



Regional Studies Center (RSC)
Yerevan, Armenia

RSC SUMMARY OVERVIEW

ARMENIA-TURKEY PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Background

The Regional Studies Center (RSC) is an independent think tank conducting a wide range of strategic analysis and objective research, and implementing a number of educational and policy-related projects. As a leading think tank based in Armenia, the RSC conducts research and analysis and develops policy initiatives aimed at bolstering political and economic reform and conflict resolution in the broader South Caucasus region. As an independent think tank, the RSC is actively engaged in the public policy process and, over the longer term, seeks to serve as a catalyst for democratic reform and sustainable economic development through the empowerment of civil society and by contributing to the formulation of public policy through innovative and objective research, analysis and policy recommendations.

The RSC is also actively involved in supporting the Armenian-Turkish “normalization” process and works closely with other think tanks, research institutes and civil society organizations in both Armenia and Turkey. Our core mission and mandate of our Turkey-related research and activities focus on five strategic goals:

- To ***sustain the momentum*** in Armenian-Turkish normalization by forging and deepening ties between civil society organizations in both countries, while seeking to shape the political context to foster a resumption of official Armenian-Turkish diplomatic and political engagement;
- To ***broaden the constituency*** for normalization, both in terms of geography, by going beyond the capitals and the usual cities to engage border regions and more rural areas of each country, and in terms of issues, by reaching out to other specific niche groups (energy, trade & commerce, academia, local municipal and regional government, culture, etc.);
- To ***conduct, disseminate and promote research, analysis and publications***, while also expanding the audience through by public events (conferences, seminars, roundtable discussions, etc.) and targeted outreach (focusing on key interest groups) in order to raise awareness and elevate the level of debate within each country;
- To ***coordinate, cooperate and collaborate in presenting more analytical coverage*** of issues with media outlets in Turkey and Armenia, while also working closely with elite “opinion-makers” and “opinion-shapers” as part of a more sophisticated informational campaign and communications strategy aimed at confronting stereotypes and challenging the narrative, while also correcting misinformation in both countries.

The “Armenia-Turkey Normalisation Process” (ATNP) Programme

The “Support to the Armenia-Turkey Normalisation Process” (ATNP) programme is an EU-financed, 18-month project implemented by a consortium of eight civil society organizations from both countries.¹ Based on a unique model of collaboration and consensus among the eight civil society partner organizations² from Armenia and Turkey, the overall objective of the ATNP programme is to promote civil society efforts in support of the normalisation of relations between Turkey and Armenia, including the opening of the closed Armenian-Turkish border and the establishment of diplomatic relations. The programme carries out a number of activities in support of this goal, including efforts to enhance people-to-people contacts, expand economic and business links, promote cultural and educational activities and facilitate broader access to more balanced information within both societies.

RSC Activities within ATNP Programme

As an integral component of our broader Turkey-related activities and research, the RSC is an active member of an Armenian-Turkish consortium of eight civil society organizations within the EU-funded “Support to the Armenia-Turkey Normalisation Process” (ATNP) programme. For its part, the RSC implements four specific projects within the ATNP programme: (1) media support and collaboration, (2) training & empowering youth, (3) the RSC “Speakers’ Bureau” and (4) exploring “new avenues and alternative venues” for diplomatic and political engagement.

1. MEDIA SUPPORT

Similar to the lack of information and limited awareness of developments in Turkey within Armenia, there is a related lack of objective analysis among both Armenian and Turkish media professionals. In light of this pronounced lack of more serious media coverage and more sophisticated analytical content, there is need to focus on improving and deepening the information environment within the Armenian and Turkish media.

More specifically, RSC media support activities include four specific goals: (1) to elevate the level of discourse by providing more serious analytical content, (2) deepen and expand the scale and scope of media coverage, (3) to correct and counter inaccurate or stereotypical media coverage and (4) to facilitate closer cooperation and collaboration between Armenian and Turkish media professionals, with a specific focus on columnists, TV talk show hosts, pundits, “experts,” and other “opinion-makers” and “opinion-shapers” in each country.

In order to deepen the level of objective analysis among both Armenian and Turkish media professionals and provide more sophisticated analytical content, the RSC has collaborated and cooperated with various Turkish media outlets. Our efforts have also been bolstered by our past work with the media, as RSC Director Richard Giragosian previously served as an Editorial Consultant to the Istanbul-based Turkish Policy Quarterly (TPQ) journal and was a columnist for the Turkish-language edition of *Newsweek International*. RSC Project Coordinator Dr. Haykak Arshamyan was also previously engaged in several earlier media exchange programs involving Turkish and Armenian journalists.

