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THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN RECONCILIATION
PROCESSES: THE CASE OF TURKEY AND ARMENIA

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UZLAŞMA SÜREÇLERİNDE SİVİL TOPLUM KURULUŞLARININ ROLÜ:
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PREFACE

“Come, let us first understand each other...

Come, let us first respect each other’s pain...

Come, let us first let one another live...”

Hrant Dink¹

I encountered with the word “olsun” in my first weeks in Istanbul. This word that can be translated as ‘let it be’ perfectly shows the sociological structure of Turkey’s society. It took me a while to realise the meaning of these five letters that would influence me and my views deeply. The word “olsun” is without a doubt the lightest discrimination that harbours the heaviest past and prejudices.

In a sweet conversation with my friend’s mother the expected question ‘Nerelisin?’- ‘Where are you from?’ was not late. I was aware that I might face different reactions of people to ‘Ermenistanlıyım’ meaning ‘I am from Armenia’ but ‘olsun’ that followed my answer was new to me. It was not an insult but it hurt more than any other insult would. It was the bitter result of our dark past and the lovely mask hiding all the prejudices we have about each other behind it. That was the moment of bittersweet awakening for me, someone who had lived her life as a majority group member in Armenia. It was then when I realized how deep the ‘conflict’, the years of no communication, the lack of information about each other and the shadow of the history affected our person to person relations. Things became even more complicated when I asked the same question ‘Where are you from?’ and got the answer ‘Diyarbakir.’ (Diyarbakir, now mostly Kurdish populated city in South-East of Turkey, the most discriminated region, peoples of which encounter with ‘olsun’ often these days.) Then there was a long lasting silence between us: the Kurdish lady slowly realizing the meaning of ‘olsun’ and me all drawn to this

¹ Hrant Dink, (2014). *Two Close Peoples, Two Distant Neighbours*. London: Gomidas Institute.

contradiction. This picture perfectly shows the complexity level of Turkey-Armenia relations and the difficulties of the reconciliation process.

Armenia and Turkey, two neighbouring countries with similar cultures, shared history and with complicated current relations. One of the civil society representatives I interviewed in Gyumri said: “*Unfortunately, we don’t have the chance to choose our country’s neighbours*” stressing the need of opening the borders, improving the relations and building a dialogue between the countries and its societies. Being from Gyumri he knows all the difficulties caused by the closed border, the inability to travel to the neighbouring country which seems that close but is unreachable. The sealed border of Armenia and Turkey is one of the main obstacles of the reconciliation, of dialogue between the nations of the two countries. The word ‘unfortunately’ is the result of traumatic past that is still reflecting on the peoples of both sides, it is the trauma of the genocide following the two societies.

Many Armenians had to flee their houses in the beginning of the 20th century and prior as a result of the massacres, mass killings, and deportations aiming at an ethnic cleansing of Armenians from Anatolia² starting from the last decade of the 19th century. The Turkish-Armenian border was closed by Turkey as a reaction to Nagorno- Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.³ My family’s story bares a history connected with both Azerbaijan and the conflict causing the closure of the border and the Armenian Genocide. My family from my father’s side

² Naming the extermination of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire starting from 1915 is a problematic issue in Turkey. There are various positions as to how to name these events (genocide, deportation, massacre, extermination, war casualties, victims of epidemics, civil war, etc.). This thesis does not concentrate on this issue and the debates in Turkey on how to name it. For more info: Akçam, T. (2013). *The Young Turks’ Crime Against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; Akçam, T. (2016). *Türk Ulusal Kimliği ve Ermeni Sorunu*. Istanbul: Su Yayınları, Üngör, U.Ü. (2012). *The Making of Modern Turkey*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³ Nagorno Karabakh used to be an autonomous region of Soviet Azerbaijan with vast majority of Ethnic Armenian population. In 1987, its local self-governing body requested society authorities to be transferred from Azerbaijani to Armenian jurisdiction. Continuous ethnic clashes between Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh and Azerbaijanis led to an armed conflict, that grew into a full-scale war ending with a ceasefire in May, 1994. Despite of this, clashes between Armenians and Azerbaijanis continue causing loses to the two sides.

originally comes from Mush surroundings (nowadays a city in Turkey) which they had to flee because of rising pressures and fear in the end of the 19th century. According to the stories my grandfather used to tell me, seven brothers among which also his grand grandfather had to flee Mush leaving everything behind and create a new life in different parts of the region. Two of those brothers settled in the village of Barum (currently a part of Azerbaijan's Shamkir Region). Then, they had to flee their houses again in the end of 1980's due to the rising conflict over Nagorny Karabakh and the expected establishment of the nation-states that happened after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Having this second and fresher refuge story, the family narratives about Mush were abrupt usually quickly leading it to the second story. With this family history, the talks about Turkey, Azerbaijan, the border, Nagorny Karabakh issue, homesickness, etc. were inescapable for me. However, every time after a family narrative, my grandparents and parents would stress *"It was not always like this. We used to live together in peace. We are too similar to hate each other."* These words deriving from experience were the picture of the reality for me until I confronted people full of prejudices, fears, mistrust towards each other, hate. I knew there were more people sharing my parents' experiences and desiring for peace, I met many people in Armenia and Turkey that wanted peace and reconciliation. Then, *why wasn't this reconciliation happening yet? What were the obstacles to the reconciliation?* These were the questions I was trying to find the answers to. This was the situation that affected my entire life, like the lives of millions on the both sides of the border. This was my personal inner fight, this was the impetus for me to do my BA at the department of Turkish Studies of Yerevan State University and later on apply for a project at the Hrant Dink Foundation and start my journey in

the Armenian-Turkish⁴ reconciliation work with the best ever experience at the foundation.

I have been trying to find the answers to those two simple questions. This reconciliation would have a huge positive impact on the development of both Armenia and Turkey. It grew up to a regional problem affecting everyone around and although there are not many steps towards the reconciliation taken by the states, I believe that the civil society organizations of the two countries have done a great job so far. While there are many sources on Turkey-Armenia relations on the state level, research on the civil society organizations' role in the reconciliation process is very limited. I came up with the idea of writing my MA thesis on this topic to find answers to the above mentioned questions trying to come up with recommendations for future and to set a light to the work of civil society organization of the two countries. This thesis is inspired with the life story, devotion and mission of Hrant Dink, who struggled for a peaceful, free and just world, whose dream was to see more democratic Turkey with stronger civil society, and who did everything possible and impossible to see those —two close peoples, two distant neighbours finally reconciled.⁵

This thesis relies on a qualitative comparative analysis of interviews conducted with the representatives of civil society organizations in Armenia and Turkey. The data was collected in both Armenia and Turkey using the method of focus groups. Four focus groups were conducted in Istanbul (two), Yerevan (one) and Gyumri (one) with the participation of civil society representatives. Twenty people took part in the focus group discussions in total. I chose this method as I wanted to capture not only individuals' perspectives on reconciliation but also the interaction among them. In fact, having the civil society representatives in a group was giving a space for them to listen to each other and make a discussion bringing the most important

⁴ The term Armenian-Turkish (or, Turkish-Armenian) reconciliation is the most common one we meet in academic works. While using this term, I refer to all the nations living in the two countries, not only those with Turkish and Armenian origins.

⁵ Hrant Dink, (2014). *Two Close Peoples, Two Distant Neighbours*. London: Gomidas Institute.

arguments. Choosing this method brought its difficulties as well. Bringing civil society representatives together especially in a big city like Istanbul and give them the confidence to speak openly in front of others (especially in a complicated political situation we have today in Turkey) was not an easy task to accomplish.

As I have already mentioned there are many initiatives for reconciliation by the civil society representatives of Armenia and Turkey. Those initiatives have had an immense impact on the process of reconciliation, however the literature on this issue has remained limited. In this thesis, I aim to present the main civil society-led initiatives and activities done in the context of reconciliation with a chronological order. This will give an overall idea of the background and will help to better understand the current situation of Turkish-Armenian reconciliation from a civil society organizations' perspective. Secondly it aims to bring to light the perceptions of reconciliation of the actors actively involved in the process. It will compare the approaches of the civil society representatives highlighting the achieved level of reconciliation, obstacles and steps to be taken on its way. Finally, in this thesis, I aim to come up with recommendations to enhance civil dialogue between these countries based on the collected data.

There are no diplomatic relations between Turkey and Armenia and we can say the states of the two countries do not put much effort to change the situation. There is a gap, no relations situation among the societies too, created by a century of silence, by closed borders. I argue, that even though there are not many initiatives by states, civil society organizations have done an impressive work towards the reconciliation and dialogue building between the two societies.

This work brings to light all the important work for Armenian-Turkish reconciliation conducted by the civil society organisations of these two countries in the last decade. While there are various publications on the Armenia-Turkey relations and steps taken by the states, the academic coverage of the civil society's role in the process is scarce. This thesis presents the current picture of the reconciliation process. The research process created a platform for civil society organization's representatives who have been actively involved in the

normalization process to express their perceptions of the reconciliation, to bring the obstacles they see on the way of it and share the steps they think need to be taken to achieve reconciliation. Based on this research, this thesis presents the perception and viewpoints of the most active CSO representatives in the field. Another point that makes this work valuable, is that it was conducted in the two countries and is a comparative work reflecting both sides. The fieldwork was conducted in the mother tongues of the respondents (Turkish and Armenian), so the representatives could express their ideas easily. As I speak both Armenian and Turkish fluently, there is low probability to have mistranslations and misunderstandings, this makes this work more trustable.

I would like to thank all the people who were next to me and supported my journey through the complicated reconciliation process between Turkey and Armenia. This was a work I enjoyed greatly. However, it would not be possible to accomplish this thesis without the generous support and help of a group of people. I will use this opportunity to thank them.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ATNP: Armenia-Turkey Normalisation Process

BSEC: Black Sea Economic Cooperation

CF: Civilitas Foundation

CRRC: Caucasus Resource Research Center

CSO: Civil Society Organization

EPF: Eurasia Partnership Foundation

EU: European Union

GONGO: Governmentally organized non-governmental organization

HASA: Sociological and Marketing Research center

hCa: Helsinki Citizens' Assembly

HDF: Hrant Dink Foundation

ICT: Information and communication technologies

ICTJ: International Center for Transitional Justice

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

OED: Oxford English Dictionary

PJC: Public Journalism Club

RSC: Regional Studies Center

TABDC: Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council

TARC: Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission

TEPAV: The Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey

TESEV: Turkish Economic and Social Studies

UN: United Nations

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ABSTRACT

The conflict between Turkey and Armenia has lasted for around twenty-five years. Since then, several attempts on the state level, and even more on civil society level have been made to achieve a reconciliation. Nevertheless, in this period, the literature focused more on the political attempts compared to the ones carried out by the civil society organizations. This thesis aims to fill this gap by presenting CSOs' perception of reconciliation, their evaluation of the process, the achieved level of reconciliation. It shows what the main obstacles preventing a bigger achievement in the reconciliation process are and what should be done to remove those obstacles in the eyes of CSO representatives involved in this process. The thesis relies on a qualitative comparative research by conducting four focus groups with twenty CSO representatives in Istanbul, Yerevan and Gyumri. This thesis demonstrates that, in the case of Turkish-Armenian reconciliation, CSOs do not work in a vacuum. They operate within a broader political context, which might facilitate or complicate their efforts towards reconciliation. However, even under negative political atmosphere, CSOs could succeed in creating dialogue among societies, while their impact remains more limited than they aspire.

ÖZET

Türkiye ile Ermenistan arasındaki uzlaşmazlık süreci yaklaşık yirmi beş yıldır sürmektedir. O zamandan beri, devletler düzeyinde uzlaşmaya yönelik çeşitli girişimlerin yanında sivil toplum kuruluşlarının bu amaca yönelik çabaları çok daha fazladır. Ancak bu süreçte akademik alan yazının STK'ların girişimlerinden ziyade siyasi adımlara odaklandığı görülmektedir. Bu tez akademik alan yazındaki bu açığı kapatmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu tez çalışması bu amaçla STK'ların uzlaşma algısını, uzlaşma sürecini nasıl değerlendirdiklerini, bu süreçte varılan noktaya ilişkin bakış açılarını ve uzlaşmanın önündeki ana engellere ve bu engelleri ortadan kaldırmaya ilişkin algılarını ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu tez çalışması niteliksel karşılaştırmalı araştırma yöntemiyle gerçekleştirilen İstanbul, Erivan ve Gümrü'deki yirmi STK temsilcisinden oluşan dört odak grup görüşmesine dayanmaktadır. Bu çerçevede tez Türkiye-Ermenistan uzlaşma süreci örneğinde STK'ların bir boşlukta çalışmadığını ve daha geniş bir siyasi bağlamın etkisi altında faaliyet gösterdiklerini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu bağlam, onların uzlaşmaya yönelik çabalarını kolaylaştırabildiği gibi karmaşıktırabilmektedir. Fakat olumsuz bir siyasi atmosferde dahi STK'lar toplumlar arasında diyalog yaratmayı başarabilmektedir, ancak etkileri onların umduğundan daha sınırlı kalmaktadır.

FIRST CHAPTER

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. CIVIL SOCIETY'S ROLE IN THE RECONCILIATION

Reconciliation has been a notable part of discourses of conflict management in a number of conflict situations around the world. And the concept of reconciliation suffers from a lack of clarity. Reconciliation is even called “one of the most abused words in recent history” by one of scholars (Meierhenrich, 2008, p. 197).

What does reconciliation mean? According to The Oxford English Dictionary (or, OED), the first usage of the term goes back to 1386 meaning “action of reconciling persons, or the result of this; the fact of being reconciled.” In different periods of history, the term various states: “[r]eunion of a person to church” (1625) and “[t]he purification, or restoration of sacred uses, of a church, etc., after desecration or pollution” (1533). As clearly seen these meanings have characteristics of religious interpretation. Another meaning used later in the history is “action of bringing to agreement, concord, or harmony” (Meierhenrich, 2008, p. 197). Today, “the restoration of friendly relations” and “the action of making one view or belief compatible with another are the first two meanings appearing in OED for the term reconciliation. The interpretation of the term is diverse in history, it also depends on the case of conflict. And in the case study discussed in this paper, we will see that the interpretation of the term by different actors changes dramatically not only from country to country (Armenia and Turkey in this case) but also among cities, despite the fact that these actors - representatives of civil society organisations, are those dealing with the same conflict, with the same reconciliation process between Armenia and Turkey.

Reconciliation is often seen as a positive process towards accommodation of political differences, and Little brings the argument that there are two main issues on the way of understanding the political implication of this concept. The first one is the need to specifically and deeply understand the meaning of reconciliation, and,

second one is to open “the ideological and linguistic presuppositions that reconciliation invokes within a specific context” (Little, 2011, p. 83).

According to Meierhenrich (2008), currently, mostly apology, forgiveness, and reconciliation are taken together by the scholars working on the topic. And of these three terms and concepts, reconciliation seems to be the most baffling. However, it is not easy to understand whether reconciliation is the result of apology and forgiveness, or it is independent of this two. These questions that Meierhenrich raises are part of the discussions over the term reconciliation during the focus group I conducted with civil society representatives especially in Yerevan (p. 197).

Bearing these questions in mind, one scholar suggests his own interpretation of reconciliation stating the following: “reconciliation refers to the accommodation of former adversaries through mutually conciliatory means, requiring both forgiveness and mercy” (Meierhenrich, 2008, p. 197). And there are diverse ideas also on how to achieve reconciliation, on what steps are to be taken in order to achieve reconciliation. Mentioning that the term reconciliation is very complex, Little, citing Thompson writes that ‘reconciliation is achieved when the harm done by injustice to relations of respect and trust that ought to exist . . . has been *repaired or compensated* for by the perpetrator in such a way that this harm is no longer regarded as standing in the way of establishing or re-establishing these relations’ (Little, 2011, p. 84). This version of understanding of the concept was widely used during the focus groups conducted with Turkish civil society representatives in Istanbul.

In his abovementioned work, Meierhenrich claims that reconciliation requires adversaries to share a present that is non-repetitive (p. 213). In this respective, it is worth to mention the specific types of human relationships that Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa’s (TRC) reports define are necessary for reconciliation. Among those relationship types, there are: individuals with themselves; relationships between victims; relationships between survivors and perpetrators; relationships within families, between neighbours and within and between communities; relationships within different institutions, between different

generations, between racial and ethnic groups, between workers and management and, above all, between the beneficiaries of apartheid and those who have been disadvantaged by it (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, 1999, 350–51).

In Turkey-Armenia reconciliation case, the establishment of “relationships between survivors and perpetrators” and new generations of both societies are important and this relation is cut by the closed Turkish-Armenian border, by no diplomatic relations between the states, no recognition of the humanitarian crimes perpetrated against Armenians ending with an ethnic cleansing as genocide. One way of rebuilding the bridge between two societies are civil society initiatives. Civil society organisations’ role in the reconciliation processes is undeniable. Especially in cases like Turkey-Armenia, the fact that diplomatic ties are missing leaves the whole responsibility to civil society organisations.

1.2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The complicated phenomena of wars and conflicts have affected societies since the beginning of the history of humanity. Even though there is no on-going, violent conflict between Armenia and Turkey, a final normalization of relations has not been reached yet. The conflict lasting for more than two decades has become topic of many academic publications, and various researches have been conducted on the topic. However, while there are numerous sources on Turkish-Armenian relations at the state level, the literature on the dialogue at the level of CSOs is scarce.

In this chapter, I will review this limited literature examining the role of civil society organizations in the reconciliation process between Armenia and Turkey. Taking into consideration the fact that the written sources on CSOs' role in Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation are limited, I will also rely on the literature on the same topic in different conflict and reconciliation cases. The review of the literature on different conflict cases will be based on the questions I discuss in the thesis to present different experiences of various conflict cases.

