

Ani Dialogue 2010

Conference Report

Yerevan, October 14-17, 2010



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Foreword

Iris Kempe, Heinrich Boell Foundation South Caucasus

Beginning with the football diplomacy in 2008, Turkish Armenian relations have been characterized by signs of rapprochement. In August 2008, supported by the US government, the foreign ministries of both countries signed protocols indicating the establishment of diplomatic relations. The protocol's agreement includes the opening of borders within two months after the ratification of the agreement by both parliaments. Opening the border would be both coming to terms with the historic past and a strategic breakthrough in 21st century Europe.

The opening of the Armenian-Turkish border would shift the balance of forces in the Southern Caucasus. Turkey's role in the Southern Caucasus would be significantly enhanced. Conversely, Armenia would become a window to Europe, much less dependent on Russia. In contrast, the Azerbaijani side expressed concerns regarding the opening of the border, linking it to the Karabakh conflict issue. Furthermore the Azerbaijani side indicated a paradigm change towards increasing energy cooperation with Russian.

In 2010, the signals of thawing are stopped, and the improvement in relations between the Turkish and Armenian governments has come to a standstill. At the same time, the two societies are increasingly interested in knowing about each other and started to open mental borders. This opening is the source of the idea of the Ani Dialogue. Behind closed borders links between civil society actors are expanding and deepening. However, the role of civil society in the rapprochement has not been considered by the diplomatic efforts. Yet experience shows that civil society initiatives such as the Petersburg Dialogue between Germany and Russia, or the Polish – German rapprochement after World War II have been known to contribute

strongly to coming to terms with the historic past. Bearing this in mind, the Ani Dialogue project aims to stress exactly this important factor by supporting a bottom-up dialogue.

Because current Turkish Armenian relations are in a bottleneck, the Heinrich Boell Foundation, as one of the initiators of the Ani Dialogue, is supporting cooperation between the two societies. The Heinrich Boell Foundation wishes the Ani Dialogue to become an inherent part of Turkish-Armenian relations, dedicated to the powerful spirit of the two societies. The Ani Dialogue should become an important event, taking place every year and pointing to an open border and beyond.

Because current Turkish Armenian relations are in a bottleneck, the Heinrich Boell Foundation, as one of the initiators of the Ani Dialogue, is supporting cooperation between the two societies. The Ani dialogue is part of the Mosaic of Peace dedicated to overcome legacies of the past and building peace in the South Caucasus.

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Alexander Iskandaryan, Caucasus Institute Yerevan

At the moment, the official project of Armenia-Turkey rapprochement has been indefinitely suspended. There is no way we can figure out if it will be resumed in the nearest future; moreover, should the rapprochement resume, we do not know whether it shall unfold as a continuation or modification of the previous political project, or as an entirely new initiative. Nor can we rule out long-term suspension as a possible scenario.

Regardless of whether the borders are unsealed, and of exactly when it happens, the two societies need to understand each other better than they do now. Public perceptions of Armenia in Turkey and of Turkey, in Armenia, are schematic and dehumanized. If we start polling people in the streets about the other country, most people will quote stereotypes from either history or geopolitics, simply because they have not had any

exposure to the real Armenia or Turkey. In a situation of mutual isolation, the political news, mostly on a level of high politics, are the principal sources of information about the neighboring nation. As long as people cannot travel across the borders and relate to each other, the neighboring country



Alexander Iskandaryan, Iris Kempe

will remain a mere page from a history book or a drawing on the map. Even should the borders open overnight, both societies will be shocked by the unexpected realities, and have to face a wide variety of problems before they learn to coexist.

Whether the borders are unsealed five years or a century from now, it is high time that the two societies learned more about each other. It is essential that people on both sides of those borders face each others' issues, apprehensions and phobias. The idea of the Ani Dialogue

is not just about interacting across borders; it's about interacting across politics. The Dialogue gives professionals from a variety of areas the opportunity to meet, identify common agendas and invent ways to start cooperating now, without waiting for a hypothetical political solution. It is not so much about promoting this solution as about laying the foundation for a long and tortuous process that we all have to face: the mutual recognition of two societies that have stayed isolated for about a century now.

Ulrike Dufner, Heinrich Boell Foundation Turkey

It was no surprise that we received more than 150 applications for participation in the Ani Dialogue in Yerevan. Although the two governments once more failed to go a step forward and sign the protocols, there is a steadily increasing interest among both societies about each other and the wish to get to know each other.