¹ For more information, see: <http://armenia-turkey.net/en/home>

² Consortium partners include the Civilitas Foundation (CF), Eurasia Partnership Foundation (EPF), Public Journalism Club (PJC), and the Regional Studies Center (RSC) from Armenia; and from Turkey, Anadolu Kültür, Economic Policy Research Foundation (TEPAV), Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly (hCa), and the Hrant Dink Foundation.

Our media support efforts have focused on three levels. First, leveraging our earlier relationship with Turkish print media, we have expanded our cooperation with leading Turkish national newspapers, and have provided not only interviews, but also deeper analytical content on a wider range of issues beyond the Armenia-related issues. Moreover, our cooperation with national newspapers have included exclusive interviews and support for analysis and reporting for both several well-known English-language newspapers and for prominent Turkish-language national dailies. Second, the RSC has also expanded our focus on Turkish television, including support for TV news teams, news anchors and editors, as well as reporters. A third area of our focus on media support involved an effort to expand our reach and raise our profile in alternative, on-line electronic media outlets and professional journals and publications.

The following is a brief summary of select interviews and coverage in the Turkish and Armenian media, for the period of January-August 2014, with links provided:

SELECT TURKISH & ARMENIAN MEDIA INTERVIEWS & COVERAGE

August 2014

In the 7 August issue of the English-language *Today's Zaman* newspaper, RSC Director Richard Giragosian assessed developments in the mediation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (see: www.todayszaman.com/diplomacy_armenian-azeri-presidents-to-meet-amid-rising-tension-in-karabakh_354917.html).

Giragosian was also cited by the *Washington Post* newspaper on 6 August, commenting on an inflammatory anti-Armenian campaign statement by then-presidential candidate Erdogan (see: www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2014/08/06/is-armenian-an-insult-turkeys-prime-minister-seems-to-think-so/).

In a live interview with Turkey's TRT Türk TV channel on 4 August, Giragosian assessed the recent clashes between Nagorno Karabakh and Azerbaijan, as well as fighting along the Armenian-Azerbaijani border, representing the most serious fighting since the 1994 ceasefire effectively ended outright hostilities (see: www.trtturk.com/video/detay/azeri-ermeni-gerilimi-tirmaniyor-3778.html).

The RSC also provided analysis of the Turkish presidential elections for the Armenia media, with RSC Director Giragosian participating in a roundtable discussion hosted by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's (RFE/RL) Armenian Service on 16 August assessing the implications of the Turkish elections (see: www.regional-studies.org/en/news/media/384-160814) and an earlier interview with RFE/RL on 15 August by RSC Analyst Dr. Mikayel Zolyan assessing Armenian-Turkish relations (see: www.armenialiberty.org/media/video/26532597.html). And on 1 August, the RSC was also interviewed by RFE/RL's Armenian Service offering an analysis of the presidential election in Turkey (see: www.azatutyun.am/content/article/25477633.html).

July 2014

And for CNN-Turk, the RSC also assessed recent developments in Armenian-Turkish normalization in an interview on 30 July. That interview focused on the impact of both the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide and the coming Turkish elections on the normalization effort and also assessed the diplomatic efforts to overcome Azerbaijani resistance to Turkish engagement of Armenia (see www.cnnturk.com/video/dunya/ermenistan-2015e-nasil-hazirlaniyor).

Giragosian was also quoted in a story in the 6 July issue of the *Today's Zaman* daily newspaper on the Armenian view of the Erdogan campaign (see: www.todayszaman.com/news-352194-armenians-worry-over-erdogans-probable-presidency.html) and for the Armenian media, provided an analysis of Turkish politics for Public Radio on 7 July (see: www.armradio.am/en/2014/07/07/richard-giragosian-armenians-worry-over-erdogans-probable-presidency/).

May 2014

In the 14 May issue of the *Today's Zaman* newspaper, Giragosian assessment of Armenian-Turkish normalization within the context of domestic Turkish politics (see: www.todayszaman.com/news-347788-normalization-with-armenia-hostage-to-turkish-domestic-politics.html).