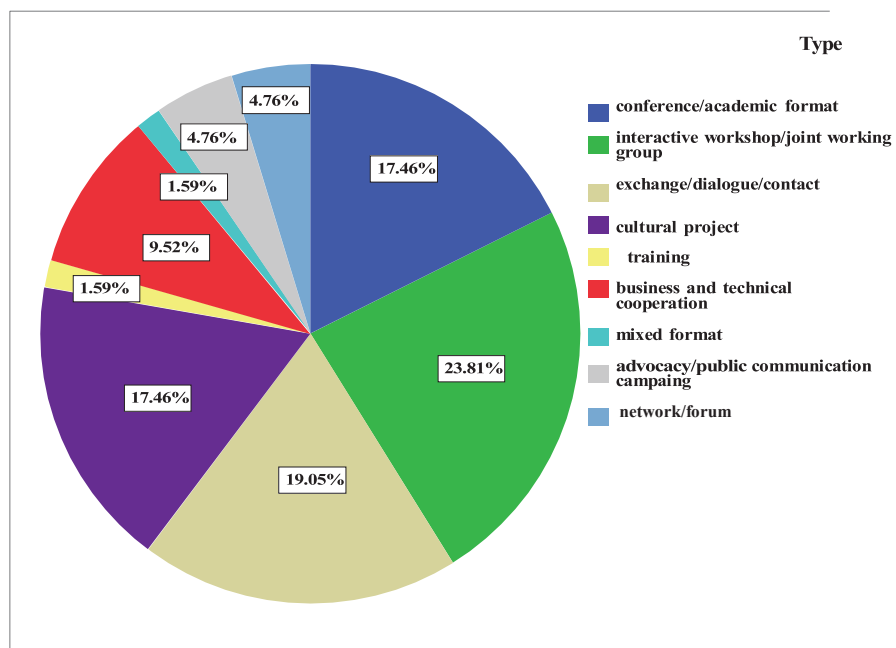
The research entitled "Reflecting on the Two Decades of Bridging the Divide: Taking Stock of Turkish-Armenian Civil Society Activities" was conducted by TEPAV in the beginning of 2012. This is a comprehensive work that first of all provides the chronological developments in Turkish-Armenian reconciliation both on state and civil society levels. The researchers categorized the civil society initiatives first according to the level of representatives involved in the interaction, and secondly according to the stage the activity was realized. They mention two stages: pre-negotiation and negotiation stages (Çuhadar & Punsmann, 2012, p. 14).

The researchers created a map of the existing civil society initiatives and conducted interviews with the practitioners of those initiatives to measure their perception of the reconciliation process. The interviews conducted in the two countries in 2010 and 2011 include roughly 90 per cent of the practitioners actively involved in the civil dialogue. In addition, several interviews were conducted with representatives of Turkish and Armenian diasporas in the US involved in the civil society dialogue

(Çuhadar & Punsmann, 2012, p. 22). The fact that the research includes most of the practitioners including the ones from the diaspora of both countries raises the level of the study's reliability.

The research looks at the perception of the conflict among civil society representatives and analyses the challenges they encountered in the normalization process. The researchers come up with suggestions of project types that need to be conducted to accelerate the process of reconciliation. They also examine the types of the projects already conducted in past and categorize them. The Figure 1.1 presented below demonstrates the types of projects carried out by CSOs.

Figure 1.1 Types of Projects



Source (Çuhadar & Punsmann, 2012, p. 29)

According to this figure, interactive workshops and establishment of joint working groups are the most common activity type used in Turkish-Armenian reconciliation by CSOs (Çuhadar & Punsmann, 2012, p. 29).

Another figure presented in the research demonstrates the breakdown of funding available for civil society initiatives between Armenia and Turkey. This will be presented later with examples of funding in other conflict cases. The research also finds that Turkish-Armenian civil society initiatives are mainly relationship-oriented and are less outcome-oriented (Çuhadar & Punsmann, 2012, p. 37). The research also touches the topics of the involvement of Turkey's Armenians and diaspora Armenians in the mutual projects, which are other important aspects of the issue.

Another important piece of literature on this topic is the book entitled *Breaking the Ice: The Role of Civil Society and Media in Turkey-Armenia Relations* by Susae Elenchenny and Narod Maraşlian released in 2012. After an introduction of Turkey-Armenian relations background, the authors discuss Turkish-Armenian reconciliation using specific projects on certain topics such as: youth exchange, journalism exchange, media reporting bus tour, TV talk shows. According to the source, civil society organizations have sustained the relations between the two societies. The authors come up with recommendations for different groups like: civil society organizations, for Turkey and Armenia (the states), the media, third-party countries. They recommend CSO's involved in Turkey-Armenia reconciliation process to involve more students in mutual dialogue projects, stating that it would "positively contribute to the interactions between the communities (Elenchenny & Maraşlian, 2012, p. 31). The other advice that researchers bring up in the source, is the implementation of initiative ideas rather than the repetition of the same projects. They recommend CSOs to implement more people who are less interested in Turkish-Armenian relations to enable them to learn more about various aspects of the neighbouring country. The authors believe that CSOs of the two countries should work mutually on every project, especially in the creation phase to prevent any complications that may appear due to the differences between Armenia and Turkey.

A report released by Caucasus Resource Research Center (or, CRRS) titled *Towards a Shared Vision of Normalization of Armenian-Turkish Relations* is an

analysis based on public opinion survey. This source is very important as it provides evidence-based information on Armenians' (based in Armenia) attitude towards Turkey-Armenia relations, the normalization, border opening and other key issues. Knowing this and having the evaluation of the reconciliation's role in society by CSO representatives (which will be presented in Methodology Chapter) will give a broader and better understanding of the situation.

This survey was conducted in December 13-25, 2014 with participation of 1164 adults of randomly sampled households. The questions were on five different aspects: "overall awareness of Armenian-Turkish relations, regulation of Armenian-Turkish relations, attitudes towards Turkey, recognition of the Armenian Genocide and commemoration behaviour, and Armenia-Turkey rapprochement" (CRRS, 2015, p. 9).

Regarding the awareness of Armenian-Turkish relations in Armenian society, the report states that 79 per cent of the total number of respondents are fairly or very interested: very interested (26 per cent), fairly interested (53 per cent), not very interested (11 per cent), not at all interested (10 per cent) (CRRS, 2015, p. 11). However, according to the answers only 55 per cent are aware of the current relationship, which means that the rate of interest is higher than awareness. Concerning the trust, the research states five most mentioned groups in Turkey. It is easy to see that the level of trust in society is very low: 83 per cent of the respondents believe that the opinions of Turkish politicians are absolutely untrustworthy (CRRS, 2015, p. 13). The interesting fact is that 73 per cent of the survey participants does not trust civil society representatives in Turkey, which is lower than the rate of trust in Turkish politicians but still quite high in absolute numbers. Hrant Mikaelian, in his paper titled *Nationalistic Discourse in Armenia*, did a content analysis of the media and nationalistic organizations. According to this paper released in 2011, the nationalistic part of the society in Armenia refers more to the Turkish society representatives who call for the deepening the conflict with Armenia. In the meantime, the advocates of dialogue (in this case mostly civil

society representative) are seen as individuals who “are trying to mislead people” (Mikaelian, 2011, p. 8).

Coming to the interests about Turkish-Armenian relations, the most mentioned answers are “the recognition the Armenian Genocide” and “the opening of Armenian-Turkish border”. “Armenian-Turkish diplomatic relations” come later (CRRS, 2015, p. 13). 51 per cent of the respondents approve the opening of Turkish-Armenian border. The population of the regions bordering Turkey are more willing towards the opening of the border, than those of other regions. This is a difference we will see in the responses of CSO representatives that took part in the focus groups conducted as part of this thesis project. For CSO representatives of Gyumri (a bordering city with Turkey) the opening of the border was a bigger priority than for CSO representatives of Yerevan.

Having more than 1000 peoples’ opinions in the survey, conducting it in different regions make this research important providing the general picture of the Armenian society’s approach towards the normalization and Turkish-Armenian relations in general. The data provided in the report might be a background information to better understand the research I conduct in this thesis

A research by Turkish Economic and Social Studies-TESEV from Turkey and Sociological and Marketing Research Center-HASA from Armenia titled *Armenian-Turkish Citizens’ Mutual Perceptions and Dialogue Project* was finalized in 2004. This quantitative research was simultaneously carried out in turkey and Armenia aiming to determine the level of knowledge/lack of the knowledge of the two societies about each other, the mutual perception of two societies and their ‘differences’, common denominators, and the expectations of Armenian and Turkish citizens from each other and the state, the society and the media (Kentel & Poghosyan, 2004, p. 6).

The questionnaire was carried out throughout different provinces and regions of Turkey and Armenia which is a proof that the ideas of different society layers are presented in the research. The research touches also the topic of Turkish-Armenian

normalization process in some of the questions: “Armenian-Turkish Business Development Council is taking steps towards cooperation. They feel, for example, that Mount Ararat and Ani Ruins could become a “region of peace” between Armenian and Turkish peoples. What do you think about these efforts?”, “Which one of the following should be most emphasized for developing relations between Armenia and Turkey to the advantage of both countries?” and “What is the main obstacles to the normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia?”. As for the last question, the most common responds in Armenia were “Armenian question/genocide” (81.7 per cent), “Armenian/Azerbaijani relationships/problem of Artsakh” (9.8 per cent). Turkish respondents mentioned “Genocide claims on the Armenian side” and “land” as the biggest obstacles (19 and 12.1 per cent accordingly). 23.7 percent of Armenian and 37.7 per cent of Turkish respondents are positive about the steps towards cooperation by Armenian-Turkish Business Development Council. 74.8 per cent of respondents in Armenia and 57.8 per cent in Turkey think that “Diplomatic relations between the states” should be emphasized, commercial relations is the second most mentioned answer coming with 6.1 per cent (Armenia) and 13.5 per cent (Turkey) of the respondents. Interestingly, in the beginning of the 21st century, when this research was conducted only 0.2 per cent of Armenian and 7.3 per cent of Turkish society mentioned NGO cooperation as a step developing Armenia-Turkey relations in advantage of the both sides (Kentel & Poghosyan, 2004, p. 39).

Factors Affecting the Normalization Process in Conflict Countries

The last decades have mostly witnessed the growing participation of CSOs in dialogue building initiatives between societies. However, the number of the obstacles that civil society/civil dialogue and CSOs face is not decreasing. The factors that somehow affect the reconciliation process in conflict countries vary depending on the countries and the cases of the conflict. Below, I will discuss the obstacles that appears in normalization processes of different conflicts, such as the

conflicts in Cyprus, Moldova-Transnistria, Palestine and Israel, Armenia and Turkey.

While one of the biggest factors slowing down the normalization process in Cyprus is the language difference, in Moldovan-Transnistrian case the society perception of the civic engagement, volunteering, civil dialogue was the factor causing the most difficulties for CSO initiatives. Another problem in Transnistrian conflict is the dependency of NGOs on the government. One study shows the following: “In July 2009, 2,310 NGOs were registered in local bodies of Justice of Transnistria... many can still be called “GONGO” governmentally organized NGOs” (Venturi, 2011, p.11).

When it comes to Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is necessary to mention the current political context making it impossible for people from both societies to meet. This context is described as follows: “the inability of bringing the people of the West Bank and Gaza to meet Israelis because of travel restrictions – the separation barrier, the roadblocks and checkpoints; the inability of Israelis to move inside the West Bank and Gaza Strip for the same reasons” (Salem, p. 1). There is the problem of finding a common venue for dialogue meetings for Palestine and Israel. The same issue is mentioned in another study: “Any joint activity requires permits that are not always easily available. There are attempts to organize meetings in neutral places but these are quite scarce because of the wall/fence. Other attempts to get together include activities abroad, but these have their own problems, in addition to their heavy costs” (Pundak et al., nd, p. 50).

Influence of the external factors on the civil society dialogue in conflict countries

The reconciliation cases of different countries show that the influence coming from international stakeholders has a significant role in reconciliation processes. The importance of international stakeholders has been noted in a study on Cyprus: “This overview shows that the international system, and notably the UN, has gradually

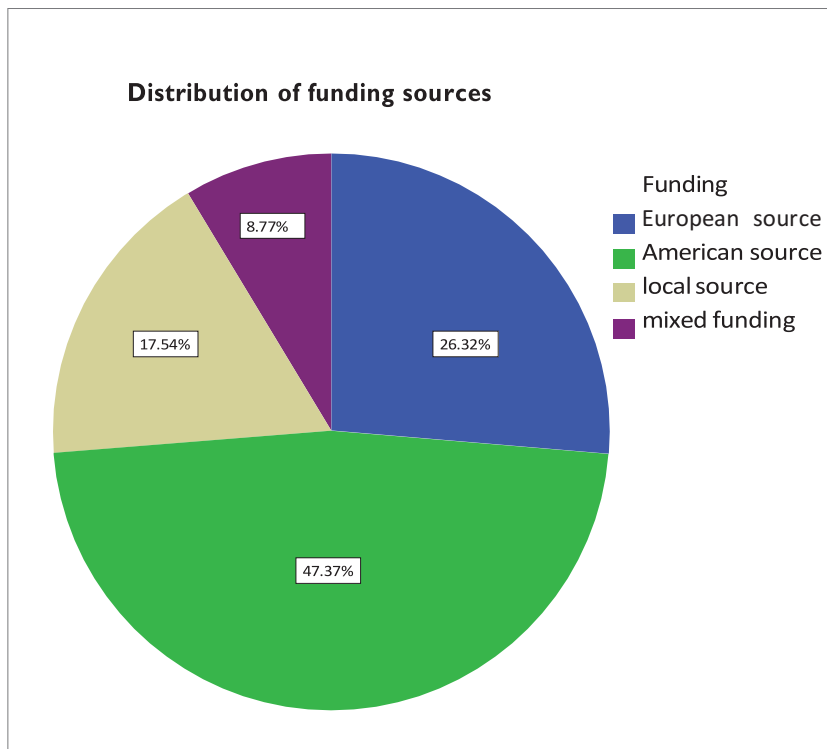
come to recognize the positive role of civil society organizations in any feasible and sustainable prospect of conflict transformation in war-torn societies” (The Cyprus Review, 2009, p. 45). It is clearly seen how much importance the Cypriot civil society gives to the presence of the UN in the normalization process.

In Moldovan-Transnistrian case we see that international stakeholders, donors “touching” the question from the Moldovan side, as Transnistria is not a recognized country and thus, it is difficult to work there. The "Department for International Development" (DFID) of the British Embassy based in Chijinău was one of the most active in the conflict resolution sector in the last years (Venturi, 2011, p. 22).

In Armenian-Turkish case, the CSOs’ dependence on external funds to initiate dialogue projects is a fact, which was also frequently mentioned by the respondents of the focus groups conducted in both Turkey and Armenia. According to the data provided in TEPAV’s report, around 73 per cent of the Turkish-Armenian reconciliation funding is external. This figure is the naked proof that the CSOs working on Turkish-Armenian reconciliation are dependent on external funding, while local funding is only 17.54 per cent.

The Figure 1.2 shown below demonstrates the funding structure of Turkish-Armenian CSO initiatives:

Figure 1.2 Funding Structure of Turkish-Armenian Track Two Initiatives



Source (Çuhadar and Punsmann, 2012, p. 38).

Back then, the main funder of the Armenian-Turkish civil society initiatives was the United States of America, which is followed by the European Union's Armenia-Turkey Normalization Program. Domestic funding (originating either from Turkey or Armenia) is only 17.54 per cent.

Today, the main funder of the Armenian-Turkish civil society initiatives is EU with Armenia-Turkey Normalization Program. However, the general picture of the funding sources is more or less the same with a dominant external funding.

In the four conflict cases mentioned in this section, we see that the obstacles to reconciliation in general and CSO initiatives in particular are diverse and context dependent. It is hard to deny that the role of CSOs and/or civil society is big in many different reconciliation cases, particularly in Turkish-Armenian case. However,

there are diverse obstacles for CSOs work including but not limited to external funding, finding a common space, language barriers and closed borders.

1.3. TURKISH-ARMENIAN RECONCILIATION PROCESS

1.3.1. Historical Background

Armenian-Turkish conflict is different from many other conflicts waiting for resolution: there is no on-going violent conflict at the moment between the two neighbouring countries, and there is a small probability to have it in the near future. However, the violent past and the need of facing it and dealing with its legacy have been hanging on the relations of Armenia and Turkey and reconciliation attempts between the two countries. In the case of this specific conflict, preventing violence is not the matter, but it is more about reconstructing the broken relationships and trust building between the two neighbouring states and among their peoples. The closed border between the two countries also has its negative effect on Turkey Armenia reconciliation process.

Being among the first countries to recognize the independence of The Republic of Armenia in 1991, Turkey closed its 328 km long land border with Armenia in 1993, in reaction to the ongoing armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh region. Turkey recognized the independence of Armenia on 16 December, 1991 as stated on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey (www.mfa.gov.tr). At the time, Turkey was gaining a new neighbour. Turkish ambassador to Moscow, Volkan Vural, travelled to Yerevan to discuss bilateral relations in Spring, 1991 even before Armenia declared its independence. Yet, in over twenty-six years that have passed since then, no diplomatic relations have been established between the neighbouring Turkey and Armenia. Despite the lack of the diplomatic relations and despite the closed border, official attitudes of these countries towards rapprochement were not always negative.

As mentioned above, the attitudes of Turkey and Armenia towards official normalization of the relations were more positive in the beginning of 1990s, these

efforts have continued on and off till now. Taking into consideration the fact that the two countries were separated from each other by the USSR border since 1920 the notions about each other were based on the coverage in media and history books, which were mostly negative. Many researchers agree that the closed border between Armenia and Turkey is a significant barrier to human interactions and prevents direct human and business interactions (Punsmann, 2012, p. 27).

