the backbone of Armenian Lobbies operating in the USA. The first one is the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) and the other one is the Armenian Assembly of America (AAA), which started its activities in 1972. While ANCA has an ultranationalist streak with a Dashnak philosophy, it can be said that the attitude of AAA is relatively more moderate. When we look at their organization in America, it is seen that ANCA has a more widespread organizational network (Türkmen, 2012,s.279).

It can be said that France is the second country where the Armenian diaspora is the strongest after the USA. Armenians, whose number is 700 thousand in France, not only recognize the 1915 incidents as genocide in this country but also engage in lobbying activities against Türkiye. It should be stated that the Armenians in France operate in an organized manner by establishing many associations for their anti-Türkiye activities (Doğru, 2021).

In fact, although the Diaspora effect is at the forefront in terms of normalization with Türkiye, we can say that the position and interests of some countries on the subject are also important. Although Russia

seems to have taken a positive attitude regarding the signing of the protocols, it should also be seen that a solution to this issue will not serve Russia's national interests.

It is a known fact that Azerbaijan and Georgia try to approach the Western world in the Caucasus. Therefore, it can be said that Armenia is the only country in this region under the influence of Russia within the trio of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia. Russia does not want to lose a fully engaged Armenia by allowing it to establish intensive relations with the West through Türkiye. In order to reach a permanent solution to the problem, sincere support from Russia as well as the efforts of the USA and Türkiye is vital.

The solution to the problems between Türkiye and Armenia is also of great importance in terms of stability in the Caucasus. The opening of Türkiye's border with Armenia will reduce Armenia's dependence on Russia and Iran. It is also desirable for the national interests of the United States that Armenia moves away from the countries both of which are seen as enemies of the United States. For these reasons, it is vital that the USA takes more initiative in this regard (Larrabee, 2010,s.16).

## **2. NEW NORMALIZATION WITH ARMENIA**

It can be stated that the normalization process with Armenia, which intensified in 2009 but a concrete result could not be obtained, started again in 2021. It should be stated that the date of 2021 was not an accidental date, but a period after the liberation of the occupied Azerbaijani territory.

A large part of the Turkish public was informed about the normalization process between Türkiye and Armenia due to the speech made by Türkiye Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu during the budget negotiations.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu made a speech within the scope of the budget negotiations on 13 December 2021 and stated that they would appoint a mutual special representative within the framework of the normalization process with Armenia (trt,2021).

As part of the normalization process, the Turkish side appointed the former Ambassador to Washington, Serdar Kılıç, as a special representative on 15 December. The Armenian side, on the other hand, appointed Deputy Speaker of Parliament Ruben Rubinyan as a special representative within the scope of the dialogue process (Kabakcı, 2022).

Within the scope of the normalization process, the first meeting made by special representatives Serdar Kılıç and Ruben Rubinyan met in Moscow on January 14, 2022 (mfa,2022). The second meeting between the special representatives as part of the normalization process took place in Vienna on 24 February 2022 (mfa,2022). Special

representatives also held the third meeting within the scope of the normalization process on May 3, 2022, in Vienna (mfa,2022).

In the announcement made on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on July 1, 2022, the fourth meeting was held in Vienna between the special representatives of the normalization process, Ambassador Serdar Kılıç and Ruben Rubinyan, the Vice-President of the Parliament of Armenia. In the announcement, it was stated that an agreement was reached for the arrangements that would enable the passage of third-country citizens regarding the land borders of the two countries and that an agreement was reached for the realization of the arrangements that would enable the air cargo trade between the two countries. The most striking information in the announcement is the emphasis on the parties' consensus on ensuring full normalization between the two countries (mfa,2022).

In addition to the meetings between the special representatives, another positive and remarkable development was the participation of Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan at the Antalya Diplomatic Forum held between 11-13 March 2022. It is possible to read Mirzoyan's participation in the Antalya Diplomacy Forum as an indicator of the constructive attitude of the Turkish side and the positive response of the Armenian side to this approach in the normalization of relations.

Despite the mutual positive steps at the official level, it should be noted that there are difficulties related to the normalization process, especially arising from the Armenian diaspora. Explanations supporting the argument of the study on this subject came from Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu on July 4, 2022.

