

THE NORMALIZATION PROCESS OF ARMENIAN-TURKISH RELATIONS AND ITS IMPACT ON HOMELAND-DIASPORA RELATIONS (Contemporary Period)

Ara Hovhannisyan¹

Abstract

In the article are discussed the normalization processes of Armenian-Turkish relations in the contemporary period. It presents in detail the attempts made to normalize these relations within the specified period. An effort is made to understand the real motives behind initiating the normalization process of Armenian-Turkish relations. Special attention is given to the impact of this process on Homeland-Diaspora relations. The article reveals the prevailing approaches in the Diaspora and mainly negative attitude toward these processes. It also outlines the reasons for certain tensions in Homeland-Diaspora relations. In particular, through specific examples, the article shows how the adversaries of the Armenian people attempted to drive a wedge between the Homeland and the Diaspora.

Keywords: Armenian-Turkish relations, normalization process, Homeland-Diaspora relations, Armenian Diaspora, preconditions, Pan-Armenian interests, counteraction

Homeland-Diaspora relations have always held a central place in the Pan-Armenian agenda. These relations became more active and gained greater opportunities for development after the collapse of the Soviet Union. With the removal of the “Iron Curtain”, there were no longer any obstacles preventing normal communication and the development of relations among all segments of the Armenian people.

It should be noted, however, that within Homeland-Diaspora relations there were several issues that were very sensitive and formed part of the Pan-Armenian agenda. Developments around these issues sometimes led to disagreements among certain circles on both sides. These issues mainly concern the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the policy regarding recognition of the Armenian Genocide, as well as Armenian-Turkish relations.

Following the 44-day war of 2020, a new phase of the Armenian-Turkish relations was launched at the end of 2021². Special representatives appointed by the two countries held several meetings aimed at improving bilateral relations.

However, this process has been met with deep concern across the Diaspora. Many hold the view that Armenia, given its weakened position and inability to fully

¹ Ara Hovhannisyan, PhD in Historical Sciences, Associate Professor, Chair of Armenian History, Yerevan State University, Email: arahovhannisyan@ysu.am ORCID:0009-0002-8421-5908

Received 05.05.2026, revised 01.07.2026, accepted 03.07.2026

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² Bilateral Relations: Türkiye.

defend its national interests, may engage in negotiations leading to harmful concessions rather than a genuinely precondition-free dialogue. These fears are largely rooted in Armenia's fragile geopolitical situation following the devastating losses of the 2020 war, which left the country in a highly vulnerable state.

In mid-January 2022, a week after the first meeting between the special representatives of Yerevan and Ankara in Moscow, the Turkish newspaper "Hürriyet" reported that steps toward normalization had been welcomed by the Armenian community of Türkiye³. The initiative was commented on by Patriarch Sahak Mashalian of the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople and other community representatives. The newspaper cited several perspectives regarding this issue. Patriarch Mashalian emphasized that for the Turkish citizens who are loyal to the Armenian Apostolic Church it is important to improve relations and fostering mutual recognition and cooperation between the two peoples. Eduard Dantsikian, editor of the bilingual newspaper "Agos", also expressed optimism regarding the reopening of borders between Armenia and Türkiye. The most striking statement came from the head of the Karagyozyan Foundation, who declared that Türkiye should henceforth support Armenia in every possible way and act as its "elder brother"⁴.

According to the publication, while some members of the Turkish-Armenian community were already defining roles in "brotherly relations"⁵, circles oriented toward the Cilician Patriarchate remained cautious and were dissatisfied that Yerevan neglects them.

Earlier, in December 2021, the leader of the Armenian Catholic Church, Patriarch Raphael Bedros XXI Minassian, had also expressed his views on the process. While generally supportive of normalization, he underscored the importance of ensuring that any peace agreement between Yerevan and Ankara had to be signed without preconditions⁶.