Turkish public opinion was largely and negatively influenced by the killings of Turkish diplomats by ASALA (Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia) throughout the 1970s and 1980s. On the other hand, the attempts for international recognition of 1915 events as Armenian Genocide has become a foreign policy goal more of the Armenian diaspora and less of the young Armenian Republic. These steps towards the international recognition of the events that took lives of around 1.5 million Armenians in the Ottoman Empire as genocide were and are even nowadays received as acts of hostility against Turkey. With a very limited freedom of expression along with the above-mentioned atmosphere in public, the political climate in 1990s was mainly negative in Turkey. This was making the work of already weak civil society even harder in Turkey, while the civil society of the young Armenian republic was still spreading its first seeds at that time.

According to The Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey's (or, TEPAV) report, *Track One*⁶ activities between the neighbouring countries accelerated in 1999 and the prospects of Turkish-Armenian normalization stayed on the horizon in 2000-2001 (Çuhadar & Punsmann, 2012, p. 17).

⁶ With the attempts to find the best methods of resolving conflicts, a variety of types of diplomacy have been identified. Nowadays terms such as "formal diplomacy", "Track One Diplomacy", "Track Two Diplomacy" and "Multi-Track Diplomacy" are common in conflict resolution vocabulary (For more see: Mapendere J. (2000). Track One and a Half Diplomacy and the Complementarity of Tracks, *Culture of Peace Online Journal*, 2 (1) 66-81). The term "track-one diplomacy" refers to official governmental diplomacy, or "a technique of state action, is essentially a process whereby communications from one government go directly to the decision-making apparatus of another" (For more see: Allen S. (2003). Track I Diplomacy. Beyond Intractability. Conflict Information Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder. URL: <<http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/track1-diplomacy>>).

The beginning of 2000s was more fruitful for Turkish and Armenian NGO collaboration as well. Göksel relates this to the following developments: “The Karabagh-related anger within Turkey lost some of its vigor, NGOs were becoming stronger, Turkey’s candidacy for EU membership was admitted, Ankara was trying to normalize the problematic relations with its neighbouring countries” (Göksel, 2010, p. 73). Even though Turkey solved its problems with neighbouring Greece and Syria at the time, it never managed to set diplomatic relations with Armenia or opened the border with it, which was sealed since 1993. I will discuss later the development of human rights protection in Turkey that EU integration process brought with it, how the positive atmosphere that made many academics and intellectuals think that immense positive changes will be made in Turkish-Armenian normalization process by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) evaporated recently, how the political atmosphere in Turkey once again turned negative for human rights activists and organisations.

The above-mentioned progress in Track One Diplomacy between Armenia and Turkey was put at risk when Members of the National Assembly, the lower house of the French parliament, agreed on the single-sentence bill, which says: "France publicly recognizes the Armenian genocide of 1915." Then Turkish Prime Minister, Bulent Ecevit said that this would harm Turkish-French relations: “We have deep political and economic relations with France. These relations will certainly be affected.” (<https://www.rferl.org/a/1095555.html>, access: 08.08.2017).

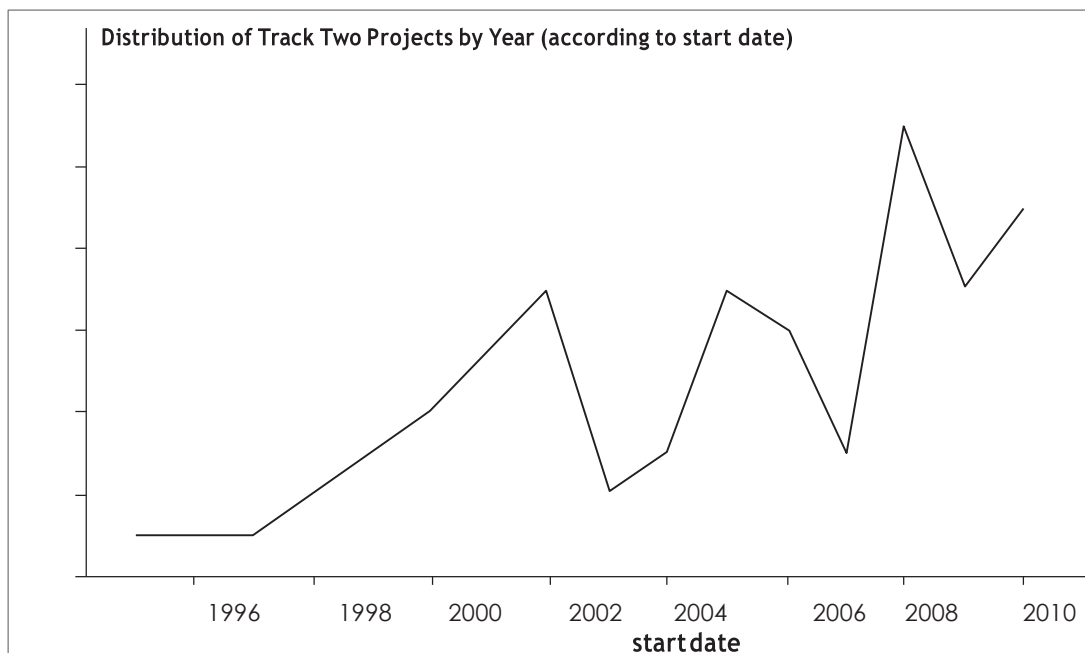
Although this affected the rapprochement process between Turkish and Armenian states, the Track Two Diplomacy kept on accelerating. Track Two diplomacy has emerged in the last couple of decades as a complementary method to official state-based diplomacy. Track Two Diplomacy is usually defined as intervention in which representatives from communities in conflict are brought together this time by an unofficial third party (Çuhadar&Punsmann, 2012, p. 12). It is a bottom-up process, where solutions to the conflict are proposed and built by civil society’s resources and agencies and are aiming to contribute the political/formal solution process:

“Track Two activities take a different path. They aim to influence the public, which will eventually put pressure on decision-makers” (Pundak et al., p. 47).

Track Two creates contact, communication, and cooperation between civil society representatives who come together to discuss their differences, the conditions that gave rise to conflict, “develop joint strategies for addressing shared problems through reciprocal efforts. Track two contributes to the development of mutual understanding with the goal of transferring insights to decision-makers and shaping public opinion” (Phillips, 2012, p. 15).

The rise of Track Two initiatives in the beginning of the 21st century can be easily noticed in the Figure 1.3 provided below, which was prepared originally by TEPAV.

Figure 1. 3 Distribution of Track Two Projects by Years (According to Start Date)



Source: (Çuhadar&Punsmann, 2012, p. 15.)

We can clearly see that Track Two activities show growth between 2001-2002 despite the slowdown in Track One Diplomacy between Armenia and Turkey.

Track two projects took a more systematic shape with financing from the US State Department, managed by the American University's Center for Global Peace in Washington, DC. More than a dozen projects were implemented until 2005 among which it is worth to mention Turkish-Armenia Reconciliation Commission (or, TARC).⁷

Before passing to the chapter on civil society initiatives that enhanced the process of reconciliation between Armenia and Turkey, it is very essential to mention the person who hugely contributed to the reconciliation process both with his actions, and surprisingly for many, even after his assassination: Hrant Dink. In the days when only a few people were touching the topic of Armenia-Turkey relations, Hrant Dink was the one to succeed in the transformation of the perception of the topic. Born in Malatya (Anatolia), he spent years in Istanbul's orphanages. After Turkey closed its border with Armenia in 1993, the issue of normalizing Turkey-Armenia relations became more important. In 1996, Hrant Dink and a group of friends founded Agos to "report about the problems of the Armenians of Turkey to the public (<http://www.agos.com.tr>). Agos became the first newspaper in the republican era to be in Turkish and Armenian. As Hrant Dink was sure that justice for Armenians passed through "the democratization of Turkey and the granting of democratic rights to Kurds, women and others", as it is mentioned in the forward to English edition of Dink's "Two Close Peoples, Two Distant Neighbours" authored by Thomas de Waal. So, it is not surprising that Agos has been focusing on "democratization, minority rights, coming to terms with the past, the protection and development of pluralism in Turkey" (<http://www.agos.com.tr/en/home>). Hrant Dink was targeted for his articles, receiving death threats. Despite the serious threats, he didn't receive any protection from that state and on January 19, 2007

⁷ It is impossible to reach the official website of TARC (www.tarc.info) as it is out of service now. The most trustful source of the commission is the book of David Philips, who was the moderator of TARC. For more see: David L. Philips. (2005). *Unsilencing the past: Track Two Diplomacy and Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation* (Oxford: Berghahn Books).

was assassinated by a young nationalist in front of the office of Agos (<http://www.hurriyet.com.tr>).

Society's reaction to the assassination of Hrant Dink was impressive. Tens of thousands came for Hrant Dink's funeral from all over Turkey. There were placards held saying "We are all Hrant Dink" and for the first time "We are all Armenians". Tens of thousands of people stood there against the injustice. After the assassination of Dink, a couple of intellectuals from Turkey initiated "I Apologize" online campaign, the website⁸ of which was opened in December of 2008 reaching tens of thousands signatories. With his death, Hrant Dink brought a dramatic change on social level. As someone who struggled for justice and democratization for his entire life, Hrant Dink made change both during his life and after his assassination. His assassination brought together thousands of people making them think about the Armenian Issue and started slowly breaking the taboo on it.

1.3.2. Civil Society Initiatives Towards Reconciliation

There were many civil society initiatives toward Turkey-Armenia reconciliation process since the establishment of the republic of Armenia. Starting from mid 1990's civil society initiatives were taken in different aspects. Below, I will bring the most effective examples of civil society initiatives in Turkey-Armenia normalization process. Then, I will discuss the CSO's that have been actively involved in the process.

1.3.2.1. The Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission

⁸ Currently, it is impossible to reach the website of the campaign "I Apologize"-<http://www.ozurdiliyoruz.com/>. According to different sources more than 30 thousands people signed the online campaign.

The foundation of Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission was announced on July 9, 2001. The group, comprised of Turkish and Armenian members (both from Armenia and diaspora), held meetings in Vienna prior to the public announcement of the commission's existence. The U.S. Department of State had a key role in the creation of the commission the chairman of which was an American diplomat, David Phillips. Among founding members of TARC were names like former Turkish Foreign Minister İlder Türkmen, former Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs Özdem Sanberk, former Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs Gündüz Aktan, among Armenian members were former Foreign Minister Alexander Arzoumanian, Ambassador David Hovhanissyan, former Chairman of the Armenian-American Assembly Van Z. Krikorian and others (Phillips, 2012, p. 118).

In his article, Haroutiun Khachatrian states that both Armenian and Turkish governments were aware of the existence of the commission before its public announcement. Besides, Aybars Görgülü claims that although TARC was seen as a civil society initiative, it was enjoying a political strength (Görgülü, 2008, p. 24). H. Khachatrian mentions about the public criticism that appeared in Armenian society mentioning that the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (better known as Dashnaktsutyun), was particularly critical about the commission. “Nobody is allowed to circumvent the issue of Turkey's recognition of the Armenian Genocide under the guise of ‘reconciling’ the two nations, which jeopardizes the process of the international recognition of the Genocide. There can be no reconciliation without the recognition of the historical truth” was declared in the statement released by Dashnaktsutyun after the official announcement of TARC’s foundation (Khachatrian, www.tol.org).

Along with the criticism of Dashnaktsutyun in Armenia on the ground of Genocide recognition, I should mention that in 2001, TARC applied to the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) to “facilitate the provision of an independent legal analysis on the applicability of the United Nations Genocide Convention to events which occurred during the early twentieth century.” The analysis was presented in the beginning of 2003. It was said in the statement of ICTJ: “...The

Events, viewed collectively, can thus be said to include all the elements of the crime of genocide as defined by the Convention, and legal scholars as well as historians, politicians, journalists and other people would be justified in continuing to so describe them” (www.armenian-genocide.org). The commission was concentrated in finding the issues causing the conflict and find mutual formulas to overcome those issues. One of the priorities of the commission was the opening of the Turkish-Armenian border, which would be a big step toward diplomatic relations establishment. However, this goal was not reached as the discussions related to the use of the term genocide in both countries and Azerbaijan’s influence on Turkish politics did not leave space for possible positive steps.

Being envisioned to work for one year, TARC continued working over three years announcing about its dissolution in April, 2004 in Moscow. The commission released recommendations for both Turkish and Armenian governments among which was also the opening of Turkish-Armenian border. Even though the governments of the two countries were unwilling to change their approach to the opening of the border, one could easily notice a change in public opinion. This tendency is mostly noticed in the areas close to the Turkish-Armenian border: like Kars and Gyumri. The president of the Kars Chamber of Commerce, Mehmet Yilmaz, who had visited Armenia twice, said: "We want to open the border - it will mean jobs for everyone. Armenians will visit Kars to shop for foodstuffs and textiles" (Naegele, www.rferl.org). Bordering city of Gyumri, the second largest city in Armenia, was on economical fall after the collapse of Soviet Union, trying to recover from 1988 earthquake. Because of the high rates of unemployment in Gyumri, the citizens were willing to the opening of the border. Representatives of the business elite of Yerevan also had statements in favour of the opening of the Turkish-Armenian border. One of them, the president of SIL Group and MP of the time Khachatur Sukiasyan (also known by his nickname “Grzo”) said in 2005: “After the opening of the border gates, we may have an opportunity for joint growth and development... Let us act together to make this region grow. There are problems even between the brothers. The most important problem between us is the opening of borders. We are neighbors, let us act as neighbors.” (Goshgarian, 2005,

p.8). As we can see from the public statement of important actors, the idea of open borders was positively accepted in the public of the neighbouring countries though obviously the inducements were different. Nevertheless, these aspirations could not be realised, and the Turkish Armenian border remains closed until now.

1.3.2.2. The Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council

As we can clearly see in Figure 1.3, there is an increase of Track Two activities in 1997, which is mostly associated with the establishment of The Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council (or, TABDC) in May, 1997. The council co-chaired by Kaan Soyak and Arsen Ghazarian, calls itself the ‘only link between the Armenian and Turkish public and private sectors’. TABDC aims to promote and facilitate cooperation between the business circles of the neighbouring countries, Armenia and Turkey, to support the companies of the two countries to strengthen their ties, to establish direct trade links. (www.esiweb.org).

Institutionalization of economic relations between Armenia and Turkey was on the agenda of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation’s (BSEC) summit held in Istanbul, in 1997. Thus, the Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council was established. However, as it was not possible to integrate TABDC into the Foreign Economic Relations Board, the council started its activities without having an official status.

The projects carried out and supported by TABDC, were aiming to reach one objective: the opening of the Turkish-Armenian border. TABDC set foundation for projects such as the restoration of Armenian Church (The Holy Cross) on Akhtamari Island in Van. The restoration of the church was realized with the contribution of the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism and it was opened as a museum on 29 March, 2007 (Görgülü, 2008, p. 27). TABDC played big role in arranging the supply of earthquake aid from Armenia to Turkey in August and October of 1999 (Çuhadar&Punsmann, 2012, p. 17).

Looking at the picture of chronological development of Track Two initiatives, it is easy to notice the big upsurge period in 2008. That was the period of the negotiation

initiative between the states called “football diplomacy” which later led to the signature of Zurich Protocols.

Abdullah Gul, then the president of Turkey, sent a warm congratulation letter to Serzh Sargsyan who was elected as the president of Armenia in controversial presidential elections of 2008. Gul’s statement was as follows: “I hope your new position will offer an opportunity for the normalization of relations between the Turkish and Armenian people” (www.esiweb.org). In response, Serzh Sargsyan invited Abdullah Gül to attend the 2010 World Cup qualifying match between Armenia and Turkey in Yerevan on September 6, 2008. Gül accepted the invitation, thus becoming the first Turkish president to visit Armenia and Gül released a statement one week prior to the visit in which he was expressing hope that his presence at the match “will be instrumental in removing the barriers blocking rapprochement between the two peoples with a common history” (Philips, 2012, p. 42).

Meetings between Turkish and Armenian Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Ali Babacan and Edward Nalbandian followed Gul’s visit to Armenia. Then, in 2009, Yerevan and Ankara released a joint statement announcing about mutual agreement on a road map: “the two parties have achieved tangible progress and mutual understanding in this process and they have agreed on a comprehensive framework for the normalization of their bilateral relations in a mutually satisfactory manner. In this context, a road map has been identified” (Recknagel, 2009, www.rferl.org).

Eventually, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Turkey and Armenia signed the “Protocol on the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Turkey” and “Protocol on development of relations between of the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Turkey” on October 10, 2009 in Zurich (Bilateral Relations, <http://mfa.am>). The protocols were signed four days prior to the visit of Serzh Sargsyan to Bursa, Turkey for World Cup qualifying match between the two countries, upon the invitation of President Gül.

The governments of Turkey and Armenia finally succeeded to come to terms on the normalization between the two countries. However, criticism over the protocols rose in the media and political circles of the both countries. Finding supporters in Armenia, the protocols got also opponents among the people. The ruling coalition's approach to the normalization process and protocols was positive in Armenia. Only nationalist Armenian Revolutionary Federation (better known as Dashnaktsutyun) was against the protocols. It even withdrew from the coalition as a sign of protest against the announced Road Map (Iskandaryan, 2009, p. 41).

The protocols were opposed not only within Armenia but also among the members of the Armenian diaspora. The criticism of diaspora was even more severe. It became clear with the visit of Serzh Sargsyan to the Armenian communities in France, Lebanon, Russia and the US aiming to get the support of those community members for the Protocols (Elenchenny&Maraşlian, 2012, p. 11).

Although the “football diplomacy” between Turkish and Armenian state leaders was a big step in the process of Turkish-Armenian normalization process, showing that the leaders are willing to the rapprochement, the societies were not quite ready for it as many argued. David Phillips represents the results of German Marshall Fund's survey carried out in July, 2010. According to the data, “55 per cent of Turkish population opposed the ratification of the protocols while 29 per cent supported the normalization of relations and the opening of the border” (Phillips, 2012, p. 72). In her article, Fulya Memisoglu cites a scholar from Turkey saying: “the issue is not the borders. Our minds and hearts are closed to each other” (Memişoğlu, 2012, p. 6). These words perfectly summarize one of the major reasons that led the Turkish-Armenian protocols to a failure, which was the need to prepare the societies of the neighbouring countries for the change: the societies living side by side but having no shared history for almost a century. This once again proves the significance of Track Two diplomacy along with other factors in the reconciliation process between Armenia and Turkey to prepare the public approach for compromise in the both sides. The societies of Turkey and Armenia should first overcome the stereotypes and be aware of the process and the results of the

normalization process in order to support it: the task that is best carried out by the civil society.