A part of Çavuşoğlu's statement on the subject on July 4, 2022, is as follows (Yüzbaşıoğlu, 2022);

"We need to take steps together to achieve lasting stability in the South Caucasus. Unfortunately, the biggest obstacle we see here is the pressure on Armenia. The diaspora is divided. Some of them definitely do not want to normalize in any way. Some of them support it. Extreme groups within Armenia are constantly attacking the Prime Minister's house... They're putting a lot of pressure on us. This prevents Armenia from taking a bold step towards normalization with both Azerbaijan and Türkiye. But we want to continue this constructive dialogue in the coming period. "

When Çavuşoğlu's statement is analyzed, it is seen that he points out that the biggest obstacle to the official authorities taking bold steps in normalization on the Armenian side is the Armenian diaspora.

In September, Prime Minister Nikol Paşinyan on the Armenian side added another one to his statements that he wanted to normalize relations with Türkiye. At the cabinet meeting held on 8 September 2002, Paşinyan mentioned the statements of the Turkish side regarding the normalization and expressed the following statements (Abay, 2021) ;

“We are ready to consult to normalize relations with Türkiye and to re-establish land and rail transportation. We are ready for such a conversation and can extend it further. ”

However, it should also be stated that not everyone on the Armenian side thinks like Pashinyan. Former Minister of Defense Seyran Ohanyan made accusatory statements against Pashinyan from a perspective that can be considered to be an extension of the Diaspora mentality. Ohanyan claimed that the policies implemented by Pashinyan defend the interests of Azerbaijan and Türkiye, not the interests of Armenia. In a sense, it's obvious that he implicitly accused Pashinyan of treason. These and similar accusations are noteworthy in terms of showing the challenges both country leaders face while they take steps on this issue.

Ohanyan's statements confirm Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu's argument on the issue. Ohanyan's statement accusing Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan of “accepting almost all demands of Türkiye and Azerbaijan” was reflected in the newspaper reports in Türkiye on September 12, 2022 (Sözcü,2022). The news that border conflicts started again between Armenia and Azerbaijan on September 13, 2022, was announced by the agencies just one day after September 12, 2022, when Ohanyan's statements appeared in the Turkish press (Rehimov, 2022).

ANCA (Armenian National Committee of America), which can be described as the spokes person of the Armenian diaspora in the US accelerated its propaganda activities. It can be said that ANCA tries to create public opinion through social media with its propaganda made against Türkiye and Azerbaijan on its social media accounts.

Besides its posts titled 'Armenia under attack', ANCA also shared a post that says they are brothers and friends with Greek Cypriots and Iranians. Another post that ANCA shared is about Senators who made negative statements about Azerbaijan under the influence of the Diaspora. (Anca, 2022). The US Senators who were influenced by the Armenian diaspora have started sharing posts against Azerbaijan on their social media accounts after the outbreak

of border conflicts. Senator Brad Sherman accused the Azerbaijani side of being aggressive and stated that the US administration should immediately stop selling weapons to Azerbaijan. (Sherman,2022). Frank Pallone is another congressman who shared posts accusing the Azerbaijani side of being aggressive (Pallone,2022). Senator Marco Rubio accused Azerbaijan of attacking unjustly Armenian villages and escalating tensions between the two sides (Rubio,2022). Another one who blamed Azerbaijan rather than calling on two sides to resolve the problems through diplomatic channels is Representative Dina Titus (Titus,2022).

It can be said that on the American side, the person who has a relatively moderate attitude towards the Azerbaijani side is Michael Doran, who works as an expert in the Think Tank called Hudson Institute. Doran critically interpreted Armenia's rapprochement and cooperation with a country like Iran. Doran defined ANCA as the Armenian lobby in the USA. Based on ANCA's posts, Doran claimed that Iran and Armenia are in an alliance. Doran is of the opinion that ANCA tries to make the alliance between Iran and Armenia look as if there were harmless cultural ties between the two countries (Doran, 2022).

It should be stated that after his posts, Doran was heavily criticized by ANCA on social media. The Armenian lobby didn't tolerate a single person on the American side who didn't take a negative attitude towards Azerbaijan.

It's also thought-provoking that there is no other person except Doran on the American side who didn't take a negative attitude towards Türkiye and Azerbaijan, at least who could criticize Armenia. This can be seen as a sign that Azerbaijan and Türkiye should make more efforts for lobbying activities in the US.

The second point regarding Doran's posts is that Doran's arguments have very strong grounds. To support his claims, Doran has shown many grounds.

One of them is the Persian posts that Armenian Parliament Speaker Alen Simonyan shared on his social media account to receive Iran's support against Azerbaijan (Doran, 2022). Another one is the statements shared by the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It should be noted that Doran shared many strong arguments supporting his claims through his social media account.

It is clear that the attitude of Iran, which is expected to call for diplomacy and negotiations, should be watched out carefully. Following such outbursts, to say something about Iran's position, it can be defined as "Iran is a neighbor with whom good relations should be maintained, but which should be monitored very carefully."