On April 14, 2022, the Bureau of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), one of the most influential organizations in the Diaspora, issued a statement expressing its serious concerns regarding both the Armenian-Turkish normalization and the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement processes. The Bureau noted that official Ankara had not abandoned its well-known three preconditions for establishing relations with Armenia—namely, Armenia's renunciation of support for international recognition of the Armenian Genocide, Artsakh's subordination to Azerbaijan, and the legal confirmation of the existing *de facto* border between Armenia and Türkiye. Moreover, a fourth precondition had been added—the so-called "Zangezur Corridor." Moreover, the statements of representatives of the highest Turkish authorities on the comparison of the process of the settlement of Armenia-Türkiye relations with Azerbaijan prove that this is not about

³ Yerkramas 2022, January 24.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

Armenia-Türkiye interstate negotiations, but about a new concession being forced on Armenia by a hostile tandem⁷.

From the very beginning, this latest normalization process has been inherently unhealthy and extremely dangerous. It is being done in an international political and security situation created around the Republic of Armenia, when the government that had led country to defeat, for objective and subjective reasons, lacks the ability to effectively protect the vital interests of the Armenian people. It is obvious that under the current circumstances, the normalization process is fraught with numerous geopolitical, security, political, economic, and spiritual-cultural challenges and will inevitably lead to irreversible, dangerous consequences and loss of sovereignty⁸.

The ARF Bureau, in its statement, demanded that the Armenian authorities immediately disclose the guiding principles of the Armenia-Türkiye normalization process, explicitly and entirely reject the Turkish preconditions, and emphasize, as a matter of political principle, that the normalization of interstate relations between Armenia and Türkiye cannot, under any circumstances, be linked to any third party.

The normalization of Armenia-Türkiye relations and the determination of the rights of the Armenian people cannot be the monopoly of any single government. The establishment of Armenian-Turkish relations can only be achieved through the unity and consensus of the Armenian people worldwide, without Turkish preconditions and without violating the rights of future generations⁹.

In July 2022, the editorial of “Paykar”, the official weekly publication of the Ramgavar Azatakan Party in the United States, reflected the Diaspora’s prevailing view that the slow progress of the negotiations was due to Türkiye’s preconditions¹⁰. It was evident that those talks could not yield tangible results so long as Armenia had not yet committed to signing a humiliating “peace treaty” with Azerbaijan. Moreover, it suggested that even after such a treaty, Ankara would advance its own political agenda and expect Armenia to accommodate it, exploiting the country’s weakened state. That agenda would inevitably include the re-affirmation of the 1921 Treaty of Kars by Armenia, thereby solidifying the current Armenia-Türkiye border. The struggle for the international recognition of the Armenian Genocide had already been left to the Diaspora. However, Türkiye would not stop there—it would also insist that the Armenian authorities restrain the Diaspora’s political activism concerning the Genocide, a move that would inevitably drive a wedge between Armenians in Armenia and the Diaspora¹¹.

The editorial recalled that during the many years when Armenia was under blockade, Türkiye’s sole condition had been the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue in favor of Azerbaijan. Now that this condition has effectively been met, the border

⁷ Aztag 2021, December 27.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Payqar 2022, July 10.

¹¹ Ibid.

remains closed, while Ankara presents new demands, despite its claims of participating in “talks without preconditions.” It is evident that Türkiye continues to negotiate on the basis of preconditions, consulting every step with Azerbaijan’s authorities and imposing extremely harsh terms. In essence, Türkiye is either negotiating or merely pretending to negotiate in order to extract further concessions from Armenia¹².

In September 24-27, 2022, the Social Democratic Hunchakian Party (SDHP) held its Congress in Yerevan that coincides with the 135th anniversary of its founding¹³. More than seventy delegates representing party organizations from Armenia and fourteen other countries discussed the current challenges facing the Armenian nation, as well as issues related to the internal life of the party.

Addressing the topic of Armenia–Türkiye relations, the Congress assessed the ongoing negotiation process between the two countries in a generally positive light. It underscored the importance of establishing normal and predictable relations between two neighboring and sovereign states, provided that negotiations are conducted without preconditions. As an act of goodwill, the Congress called on Türkiye to first re-open the border it had closed. At the same time, it emphasized that the negotiation process must by no means imply a renunciation of the Armenian people’s legitimate demands toward Türkiye, and that this issue can never become a subject of political bargaining¹⁴.