Another reason of the Protocols not to be ratified is the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, assurances given by Ankara to Baku during the conflict. Many researchers agree that Azerbaijan put pressure on the Turkish government against the Zurich Protocols and that “The Armenia-Turkey diplomatic track has been bogged down in issues related to Nagorno-Karabakh ever since” (Hill, Kirişci & Moffatt, 2015, p. 132).

Track One and Track Two Diplomacies are moving side by side. Track One affects the effectiveness of Track Two Diplomacy, slowing it down or speeding it up. So does Track Two. Therefore it is not surprising that the failure of “football diplomacy” not only slowed down Track One initiatives but also decreased the effectiveness of Track Two initiatives. Though, it is worth to mention that civil society initiatives didn’t return to their previous speed in 1990s, and regained vitality in 2014 with the launch of the program Support to Armenia-Turkey Normalisation Process funded by the European Union.

1.3.3. Current CSOs Involvement in Armenian-Turkish Reconciliation

Support to Armenia-Turkey Normalisation Process (or, ATNP) supports efforts towards opening the Turkish-Armenian border, like the previous civil society initiatives I have mentioned before: TARC and TABDC. The official presentation of the programme is as follows: “The programme aims to promote civil society efforts towards the normalisation of relations between Turkey and Armenia and towards an open border by enhancing people-to-people contacts, expanding economic and business links, promoting cultural and educational activities and facilitating access to balanced information in both societies” (<http://armenia-turkey.net>).

ATNP opens up a new space for civil dialogue bringing people together and promoting direct contacts. It supports projects in very diverse fields to accelerate

the normalization process between the two countries. Nowadays, this is the biggest program supporting civil dialogue between Armenia and Turkey. Support to the Armenia-Turkey Normalisation Process is implemented by a consortium of eight civil society organizations from the two neighbouring countries, which are: Civilitas 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.

The consortium member CSOs are the institutions that contributed most in Turkey-Armenia normalization process for the last couple of years. As ATNP is currently the major program that supports the Track Two activities between the two countries trying to achieve normalization, in the remaining part, I will focus on the consortium member organizations and their activities toward Armenian-Turkish normalization.

Hrant Dink Foundation

The Hrant Dink Foundation (or, HDF) was founded in 2007 after the assassination of Hrant Dink “to carry on Hrant’s dreams, Hrant’s struggle, Hrant’s language and Hrant’s heart” says on the website of the organization citing also the dream of Hrant Dink:

...a Turkey and a world
where we listen to each other,
share one another’s pain and grief,
and work toward preventing new pain...

(<http://hrantdink.org>).

Hrant Dink was the Armenian citizen of Turkey who through his entire life struggled for the protection and promotion of human rights, democratization, for the rights of all minority groups, for a better Turkey and Armenia, for the

normalization of the relations of those “Two close peoples, two distant neighbours” as says the title of one of his books.

Aiming to have the development of a culture of dialogue, empathy and peace on the basis of all its activities, one of the main focus areas of the Hrant Dink Foundation is “developing cultural relations among the peoples of Turkey, Armenia and Europe” (<http://hrantdink.org/>).

HDF’s scope of activities is quite multifaceted: from book publications, archive creation, summer school, film, music, visual arts, dance and literature organization, ending with the international award in memory of Hrant Dink given to the people who “work for a world free of discrimination, racism, and violence” every year on Dink’s birthday September 15 (<http://hrantdinkodulu.org>).

Turkey-Armenia Program

This is one of the programs of the foundation aiming at the normalization and development of Turkey’s relations with its neighbour Armenia. This program carries its activities with the principle “the border first opens in our minds” trying to create a “common language” between Armenia and Turkey (<http://hrantdink.org/>).

Opening the borders of minds of the neighbour peoples is the main mission to be carried out by civil society organizations. The failure of “football diplomacy” already shows the importance of civil dialogue between the societies of Armenia and Turkey. “... Our minds and hearts are closed to each other” was mentioned by an interviewee from Turkey (Memişoğlu, 2012, p. 6). So, opening those closed minds and hearts is the key to reconciliation that may lead also to the normalisation of state and social relations. And civil society organizations like the Hrant Dink Foundation seem to be one of the main actors in finding this key with Turkey-Armenia program.

Turkey-Armenia Travel Grant

The Hrant Dink Foundation launched Travel Grant in 2014 and has been supporting non-profit civic initiatives and individuals to travel to the neighbouring country to create joint initiatives in the fields such as “youth and volunteering, human rights and democracy, education, environment, history, culture and arts, development, sports, regional cooperation and European integration.” Only in 2014-2015 the foundation managed to support 210 individuals to travel to the neighbouring country and create a person to person contact working on mutual initiatives (<http://hrantdink.org>).

Turkey-Armenia Fellowship Scheme

A program by HDF that has been promoting cross-border cooperation of professionals since 2014. The program enables fellows to live and gain experience in one of leading organizations hosting them in the neighbouring country. The fellowship scheme program supported 18 professionals from the two countries in 2014-2015 and 15 in the 2016-2017 period managing to support 33 fellows so far (<http://hrantdink.org>).

Media has always been one of the main actors in the building process of the reconciliation between Armenia and Turkey. The right to unbiased sources of information is very vital in the case of Turkey-Armenia reconciliation process if we consider the stereotypes, prejudices the societies of the two countries have against each other. However, the media representatives of the two countries do not have many chances to meet their colleagues from the neighbouring country and to get the information from the first source because of the lack of diplomatic relations and closed border. In the best case, we have media representatives trying to be neutral and cover the neighbour without using hate speech. But the lack of a direct access to each other makes it even more difficult to create bridges between the societies of Armenia and Turkey and overcome stereotypes.

Launched in 2009, HDF’s Journalists’ Dialogue Programme aims to strengthen links between journalists from Armenia and Turkey and to contribute to the

establishment of direct and accurate communication channels and news reporting across the two countries. Every year, ten journalists from each neighbouring country take part in a one-week program implemented in the neighbouring country and giving opportunity to meet colleagues, media outlets, politicians, civil society representatives and academicians of the neighbouring country face to face. Around 140 journalists took part in the project so far (<http://hrantdink.org>).

Every year Hrant Dink Foundation organizes conferences on different and mostly taboo topics, among which “Islamized Armenians” conference held in the Bosphorus University, “Critical Approaches to Armenian Identity in the 21st Century” held in Havak Hall can be mentioned. Another big conference titled “The Sealed Gate: Prospects of the Turkey-Armenia Border” was held in Ankara in November of 2014. The conference had different panels pointing out diverse aspects of the Turkey-Armenia border such as socio-economic perspective and the Turkish-Armenian border from the perspective of Nagorno Karabakh conflict. (<http://hrantdink.org>).

In 2011, the HDF in cooperation with other organizations organized a multimedia dialogue project. The Project aims at establishing direct communication between photojournalists and photographers from Armenia and Turkey and enabling them make 5 joint multimedia productions to mutually promote dialogue. The project’s entitled “Beyond Waiting... Stories from Turkey-Armenia Border” exhibited not only in Armenia and Turkey but also in Belgium (<http://hrantdink.org>).

Anadolu Kültür

Anadolu Kültür is another organization based in Istanbul, Turkey that promotes the Turkey-Armenia dialogue through cultural and art exchange. It was founded in 2002 as a non-profit cultural institution. The mission of Anadolu Kültür is to share culture and art in Turkey and across borders. Through its diverse activities it develops inter-cultural relations, creating ties between various ethnic, religious and regional segments, supports regional collaboration and initiatives and the diversity of culture. Anadolu Kültür implements activities in different areas such as Cultural

Diversity and Human Rights, Cultural Collaboration with Europe, Arts and Cultural Dialogue in Anatolia, and Arts and Cultural Dialogue with Armenia.

Arts and Cultural Dialogue with Armenia was launched in 2005 and since then it includes collaboration with civil society organizations, academic institutions, and independent artists from Armenia. The aim is to promote intercommunal dialogue between Armenia and Turkey through concerts, exhibitions, film and literature events and art workshops (<http://anadolukultur.org>).

Armenia-Turkey Cinema Platform

One of the main projects of Anadolu Kültür is Armenia-Turkey Cinema Platform (ATCP) inaugurated together with the International Golden Apricot Film Festival in 2009. Since then, the platform has been organising workshops, providing funding for short films and various means to produce mutual films (<http://cinemaplatform.org>).

Armenia-Turkey Cinema Platform aims to provide guidance to joint productions from the two countries, create a network of communication, and supports the creation of films in collaboration.

Since 2010, ATCP started to give small funds to filmmakers from Armenia and Turkey for joint productions. ATCP brought together nearly 100 filmmakers from Turkey and Armenia in various meetings.

The Turkey-Armenia youth Symphony Orchestra

It was founded in 2010 in İstanbul by Anadolu Kültür, in order to contribute to the process of the two countries getting to know each other, upon the initiative of conductor Nvart Andreassian (<http://www.anadolukultur.org/en/areas-of-work/projects/armenia-turkey-youth-symphony-orchestra/128> access: 12.08.2017).

This project contributed to Turkey and Armenia reconciliation process through music and enabled conservatory students from the two countries to meet and produce common work.

Van is another project realized with the support of Anadolu Kültür, comprises the musical research carried out in various cities across Anatolia by the fourteen-person music group Van Project formed of members of Yerkir Union together with ethnomusicologist from Turkey. Van Project is an Armenia-France centred civil society institution, with members with ages ranging from 16 to 20. The team carried out interviews with elderly citizens and local musicians that could provide information about local traditions in the cities that were visited, and held workshops with young people, and also performed concerts (<http://anadolukultur.org>). The aim of Yerkir Union's music group Van Project is, with Anadolu Kültür's support, to seek out the traces of the local musical tradition of Anatolian cities and the traditions of Armenians that once lived on this land and to record those who continue to exist but face disappearance. A further aim is to bring together musicians from Armenia with musicians from Turkey to form an exchange of knowledge and experience and to build a path of dialogue.

Female Minstrels

This project by Anadolu Kültür did not only bring together cultural representatives from both countries but also reached out to a broader audience through the joint concerts in Yerevan, Van and Istanbul. Female Minstrel (dengbêj in Kurdish and ashough in Armenian) was an opportunity to discover the common musical traditions in the two neighbouring countries. The stories told by the minstrels during the project were supposed to be collected in a book. A CD of the joint repertoire was released.

The Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV) and Public Journalism Club (PJC) Besides the implemented separate projects, two member organizations of the Consortium, The Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV) and Public Journalism Club (PJC) based in Armenia have been implementing mutual initiatives.

TEPAV, established by a group of businessmen, bureaucrats and academics in 2004, aims to conduct data-based policy analysis, contribute to policy making as well as realize the ideas of the foundation through projects (<http://tepav.org.tr>).

Established in 2011 in Armenia, the Public Journalism Club (PJC) is aiming at the protection of “human rights and fundamental freedoms, development of democratic environment and civil society, as well as building regional dialogue and peace through innovative ideas” (<http://pjc.am>).

With the support of the Armenia-Turkey Normalization Process, TEPAV and PJC have been carrying out a mutual project called “Exchange of Entrepreneurs” to promote partnership in the field of information and communication technologies (ICT). With the participation of around 90 ICT investors and entrepreneurs, and other representatives of the field, TEPAV and PJC have initiated the biggest industry to industry exchange between Turkey and Armenia (<http://armenia-turkey.net>). These organizations continue implementing investors, start-up enthusiasts exchanges between the neighbour countries giving them unique chance to learn more about the developments in the ICT circles of the neighbouring country, meeting local and international investors and get a chance for the realization of their projects.

Civilitas Foundation

It was established in 2008 and aims to foster innovative ideas and initiatives, assist or create the mechanisms and institutions that bring them to fruition (<http://civilitasfoundation.org>). The Foundation states that it contributes to peace and stability in the Caucasus and beyond. CivilNet (<http://www.civilnet.am/>), one of the alternative media means in Armenia is one of the projects of Civilitas Foundation. CivilNet is where we can follow the projects released by the support of ATNP. Those are series of media reports that aim to help the population of Armenia to better understand what’s happening in the neighbouring Turkey. As mentioned before, the need of getting direct and unbiased information from the

neighbouring country is essential in case of Armenia and Turkey. Civilitas Foundation, with the support of ATNP is trying to fill this gap especially in the days when the political course of Turkey is changing very fast. The project aiming this is called Increasing Understanding of Turkey(<http://armenia-turkey.net>).

Climbing the Mountain is another project by the Civilitas Foundation that consists of a series of travelling programs with a pair of celebrities from Armenia and Turkey speaking about their personal journey of dealing with historical and political tensions arising from the Armenian Genocide (<http://armenia-turkey.net>).

The Helsinki Citizens' Assembly (hCa)

The Helsinki Citizens' Assembly (or, hCa) is an organization of citizens dedicated to peace, democracy and human rights in Europe. It is a non-governmental organization, working on the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms, peace, democracy and pluralism. The Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Turkey was founded in 1993.

Along with its projects in the fields of European Union Integration process, minority rights and multiculturalism, civilian approaches to conflicts, superiority of law, human rights and citizen's participation, strengthening local democracy and civil society, hCa has been implementing Yavaş-Gamats Summer School. (<http://www.hyd.org.tr>).

The first summer school was organized in 2005 bringing together 24 university students from Armenia and Turkey. This summer school aims to promote peace, confidence and reconciliation through “touching” teachers as they are the largest stakeholder group of practitioners in the formal education. It believes that the teachers carry the values of democratic citizenship and conflict resolution, they will be role models to create new language of interaction. The summer school supports the intercommunal process of building trust and reconciliation (<http://armenia-turkey.net>).

In 2016, Yavaş-Gamats Summer School was supposed to take place on August 1-7, 2016. After the failed military coup attempt on 15 July, 2016 the political

situation in Turkey became much cloudier and the summer school was postponed. “Due to the extraordinary conditions in Turkey, we have postponed Yavaş-Gamats Summer School... The new date will be announced” is said in the announcement released by the foundation. Any information about implementation of the summer school in 2016 was not found on the website (<http://yavasgamats.org>).

The summer school aiming to achieve reconciliation between Armenia and Turkey was supposed to be held also in 2017. It was supposed to take place on 10-16 July in Istanbul, Turkey. On 5th of July 2017, eight human rights activists including members of hCa were taken into custody by police from a “digital security and information management workshop” on Büyükkada, Istanbul. After this, the hCa decided to first postpone than cancel the summer school because of the unfavourable political conditions.

The Regional Studies Center

Armenia based Regional Studies Center is a consortium member that was founded in 2012. The Regional Studies Center (or, RSC) is a think tank that implements strategic analysis and researches as well as educational and policy related projects aiming at political and economic reform and conflict resolution.

The main programs of the RSC activities are as follows:

- Regional analyses and assessments of political, economic and security issues in the South Caucasus, but also including Iran, Russia and Turkey;
- National security and defense reform;
- Democratization and good governance;
- Economics and sustainable development;
- Educating and empowering youth as an “agent of change” (<http://armenia-turkey.net>).

One of RSC's focus areas in Armenia-Turkey reconciliation process is youth empowerment. RSC sees youth empowerment important because it sees the youth as a crucial agent of change. It implements two mutual cross-border projects as well which aim at supporting the policy-making process and media (<http://armenia-turkey.net>).

Eurasia Partnership Foundation

Being the legacy institution of Eurasia Foundation, the non-governmental organization, Eurasia Partnership Foundation (or, EPF) was established in 2007 with its local offices in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. EPF has a wide range of programs in fields such as: human rights and democracy, anti-corruption and conflict of interest, peace building and conflict transformation, civil society capacity building, and youth empowerment, etc. (<http://epfarmeria.am>).

As part of the consortium of Armenia-Turkey Normalization Program, EPF implements diverse cross border projects. Media Bus Tour is only one of those projects that gives an opportunity to its participants to re-explore their own country and explore the neighbouring one. The project also aims to increase the attention to the Turkish-Armenian relation issue. The target groups of this specific project are video and photo journalists, filmmakers and bloggers from the neighbouring countries. "EPF, in consultation with the other members of the Consortium, will elaborate on the participant selection criteria, build the agenda of the tour and conduct the tour" is said in the description of the project (<http://armenia-turkey.net>) which clearly shows that the ATNP created trust among the consortium members and helped them to establish a network that would continue its efforts toward Armenia-Turkey reconciliation even after the ATNP ends.

As mentioned before, Turkey's role in the agenda of Armenia is quite big while it is difficult to argue vice versa. With the current political developments in Turkey, especially rising after the Military Coup attempt on July 15, 2016, Turkey-Armenia relations issue remained on the "back seat". This is also reflected in the media coverage. In the last years, there is an obvious lack of interest towards Armenia and

Armenia-Turkey relations in Turkish media. To address this issue, EPF organizes Media Crew Visits from Turkey to Armenia. The visits include representatives of leading TV channels and printed media of Turkey. EPF hopes that through the project, the audience in Turkey will be able to increase the awareness of modern Armenia and Armenians (<http://armenia-turkey.net>). The organization chooses important dates for the visits: such as April 24, the commemoration day of the Armenian Genocide, Independence Day, etc. EPF organized three media crew visits before and after April 24, 2015 with the participation of mass media representatives, such as Anadolu News Agency, CNN Türk, Habertürk TV.