In Turkey, we can observe an increasing activity of civil society actors to cope with the historical burden as well as to search for possibilities to establish a common future with the society of Armenia. The Ani Dialogue builds on this interest in mutual understanding, exchange and co-operation of the societies. There is also the wish of the civil societies in both countries not to be hostage of the governmental policies that seem unable to substantially overcome the bilateral conflicts. Somehow it seems that the societies are much more open to bridge the gap and establish new bridges than the governments are.

Starting with this rising interest in mutual understanding and exchange, which can be seen as a result of the activities of many actors in the civil society and scientific community in both countries, we decided to establish Ani Dialogue. It is considered to be a forum for further exchange on areas of common interest. Thereby it shall provide further possibilities of establishing durable contacts and mutual support for the civil societies in both countries.

Any improvement in one of the societies would also be to the benefit of the other, as many of the problems existing in one country have an impact either on the bilateral relations or on the common future in one region. Issues such as for example climate change cannot be solved on a national level and need regional co-operation as well as consciousness raising. Democratization, human rights and gender democracy have an impact not only on the internal politics of one country. They also have an impact on the shaping of the foreign policy of governments.

Therefore, civil society dialogue can contribute not only to overcome the stalemate between the two governments. It is also constructive and necessary for the shaping of a common sustainable, ecological and democratic future in the region.

Driven by this conviction, the organizers of the Ani Dialogue, the Heinrich Boell Foundation Offices in the region and the Caucasus Institute, wish to contribute to the establishment of durable relations among civil society actors. It is desirable that this will put pressure on both governments to take over the responsibilities for sustainable ecological and gender-democratic policies in the region.

Introduction

Why a bottom-up dialogue is needed

The Turkish Armenian relations, which have been very tense even prior to the independence of Armenia, are until now characterized by high level politics and a top-down approach. Recently, some new attempts have been made to ease the situation: In October 2009, Turkey and Armenia signed bilateral Protocols on the opening of borders and establishment of diplomatic ties. However, ratification of the Protocols by the two countries' parliaments stalled in 2010 and the top-down approach is not likely to yield major successes in the nearest future. Important factors, which will influence this development in this regard are the upcoming parliamentary elections in Turkey in 2011 and the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Nevertheless, key words like "football diplomacy" come to mind when thinking about the states' efforts for rapprochement, which can be interpreted as some kind of bottom up dialogue. Meanwhile, contacts on civil society level began even prior to the official rapprochement and have continued after its suspension, thus preparing the ground for rapprochement on societal level and potentially a new round of diplomatic efforts. However, the role of the civil society in this rapprochement process has not been paid much attention in large parts of the discussions by the diplomatic attempts. Yet experience shows that civil society initiatives in various parts of the world, such as the role of the civil rights movement in the former German Democratic Republic and especially civil society dialogue initiatives as in the German French rapprochement process have been known to contribute strongly to regional cooperation and peace. This attempt has also been taken when institutionalizing the Petersburg Dialogue (unfortunately, the process was in the end again driven by top down structures too much). Bearing this in mind, the Ani Dialogue project aims to stress the important role a civil society dialogue can

play in the rapprochement process and support the bottom-up dialogue in the Armenian Turkish relations.

First of all, the new initiative needs to look at the geopolitical implications of the border opening for the South Caucasus and beyond; societal and economical consequences also have to be considered. New problems like illegal migration or smuggling may occur and have to be considered and managed. Along with these upcoming problems, there will nevertheless be a wide range of opportunities and possibilities for cooperation and dialogue between the two civil societies. This dialogue has so far been hindered not only by the physical border, but also by borders in the minds of the people. That is why programs aimed at building common ties that are already conducted should be expanded and the focus of civil society actors should be drawn to the high potential for a peaceful, even amicable relationship of the societies of Armenia and Turkey. The normative aim of these efforts should be to utilize the possible opening of the border between Armenia and Turkey for building a peaceful environment between the two states and their society, but also in the wider region of the South Caucasus.

The idea of the Ani Dialogue

In reference to and considering the lessons learnt from similar formats like the Petersburg Dialogue, the Ani Dialogue aims at supporting the rapprochement of Armenia and Turkey from a bottom-up perspective. It is supposed to become a permanent forum, where representatives of the civil society of Armenia and Turkey can meet and talk about cross border problems, challenges and possible cooperation. Through this, the project's aim is also to shape regional policy making in the states of the Southern Caucasus in the discussed fields of socio economic development, culture, environment and human rights.