According to Mourad Papazian, President of the Coordinating Council of Armenian Organizations of France, the Diaspora has historically opposed the normalization of Armenian–Turkish relations. In his view, it is evident that Armenia is not prepared for a process led by Türkiye¹⁵. “Today, the defeated Armenia is unfortunately incapable of signing any agreement with Türkiye or Azerbaijan, because under current conditions any document drafted by them will inevitably turn against us—since they hold the pen, while Armenia, regrettably, does not,” he stated. This is precisely why the Diaspora, and particularly the Armenian community in France, opposes the ongoing developments.

That is why Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlut Çavuşoğlu is again worried about the Armenian Diaspora. This time he is concerned about the activities of the Armenian community in France, which, according to him, hinders the process of normalizing relations between Armenia and Türkiye and Azerbaijan.

Most likely, according to Papazian, the start of Armenian-Turkish relations may be related to the ban on entry into Armenia, since they have been against the normalization of relations with preconditions since 2009 and have not changed their position in this regard, which is not well regarded by the authorities, since the latter are not only for it, but also positively relate to all of it. We should not forget the statement made by Turkish

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Statement of the SDHP 22nd Congress.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Turkish leaders have realized that Pashinyan is already in their pocket, and now the problem is the Diaspora.

Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu that the main culprit in the delay in the normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations is the Diaspora¹⁶.

The decision to resume the normalization process should not have been made hastily or unilaterally, as was the case. Such a critical and highly sensitive issue bears national and Pan-Armenian significance. Therefore, before initiating the process, a broad Pan-Armenian discussion should have taken place, followed by a collective decision on whether or not to proceed.

Armenia entered the talks from a position of weakness, which could naturally result in further concessions. Instead, Armenia should use the Diaspora's influence and resources as a strong card to overcome its current difficulties. Papazian clarified that the Diaspora doesn't categorically reject the normalization of relations with Türkiye, as is sometimes assumed. However, such normalization must take place on a reciprocal basis and without preconditions. The Turkish side, however, has ignored this principle, imposing its own preconditions, which Armenia has surprisingly accepted, thereby placing itself in an extremely vulnerable position. It is precisely this approach and haste, that are being rejected¹⁷. Armenia is simply not yet ready to appear at the negotiating table from a position of strength.

His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, also expressed concern about the recent developments in Armenia-Türkiye relations, particularly regarding the ongoing negotiations and the entry ban imposed on ARF Bureau member Mourad Papazian¹⁸. He warned that such developments could have adverse consequences, especially for Armenia-Diaspora relations, and called for transparent and comprehensive information to be provided to the public¹⁹.

With regret, Catholicos Aram I observed that current Armenia-Diaspora relations are, in essence, stagnating and require revitalization, particularly amid the uncertainty and disillusionment that have prevailed since the 44-day war²⁰. Meanwhile, Ibrahim Kalın, spokesperson and senior adviser to the President of Türkiye, also commented on the normalization process, criticizing the Armenian Diaspora and claiming that the benefits of Armenian-Turkish normalization would be "understood last" by the Armenian communities in the United States and France, which he referred to as the largest Armenian communities in the world. Recently, similar rhetoric has become increasingly frequent in the statements of Turkish and Azerbaijani officials, who attempt to portray the Armenian Diaspora as acting against Armenia's national interests²¹.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ "The Armenia-Türkiye Negotiations and the Ban on Mourad Papazian's Entry to Armenia Are Concerning," Says Aram I.

¹⁹ "The Armenia-Türkiye Negotiations and the Ban on Mourad Papazian's Entry to Armenia Are Concerning," Says Aram I. 16.07. 2022.

²⁰ Yerkrmas 2022, January 24.

²¹ Is the Armenian Diaspora the Nightmare of Turkish Statesmen? Kantsasar, 11.11. 2022.