Grant Scheme for Armenia-Turkey Normalization Process was initiated by The Consortium of Armenia-Turkey Normalization Process program to support other actors' involvement in the normalization process. The consortium allocated € 200,000.00, which makes 10 per cent of the total budget of the program for the Grant Scheme, which managed to support dozens of CSOs, initiatives to implement their projects on the way of Armenia-Turkey normalization. Due to the support of the Grant Scheme, many dialogue projects were implemented, co-produced films released, festival and conference organized. The conference entitled "Armenia-Turkey: paving ways for dialogue and reconciliation" organized by the Caucasus Resource Research Center - Armenia (CRRC) in partnership with the Istanbul-based independent think-tank Center for Public Policy and Democracy Studies (PODEM), took place in Yerevan on May 18-19, 2017 and was one of the latest projects supported by the Grant Scheme.

SECOND CHAPTER

2. THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN RECONCILIATION PROCESSES: THE CASE OF TURKEY AND ARMENIA

2.1. METHODOLOGY

This thesis is built upon a qualitative research, which is according to D. Porta and M. Keating (2008, p. 28) a situated activity that locates the observer in the world and “consists of a set of interpretative practices.” This research is inspired by an interpretive approach, which refers to the fact that “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings” and interpret the meanings or phenomena expressed by people (Porta & Keating, 2008, p. 28). Qualitative researchers aim at understanding events by unfolding the meanings people attribute to their behaviour and the world. In this specific research, my aim was to collect and analyse the accounts of representatives of civil society organisations (involved in the research) to Armenian-Turkish reconciliation. And for this, focus groups were conducted in Turkey and Armenia.

According to many researchers, reflexivity in qualitative research is of big importance. The subject of examining how the researcher and intersubjective elements impinge on has been a topic of discussions for a long time though not always referred to as reflexivity. Linda Finlay offers five variants of reflexivity: introspection, intersubjective reflection, mutual collaboration, social critique, and discursive deconstruction (2002, p. 209).

Reflexivity as introspection is when researchers’ own reflection, intuition and viewpoints are used as main evidence. “Those researchers who begin their research with the data of their experience seek to ‘embrace their own humanness as the basis for psychological understanding’” (Finlay, 2002, p. 2013). According to L. Finlay, intersubjective reflection is when researchers explore the mutual meanings emerging within the research relationship. The process here involves more than

reflection where the “self-inrelation-to-others becomes both the aim and object of focus” (2002, p. 215). In mutual collaboration, the researchers are at the same time participants in their own research, engaged in cycles of mutual reflection and experience. Researchers describe their work as “sharing personal and social experiences of both respondents and researchers, who tell . . . their stories in the context of a developing relationship” (Finlay, 2002, p. 218). The next category, according to Finlay, is using reflexivity as social critique. One of the main concerns about this is managing the power imbalance between researcher and participants. The author argues that “reflexivity as social critique offers the opportunity to utilize experiential accounts while situating these within a strong theoretical framework about the social construction of power.” In case of reflexivity as discursive deconstruction, attention is paid to ambiguity of meanings in language used and its impact on presentation modes (Finlay, 2002, pp. 222, 223). While these kind of studies conducted with groups are being valued for their collaborative, democratic, inclusive characteristics, many scholars criticize it because of its drawbacks in reflexivity, power relations. Having all of these in mind, I tried to minimize the possible influence on the respondents.

Having in mind my Armenian origins and the fact that I have direct or indirect ties with most of the CSOs presented in the focus groups, having my colleague Ayşenur Korkmaz with me to conduct the focus groups in Istanbul was a big chance. Having one Armenian and one Turkish conducters of focus groups working mutually, helped us to keep the balance and ensure objective answers from the CSO representatives.

Being originally from Armenia I have lived in Turkey for the last four years. These four years helped me to better learn the dynamics in Turkish society and the ways to approach it. This fact enabled me to work with the both societies easily knowing every small aspect of their characteristics. Being fluent in two languages was a big advantage to conduct the focus groups and take care of the translations making sure no detail is changed or falsely interpreted. Having worked in different NGOs in a way dealing with Armenia-Turkey reconciliation, I have got the network of CSOs that I used for the focus groups.

Focus group is listed as one of the key methods of a qualitative research. The reason for the choice of focus groups rather than individual interviews is to bring CSO representatives working on the same topic together. With the atmosphere created, each respondent's contribution was essential. Having diverse voices in the group, enables participants to have a dispute, bringing new ideas to the discussion, thus giving others chance to think about the same topic and express themselves. As NGO representatives mostly knew each other before, they were comfortable to share their ideas in such a sensitive topic. The natural discourse in the focus groups made it possible to have the most diverse viewpoints on the topic. Because of this, I tend to think that with individual meetings I would not get as good results as I did with focus groups. Conducting focus groups was an opportunity to see the contradictions that respondents have among each other and with themselves. The interaction among the respondents was bringing up new ideas on the questions. Ayşenur Korkmaz and I tried to minimize the influence that a respondent might have on other respondents regarding the answers. As well as, the moderators made sure that their views did not have any influence on the answers of the participants. Paying attention to those details is especially important in such sensitive topic. I tend to believe that we managed to minimalize the possible power relations in the conducted focus groups both in Turkey and in Armenia.

The focus groups were conducted in Armenia and Turkey with civil society organization representatives. The CSO representatives involved in the focus groups were selected carefully. Using several criteria in selecting my respondents. First of all, I used the criterion of the involvement of their CSOs in Armenia-Turkey reconciliation process (either in past or currently). An exception was made in one of the focus groups in Istanbul, when a representative of a quite influential CSO expressed desire to be part of the focus group as the organization had been trying to implement mutual projects with Armenia and had been interested in the project. Secondly, I tried to keep the gender balance of the groups though it was not possible in all four focus groups. The total number of focus groups participants is 20, out of which eleven were female, nine men. As for venues of the focus groups, Istanbul, Yerevan and Gyumri were selected. Istanbul is the city where Turkish-Armenian

dialogue projects are mostly implemented and CSOs working on the topic are based. Due to this reason two focus groups were conducted in Istanbul on 9th and 21st of June, 2016. There are as well CSOs based in Ankara, Diyarbakir, Kars and other cities that are involved in Armenia-Turkey reconciliation process but in one hand, the number of those organizations was not sufficient for a focus group and on the other hand political and other conditions were not very favorable for focus groups to be conducted in one of those cities In the previous chapter of this thesis, I have already mentioned one of those organizations, Ankara-based TEPAV and the noteworthy work it carries out.

Yerevan, the capital of Armenia is the centre for Armenian CSOs involved in Armenia-Turkey reconciliation process. I chose Gyumri as a second venue for the focus group work in Armenia. Gyumri is the neighbouring city with Turkey that (especially economically) suffered most from the closure of Turkey-Armenia border. Gyumri is the second largest city with quite vivid civil society that has been involved in Turkey-Armenia dialogue process since the beginning. The focus groups in Yerevan and Gyumri were conducted on November 14 and 15, 2016 accordingly.

Due to increasing political pressure on human rights activism in Turkey, it was hard enough to convince many CSO representatives in Turkey that their confidentiality will be ensured. I was lucky enough to conduct the focus groups before the military coup attempt on 15th of July, 2016 as later with the state of emergency that followed the military coup attempt, the fear of speaking about such politically sensitive issues like Turkey-Armenia reconciliation has been aggravated. Names of the respondents and the CSOs they represent will not be mentioned throughout the thesis, instead they will be given pseudo names.

Ideally, five to eight respondents were supposed to be present in the focus groups realized in both countries. The first focus group of Istanbul was an exception with participation of four civil society representatives. Participants in focus groups were actively involved in organizations that held reconciliation projects or activities which gives us up-to-date information and comments.

As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, the term reconciliation is a quite complex notion and the interpretation of it depends on the context of conflict and on the parties involved in the process. It was also mentioned that the word itself has had various interpretations in history. There are many arguments about finding equivalent terms in both Armenian and Turkish. Thus, it became very important for me to see the interpretation (also in terms of its translation) of the term reconciliation among the focus group participants in the two countries.

Two focus groups were conducted in Istanbul, so I will be mentioning which focus group responds I am discussing. As for the pseudo names, the letter R (meaning respondent) will be used with the indicator for each participant. For example, R4 stands for the fourth respondent in a specific focus group. The focus groups will be named according to the cities they were conducted in.

Having in mind the questions and number of participants, the focus groups were expected to last one hour and twenty minutes. Even though all the focus groups exceeded the predicted duration, it was not more than ten-twenty minutes. An introduction to the project was made before the questions were asked. A confidentiality agreement was made with each participant. All participants had signs with their names behind them. Photos were taken during the focus groups except from one of the focus groups as one of the participants did not agree to appear in the photos. In Istanbul, evaluation was done after the focus groups which let me notice the drawbacks and get feedbacks from the participants, and take them into consideration for the next focus groups. The focus groups were recorded mostly with two recorders to avoid any misunderstanding. The records were deciphered then translated to English.

2.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

For the last two decades, there were quite many CSO initiatives working towards Turkish-Armenian reconciliation. This thesis investigates how the representatives of CSOs perceive the reconciliation process and evaluate the successes and failures of this process. It examines CSOs' viewpoints on their own role in the reconciliation process, the obstacles they see on the way of a more productive reconciliation process and the steps they suggest to overcome those obstacles.

'What is the meaning of the term reconciliation' was the first question I asked to the respondents. While there are many different interpretations of reconciliation and various translations of this term to both Turkish and Armenian, it was important to understand the subjective perceptions of the term by CSO representatives. The second question was as following: 'Do you think reconciliation is generally accepted in the society?' The reconciliation process of Armenia and Turkey was discussed throughout all the focus groups. In order to have a clearer notion of the reconciliation process itself, it was essential to understand how deep is the term accepted in the society, how stable the basis of the reconciliation in the society is, and how CSOs evaluate this. 'How would you assess the achieved level of reconciliation?' and 'What institutions, individuals and events were the most influential in achieving it?' were asked to show how the CSOs see the achieved level of reconciliation and the factors that created it. 'What is the role of CSOs in the reconciliation process and what are the greatest obstacles against a larger influence of CSOs in the process?' and 'What would be the next steps to enhance the reconciliation process?' were the last questions I asked to the respondents.

In the following chapters, the answers to above mentioned questions will be assessed.

2.2.1. Civil Society Perception of the Concept of Reconciliation⁹

For the representative of one of the leading human rights organizations in Turkey (1st focus group, Istanbul) reconciliation means normalization: “I would use the term ‘normalization’ in Turkish. The experiences Armenians have had in the past hundred years are not normal.” Mentioning a research conducted by Hrant Dink Foundation, according to which the word ‘Armenian’ is used as a curse word in Turkey, the respondent states that peoples of Turkey “need a normalization process in order not to hear people using the word ‘Armenian’ to curse someone.” The second respondent of the first focus group in Istanbul (or, I(1)R2) sees reconciliation as negotiation because “there needs to be a negotiation if there is a problem”. I(1)R3 agrees with the term normalization but finds it insufficient: “A process of facing and confronting the past is needed to improve the relations that the two countries have.” Interestingly the fourth participant of the same focus group also mentions the term confronting the past.

The first respondent of the second focus group (I(2)R1) conducted in Istanbul replied to the same question as follows: “Although we do reconciliation projects I try to avoid using the term. Because it has political problems. The genocide is not recognized but we still use the terms reconciliation and peace” referring to the recognition of the 1915 events as Armenian Genocide by the Turkish state first, then the concept of reconciliation process that should be used afterwards. This idea coincides with the following interpretation of reconciliation: “reconciliation is achieved when the harm done by injustice to relations of respect and trust that ought to exist . . . has been repaired or compensated for by the perpetrator” (Little, 2011, p. 84). Three of the respondents state that there is emotional and conscientious unevenness among parties involved in reconciliation caused by the denial of the genocide. The first interviewee mentions the lack of and need for a multidimensional term, for one side recognizing and apologizing and the other side

⁹ The views and concepts used by participating CSO representatives and do not necessarily reflect the views of the author, thesis advisor and jury members.

building trust. I(2)R3 also admits the following challenge: “there is a scarcity of terms and no word can capture the whole situation”.

Gyumri’s focus group’s first respondent (GR1) interprets reconciliation as a recovery which assumes that there used to be relations that need to be recovered at this point in time. GR2 sees reconciliation as normalisation. Finding a common language and coming to terms with each other was the response of GR3. As for GR4 the term reconciliation means cooperation.

YR1 of Yerevan’s focus group (YR4) mentions re-establishment of relations as the best match for reconciliation. YR2 mentions the term “Hashtetsum” (հաշտեցում) which is translated to English as reconciliation, conciliation as well as normalization. YR3 prefers the term normalization of relations. Sharing their project experiences, YR4 said that they used to choose the term that they use in Armenia according to the group they were going to work with. According to her, in one case it was conciliation, in another case they translated it as dialogue, and in another context the term “normalization of relations” was used. She mentions that they had long discussions on the Armenian term for reconciliation as it is a complex concept and requires deep analyses of the group with which the term would be used. Cooperation was among the terms they used. YR4 mentions that for many people reconciliation is the ideal term that should be used in the case of Armenia and Turkey. According to her, many prefer more neutral terms and think that there should be some steps accomplished, a dialogue before the start of a reconciliation process. YR5 also agrees that there first needs to be dialogue and cooperation, which would then lead to reconciliation.

YR6 of the Yerevan focus group thinks that we should not mix normalization with reconciliation as “the latter is a way longer process while normalization concerns specific issues on state level.” YR4 thinks that society’s perception of the term is more important than the academic description of it. YR3 also raised the issue of society’s perception saying that he prefers using normalization of relations instead of reconciliation and it might be understood as the normalization of relations between the peoples. He stated the following: “Deriving from my personal

experience, I can say that reconciliation is usually associated with obligations that come together with it. That is why reconciliation is not the best term to use if you want to release your media material.”

YR2 mentions that normalization is a more neutral term that they prefer to use in their Armenian-Turkish projects: “Our NGO works with IT sector, start-upers, entrepreneurs and the moment the term reconciliation is mentioned they take an objective position towards the projects. For example, we were going to take a group to from Armenia to a start-up event in Istanbul. When I was introducing the project to the potential participants, their concern was: “How? Are we going to reconcile with Turks?” That is why I was trying to be more diplomatic and stay in a more neutral zone of terms for the beginning. So, at least in our case normalization of relations was a better term to use.”

The responses of interviewers to the first question on their perceptions of the term reconciliation differ in one focus group to the other as well as from country to country. While having different interpretations of and preferences for reconciliation, the most common answers of the respondents from Turkey were normalization, negotiation, and recovery mostly stating that the term itself is not enough and doesn't sufficiently grasp the whole situation. They argue that facing and confronting the history is needed before the reconciliation including the recognition of 1915 events as genocide. Armenian Genocide should be first recognized by the state to achieve reconciliation. This means that civil society representatives of Turkey see reconciliation as a far goal that requires several steps to be taken beforehand.

Armenian civil society representatives also prefer using other terms due to different reasons. Recovery, normalization, finding a common language, coming to terms with each other, dialogue, and cooperation are among the terms they used in their activities. However, I will not be mistaken to argue that “normalization” of relations was mentioned most of the time and was considered to be a more neutral term that won't disturb the society. Like in Turkey, in Armenia civil society representatives prefer other terms than reconciliation, arguing that this specific term brings

obligations with it and might be too loaded for the general society, that society needs more neutral, soft terms to voluntarily become part of the reconciliation. The most preferred term was normalization. The reasons of this will be discussed in the analysis of the respondents' answers.

2.2.2. General Acceptance of the Reconciliation in the Society

In order to have a better notion about the Turkey-Armenia reconciliation process, it is better to look at the bigger picture to see how and to what extent the reconciliation in general is accepted (or not accepted) in the country. That is to see how much the societies are ready for reconciliation whether it be with Armenian people (or with Turkish people for Armenians) or in another context.

I(1)R2 of the first focus group in Istanbul said that it is hard to notice the notion of reconciliation being present in the society of Turkey though it seemed to be there one year ago: "We thought reconciliation is accepted until a year ago. Set the Armenians aside, the peace-making process with Kurds is getting disrupted. We reached an impasse. That is why I find it hard to reflect on the place of terms like 'dialogue' or 'peace-making' in Turkish society." With this the CSO representative means the "peace process" between the Turkish state and Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) that was cut in 2015 and the armed conflict started once again. She mentioned that she has been able to speak about such topics more easily in past, however at that point it's not easy to say anything concrete. As I mentioned before, the political atmosphere in Turkey was becoming less and less fertile for any kind of dialogue or even for a discussion on it.

R3 of the same discussion in Istanbul (I(1)R3) mentioned that she didn't believe in reconciliation between states and found the idea of it "very hegemonic", however she has faith in the efforts of societies and people. On the one hand, she stated as follows: "I do respect NGOs that make projects for reconciliation between Armenians in Armenia and peoples of Turkey." On the other hand, she's sure that those projects create illusions as Armenian young people taking part in them meet

Turkish people that are aware of the past, the genocide and its denial. This experience might create an illusion that everything is going well in Turkey. She continues saying that as far as her opinion is concerned; she sees the denial of the genocide is the dominant opinion in Turkey. She argues that the reconciliation programs do not correspond the social reality in Turkey: “This year, the Turkish protesters chanted slogans in front of the German Consulate, saying ‘The best Armenian is dead Armenian’.” According to her, this shows that the reconciliation programs are effective in short term. She added the following: “As I said earlier, I do respect these projects. Yet, I also find them a bit dangerous. Because we do not comprehend the extent of the denial. If we cannot influence the society at large, if it is speaking only to each other, then there is no point.”

I(1)R4 thinks that it is difficult to define Armenian-Turkish reconciliation process. He thinks that CSOs don't get the expected outcomes of the efforts they put. He followed: “There is still denial, which is a horrible thing itself. Even more horrible is that the denial coexists with a discourse, saying: “Yes we did it, we would do it again.” This paralyzes all the reconciliation, approaching, and peace-making processes. When they attack Kurdistan, they refer to Kurds as ‘Armenian bastards’. There is no end to victimizing in Turkey over and over again. All other victimizations are grounded on that first perpetration. It is very hard to face that crime. Therefore, they both deny it and feel the need to defend what they have done at the same time. Maybe that is why it is compelling to name this process, and perceive it from the point of a moral and political responsibility.”