As talks about the border opening have been initiated recently, the boundary conditions for intensified dialogue between the civil society of Turkey and Armenia have improved. There is a window of opportunities for starting and intensifying contacts between different actors. The Ani Dialogue is meant to aim to seize these new opportunities and bring civil society stakeholders of the two countries together to discuss the possibility of a joint future.

The goals and objectives of the Ani Dialogue are:

- to support the rapprochement of Armenia and Turkey,
- to involve representatives of the civil society of both countries in this process,
- to reveal possible fields of cooperation for civil society actors,
- to activate cooperation of civil society organizations,
- to reduce the isolation of civil society organizations of the South Caucasus region,
- to contribute to the policy making of both countries, Armenia and Turkey.

The city of Ani – a symbol for prospering relations between Turkey and Armenia

The special relation between Turkey and Armenia is symbolized by the city of Ani. It is on the one hand a symbol for the rivalry of the states, but on the other hand an example for a prospering culture and economic exchange in the area, which nowadays belongs to one of the most remote landscapes in the borderland of Turkey and Armenia.

The name of the dialogue project between civil society representatives from Armenia and Turkey was chosen after this city, which is nowadays situated on the territory of Turkey, in close proximity of the Armenian border.

Between the 10th and 14th century, the city of Ani saw times of glory and ruin. Founded as the capital of the Armenian Bagratide kingdom, it grew to a flourishing city with up to 100.000 inhabitants, changed hands between empires, was destroyed and rebuilt several times. Although all is left of it now are ruins, its architecture and history make it one of the most valuable objects of cultural heritage on the territory of Turkey.



Information board at the Armenian Turkish border near the city of Ani

The kick-off conference – revealing great potential

The first meeting of the Ani Dialogue took place in October 2010 in Yerevan. It ended with opening windows of opportunity in building relations and preparing the ground for future joint projects between the Turkish and Armenian civil society. 70 representatives of civil society organizations from each of the two countries came to Yerevan and took part in an intense meeting concerning the future of the dialogue process.

It is the aim of this report, to recall the achievements of this first conference and show how cooperation between Armenians and Turks can look like on a civil society level.

1. The current state of relations between Armenia and Turkey, Alexander Iskandaryan

Following a long period of little or no communication, Turkish-Armenian relations gained significant momentum in 2008-2009 followed by a recess in 2010.

The first step to breaking the deadlock came in 2008 when Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan invited Turkish President Abdullah Gül to attend the 2010 World Cup qualifying match between Turkey and Armenia. President Gül reacted positively to the invitation and became the first Turkish President ever to set foot in Armenia in September 2008. The thaw culminated in 2009: during discussions mediated by the Swiss in April, Turkey and Armenia agreed a road map to the normalization of relations, and in October they pre-signed two protocols on the establishment of diplomatic ties and opening of borders. Four days later, Armenian President Sargsyan visited Bursa upon the invitation of his President Gül to watch the second Turkey-Armenia match. In early 2010 Armenia made a step towards ratification of the protocols by submitting them to its Con-

stitutional Court which judged the protocols to be in accord with the Constitution.

Ever since, Armenia-Turkey relations have been stagnating. The two protocols remain pre-signed documents which should be approved by parliaments to become binding, but are not submitted to the parliaments to be ratified. Top officials in Turkey regularly make statements tying ratification to the settlement of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, something not prescribed by the protocols and strongly resented by Armenia. By now Armenian authorities have practically made the decision that Armenian parliament will not be the first to ratify the protocols. The procrastination is the direct consequence of the fact that in both countries, the protocols in particular and Armenia-Turkey relations in general have become part of the domestic political discourse and domestic political competition.

In Turkey, attitudes to reconciliation with Armenia are further complicated by Turkey's close relationship with its ally, Azerbaijan, a country which is strongly opposed to the very notion of Turkey normalizing its ties with Armenia. A comparable complication in Armenia stems from the attitudes of the Armenian Diaspora, which has some leverage over Armenian politics and in most part disapproves of the protocols and of the rapprochement. However, the strongest deterrents to rapprochement are the activities of nationalistic groups in both countries which are using anti-reconciliation campaigns as tools for gathering political support in their societies.

