



Support to the Armenia-Turkey
Normalization Process

European Union Initiative



EURASIA
PARTNERSHIP
FOUNDATION



SUPPORT TO ARMENIA-TURKEY NORMALIZATION PROCESS PROGRAM, STAGES 1 AND 2 (2014-2017)

Overview

In 2014-2015, the EU supported an 18-month ATNP programme that promoted mutual dialogue, cooperation, and normalisation of relations between Armenia and Turkey. The programme had a budget of 2 million EUR, and it was implemented by eight civil society organisations: Civiltas Foundation (CF), Eurasia Partnership Foundation (EPF), Public Journalism Club (PJC), Regional Studies Center (RSC) from Armenia; and Anadolu Kültür, the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV), Helsinki Citizens' Assembly (hCa), and Hrant Dink Foundation from Turkey. It has been the most significant international action to counterbalance further divisions and to promote an opportunity for pacifying tensions, exchanging opinions, learning about each other, and preventing conflict.

The initiative's methodology was based on the understanding that a personal encounter with the 'other side' and establishing rapport even with only one person from the 'other side', if implemented correctly, irrevocably changes the person's value system and his/her entire attitude to the 'other side'.

The programme made local CSOs strategically-minded peacebuilders that achieved levels of dialogue with the authorities which were often not achievable by international organisations. About a million people learned about the programme via the innovative internet platform¹ put forward by the Programme, hundreds² participated personally, visiting each other, including students, business persons, journalists, policy writers, teachers, and innovators.

By the end of the first stage of ATNP (ATNP1) in mid-2015, it had become a major vehicle for confidence-building and counterbalancing actions that could further build up mutual suspicion. ATNP1 did so via destroying the enemy image, establishing a joint vision for the past, present and future, and focusing on areas of cooperation. It demonstrated the vested interest of the sides in moving forward with sustainable peace options, in the context of the European value system, i.e. democracy, human rights, minority and gender rights, tolerance, etc. It was a clear case of using the European policy initiatives to impact the governments' opinions and policies about the need for dialogue and reconciliation.

The impact and achievements of ATNP1 created the necessary atmosphere for the continuation of the programme, which was again supported by the EU, providing 1.5 million EUR. ATNP2 specifically focused on the efforts on the three levels of normalisation: policies, attitudes and behaviours. These levels are interrelated and in the attempt to target them together, it is becoming more possible to reach sustainable change and the transformation of relations.

Since the start of ATNP2 in April 2016, the political climate in the region, particularly Turkey, has worsened and the sense of insecurity among the civil society actors on both sides of the border has increased. But despite the setbacks in the context, ATNP2 has been able to

1. <http://armenia-turkey.net/>

2. <http://armenia-turkey.net/en/Summarizing-Programme-Results-1481025598>

continue successfully. The activities³ within ATNP2 were carried out without major problems. The Consortium implemented a considerable number of activities such as business forums, workshops, trainings, professional exchanges, training courses for young people, artists and film-makers. In particular:

- representatives of Armenian IT start-ups received a unique opportunity to participate in one of the most prominent events in Istanbul in the field of IT and look for possible investments from Turkey;
- Armenia- and Turkey-based architects and art historians made a unique joint contribution to the preservation of historical heritage by visiting and assessing Armenian historical monuments in Turkey (Mush and Artvin);
- film-makers from Armenia and Turkey⁴ were able to meet, screen their movies for the public, meet with the audience and discuss possible ways of collaboration;
- artists, scholars and others were able to travel across the border to strengthen professional ties.

One of the important components of ATNP is HDF's travel support and fellowship opportunities,⁵ which promotes direct contact between people from Armenia and Turkey, while creating and strengthening institutional cooperation. More than one hundred applicants received the opportunity to travel to the neighbouring country. Fifty organisations from Turkey and 33 from Armenia showed an interest in hosting fellows from the neighbouring country. Amongst these organisations, there were major universities, research centres, think tanks, newspapers and TV channels, civil society organisations, art centres and museums from both countries. Four fellows from Turkey and 11 from Armenia engaged in long-term research in the neighbouring country.

As in ATNP1, the Grant Scheme was one of the key components of ATNP2. Civil society organisations from Turkey and Armenia were once again invited to present their project ideas on strengthening the Armenia-Turkey normalisation process and people-to-people contacts. Forty-seven organizations (31 from Armenia and 16 from Turkey) submitted their proposals. Nine of these proposals were approved. The projects ranged from joint research on common urban heritage and film festivals to training courses for literary translators and an academic conference on the prospects of Armenia-Turkey normalisation.

During the first ten months of ATNP2, more than a hundred analytical materials, articles, interviews and analyses have been produced.

ATNP2 presents the case of civil society continuing to work for security, stability, democracy and human rights in difficult circumstances, providing an example to those who may feel dispirited because of the situation.

There were also several results, which, if not attributed solely to the impact of ATNP2, nevertheless created a conducive environment that should not be underestimated. While the situation in both countries has further deteriorated and, according to some policymakers, the issue of mutual relations has become even less of a priority than before, there have been the following developments nevertheless:

- the number of air flights between Yerevan-Istanbul increased (to four times a week);
- perhaps more importantly, the flights were included in the Amadeus system, allowing people to fly from Yerevan, via Istanbul, to the destinations globally where AtlasGlobal operates;

3. <http://armenia-turkey.net/en/events>

4. Please watch the short film on the Armenia-Turkey Cinema Platform following these links:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6TQs2UE0uLo>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pW_BRWnvbd4

5. <http://www.armtr-beyondborders.org/>

- during the Turkey-Russia fall out, goods exchange between Turkey and Armenia increased significantly, since Turkey-based businesspeople were interested in using Armenian territory as a transit zone because they could not directly export to Russia.

Such examples demonstrate that more and more people, also in policy circles, see the value in increasing economic and business cooperation across the border, which is still closed. The engagement of policymakers and separate state-related agencies and/or large-scale strategic businesses in ATNP2 activities once again indicated that the Programme is having an impact on the thinking of decision-makers and reinvigorating the interest of the officials in re-engaging in dialogue in current and future policymaking.

The implementers of ATNP are happy to claim that, thanks to the EU's support, they and their constituencies have played a significant role in making inroads into repairing society-level relations between both countries. There are three claims in this respect which plausibly explain that the chosen strategy was correct:

- The project had a significant preventive impact. If not for ATNP, it is highly likely that relations between the two sides would be much worse.
- The project acquired added significance. Thanks to the fact that, in the situation of clamping down on civic freedoms and civil society initiatives, ATNP has not been touched and has continued functioning at full scale, this EU project with its individual success cases has become a beacon of stability and progress, counterbalancing the background of pessimism that the civil societies of both sides experienced because of democracy and human rights setbacks in many other cases and areas.
- The cumulative impact of individual strands, interactions and connections has become sustainable. Individual success cases of different strands have established credible, well-functioning and sustainable links and partnerships between some professionals, institutions, and activity lines, including also the cautious development of relations between state-linked institutions.

ATNP activities have issued a message that despite all the negative events in the region, significant civil society groups in Turkey and Armenia build and sustain relations, adhere to the values of human rights and democracy, and work for integration around European values, also engaging policymakers and individual state-related agencies and/or large-scale strategic businesses, thereby making cooperation a habit and a tradition.