The first respondent (I(1)R1), the representative of a foundation working on Armenia-Turkey dialogue projects for many years thinks that the pro-reconciliation group is getting larger arguing that they have a positive influence on the society at large. He argued as follows: “The society has changed its stance on the genocide. Twenty-five years ago, when I told my family that I will be doing my PhD research on the Armenian Genocide, they thought it was madness even though they were leftists. Not one among them said: “You could do such a research.” Today, everyone

around me recognizes the genocide. This means there is an improvement...The stance of the society today is not completely denialist. Instead, the rhetoric is.”

I(2)R1 of the second focus group conducted in Istanbul says that the societies of Armenia and Turkey need to confront the past. Then continuing on the topic of the place reconciliation has in the society, he says: “We are not normal if Armenian writings are removed from a historical Armenian city because of the complaints of the society.”¹⁰ As a solution, the respondent suggests changes in the education system: “We need to look at Turkey in a broad sense, not the neighbourhoods we live in like Kadıköy, Bakırköy or Beyoğlu (those are districts in Istanbul that are known to be politically liberal in comparison with other parts of the city). The change is only possible through education. Kids are not born with hateful feelings.”

Stating that reconciliation doesn’t have a stable place in the society, I(2)R2 speaks about the perception the society of Turkey has about Armenians: “The society’s view is shaped by the official state view. They determine what stance will be taken on Armenians. So, unfortunately, the society lacks information about historical and contemporary facts on Armenians. Many, for instance, would not know that there are Armenians with Turkish citizenship. Or, on the contrary, some think that the number of Armenians is about two or three millions in Turkey. There is a need to correct misinformation first.” The interviewee also mentions reforms in education system as one of the means to correct the abovementioned misinformation and misperceptions.

We see the topic of education is present also in the speech of I(2)R3 that speaks about “the others” and the perceptions about them: “I think; we are deficient in listening to or developing equal relations with communities who are considered to be ‘the other’. Maybe, education is a good starting point, yet it is not enough. People

¹⁰ On the entrance and exit of Tuzluca Province of Iğdır, there was a sigh with “welcome” and “good bye” in Turkish, Kurdish, English and Armenian. The Armenian part was removed in 2016. For more: <http://www.agos.com.tr/en/article/15720/turkish-english-and-kurdish-is-ok-but-no-armenian>; <http://www.sabah.com.tr/webtv/yasam/igdirdaki-ermenice-tabela-tepki-uzerine-kaldirildi>

of this geography are used to top down reforms and changes. All changes so far - which are also called revolutions- have been made from the top. Something that the society solely wants to happen is very unlikely to happen. This problem can be seen in the Kurdish issue. There is a problem with accepting and embracing Kurds and other minorities.”

I(2)R4 also brings the picture of “the other” in Turkey claiming that the discrimination against them is obvious even from the language used: “When we look at such problems, we do not see a single statement that does not come with a ‘but’. Yes, it did happen but... But Alewite people... People treat each other as enemies when they have personal contact.”

As a bordering city with Turkey, Gyumri had more interaction with Turkey than the rest of Armenia. This contact was interrupted by the closure of the Turkish-Armenian border in 1993. Historically, Gyumri also accepted many Armenians fleeing their lands due to deportations and massacres in the beginning of the 20th century. So, as we will see from the answers of the respondents, the civil society of Gyumri is on the one hand open for reconciliation as it still keeps the memory of the border once open and interactions with the neighbours in Turkey, on the other hand it puts forward preconditions for a reconciliation.

GR1 suggested that people of Shirak region (the region of Armenia Gyumri is located in) and especially Gyumri are more open to a reconciliation, more willing to find common language than people in other regions: “Our region has a border with Turkey and we see ways of possible development. If the border opens, not only tourism but also market will be more vivid in Gyumri. When there were talks on the opening of the border (he refers to Zurich Protocols) people of Gyumri were happier and more positive about it.” He mentions that the society of Shirak region is eager for a positive change and normalization of relations though they expect at least some steps from the other side: “A human being should be able to admit his mistakes in the past. And there are good examples in the history” [Pointing Germans on the issue of the Holocaust]. This response clearly shows that the idea of reconciliation is still very much influenced by the expectations of the other side to

take some steps on the way of the confrontation of past. The society in Gyumri realizes the benefits it will get from an open border but expects a recognition of its pain at least by the society of the neighbouring country not even mentioning about state recognition in this case.

The second respondent in Gyumri (GR2) also agrees that Gyumri (and the region) is more positive about reconciliation than other parts of the country: “I also agree that our region is more optimistic about it. Though the events in 1915-1920 affected Gyumri a lot, we are more positive. Its reason is maybe the fact that we had a direct contact with Turkey, and we can even say we have it even today due to the border.”

GR3 explained how important this issue is in everyday life of the city’s population: “I cannot say that the micro society is discussing this topic every day. Unless it is not imposed by the political agenda like it happened a couple of years ago, when we woke up and learnt that the border with Turkey might be opened. Then we have a discussion and interest on reconciliation among the society. Of course if we conduct a survey, the society of Shirak region will be interested in opening of the border more than other regions. The cause of this is economic. These regions are still the least developed one in the country. Then, when we have tough socio-economic conditions, the enemy perception is put back.” On the topic of the difference among the regions of the country, the respondent mentions the priorities youth of those regions have. While most of the young people in Gyumri are concerned about low employability, security issue and issue of the conflict with Azerbaijan concern their peers in the Eastern regions of the country. According to him, these are determining the place of reconciliation in the agenda of civil society.

The youngest participant of the focus group in Gyumri (GR5) focuses on the perception of reconciliation among the members of her generation (1990s), suggesting that as a young representative of the society, she would like to find common ways of cooperation but she’s not ready for that yet: “And I believe that everyone among my friends is for a peaceful normalization of relations but none of them is ready for that at the moment.”

YR4 of Yerevan focus groups stated that the picture of reconciliation perception changes once you enter houses of individual people. Sharing the experience of their organization that is mostly working on collective memory, she mentioned: “We have many visits to households as part of our projects. Just imagine you are entering a house in Talish where mostly people from Sasun (now a region in Turkey, Sason) live and start your conversation saying that you came for a Turkish-Armenian reconciliation project. They would kick you out immediately. That is why you use other vocabulary saying the same thing with different words.” From this we can say that according to CSO representatives the society expects some steps before the reconciliation or before calling it a reconciliation. And in the specific case the respondent is sharing, the genocide recognition is the biggest step: “Before every project we do a field research: We visit the families our Turkish participants will visit and explain to them that we are conducting a project on the genocide of Armenians and Turkish participants will visit them in the hope of hearing their stories. So, basically we say that Turkish participants are there to listen to their stories regarding the genocide.”

YR3 agrees that the issue of genocide appears once they start speaking about reconciliation: “Did we reconcile with Turkish people over the topic of genocide? No, we didn’t: neither on the state, nor on the civil society level. That is why we should first of all find common approaches on the topic of genocide if we want to have reconciliation. Many people, as well as I cannot imagine a reconciliation without the genocide question on the table.”

Another respondent of Yerevan focus group (YR2) mentions that even though the civil society has the issue of genocide in mind, it is still ready for establishing open relations: “Look at Armenia-Turkish Protocols: back then the society was not against normalization of relations, it is against preconditions. In the elite circles of the society, the discussions of normalization became quite hot. So, when the rest of the society sees that more visible elite part discussing the normalization with or without preconditions, but discussing it, it starts accepting the fact of reconciliation, choosing the way that is closer to it, which was in this case normalization without

preconditions. Thus the society already has the idea of normalization in its mind, it's not something unfamiliar. It starts realizing that soon or late, they will have to normalize the relations, the border will open and they will reconcile with Turkish people without "a war".

Accepting that the notion of reconciliation had existed in Armenian civil society, one of the participants stresses that the reconciliation started accelerating after 2010 referring to the Protocols: "If the group not accepting the normalization with Turks at all was dominant, after 2010 it became a more marginal one."

YR4 sees positive changes in the civil society especially among young generation: "Even though reconciliation and its perception is highly connected with the genocide discourse, I can see a positive change in NGO sphere, especially in the youth involved in Armenia-Turkey mutual projects. Those are people who have ideas about the Armenian-Turkish relations, who realize that despite of everything they should come together, know each other better and organize mutual projects. I do not know what it will bring with it for the future, but I can see that prejudices have been overcome." YR6 suggested that she notices positive changes especially in NGO sphere and that the attitude toward reconciliation, towards better relations is getting better by time.

Some of the participants of the focus groups also mention that when the topic of a mutual project between Armenia and Turkey is on a neutral topic like art, music, cinema, etc, the project goes on without any serious obstacles, while having Armenian Genocide at the core of the project is making it more and more complicated. Admitting that the number of people involved in the dialogue is larger now, and both sides have clearer images of each other, not the one that is sown on the news or the one told by their grandparents but the image they see, YR4 thinks it is insufficient as everything gained evaporates once the projects touch vulnerable topics like the genocide: "There is a change, we all can notice it. There are more people in Turkey that recognize the genocide and struggle for the recognition of it on the state level, which contributes a lot to the reconciliation process. However, with the current situation in Turkey, we are not even sure what will happen to those

people: will they get imprisoned or what? I want to be clear, we have done a lot, but at certain point you feel that whatever we did is not enough especially when it comes to the genocide.”

In Turkey, reconciliation as a term does not have a direct connotation to Armenia. While in Armenia the term reconciliation usually concerns the neighbours: Turkey and Azerbaijan. Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno Karabakh is an ongoing conflict and is still affecting peoples’ lives while making talks of reconciliation more difficult. That is why in the discussions of reconciliation perception in the societies, Turkish participants of the focus groups had the chance to evaluate the term acceptance and role of the reconciliation in the agenda of the society in a broader sense (including but not limited to Armenia-Turkey reconciliation process), while in Armenia the discussion automatically went to Armenia-Turkey reconciliation process.

The participants of focus groups in Turkey are sceptical about the extent of acceptance of reconciliation in the society. According to them, low level of societal acceptance of reconciliation is because of the lack of information caused by the deficiencies of current education system. They believe that there is a general intolerance towards “the other” in Turkish society, be it an Armenian, Alevite, LGBTI+, or another minority group. Many respondents are sure that the term reconciliation started gaining larger place in the society and becoming more accepted over time. Some of the CSO representatives think that the term reconciliation became more accepted in the society with the “peace process” between the Turkish state and Kurdish movement, and started losing its speed after the process was cut.

Civil society representatives in Gyumri suggested that the discussions on the reconciliation are more noticed in Gyumri and Shirak region than anywhere else because of the closed border (or in general being located on the border with Turkey). And even though the population of the city of Gyumri is willing to normalize the relations with Turkey, the genocide issue is still alive and frequently mentioned. The participants of Yerevan focus group also mentioned about the difficulties the

genocide recognition/non-recognition issue brings with it mentioning that even though there are important steps taken, the efforts cannot be considered sufficient. Many of the respondents in Yerevan mentioned that even though Zurich Protocols were failed they had a positive impact on the society's perception of reconciliation.

2.2.3. Assessment of the Achieved Level of Reconciliation

Civil society representatives of the both countries have diverse views on the achieved level of the Armenian-Turkish reconciliation. Though everyone agrees that there is a positive change, they are mostly sceptical about the impact of the dialogue initiatives so far. However, I need to stress that almost every respondent hopes to see the longer term results of their work.

A civil society representative from Turkey who has previously worked as an academic, suggests that dialogue projects are effective at the university level: "These projects are not in vain. We used to use the project reports in our course syllabi at the university. Students made interesting homework on such topics. Yes, maybe the projects cannot change all of Turkey, but I do not think we are flogging a dead horse either. There will be outcomes in long term process. At the end of the day, we are talking about a hundred years of denial and resentment."

I(1)R3 brings up the issue of the government's role in the process. She states that the way governments use domestic affairs as a trump card for international affairs (or vice versa) harms dialogue efforts. However, when the football diplomacy started between Armenia and Turkey, both governments were positive about each other, which affected dialogue efforts positively. She is sure that the changes in governmental attitudes have significant impact on the society.

"In a place where the denial is maintained for a hundred years, it is possible to commit atrocities against Kurds today" says I(1)R1. He states that there are positive steps taken during the last years, however those steps have largely been intellectual efforts that did not have a larger impact on the rest of the society. "We can commemorate the genocide only at certain places like Istiklal Street. When we

attempted to organize a commemoration in Kadıköy (another district of Istanbul), we were attacked and taken into custody. This means the state's denial of the Armenian genocide still continues," mentions the respondent in Istanbul.

I(2)R5 points out that Turkey doesn't make any attempts for reconciliation with Armenia as it doesn't see Armenia as a country that is worth to negotiate: "That is why, only from time to time, Turkey does something positive on this issue to solidify its politics. Therefore, no improvements are made." By saying this, and connecting the reconciliation process with economic interests of Turkey, the respondent doubts that any major steps will be taken by the Turkish government as Armenia is not a strong economic actor in the region.

I(1)R4 of first Istanbul focus group claims that even though, both states did not change their stances towards each other, the society's perception in Turkey has changed after Hrant Dink. She also mentions that on the state level, small steps do not make major differences: "Only when Turkey finds it helpful for its own interests, there will be bigger steps to make. Those steps would help the normalization process and maybe the recognition of the genocide. Yet, I am not sure whether those steps would be taken with a good intention."

As clearly seen, almost all of the focus groups participants see a change, even if it is a small one at the level of the civil society in Turkey. While evaluating the achieved level of reconciliation in Turkey, they doubt about a big change, though mentioning that the attempts of civil society are not in vein.

While holding similar opinions with the Turkish CSOs in many senses, Gyumri's civil society respondents' evaluations regarding the achievements of Armenia-Turkey reconciliation can also differ from them. They mention different reasons for which the reconciliation process is moving very slowly. GR2 of Gyumri's focus group claims that the dynamics of the reconciliation in the last five years are negative mentioning that the Armenian society used to be more ready for steps towards the reconciliation with Turkey than it is now. He is sure that the number of the citizens who would like the Turkish-Armenian border to be opened was larger

five years ago. According to him, due to the long period with the closed borders and rising conflict with Azerbaijan, society of Gyumri became more sceptical about the opening of the border: “I even think that even if the Turkish government decides to open the border today, there will be a strong lobby in Armenia to oppose this step.” GR1 mentions that the steps on the state level and especially the initiatives from Armenia are very few.

Assessing the developments on civil society level, GR2 says that there are not many CSOs on both sides that work for the reconciliation between Armenia and Turkey. Mentioning a couple of Istanbul based NGOs working on the field, he highlights that working on the topic is not easy for Turkish CSOs due to the severe political pressure: “We have a mutual project with a CSO from Turkey, that we have not been able to realize because of the political atmosphere in Turkey.” He also states that the interest in mutual projects decreased both among NGOs in Turkey and in their organization specifically.

Evaluating the achievements in the Armenia-Turkey reconciliation GR3, mentions that there is no big demand from the society, which is the reason CSOs don't implement more mutual projects. He doesn't foresee rise in the number of projects that would influence larger circles of the society. He mentions the unpredictability of the governments as one of the reasons for a slow development, saying that he does not expect acceleration in the work of civil society organizations towards the reconciliation and evaluates the current situation as passive.

GR1 from Gyumri thinks that the reconciliation process is a playing card for the governments. He mentions about a conference organized by one of the well-known and largest NGOs. The hospitality and the good will they saw turned to be a show off according to him: “Everything was just perfect. They met us, took to the different branches of the NGO. I believe they were told to treat us very good as it was the 90th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide and they needed to show the world that we are brothers and don't have problems. After the project we tried to keep our good relationships and continue cooperation. However, we haven't heard from them. We have sent one of our member to a visit, but none of them came to

visit us afterwards.” He mentions that the topic is misused by the governments and brought to the agenda whenever needed.

GR2 agrees with the above-mentioned idea partly, and suggested that the civil society representatives in Turkey are willing to keep good contacts, however sometimes they are not able to do so because of the political pressures. He also mentions that the initiatives are depending on the funds which are easier to get for Turkish NGOs. He believes that they would do more mutual dialogue projects if they had more means in their NGO. A civil society representative of Gyumri evaluates the achieved level of reconciliation as passive.

In the focus group conducted in the capital of Armenia, there were different opinions on the current achieved level of reconciliation. YR4 mentions that even though there is a positive change especially on the civil society level, the political circumstances are not fertile for the reconciliation in the recent years. She mentions that there are not many CSOs consistently working in specific topics such as the genocide. According to her, the political pressure mostly existing in Turkey is a big factor that affects the process negatively. Evaluating the society’s willingness and readiness for the reconciliation, as well as the current political climate in the both countries, the civil society representatives are not satisfied with the current reconciliation level, even though all respondents agree that there have been important initiatives bringing a good change.

2.2.4. The Most Influential Institutions, Individuals, and Events in the Achievement of Current Level of Reconciliation

Civil society representatives of the two countries mention the change for good (though usually not a large scale one) in the process of Armenia-Turkey reconciliation arguing that even though states did not make much improvement on this issue, positive developments in the societies of the both countries are observable. Therefore, we can assume that the current level of reconciliation is higher in comparison to what there was in the past. In order to better understand the

change in the process, I asked the respondent to name the institutions, individuals, events that influenced most the reconciliation process, whether positively or negatively. Results are as follows:

I(2)R3 mentions Hrant Dink as a figure who influenced the reconciliation process positively: “After Hrant’s death, the Armenian community in Turkey also made improvements. Around 2005 and 2006, we had asked Hrant’s help on our NGO works. He said: “Unfortunately, Agos is a company, not a civil society organization. Since there has been no civil organization in the Armenian community, people come to us.” Now the situation is different. The youth in the community is quite active.” The respondent also mentions that the Armenian diaspora started getting more involved after Hrant Dink’s assassination, mentioning that diaspora’s fears about Turkey are lower now. She mentions about mutual projects they started conducting with organizations both based in Armenia and Turkey.