Until the parliamentary election in Turkey due summer 2011, it would be unrealistic to expect any changes in Armenia-Turkey relations. After the election, a lot will depend on how the election goes, how many seats the ruling AKP party gets and whether it enters a coalition with CHP, the Republican People's Party of Turkey. In fact, whether or not the rapprochement initiative will be resumed will be largely determined by the results of the election. This does not imply that the renewal of reconciliation efforts is certain or even probable;

however, it may still be possible. Should it resume, its course is not obvious: it might continue to rely on the ratification of the protocols, or it may take a detour of some kind, such as the de-facto opening of borders or establishing alternative formats for diplomatic interaction.

2. The picture is not as dark as it seems – lighthouse projects in the Armenian Turkish cooperation

When Armenia became an independent state in 1991, diplomatic ties between it and Turkey were not established, and in 1993, Turkey sealed off its border with Armenia. The societies of both countries are separated by mutual mistrust, misinformation or simply ignorance. But the picture is not as dark, as it appears on this first sight. Ever since there were people who engaged in the dialogue between Armenians and Turks, who did not want to accept the fact, that a closed border should mean the total isolation of the bordering nations.

There were people who were actively participating in projects which aimed at bringing together citizens from both sides of the border to strengthen the common ties which exist between these individuals. The focus of these projects was always on the depolitization of the subject. As the common opinion was, that a solution to the conflict could only be reached, if the work on it would begin from the grass-roots. High diplomacy is a matter of government representatives, but the work with the people lies within the civil society organizations.

The following three examples of this civil society activity will show how civil society is already engaged in the rapprochement process. Of course, they portray only a little part of the variety of projects conducted. But as representatives of the implementing organizations were part of the Ani Dialogue community, the projects are worth

mentioning in a special way. Besides that, the democratic development which reveals in the presented projects is also contributing to the possibility to have a dialogue process like the Ani Dialogue. Therefore, the following examples for cooperation between Turks and Armenians also show what basis the Ani Dialogue is built upon.

Journalist exchange between Armenia and Turkey

Media influence the mind of the people. This common reality is always virulent, especially in international conflicts. Because the people cannot go on the other side themselves, they have to rely on the stories they read and hear from journalists. But how is this "other side" reported about? Is it a different, but still somehow related "other side", or has it got hostile attitudes towards the own side? Are there brothers and sisters behind the border, or are they enemies we have to fight? The answers to these entire questions are highly dependent on the opinion of the journalist and how he or she writes about it.

Journalists have got the power to create pictures, to state positions others might take over. At the same time, they have got the mediums to circulate their ideas, to bring them to the people. Nowadays the mass media are more multifaceted than ever. The ways of circulating information extend the classical newspapers and television. By means of using the World Wide Web, online journalism has become an especially important, influenceive and above all, fast way to publish.

In regard of all this, the involvement of journalists into the rapprochement process between Armenian and Turkish society should and always has been a focus of all attempts to bring together civil society.

The Hrant Dink Foundation is one of the leading organizations in this regard. Named after the Armenian/Turkish journalist and writ-



Group of journalists during the exchange visit in Armenia

er who has been assassinated in 2007, the Foundation's aim is to develop a "culture of dialogue, empathy and peace" and therefore supports various projects related also to journalist's trainings and awareness raising. One example of this was the project "Let's Pin Down the Headline at the Neighbor's!", which was established in co-operation with the Heinrich Boell Foundation Turkey in May 2009.

The central idea of this project is to give journalists from each of the two countries the possibility to get an insight into the neighbor's country and its society, which they are supposed to integrate into their further work. With an one week visit to Armenia, ten Turkish journalists started the mutual visits. They had the opportunity to do researches, talk to experts from the Armenian media sector, representatives from civil society and explore the country in various field trips. But the most important aspect of the visit was the involvement in the Armenian community: The Turkish journalists had the possibility to "mingle with the crowd on the streets", as it

is said in the foundation's own words. The experiences made during this visit were processed into articles and reportages, which were published in newspapers and online media in Turkey. One participant of this workshop said, that the work that the journalists have been doing during these seven days was more intense, then it could have ever been in Turkey. Furthermore, the direct contact to the Armenian people was without any doubt inspiring for the journalists and they profited from this, not only in regard to their work but also and foremost personally.

On the other hand, the Armenian Journalists made their visit to Turkey in October 2010. Applying the same model of the visit, they had meetings with civil society and media representatives as well as the opportunity to meet the local community.

After the first round of the exchange, the participants from both sides stayed in contact and used the new ties in different projects. A significant network between the journalists was established and the articles written about the respective other side were met with great interest by the readership. Considering the great success of this first exchange, a continuation of the project in 2011 is planned.