April 2014

On 24 April, RSC Director Richard Giragosian participated in a live talk show on *A Haber TV* (see: www.ahaber.com.tr/webtv/videoizle/gece-ajansi--ihsan-aktas-nevzat-cicek). The live interview (the second appearance on this TV station) was part of our broader cooperation with *A Haber TV* and its news anchorwoman Duygu Leloglu, a prominent journalist and TV personality. Giragosian also gave several interviews with Turkish media outlets on the official statement on the Armenian issue that was issued by the Prime Minister's Office on 23 April 2014, including the English-language *Daily Sabah* newspaper (see: www.dailysabah.com/politics/2014/04/28/pms-candid-condolence-message-aimed-to-reach-armenians-without-interference) and two separate articles in the *Hurriyet Daily News* (see: www.hurriyetdailynews.com/deconstructing-turkish-pms-statement-on-armenian-tragedy.aspx?PageID=238&NID=65482&NewsCatID=412 and www.hurriyetdailynews.com/pm-erdogan-stresses-shared-pain-in-statement-on-armenian-issue.aspx?pageID=517&nID=65437&NewsCatID=510).

And in an extensive interview on 26 April with the *Anadolu News Agency*, Giragosian also offered a broader analysis of Turkish-Armenian normalization efforts (see: www.aa.com.tr/en/mod/video-gallery/2011781/richard-giragosian-from-an-armenia-based-think-tank-speaks-to-aa0 and www.youtube.com/watch?v=3q5N4T8uAoU).

On the issue of the Erdogan statement, Giragosian was also cited on 23 April by the *Financial Times* (see: www.ft.com/cms/s/0/d5c21b40-cb01-11e3-ba9d-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3BaGUZUfP) and by "The Majalla," an Arab on-line publication (see: www.majalla.com/eng/2014/05/article55249843) on 5 May written by Barçin Yinanç, a Turkish columnist cooperating in our media support effort.

March 2014

In order to improve the coverage and analysis of Armenian-Turkish normalization in the Armenian media, the RSC also published an extensive assessment of the issue in the 10 March issue of the Yerevan-based "De Facto" magazine. The analysis was published in both English and Armenian (see: www.df.am/news/1921/richard-giragosyan_92_14.html).

2. EMPOWERING YOUTH AS AN AGENT OF CHANGE

The potential transformative power of the youth as an agent of change has long been recognized as a crucial element of Armenian-Turkish normalization, with a number of important and largely successful youth exchange initiatives between Armenia and Turkey garnering the support of international donors. In light of previous activities, the RSC continues to support youth exchanges and offers youth training opportunities, while focusing on empowering youth (including youth groups, students, activists and civil society representatives) by forging ties between civil society organizations in both countries, offering targeted training on civic activism on a wide range of issues, and helping to shape a more positive political context.

The RSC implements our youth training activities in partnership with the Civic Forum NGO, an Armenia-based partner endowed with extensive experience in organizing youth training events, including for the Council of Europe, SALTO and EU Youth in Action programs, which supplements our own experience in conflict-resolution youth training experience. Furthermore, we utilize a team of trainers, reflecting a shared and joint design with partners from Turkey and leveraging and complementing other youth-focused efforts.

The **specific objectives** of this proposed activity include two youth trainings based on a “train the trainer” methodology, designed to maximize the impact and outcome, and will focus on empowering youth by offering civic training and advocacy workshops that can be applied to Armenia-Turkey advocacy and organizational support.

The **expected outcomes** of this proposed activity focus on empowering youth as an “agent of change” and forging deeper ties between civil society organizations to help shape a more positive political context to strengthen and advocate a resumption of the Armenian-Turkish normalization process.

To date, in partnership with the Civic Forum NGO, the RSC conducted the first of a two-phase training course entitled, “Closed Borders, Open Minds,” in Yerevan from 12-19 May 2014, with twenty participants from Armenia and Turkey. The second, follow-up training is set to be held in Istanbul from 12-19 October 2014. For the second phase of the youth training, the aims and objectives focus on the deepening of participants’ knowledge, developing their skills and shaping a more positive opinion and political context of the Armenia-Turkey normalisation process.

Moreover, the second training course also seeks to deepen participants’ understanding of the key concepts on conflict management/transformation and peace-building efforts; expose the participants to new concepts of designing initiatives/projects which could promote the Armenia-Turkey normalisation process at least on the civil society level; develop a common vision of the normalisation process and its final outcomes; and map the potential resources for joint efforts to contribute to a shared, common vision of Armenia-Turkey normalisation.