### 3. FINDINGS

Gürsel Demirok, the former Head of the Middle East Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, expressed the following opinions on the subject;

“Actually, I say that the Armenian question should be left to historians. That time, in 1919, the Ottoman administration proposed to the British administration to establish a commission from the countries that did not participate in the war and to investigate whether any action was taken against the Armenians. However, the British did not respond positively to this proposal. There is also a document of this and sometimes I put it on Instagram. So it's a very controversial issue, a tragedy, the events that took place in that war. We do not accept it as a genocide, but I still say that there should be some kind of dialogue between Armenia and Türkiye and that relations should somehow return to the spirit of 2009. So, you know, protocols and so on were signed at that time, but then the developments did not progress in the direction that the parties wanted. The rigid attitude of the Armenian diaspora and on our side, Azerbaijan's resentment on this issue prevented the developments from taking place in the desired direction.” (G. Demirok. interview, 30 December, 2019).

When the interview of Gürsel Demirok is analyzed, it is seen that he also draws attention to the historical aspect of the problem. Demirok also emphasizes two factors in the failure to solve the problem. The first of these is the rigid stance of the Armenian diaspora regarding the solution to the problem. The second is that the Azerbaijani side is very sensitive and resentful about the issue.

Regarding the Armenian question, former Undersecretary of State Onur Öymen stated that;

“Especially in the American public opinion, the support for these Armenian claims lies in the efforts of Britain to bring America into the war in World War I. There are documents and books prepared by the British War Propaganda Bureau, called Wellington House, against Türkiye and Germany. The book, known as the Blue Book, is one of them, and this book is a pure war propaganda document. These efforts are the result of attempts to create Turkish and German hostility in American public opinion and to bring America into war. Everybody knows that today. We can't understand that even after 100 years, America brought up these allegations as if they have legitimate and justified justifications.” (Onur, Ö. interview, 10 December, 2019).

When Onur Öymen's interview is analyzed, it is seen that he draws attention to the fact that the roots of supporting the claims of the Armenian side date back to the days of World War I.

Öymen emphasizes that this problem emerged as a result of the propaganda activities carried out in those days to create a negative atmosphere in American public opinion against Türkiye.

#### **4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is seen that the biggest obstacle in the implementation of protocols such as the Zurich protocol signed between the parties in 2009 and in the progress of the process, which can be described as the new normalization that gained momentum between 2021-2022, is the Armenian diaspora.

The fact that the discourses such as we want to normalize relations with Türkiye and that we are ready to negotiate with Türkiye without preconditions, which Pashinyan has expressed many times on the Armenian side, are not being carried out in practice, confirms the argument of the study. It is clearly seen that the negative impact of the Diaspora should be curbed in order to provide a permanent solution to the issue and for the process to proceed healthily.

Efforts to solve the problem have been consuming the energy and time of the Turkish side for many years. In addition, the possibility that propaganda activities that do not reflect the truth may damage Türkiye's image in the eyes of the international community disturbs the Turkish side. Turkish Ambassadors working both in the United States and France have had to spend a large part of their time showing that the accusations of the Diaspora in these countries do not reflect the truth instead of making initiatives that will create new economic and social gains for Türkiye.

Today, Armenia is a poor country dealing with many economic and social problems. The initiatives of the Diaspora cause the Armenian people to be deprived of the economic and social gains that will be created by positive relations with Türkiye. The approach of the Diaspora can be seen as a striking example of how patriotic portrayals condemn their own countries and people to poverty.

People like Ohanyan, who aim to solve problems with a confrontational approach and try to get the support of the Armenian public opinion with their racist discourses, make it more difficult to solve the problems. It is clearly seen that Ohanyan and others like him who see the solution to their problems in the use of military means can give nothing but blood and tears to the Armenian people. The fact that the demonstrators who took to the streets in Armenia after the border clashes chanted slogans accusing Pashinyan of treason and calling for his resignation clearly show that the opposing party is benefiting politically from these events.



The solution to the problems between Türkiye and Armenia seems to depend on the decisions of the Armenian leaders, who prioritize the welfare and wealth of the Armenian people and try to solve the problems through diplomatic means. It is vital for the Armenian society to support leaders who have good relations with their neighbors, integrated with the western world, and have a rich Armenia dream.

Finally, it does not seem possible to solve this problem unless the borders of Azerbaijan accepted by the international community are recognized by Armenia. This situation also prevents the efforts made for the normalization process between Türkiye and Armenia from reaching their goals.

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