Detailed information about the project is available at:
www.hrantdink.org



Visit of the Museum for the Armenian Genocide

Adult education and the problem of dealing with the past

When the talk comes to Turkish Armenian relations, there is one critical topic that is impossible to avoid: the murder of 300.000 to 1.500.000 (the numbers vary dramatically according to the used source) Armenians in the course of the First World War in 1915. The discussion about this issue is highly controversial and has to be handled very carefully.

The Armenians and many international scholars call it genocide, the Turkish government until nowadays denies the planned extermination of the Armenian people and speaks of war related circumstances that led to the deaths. However, what cannot be denied is the fact that related to these



Participants in discussion

mass murders, thousands of Armenians had to flee their homes located on the territory which nowadays belongs to Turkey, the so called Western Armenia.

The events which took place almost one hundred years ago still influence the relation between the two people. Special attention must be paid to the fact, that history and historical facts depend on the narratives of the people who tell it. That means that every person who talks about history creates his/her own history by including personal memories or adopted ones. This leads to the fact, that in talking about history, there is not one truth, but as many as there are people who talk about it.

These ideas led to a project called "Adult Education and Oral History Contribution to the Armenian-Turkish Reconciliation", which was designed by the dvv international (Institute for International

Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association) and conducted with the help of the local project partners Anadolu Kültür from Turkey and the Center for Ethnological Studies "Hazarashen" from Armenia. According to the organizers, "the main aim of the project is to build bridges between Turkish and Armenian societies through adult education, intercultural exchange and oral history research." Between August 2009 and February 2010 several activities took place which started by training young researchers from Armenia and Turkey in the methodology of oral history.

The idea of this methodology is to study how history is displayed in the personal experiences of each person, and how these shape the perspective towards historical events. The central tool of this method is the narrative interview. In this, the interviewer does not intervene in the story telling of the conversation partner. The interview therefore reveals the pure experience of the interviewee and how he/she experienced and internalized history.

Within the scope of the project, the trained researchers interviewed people from both Turkey and Armenia to talk about their perceptions of recent history. As one result, there was a publication "Speaking



Group picture of the participants

to one another”, in which the results of the interviews are presented showing exemplary stories of the interviewees. The book is split into two sections, one dealing with the research results in Turkey, the second with those in Armenia. The project uses these findings to show, how differently history can be understood and reconstructed by different people, depending on their own experiences and the stories they have been told before. By this, mutual understanding for each other shall be enhanced, as the reader recognizes that the other one’s attitude towards the conflict is only a result of its own history. It is this path dependency, which gives the ground for current conflict constellation. Understanding and accepting this complex setting of narratives, results in taking a big step means taking a big step towards a reconciliation process. The organizers of the project hope that a recognition of the other one’s perception of history and understanding how this came off will contribute to a better mutual understand for each other’s feelings and needs, and that the people learn to listen to each other.

More information about the project can be found on www.learningtolisten.de

Revealing the other side – “Merhabarev/Yerevan-Istanbul” Photo Exhibition

How do my neighbours on the other side of the border live? What do they look like, their houses, their families, their streets? That these questions are sometimes hard to answer, even for people actively engaged in the Armenian Turkish dialogue process showed a little poll amongst the participants of the Ani Dialogue. It turned out, that for many Turks, the visit in Yerevan in the course of the conference has been the first time they crossed the border. Asking the Armenian participants, a similar picture revealed. So one can imagine, how little the ordinary man or woman on the street in Yerevan or Istanbul knows about the other group.



Exhibition opening in Istanbul

The picture of each other is mostly constructed by stories, tales and rumors, not by personal experience.

In 2006, 10 documentary photographers from Armenia and Turkey initiated a project which was aimed at closing this gap in the mutual perception. In this form, it was the first and until now unique attempt to contribute to Turkish Armenian reconciliation process. The photographers went from Istanbul to Yerevan and vice versa to document the daily life of the people living in the cities. They were eager to present, what each Armenian and each Turk should know: My neighbours are just living the same life as I do, struggle with the same problems, enjoy and laugh about the same things. The unprejudiced approach the photographers took displays in their work. The title of the exhibition was Merhabarev, a combination of the words merhaba and barev, meaning hello in Turkish and Armenian language. The composition of this word stands for the common realities people share in both countries.