The training course utilizes a non-formal education methodology, including working in small groups, debates, discussions, workshops, visits, etc. Contributions from experts in the field of conflict management will establish a theoretical framework and a common reference point for learning and communication. There will also be opportunities to meet civic activists who will share their practical experience on the topic and share their lessons learned. The project will be adapted to the needs and expectations of the participants, who will be able to implement their ideas and initiatives by developing and carrying out follow-up projects.

3. “RSC SPEAKERS’ BUREAU”

Given the lack of bold ideas and apparent absence of any sustained strategic vision to resume the official normalization process, the RSC has sought to contribute to the process by initiating a new effort to engage several prominent retired diplomats and officials, and other high-profile figures from Armenia and Turkey to solicit a range of new policy ideas and suggestions.

The **specific objectives** of this initiative, or virtual “Speakers’ Bureau,” center on both targeting decision-makers and helping shape public opinion through a process designed to facilitate a sharing and exchange of ideas and views. This process is conducted through a series of closed meetings and seminars, as well as public events, utilizing a select group of retired politicians and policy makers from Armenia and Turkey, as well as interested third parties such as former officials from the US, the EU and individual European countries. These eminent figures contribute new ideas and policy recommendations based on their personal and professional experience, including a broader strategic vision for the future relations between both countries. The participants have begun to formulate and present a set of policy recommendations to government officials and decision-makers and are also helping to guide or shape public opinion in each country.

The **main outputs** of this proposed activity include a series of special closed meetings and subsequent public events/speaking tour in each country aimed at offering a sophisticated set of policy recommendations to government officials and decision-makers. A related output will also include a series of written publications based on these recommendations, serving as “policy papers” for Armenian and Turkish officials, as well as for the international community and international organizations interested and involved in the normalization process.

The **expected outcomes** of this proposed activity include bold ideas or strategy to restart the normalization process by relying on prominent high-profile figures from Armenia and Turkey to offer a range of new policy ideas and suggestions, aimed at both targeting decision-makers and to help shape public opinion. In addition, this effort also helps to provide each government with a greater range of policy options and ideas, broader “space” in which to consider political considerations, and more political “cover” to encourage more compromise and flexibility.

4. NEW AVENUES & ALTERNATIVE VENUES

Although Armenia and Turkey were unable to establish official diplomatic relations to date, as originally envisioned in the signed diplomatic Protocols, both countries are engaged in “unofficial” diplomatic relations, based on their interaction within international organizations and other third-party institutional forums. Such informal contacts and diplomatic interaction between Armenia and Turkey government officials need to be strengthened in order to encourage and better prepare for the subsequent return to more official diplomatic engagement.

At the same time, there is a pronounced readiness, based on our direct experience, on both sides to continue and even increase the level of diplomatic contact, cooperation and collaboration under the auspices of international settings and institutional forums (such as through the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization or BSEC, NATO, the OSCE, Council of Europe, etc). Therefore, the RSC has launched a project aimed at leveraging such opportunities as “new avenues and alternative venues” for official, “track one” Armenian-Turkish diplomacy.

The **specific objectives** of this proposed activity focus on overcoming the absence of official diplomatic relations by utilizing other venues and avenues for official contacts, dialogue and issue-based cooperation through the use of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC), the Council of Europe (CoE), NATO and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Within this context, the RSC has expanded its cooperation with the BSEC Academic Forum and has initiated discussions with the Turkish Foreign Ministry to rely on Turkey's leading role within the G-20 to pursue new and alternative venues for diplomatic engagement.

The **expected outcome** of this proposed activity is to encourage the use of neutral international settings and institutional forums for diplomatic contact and collaboration between Armenia and Turkey in order to both prepare for the subsequent return to more official diplomatic engagement and to offer a set of policy recommendations for each side.

The RSC has already made some progress to date by utilizing the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) organization, especially given Armenia's role as a founding member of the BSEC, and we have been an active participant in previous high-level BSEC events, including the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) Organization 20th Anniversary Summit in Istanbul in June 2012.



RSC activities Media Support, Empowering Youth as an Agent of Change, Speakers' Bureau New Avenues & Alternative Venues are taking place within the framework of the programme [Support to the Armenia-Turkey Normalisation Process](#) financed by the European Union.

The contents of this report are the sole responsibility of and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union or any other Consortium partner in the Programme.