The first interviewee, I(2)R1, continuing the topic of Armenian minority civil society organization, mentions Nor Zartonk¹¹ (<http://norzartonk.org>) the members of which identify themselves as leftists. He mentions that many Armenians became aware of their identities and started to become politically active after Hrant Dink’s assassination in 2007. I(2)R2 mentions civil society organizations based in Turkey working on the denial of the Armenian Genocide as one of the negative factors influencing the reconciliation process.

I(2)R1 also mentions Hrant Dink and Agos newspaper: “Hrant spoke the language of the society. That language touched people. No previous Armenian institution opened its doors to people other than Armenians. That is why Hrant was a crucial

¹¹ Nor Zartonk, which translated from Armenian means New Awakening, is the self-organization of Armenian people of Turkey. It is an organization that aims an equal, free and fraternal life for all Armenians in Turkey, and other peoples in the world and Turkey. As said in the website, even though the seeds of Nor Zartonk burgeon before 2007, after the assassination of Hrant Dink, it was restructured as the self-organization of Armenians of Turkey. (For more see: Nor Zartonk- Program: <http://www.norzartonk.org/nor-zartonk-program/>)

figure.” Hrant Dink is the main figure mentioned by the civil society representatives of Turkey to influence the reconciliation.

Answering the same question, Gyumri’s civil society representatives (involved in the focus group) mentioned many figures, NGO names influencing the process in a good or bad way. GR2 of Gyumri’s focus group thinks that culture is the main road to reconciliation. That is why he mentions Istanbul based Anadolu Kültür as an organization that has enhanced the reconciliation process a lot. GR4 speaks about local governors that contributed to the reconciliation between Armenia and Turkey: “I would like to mention the previous mayor of Kars and his brother, who put a lot of efforts on the opening of the order. Currently, of course they are politically targeted and are not able to do much.”

GR2 speaks about a party in the reconciliation process that according to him influences the process negatively: the Armenian diaspora. He says that diaspora that is ready to support Armenia in every stance: economic, cultural, social, is absent when it comes to the reconciliation with Turkey. He suggests: “Having the potential of being a strong player in the process, the Armenian diaspora prefers not to take part in it. And the state is not inviting the diaspora to be part of it. So, I believe as representatives of civil society organizations [In Armenia], we are left alone in this process.”

GR3 brings the example of the Hrant Dink Foundation as an organization putting effort in the reconciliation process. He mentions the Turkish government as an obstacle to the reconciliation process, bringing in the topic of the national education that is bringing up new generations full of hatred and lack of information. According to him, the influence of the state is significant on the civil society and if the state wants to solve the issue, it would be solved shortly. So, in this case, he suggests to take the state as an institution that affects the process negatively.

YR3 mentions about the developments in the business sphere in the last years, stressing the importance of Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council (TABDC) by stating the following: “It had a big role in development of business

ties between the two countries, explained, promoted and involved many new actors interested in the cooperation.”

YR1 brings examples of cultural dialogue arguing that there is a positive change that followed these cultural dialogue projects on that ground as well. He specifically mentions Anadolu Kültür from Turkey and Eurasia Partnership Foundation from Armenia that cooperate on the Armenian culture in Anatolia. The respondents also stress that many tour agencies contribute to the development of tourism between the neighbouring countries.

YR5 believes that the project called “Speaking to One Another” organized by DVV International offices in Armenia and Turkey, has changed her views and that DVV International is one of the organizations that influenced the reconciliation process highly.

YR4 remembers City Research Center in Gyumri that used to be active in mutual dialogue projects. She mentions Golden Apricot International Film festival that hosts Armenian-Turkish Cinema Platform every year, CivilNet, a project of Civilitas Foundation. Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Committee is mentioned as the first ever initiative to work on the reconciliation.

Coming to the topic of influential individuals in the reconciliation process, YR4 mentions Serzh Sargsyan, the current president of Armenia, as a negative figure. This is because he doesn’t put enough effort to the reconciliation process. As another figure with negative influence, she mentions Robert Kocharyan, the second president of the young republic of Armenia: “He came to power saying that the genocide issue will become the axis of his external policy. After him, S. Sargsyan signed the protocols which was at least a step forward. But in general if I think of individuals these figures come to my mind.”

YR5 from Yerevan focus group thinks that some universities in Yerevan sometimes are obstacles to the reconciliation process. She mentions Yerevan State University that many times is preventing its students from applying to dialogue projects because of the conservative viewpoint still dominant at the university. YR4 thinks

that Armenian Revolutionary Party (Dashnaksutyun) is obviously a barrier on the way of reconciliation.

YR6 remembers Fethiye Cetin and her book “My Grandmother” that brought change in the both societies: “I think we can even call her peace ambassador for both Armenia and Turkey. With her personal story and her approaches, she brought a new positive line into the process.” R2 says that Hrant Dink’s name should have been mentioned in the first place, as his contribution is unquestionable.

YR4 of Yerevan focus group points out United Worlds College Dilijan¹² (<http://uwcdilijan.org>) as the school that has the biggest numbers of students from Turkey: “This initiative of Ruben Vardanyan can be considered important of the reconciliation. The school not only doesn’t approach discriminatively to Turkish students but it promotes their attendance by giving exceptional scholarships for those applying from Turkey trying to promote more Turkish students to study in Armenia. I believe it brings a change.”

2.2.5. The Role of CSOs in the Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation and the Biggest Obstacles to Civil Dialogue

Even though almost all participants of the focus groups in Istanbul expressed a pessimistic view of the current situation of the reconciliation process, many of them agree that Civil Society Organizations have had a big role in the achievement of what we have now.

I(1)R1 believes that there is a positive change in Turkish society and that its stance is not completely denialist today. She mentions that in their last project, they have

¹² “UWC was founded in 1962 with the vision of bringing together young people whose experience was of the political conflict of the Cold War era. By offering an educational experience based on shared learning, collaboration and understanding it was intended that the students would act as champions of peace” says on the official website of UWS Dilijan, which joined the movement in August, 2014 (For more see: <http://uwcdilijan.org/about-us/uwc-movement/history>).

got many more applications than they would expect and she considers this as a hope for a better change. Continuing with the topic of genocide recognition, she mentions that she hardly believes in a better cooperation between NGOs of Armenia and Turkey, she rather thinks that students and young people are individually more open to the discussions of the genocide than specific NGOs: “In NGOs that I worked with previously I encountered people saying, they cannot co-organize the event if the word genocide is used. I do not find this hesitant attitude in youth. It exists in institutions. In Armenia too, there are problems. In our project an Armenian student told the Turkish fellow that he was doubtful of Turks being human, and after knowing them he thought they are slightly close to humans. Some participants from Turkey who was excited about the project lost their enthusiasm at the end of the project, and told us they were offended.” She thinks that not only the denialist approach of Turkish society but also the aggressive/offensive attitude of Armenian society is a big obstacle against the reconciliation.

I(1)R2 agrees with the view of I(1)R1 mentioning that she also encountered similar situations in dialogue projects. She states that there were frictions between the participants: “Participants from Armenia directly assume that participants from Turkey are Turks, not considering that they might be Kurds, Armenians or Islamized Armenians. They often think within the perception of nationality, national borders and nation state. The official history they were thought and national education is decisive there.”

According to her, Armenian participants of such projects look for the answer of a simple question: “Do you recognize the Armenian Genocide?” She says that is mostly the first question asked while participants from Turkey go there for dialogue, already acknowledging the genocide: “I doubt there is too much that Turkish participants can do at that point. They listen to them, even though they know they are not the Turk that Armenians looking for. After this first confrontation, Armenian participants gradually open themselves to the dialogue.” She states that as far as she could observe, their nationalist perceptions fade away and their approach to Turkey and Turkish people changes over time. “When I went to Armenia for a film project,

I was questioned at every house, even though our film topic was unrelated to the genocide” says I(2)R2 mentioning that this experience gives hard times to Turkish participants.

We can obviously see that the mentioned obstacles match with the statements of YR4 from Yerevan. She also mentions the difficulties of working with the society, when it comes to the topic of reconciliation between Armenia and Turkey. Even if the civil societies are more informed and more ready for a reconciliation, it is hard to argue the same about the societies at large. In this case, preparing the ground for such projects (in both sides) by which I mean doing a preliminary research and preparing the participants from the both sides of the project, is one of the key responsibilities of the CSOs.

YR3 compares the number of active civil society representatives (in Armenian-Turkish reconciliation process) with the number of those who have never been involved in any project. She argues that above mentioned type of participants constitute a very small percentage of the population in Turkey and do not represent the general profile of Turkish society, while YR2 sees the active civil society representatives as a sign of diversity in Turkish society.

The viewpoints of I(1)R1 are more similar to I(1)R2's: she thinks it is not good to hold on to victim role and mentions that her Armenian colleagues also criticize this: “They can change the identity by talking to us like the Jews who managed to change their victim identities.” However, she immediately adds: “They managed to do so because Germans' position was much more different than ours.”

Regarding the obstacles of the larger CSO impact on the reconciliation process, I(1)R3 says that it was not easy also for other countries to face and recognize genocides done in the past. She thinks that CSO representatives should continuously try to achieve the recognition and reconciliation. But as the main obstacle she mentions the weakness of civil society in Turkey: “Only few NGOs are working on human rights, especially on the rights of non-Muslim minorities in Turkey. The other problem is that projects are carried out through short term grants. We work

on a topic for a year, then switch to another because there is not enough funding. Almost no NGO works on an issue for a longer period like ten or twenty years. So, NGOs end up not being very effective in civil society.” As we will see the second obstacle, which is the lack of sustainable funding, is also mentioned by the representatives of Armenian civil society organizations.

The other problem I(1)R3 sees in the reconciliation process is the gap between civil society and public sectors. According to her, there is no collaboration between public institutions and civil society organizations and even if there is some space for collaboration, the public sector dominates NGOs and does not give them enough space. As for I(1)R4 the problem is that civil society organizations do not have the means to reach many people.

I(1)R1 mentions that Armenian diaspora failed in the management of its sources. While doing its best and spending a lot of money and efforts in other countries, the Armenian diaspora never tried to contact NGOs in Turkey and work together with them. She thinks that the reconciliation process usually includes the same circles of people: “When I go to those events, I realize I see all the same faces over and over again.” She believes that CSOs should spend more efforts in reaching out new circles which preferably should include more nationalistic people to increase the possibilities for change in the society.

I(1)R2 sees the reliance on external funding as a problem. EU and the US, and governmental institutions of some Western countries are the main supporters of the reconciliation: “We do not do much, but whatever we do, we do with external funding. We are not able to conduct our projects only by our means, independently.”

In Gyumri, respondents from civil society organizations presented in the focus group also think that CSOs are not able to make a big change. They believe there are many drawbacks in the work of civil society organizations, though they are the only actors working in the field. Gyumri’s civil society representatives mentions many obstacles that prevent the civil society to take more active role in the reconciliation.

GR1 mentions the unresolved issue of the killings of Armenians in the beginning of the 20th century as the largest obstacle. According to him, it has always been a problem that causes trauma for both sides: “The Turkish society carries the trauma because the memory was erased, and we carry it because of the overload of the memory. This separates us.” He believes that the recognition of the genocide by Turkish state, will let the societies of the both sides to free of their trauma and act independently.

GR2 believes that in case of the recognition of the genocide by Turkish state Armenian civil society will be more ready for the reconciliation. He mentions that Turkish society needs alternative media channels. He also thinks that the educational system in Turkey is not supportive to reconciliation.

GR1 speaks about the stereotypes Armenian people have about Turkish society as an obstacle. He remembers his friends telling him not to even try to implement a project in Iğdır (a city in Turkey), however he tried: “They told me to close the doors of the car and pass through Iğdır without even stopping there. However, we even managed to have a concert there. It (obstacle) is sometimes about our perceptions and stereotypes.” By saying this, he also adds “Of course, I wouldn’t suggest someone from Armenia to do this nowadays” stressing the current negative political atmosphere.

As the main obstacle to the civil society’s active role in the reconciliation, YR2 of Yerevan’s focus group mentions current state policy, while YR3 brings the examples like the rise of authoritarianism, of the pressures against Kurdish people and the civil society, and security issues.

The fear of civil society representatives in Armenia to be misunderstood is one of the main problems that pumps up. While organizing dialogue projects, many people bear the fear of being misunderstood by their society.

YR4 thinks the claims of Turkish government that the PKK has ties with Armenians is a big obstacle as well. She mentions that this idea is quite widespread though it sounds unrealistic. Focus group participants in Armenia mentioned particularly

Turkish media being sided and governmental. According to them this is one of the main barriers slowing down the reconciliation process and there is a need to open up alternative information channels. The data provided in the research of TEPAV comes to prove this point. “Very few people in Turkey have realistic knowledge of Armenia as a neighboring country and vice versa. A 2005 opinion survey revealed that half of the respondents in Turkey did not know whether Armenia was a large or small country, 16.8% believed that most Armenians practice Judaism while 25.5% did not even venture a guess” (Çuhadar and Punsmann, 2012, p. 30).

The respondents from civil society organizations evaluate the obstacles caused by the both sides. Both sides speak about the trauma that Armenian and Turkish societies carry. The trauma of being a victim and perpetrator might be different but they are barriers on the way of civil society’s involvement in the reconciliation. The limited resources of the civil society and their reliance upon foreign funding is also seen as an obstacle by the two sides. The current governments’ policies are mentioned as obstacles for the reconciliation. Civil societies of both Armenia and Turkey don’t find their governments reconciliation-friendly or civil society-friendly mentioning that the governmental institutions almost never help their efforts. Nationalist oriented party Dashanktsutyun and the Armenian diaspora are also mentioned as actors having negative impact on reconciliation efforts by the Armenian civil society respondents. According to them, the diaspora could contribute more to accelerate the reconciliation process. But, it doesn’t as the recognition of the Armenian Genocide is the priority for them and having no relations with Turkish society or Turkey is the core of their ideology. However, Turkish civil society representatives mention that their ties with the Armenian diaspora organizations are becoming more vital over time and they see a good change in their approach.

2.2.6. Steps Needed To Enhance the Reconciliation

I(1)R2 of the first focus group of Istanbul brings the opening of Turkey-Armenia border as one step to be taken to enhance the reconciliation. Saying that the closed border negatively affects the economy of Armenia, the interviewee believes that opening of it will make the reconciliation easier. And as the second step the involvement of the Armenian diaspora is mentioned: “I believe the Armenian-Turkish reconciliation will not only be between Armenia and Turkey. Leaving the diaspora outside may have caused them become radicalized. Therefore, the diasporans should be included in the debates.”

I(1)R4 believes that the tensions at the regional level cause many problems “... while opening the borders between Armenia and Turkey could have solved the problem.” She imagines Armenia and Turkey achieving reconciliation without interference of foreign countries. She says that a normalization between the states is needed for a final reconciliation: “Yes, societies may understand each other’s pain and reconcile, but without the peace between states there cannot be a total reconciliation.”

I(1)R3 from Istanbul believes that the denial of the genocide [by society] should be stopped first and the attitude of the civil society to this denial should be more certain: “When the protesters were chanting slogans in front of the German Consulate like “the best Armenian is the dead Armenian,” the society and media was tolerating their hatred. We should fight the denial and hatred.”

I(1)R1 believes that the Turkish society should be transformed first, as small steps taken by the Turkish government do not change the perception of the society. She believes that thus there should be more pressure on the Turkish government to initiate more changes. “So far the society shifted its denialist stance from completely denying to accepting that bad things happened but still questioning the word genocide” says I(1)R1, while I(1)R3 thinks that most part of the society still holds the denialist perception.

In the second focus group of Istanbul, there are suggestions to change the language used in the reconciliation process. The participants mostly agree that the society of Turkey (not only the East where Kurds reside, but also in the Black Sea and the Aegean part) is aware of the crime committed against Armenians in past. I(1)R4 remembers Nazan Maksudyan's talk at the first Armenian Genocide conference [a conference held in 2005 and titled "Ottoman Armenians During the Decline of the Empire: Issues of Scientific Responsibility and Democracy"] at Istanbul Bilgi University, who suggested to find another word than genocide that would make it easier to speak about the stories of Armenians in Turkey: "I believe we should name the crime as Genocide but still it would not harm to be distant from a legal terminology when telling the sorrowful stories. It would be more helpful to tell what happened than naming the whole thing." According to her, people wouldn't apply to their denialist statements like "genocide never happened", "they deserved it" or "conditions forced us to do it", in case you speak about, for example, rescue stories.

I(1)R1 also agrees with the widespread opinion that the term "genocide" is scaring people and preventing the recognition. She thinks that we should speak about the rescue stories more to achieve recognition in the society, as no one wants to accept that their ancestors were perpetrators. She brings the example of Cem Özdemir: "In Germany, Cem Özdemir from the Green Party said he is not a descendant of Enver or Talat Pashas. He is the grandchild of the Kutahya Governor who saved Armenians."

As said before, having the discussion in focus groups gives a chance to bring out more ideas, as well as more controversial points among the participants of the focus group and of the same person. As it can be clearly seen, the participants have diverse points on the recognition of the killings of Armenians starting from 1915 as genocide. While most of the participants see it important for the reconciliation, some mention other obstacles, that according to them are more essential and have more urgency to be solved. And it can be noticed that the same person speaks about the importance of the genocide recognition on the state level and minutes later mentions of using another term during the projects, which will enable them reaching

more layers of the society. On the other hand, Ayşenur Korkmaz and I were trying to take the discussion to another topic, however it was always coming back to the genocide issue, marking the importance of the topic. Thus, It was the most discussed topic especially in the two focus groups in Istanbul (while in yerevan and Gyumri, the respondents were referring more to other topics such as political conjuncture, closed border, etc.) and the topic that brought out the most controversial views.

In Gyumri, the civil society representatives think that there should be more dialogue projects between the neighbouring cities/villages like Gyumri-Kars. They think they are more professionalized in those projects and know how to do to better influence the reconciliation.