The 130 pictures shown in the touring exhibition are a result of an intense ten-day work in both cities. Especially interesting are the back street scenes, documenting an even lesser known side of the cities. According to the participating photographers, their cameras and the background of the project allowed them to have an insight into even more remote scenes of the people's live. They were welcomed very warmly and that is why the project served not only as enrichment for the audience attending the exhibitions, but also as a personal enlargement of the photographer's minds.

The pictures were first shown with a great interest by the local population and overwhelmingly critics in the art scene in Yerevan in the culture center Moscow Cinema, before it went on to Istanbul, where the perception was as well very high and intense. Being financially supported by the German Heinrich Böll Foundation office in Turkey, the exhibition was also displayed in the foundation's office in Berlin, Germany. In addition to this exhibition, a book has been published, in which all works are shown. The descriptions are written in four languages.

The exhibition was organized by Nar Photos (Turkey) and Patker Photo (Armenia). More information about the project and related exhibitions on www.narphotos.net



The exhibition met a great public interest

3. Perspectives for civil society cooperation – going beyond Ani

As the previous section has shown, there are already attempts for Turkish Armenian civil society cooperation. The idea of the Ani Dialogue is to enhance this cooperation by developing new projects and also by supporting the civil society with an institutionalized framework. As mentioned above, this shall contribute to the Turkish Armenian rapprochement and a better understanding of the two people.

The main intention of the initial conference in Yerevan was to overcome obstacles that are related to ignorance of each other's view towards history, recent developments in society or just unwillingness to talk to each other because of skepticism and still prevailing prejudices.

During the meeting in October 2010, the civil society representatives thought about perspectives for cooperation in working groups dealing with five different topics. These were "Culture and Heritage", "Journalism and Media", "Research and Education", "Environment" and "Human Rights". The main paths of discussion as well as ideas developed amongst the participants are reflected in concrete project proposals. In the following, plans for upcoming cooperation between actors from both Armenia and Turkey that were developed within the working groups will be presented.



Looking beyond the border

Culture and Heritage – the key lies within the youth

The biggest problem when talking about culture and heritage in connection with the Armenian Turkish dialogue process is that culture is a highly politicized topic. Every party to the conflict tries to exploit the perception of culture in order to influence the people's attitude towards the other.

The participants of the Ani Dialogue who dealt with this topic during their discussions came to the conclusion, that due to this problem, the most efficient way to bring Turks and Armenians together will be the way of youth exchange programs. These programs should be organized in a non-political and non-official way. The topics of the meetings will have a variety starting with capacity building in regard of writing skills and techniques in order to plan and conduct own projects in the field of culture and heritage. The idea of this approach is, that young people have less prejudices, are more open to new approaches, and therefore are more independent from prevailing pictures about the other side. In supporting them in realizing own project ideas, giving them encouragement and logistic aid, civil society organizations from both Turkey and Armenia can help to establish an open minded culture.

A concrete project, that promises valuable scientific insight, and which could be conducted by a group of young trained researchers, could have a linguistic approach: Considering many similarities in Turkish and Armenian language, which resulted from centuries of mutual contact, trade relations as well as cultural exchange, an analysis of these congruencies can lead to a dictionary which can be utilized for further confidence building projects.

Besides this, many more topics have been subject of discussion:

- Cleaning the Armenian cultural heritage and historical sites in cities like Kars and Diyarbakır;
- Starting an exchange/mobility program for people from both countries and publishing the observations of those who participate in this program. Having necessary translations and publishing them through internet or as a book etc.;
- Hosting people in old-Armenian quarters/cities. This is an idea for participants from both countries;
- Possibility of youth exchange in term of the Black Sea Music festival organized by Gola Culture and Ecology Association.

Human Rights and Democratization – reaching out for mutual trust and supporting human rights activists

Torture by police officials, repression of journalists, restrictions for opposition parties. Both in Armenia and Turkey these human rights violations are reported by independent organizations observing the democratization process of both countries. The list could be continued and shows that there is still a long way to go to establish a democratic climate where citizens can openly express their opinions and feel safe from state repression.

The working group dealing with human rights and democratization was focused very much on confidence building within its own group and to create an atmosphere of trust and amicability amongst the participants. The main aim was to facilitate a real contact between the participants, to increase mutual understanding and therefore create a candid base for convergence. By this, the group represented, what is the overall aim of the Ani Dialogue: mutual understanding for each other's feelings and needs which leads to a friendly and peaceful cooperation.



Discussing human rights issues

The projects the participants developed reflect this idea. As described above, the human rights situation in both countries does not meet international democratic standards. A monitoring of abuses could be conducted by Armenian and Turkish activists in a comparable manner. This may have the advantage that reports grounding on these findings will have a greater international reception, as the publishers of them will represent a wider range of civil society organizations. The aim is not to compare the situation in Turkey and Armenia in order to rank them, but to draw the attention on similar problems existing in both countries and also revealing the chances for applying lessons learnt from one case on the other. The topics of monitoring activities could be the banning of torture, rights of homosexuals, conscientious objection, violence towards women and women's rights.

Furthermore, educational activities, especially concerning aforementioned topics in order to increase the knowledge and competence in the human rights field should be organized.

The question of democratization can be dealt with in course of the above mentioned projects. Nevertheless, special attention has to be paid to the topic of elections in both countries. The idea of the participants was that these could be monitored through the establishment of commissions consisting of civil society representatives from both countries.

Journalism and Media – creating a platform for information

Mass media in Turkey and Armenia are influencing the people in both countries very much. Misinformation is a very big issue in this regard and might contribute even to a worsening of the relations between the two people. The abilities to change these circumstances lie within the politics and should be solved on a national basis. This quite pessimistic, but also demanding statement was made by the moderator of the journalism and media working group when summing up the results of the sessions.



Participants in discussion

But as there is the clear call for governmental actions, on the other hand the group had worked out an impressive tableau of how they themselves can and will contribute to a rapprochement of the people. The central project will be a website, which will be created by the participants and which will deal with political as well as cultural issues. Furthermore, the focus will be set on daily life story telling, like for example reportages on cultural festivals, celebration of holidays and so on. The aim of this website will be that the visitors will get an impression of how Armenians and Turks live, what concerns they have, what they are thinking about and how they organize their daily lives. By this, there should be established mutual understanding for each other's living environment.

But the work of the journalists will have another facet: They want to be actively engaged in the shooting of a movie about the city of Ani. The problem the participants identified is that there is not much information available about this site and its unique history. Especially there is a considerable lack of information about the Armenian Turkish relation that become manifest in the ruins of the city. No information board informs the visitors of Ani about the importance this place plays in the course of the relations between the Armenian and Turkish state as well as its meaning for both societies.

The movie that will be the outcome of a joint project between the Armenian and Turkish journalist, and in whose production also students from both countries might participate, may be broadcasted on the website as well as in different forums in Turkey and Armenia. By this, the flow of information about the history of Ani will be brought closer to the people. In order to reach as many people as possible, the idea was to also involve the State Departments of both countries, so that the prevalence rate amongst state institutions (e.g. schools, universities) will be higher as well.

Research and Education – working together, getting to know each other

If you want to understand your neighbour, you have to understand how he thinks. And to understand how somebody, or even how a whole society thinks and acts, you have to rely on the help from trained scientists and thinkers. Therefore, one way to get to know each other better, is by strengthening research projects on topics like history, language, society, gender relations and many many more.

The participants in the working group which dealt with this topic stressed the important role scientists from both Armenia and Turkey played in times of the Ottoman Empire. It was emphasized that these people symbolize the connection of the societies of Turkey and Armenia and the common history both countries share. Unfortunately this knowledge is not as widespread as desired, so the participants came up with the idea to initiate research on these people and to establish an exhibition in order to raise the attention to this important topic in Armenian Turkish history.

Generally the civil society representatives called on both scientific communities to work together more closely and to communicate research results more openly. This may happen in such sensitive research areas like human trafficking or perception of the Armenian Turkish history. A joint work in these fields will counteract the prevailing different writing of history and biased research.

But, as was the focus in most of the working groups of the Ani Dialogue, the participants did not only look on the past, but in fact the focus was laid on future perspectives. In this case, the future lies, again, within the young people of Turkey and Armenia. An important issue in Turkish Armenian relations should therefore be the mutual acknowledgement of school and university certificates in order to simplify the possibilities of research and work exchange. Special attention should also be paid to the education of qualified transla-

tors on both sides of the borders, most preferably including mutual student exchanges. Furthermore, scientists and educators from both countries should feel responsible for and engage in the area of educating the societies through television. Because television plays a big role in the provision of information to the people, scientists should be eager to take part in shaping the agenda of the broadcasting stations and provide thorough and scientifically grounded information about vital topics in Armenian Turkish relations. It should be made clear that science and research, especially when it deals with the Turkish Armenian relations, is not meant to be a silent and hidden project, but that it has to take responsibility and present itself and its findings to the people.