GR4 thinks that the first step should be the recognition of the Armenian genocide by the Turkish state, as according to her, the Armenian society will not be ready for the reconciliation with the pain of the history not being recognized and justice not revealed.

GR3 suggests reaching out more nationalistic circles of the society would be a big step forward to the reconciliation: “You always see the same people involved. They are already open minded people. However, you don’t see many participants with nationalistic views. We should try to reach them out more.”

It is worth to be mentioned that in the focus group conducted in Gyumri, the most discussed topic was Turkish-Armenian border. I can say that that was the main and biggest obstacle the majority of participants was mentioning. The problem of scarce sources was the other issue that was mentioned in the focus group. They also think that projects between the bordering cities, Kars and Gyumri should be more. And for this an open border would create a fertile ground.

YR2 of Yerevan focus group mentions about Taner Akçam’s ideas of the steps to take towards Armenia-Turkey normalization: “The first step is the opening of the border. A prayer at Sultanahmet Mosque (Blue Mosque) in the memory of the martyrs of the Armenian Genocide.” He continues mentioning that in the past he used to think that the change of the textbooks will lead to reconciliation, while now

he realizes that the state should change first as the textbooks are directly written, the story is directly told by the state. He means the Turkish state and textbooks in this context. He says: “We need a change at the state level. I don’t say that every change is a top down process, however the improvement in the states’ attitude would lead to a bigger change. On the civil society level, we should keep on publishing mutual books on the reconciliation and the genocide, make dialogue projects, etc.”

YR1 believes that the biggest step would be the establishment of diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey. The second step is the opening of the border. “There is a lot being done on the civil level, however its influence would be wider if it has a state support, if diplomatic relations are established”, adds the interviewee.

YR4 thinks that the biggest change will be noticed if there is a political will in Turkey to review their history, to change their attitude towards the history. YR5 brings the experience “memory politics” of German-Jewish reconciliation: “When you come across to a sign while walking in the street, a sign saying that a certain person used to live in that house, on that street etc. We could apply this experience also to the Armenian-Turkish reconciliation.” YR4 finds this possible in case if the whole system of the Turkish government changes, as it was possible in Germany because of the new official ideology there.

2.3. DATA ANALYSIS

While conducting the focus groups, first of all I tried to see the diverse interpretations of the term ‘reconciliation’ by my respondents. It was not surprising to get diverse answers depending on the CSOs the respondents were representing, the backgrounds they were coming from, the cities they worked in.

There is often criticism on the limited influence CSOs have on the society. Many would argue that the influence of the CSOs’ activities is limited and does not raise the acceptance of reconciliation among peoples. For this reason, it was essential to

learn how CSOs evaluate the degree of the acceptance of reconciliation in the society. The CSO representatives of Armenia and Turkey also evaluated the achieved level of reconciliation and brought the names of institutions, events and individuals that had a role on the way of achieving the current reconciliation stage. The respondents of the conducted focus groups also expressed their views on the role CSOs have in the reconciliation process, mentioning the obstacles of it and suggesting steps required to reach reconciliation. The answers of all of those questions are given by CSO representatives involved in the focus groups, it is a sight from inside, the evaluation of those who are most involved in the process and shared their viewpoints of current situation, the obstacles and steps to be taken.

Neutral terms preferred

One of my findings is that the concept of *normalization* was the most preferred one among the participants of all the focus groups. Interviewees find this term softer than the term reconciliation and think that it is one of the steps leading to a long term goal, which is reconciliation. CSO representatives of the two countries believe that normalization is a closer step than a reconciliation. So, while interpreting reconciliation Turkish CSO representatives mostly use the term normalization, CSO representatives also mention that same term claiming that reconciliation is a much more complex process. “Reconciliation requires time and a reconsideration of identity as well as of history” while “the normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations is more limited in scope. In theory, it could proceed more quickly” (Hill, Miriřci, Moffatt, 2015, p. 129). As we can see, CSO representatives mostly share this idea. They establish a conceptual distinction between normalization and reconciliation as two separate steps; the latter requires the former sequentially.

Terms like negotiation, recovery, finding a common language, coming to terms with each other, dialogue, cooperation were other terms mentioned to describe the civil society efforts. Cooperation was mentioned by a focus group member in Gyumri. Economic cooperation is probably preferred in Gyumri, as Gyumri is the neighbouring city with Turkey that suffered the most from the closure of the border. Turkish civil society organizations’ members mentioned facing and confronting the

history, which imply that they associate the reconciliation with the genocide recognition. Armenian CSO members mention that in many of their projects they encounter with society representatives expecting Turkey/the Turkish project partner to recognize the Armenian Genocide before taking part in any kind of reconciliation activity. Armenian respondents mention, that because of this issue, they prefer using more neutral terms like normalization. According to many of CSO representatives from Turkey, reconciliation is a stage that requires several steps. Mentioning the genocide recognition by Turkish government as one of the steps, they mostly interpret reconciliation as normalization that is very much needed between the societies of Turkey and Armenia. Looking at the responses of the CSO representatives, we can see that a softer and more neutral term like ‘normalization’ is preferred in the two countries. While Armenian CSO representatives discuss the term according to their needs in the work with society (whether they should use reconciliation, normalization, rapprochement, etc.), the Turkish CSOs try to find the equivalent of the term reconciliation in Turkish. Interestingly, even though the approaches to the topic are different, CSO representatives of both countries come up with the term normalization.

There is a change but...

Civil society organisations are generally composed of a more responsible and well-educated part of both societies. My aim was to see how the civil society organizations representatives involved in the focus groups see the society’s approach towards reconciliation.

The responses were diverse, especially among the respondents in Turkey. Many interviewees were arguing that there is no tolerance towards any minority group, while other would mention that there is a positive change in the society’s perception. While stressing that there is a positive change in the Turkish society’s perception in recent years, we should not forget that this change is limited in scope, so it is still too early to observe a broader positive change of the entire society.

The awareness of Turkish-Armenian reconciliation varies from region to region in Armenia. As a result of the focus group in Gyumri, we can see that people of Shirak region are more aware of the situation as the region is on the border and every change in situation has an immediate effect on them. Yerevan focus group participants also see a positive change in the society. However, in Armenian case too, the positive change in attitude toward reconciliation does not cover the society in general and is very much dependent on political developments.

While on the two mentioned topics, the viewpoints of the representatives were quite different from each other, they are mostly like-minded on the issue of civil society's achievements in the normalization process. Almost every participant states that civil society organizations have done a huge work on the dialogue process in the political atmosphere where states are mostly silent. However, they are not satisfied with the results so far, mentioning that more could be achieved if obstacles were removed.

Various obstacles

The last decades have mostly witnessed the growing participation of CSOs in dialogue building initiatives. However, the number of the obstacles that CSOs face is not decreasing. The factors that affect the reconciliation process in conflict countries vary depending on the countries and the cases of the conflict. Different factors can be seen as obstacles in different conflict cases. For example, language differences, lack of trust to CSOs, external funding, lack of direct contacts, etc. The latter is an obstacle also for Armenian-Turkish normalization process as the closed border causes less direct contact which leads to a slow reconciliation, as it is expressed in one study: "Although Georgia and Armenia are of comparable size and both border Turkey, ten times more Georgians enter Turkey than Armenians. This is because of the practical difficulties of entering Turkey from Armenia, coupled with the prevailing prejudices and fears in Armenia towards Turkey" (Çuhadar and Punsmann, 2012, p. 31). In this research too, the closed Turkish-Armenian border is one of the most frequently stated obstacle. Especially the CSO representatives in Gyumri are very much affected by it and are doing mutual projects to achieve the opening of the border which will accelerate the process of

normalization. The closed border decreases the number of people to attend joint meetings. And the only remaining mean of getting information about each other is media, which in this case can also be another obstacle.

According to the vast majority of the focus group participants, the non-recognition of the genocide is the biggest obstacle laying on the way of reconciliation. They think that the recognition of it by the Turkish state would stimulate the reconciliation process as it would change the perception of Turkish society. However, as said before, contradictions appeared among the respondents and the same person would contradict with his/her views.

In Gyumri civil society representatives think that the lack of independent funding for their activities to develop dialogue projects and their reliance upon foreign funding is a problem. In the focus groups in Istanbul, the participants mentioned that short term grants and mostly external sources are obstacles to a faster reconciliation.

Steps to lead to reconciliation

The opening of the Armenian-Turkish border is the most frequently mentioned step that would lead to reconciliation. Both countries' CSO representatives see this step as vital to normalize the relations. The opening of border as a step to reconciliation was mostly mentioned in Gyumri. As said before, it can be described with the city being on the Border with Turkey. Not only the CSO representatives but also society of Gyumri see the opening of border as vital for Turkish-Armenian normalization process and a reconciliation. This is stated in the report of CRRS: "We observe that respondents in regions that border Turkey are more interested in opening the border than respondents in regions that do not share a border (2015, page 14).

The Armenian Genocide recognition by the Turkish government is another important step that was mentioned. CSO representatives involved in the focus groups think that it will change Turkish society's approach towards Armenians and the reconciliation process. This will be the most important step to prepare the Armenian society to reconciliation. The trauma caused by the dark past and by the

century of silence will leave its place to the desired dialogue and normalization. That was a dominant idea especially in the focus group participants in Istanbul.

The change of governments' policies is seen as the next necessary step for the reconciliation. Civil society representatives believe that more active involvement of the Armenian diaspora, positive change in the language used for each other, positive change of representation of each other in the education systems, opening up new media channels together with other steps will accelerate the reconciliation process.

Punsmann mentions four different frames about the Armenian-Turkish conflict: "The psychological and cognitive factors at the core of the conflict; structural; the need for justice; and Realpolitik" (Punsmann, 2012, p. 25). As structural barrier she mentions closed borders, lack of communication and contact, lack of knowledge of each other, diplomatic relations, economic ties. Deriving from the data of focus groups, in addition to this, I can add the financial reliance on external/international sources and limited resources available for CSOs working on reconciliation as another structural barrier.

THIRD CHAPTER

3. CONCLUSION

Two neighbouring nations are physically separated from each other for more than two decades. The right of those people to have direct contacts and know each other better is taken from them since 1993. Adding to the complicated past, and the genocide trauma two sides carry, Turkish-Armenian sealed border is a ‘thick wall’ making the gap between the peoples even deeper and the reconciliation more difficult.

The normalization process between Armenia and Turkey and its peoples has not been completed although there is no on-going conflict between the two countries. While sharing similar cultures, having shared history and geography, being next to each other, why are these people still so ‘distant’ to each other?

In the beginning of this work, I asserted that CSOs has a prominent role in Armenian-Turkish reconciliation. In the days of zero diplomatic relations between the neighbouring states, civil society organizations have been the main moving force of the civil dialogue. This thesis argued that even though the extent of its influence on society might have remain limited, civil society organisations have played a positive role in the normalization process between Armenia and Turkey.

Civil society organisations of Armenia and Turkey working for reconciliation are the focus of this study. The fieldwork, which included 4 focus groups conducted in Armenia and Turkey, is conducted with the participation of representatives of the civil society organizations of the two countries. This study is an attempt to understand how civil society organizations see reconciliation between two countries.

Civil society initiatives working towards reconciliation have been carried out since mid-1990s, though with ups and downs. The most important and effective civil initiatives were discussed and presented in a chronological perspective. The main developments on diplomatic level were also presented. I tried to show the influence of diplomatic relations on civil society initiatives between two countries. Then the

main CSOs currently active in the reconciliation process were presented with the immense work they carry out.

Most of the scholars working on the topic agree that civil society has an impact on Armenian-Turkish reconciliation. However, no study investigated how civil society representatives involved in the process see and evaluate the work they do and their perception of reconciliation so far. My thesis fills this gap in the literature.

While the perception of the reconciliation varied between the countries, among representatives of different CSOs involved in the discussions, there were also shared views on the achieved results evaluation, the obstacles, and further steps to be taken. Being the most actively involved parties of the reconciliation process, CSO representatives present at focus groups mostly evaluated the current achievements as insufficient and the current situation as passive. Almost all the obstacles brought into the discussion by my respondents are external factors: closed border, non-recognition of the genocide, state policies, lack of independent media channels and the discriminatory contents in education systems. They mention also dependency on international funds as a major obstacle. According to Armenian-Turkish Citizens' Mutual Perceptions and Dialogue Project carried out by TESEV and HASA population of Armenia sees genocide recognition and Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict as the biggest obstacles, while as we can see from the results of the focus groups the approach of CSO representatives is different. While mentioning non recognition of the killings of Armenians in 1915 as a genocide as one of the biggest obstacles, they believe that closed Turkish-Armenian border is another big obstacle on Turkish-Armenian normalization process. Even though Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Turkey was mentioned as an obstacle to Armenia-Turkey reconciliation, particularly in the focus group in Yerevan, it is hard to say that CSO representatives see it as one of the two most essential obstacles. According to the research of TESEV and HASA, as mentioned before, the two main obstacles to the reconciliation mentioned by Turkish respondents are "genocide claims" and land issue. As it can be seen clearly, Turkish CSO representatives do not mention the land/ compensation issue as one of the key

obstacles. We can also say that Turkish CSO representatives are aware of this difference of approaches between the general society and CSO representatives. This might be the reason lying behind some focus group respondents who claim that the recognition of 1915 events as genocide by Turkish state will change society's approach and will ease their work with society.

In this study, I observed how civil society organizations in both countries deal with complicated historical problems including the past with genocide and closed border. The opening of the Armenian-Turkish border seems to be the most vital step for reconciliation. The Armenian Genocide recognition by the Turkish state is the other important step mentioned by many CSO representatives of the two sides. These two steps are necessary to open up direct contact possibility and to cure the two societies' trauma. In this case we can see a similarity with the obstacles mentioned in Israeli-Palestinian conflict, especially travel restrictions (Salem, p.1). In Turkey-Armenia case it is not about roadblocks, checkpoints, it is about the border being completely closed. Even though it is not a matter of big problems for citizens of Armenia to travel to Turkey and visa version (through neighbouring Georgia), the lack of direct border interactions affects dramatically the rate of direct people-to-people contact. Thus, we can say that the lack of open border makes the societies of Armenia and Turkey use a third country as a common space for dialogue slows down the normalization process between the societies causing misinformation or lack of information about each other in the societies of the two countries as it is mentioned in Armenian-Turkish Citizens' Mutual Perceptions and Dialogue Project.

Other steps are mentioned to support and speed up the reconciliation are as follows: change of state policies, active involvement of the Armenian diaspora, change of hate language used, changes in education system, creation of more independent media channels. We cannot ignore the economical aspect of the normalization process. An interviewee from Istanbul mentioned that Turkey does not take major steps towards reconciliation as it doesn't see Armenia as a country that is worth it. On the other side, it was clear in Gyumri that the strong will of CSO representatives

for reconciliation has also economic reasons behind it. Many times the opening of Armenian-Turkish border was mentioned as one of the steps to be taken on the way to normalization, stressing the economic advantage that particularly bordering regions will get.

In this thesis, I tried to bring to light the point of view of CSOs that are the most if not the only active party in the process of Armenian-Turkish normalization. I aimed to cover a topic that is important but rarely considered in academic publications so far. As an academic work covering the two countries, I believe this study provides an important academic source to those willing to understand the CSOs perspectives to reconciliation between Armenia and Turkey.

CSOs operate within a broader political context affecting greatly their attempts of reconciling the two societies. As such, Kurdish issue was mentioned both in the first focus group of Istanbul and the focus group conducted in the capital of Armenia. CSO representative in Istanbul, mentioned that the end of peace process between Kurdish movement and the Turkish state affected dramatically not only Armenia-Turkey reconciliation process, but all reconciliation processes in the country. CSO representative from Yerevan mentioned the notion of Turkish government that Armenian state somehow supports Kurdish forces slows down the reconciliation process between Armenia and Turkey. According to her, this idea is being mentioned from time to time which makes her think that it affects the process negatively. From this, we can assume that Armenian-Turkish reconciliation is indirectly connected with Kurdish issue in Turkey as it directly affects the political climate in Turkey.

External funding and dependency of civil societies on them is a big issue for many conflict areas. Moldova-Transnistrian normalization process is not an exception too. The funding supporting the dialogue is mostly external and is mostly provided to institutions in Moldova. In Turkish-Armenian case, the picture is obviously not different. According to TEPAV's research mentioned prior in the thesis, more than 73 per cent of the funding provided for Armenia-Turkey reconciliation is external. While the balance can change, having the most funds from the US or EU, the

external funds continue to be the biggest part of the total funding. And as mentioned by a respondent in Gyumri, institutions in Turkey are able to get funds easier and, according to him, CSOs in Gyumri have nothing else to do, but wait for their partners from Turkey to come with mutual project suggestions. Getting most of the funds from external sources, CSOs in both Armenia and Turkey become very dependent on the changing dynamics of international politics. Not having state support on the reconciliation process, civil society organizations have to carry out their projects, initiatives with an external support. This makes them dependent on international institutions. Negative political changes have been putting them in a more vulnerable position in both countries. With the current governments taking no steps, CSOs are carrying the whole burden of the reconciliation alone.

In societies that have been separated from each other for around a century, the states play a big role and the message of states reach both societies much faster. So, while arguing that civil society initiatives have a big impact on the reconciliation process, one should not forget about the key roles that both states play. So far being largely negative, we can easily see how easy the society's approach changes positively, when the states change their language from hostile to peaceful. Having observed this weight of state's influence on reconciliation, one cannot ignore its importance in the reconciliation process. Without any state support, it is extremely difficult for the civil society organizations to carry the whole normalization process. Even in this context, I should say that the changes made by the CSOs have been quite impressive. CSO representatives viewed their self-image mostly accepting that the same circles are mostly involved in the reconciliation process. They state that CSOs working on the topic should put more efforts to reach out new people, groups.

Hoping that the states will take into consideration the points of civil society representatives and will take steps towards the Armenian-Turkish reconciliation, I hope this work will be useful for the civil society organisations to continue carrying out their important work and take steps that will quicken the process of the 'two distant neighbours' getting closer.

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