Environment – starting to care about the border

It is common knowledge, that environmental pollution does not know any state boundaries. And consequences of global warming will be and are already felt in any country in the world, regardless how much it itself contributed to the emission of greenhouse gases. The question of how to solve the increasing hunger for energy facing the requirement to do this in a least environmental polluting way is certainly a topic in Turkey as well as in Armenia and there is a great chance for civil society cooperation in this field. Related to this, there should be talks about cooperation in technology transfer and also efficient energy transport and saving. All these topics were mentioned during the sessions of the working group on environmental issues. And that cooperation between the two states is definitely needed was not put into question at all. But in a climate, that is highly uncooperative as nowadays between Armenia and Turkey, this knowledge cannot be emphasized enough. Considering the fact, that there are high numbers of environmental challenges that concern both Armenia and Turkey, the civil society representatives joining in the environmental group nevertheless quickly decided to concentrate

on one problem, in order to be able to establish a concrete project which is very likely to be established and conducted during the next year.

As a result of the discussions, the participants established the project on fighting the pollution of the Akhourian and Arax River. Turkey and Armenia share a 325km long border line, a big part of this constitute itself in the two rivers. The quality of the waters declined in recent years mostly depending on industrial as well as urbanization related factors. The aim of the project is to enhance the water quality of the rivers by cooperative action between civil society organizations from both sides of the banks. In order to have the scientific groundings for the project, a liaison with the Yerevan State University, Department for Environmental Issues, is very likely to be established as well. Besides that, a research on further potential collaborators from the Armenian and Turkish NGO-sector and Universities situated in Turkey will be conducted by the participants involved.

The Working group planned an initial meeting to this project, to bring together the relevant actors. In this meeting, which will take place either in Yerevan or in Istanbul, the expertise of each participating institution will be elaborated and further steps will be negotiated.

A central element of the project will be a database collection of the ongoing pollution in the rivers, which will be ready for publicaion.

4. Messages from the Ani Dialogue to policy shapers and makers

The Ani Dialogue was established as a forum for civil society actors. It was meant as an alternative to diplomacy, which often struggles to reach agreements due to contradicting interests and views. The Ani Dialogue came to the conclusion, that these potential stale-mate constellations can be overcome with the help of civil society action. But nevertheless, the participants of the forum are aware of the fact, that in order to reach a sincere rapprochement between the people of Armenia and Turkey, civil society and diplomacy have to work together into the same direction. Because civil society can only succeed to its full means in an appropriate environment where there is no major suppression or interfering executed by governmental institutions. On the other hand, there are many advantages both sides can have when dealing with the conflict jointly and civil society actions can in no way be a substitute for diplomatic relations between governments.



The focus of the first meeting of the Ani Dialogue was laid on the appraisal for cooperation as well as a needs assessment. The latter aspect relates not only to the capacity the civil society organizations participating in the dialogue forum can contribute, but also what has to be demanded from the governments in Yerevan and Ankara.

The following postulations were collected from the discussions among the participants in the working groups. They exemplify the urgency governmental action has in regard of the success of civil society action.

The participant of the Ani Dialogue call upon the governments of Turkey and Armenia to

- **Fight** for democratization and human rights. Because these provide the seating for a reconciliation process which involves all people in Armenia and Turkey.
- **Think independently** from political terms and do not politicize topics that should be dealt with on a civil society basis.
- **Act independently from** personal political interests. Nationalistic or xenophobic politics may be efficient for vote seeking, but contradict the aim of reaching mutual understanding and reconciliation.
- **Change** the information policy. Thorough information on Armenian/Turkish rapprochement process is necessary as well as transparent and unbiased information about the neighbour. Do not support misinformation.
- **Support** civil society projects by contributing facilities like logistic support or providing means of public information. By this the administration shows that it acknowledges the importance of civil society dialogue next to high diplomacy approaches.
- **Cooperate** in the aspects of energy production and usage and set joint environmental benchmarks to work on border crossing environmental issues. Recognizing, that man problems can and will not be solved thoroughly one sided, cooperation is needed for the sake of the well being of the people of Armenia and Turkey but also the wider region of the South Caucasus.
- **Assist** youth exchange programs by the means of travel facilitation.
- **Increase** the amount and quality of historical information. E.G. the information policy at the site of Ani has to be improved and the important factor of the city for the Armenian Turkish relations has to be mentioned and thoroughly explained in order to avoid misinformation.

And, last but not least

- **Listen to the ideas developed within civil society and increase the cooperation with it!**