Within the Diaspora, there is a prevailing belief that although Türkiye may not explicitly mention the Armenian Genocide in the framework of normalization, its political strategy nonetheless seeks to eliminate any possibility of addressing or acknowledging the issue. To achieve this, Türkiye aims to set Armenia's interests against those of the organized Diaspora communities, exploiting every possible means to create divisions within Armenia–Diaspora relations. Every opportunity will be used to criticize the Diaspora and to weaken its ties with Armenia²².

The organized Armenian Diaspora has become a principal target of Turkish and Azerbaijani state officials, as they are well aware that a strong and united Diaspora serves as the most vocal advocate against Turkish–Azerbaijani aggression. The Diaspora continues to be the bearer and witness of the consequences of the Armenian Genocide, and is the one that supports Armenia with its economic and political capabilities.

The decision to hold a World Summit in Yerevan (October 28–31, 2022) without inviting long-established Diaspora organizations that have sustained the existence of Armenian communities abroad for over a century, and, moreover, to restrict the entry of Diaspora Armenians into Armenia, has caused serious concern. Many in the Diaspora have begun to question whether the defense of Pan-Armenian interests become unrealistic or secondary for the current authorities in Armenia²³.

There is also a growing perception that these developments are occurring under Turkish–Azerbaijani pressure and under the guise of “Armenian–Turkish normalization.” This once again reinforces the widespread belief that such a process may carry grave and costly consequences for the entire Armenian nation.

According to Hakob Ter-Khachaturian, a representative of the ARF Bureau, the war of Autumn 2020 brought about an immense national shock. The resulting despair and disappointment created, to some extent, a rupture between the Homeland and the Diaspora. It is necessary to close the gap that has arisen between the homeland and the Diaspora²⁴.

In Ter-Khachaturian's view, it was a strategic mistake for the Prime Minister of Armenia to open an additional front of negotiations with Türkiye during such a turbulent period, when the country continues to face severe security threats and unresolved issues with Azerbaijan. All of this occurs under the misleading narrative of promoting “regional peace,” even though Armenia's adversaries have by no means renounced their aggressive ambitions or their predatory behavior toward Armenia.

Türkiye has closed the Armenia–Türkiye border and can open it without any preconditions. Any concessions or preconditions from Armenia are unacceptable. Yet in reality, the situation is quite the opposite: Türkiye has already advanced numerous

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ More than ever, a solid Pan-Armenian unity based on national ideology is necessary, Kantsasar Weekly, 22.11.2022.

preconditions, linking normalization with Armenia to the fulfillment of Azerbaijan's demands. In any case, Armenia must prepare the necessary legislative framework that will allow it to prevent a possible Turkish invasion if the borders are opened one day²⁵.

As we can observe, the dominant attitudes within the Diaspora toward the normalization of Armenian–Turkish relations are largely negative. However, this does not mean that the Diaspora rejects the idea of normalization. The problem is that the Diaspora wants Armenian-Turkish relations to be normalized without preconditions. The Diaspora strongly opposes any outcome that could lead to painful national losses for Armenia or the wider Armenian world and rejects the inclusion of Pan-Armenian issues of vital significance within the agenda of Armenian-Turkish negotiations.

It is certainly not possible to present all the viewpoints on the current situation. However, the approaches presented almost entirely reflect the moods that exist in the Diaspora regarding the process of normalizing Armenian-Turkish relations at the current stage.

If we attempt to compare this normalization process with the most active previous attempt at establishing relations, the so-called “football diplomacy”, we can observe that Armenia at that time was in a far more advantageous position and had significantly greater opportunities. Although the 2009 protocols were subject to sharp criticism, especially from the Diaspora, they nevertheless contained certain positive elements. In particular, the initiated process began to unsettle Azerbaijan, and some tensions emerged between it and the Republic of Türkiye. In contrast, today Armenia's opportunities at the negotiating table are extremely limited, and the country is facing serious challenges, as Azerbaijan and Türkiye are now acting jointly against Armenia. If previously we had a unified Armenia–Artsakh–Diaspora triad that largely managed to act with a common front against shared adversaries and withstand difficulties and challenges, today the Republic of Artsakh practically no longer exists, and relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Diaspora are not at a desirable level. If we also take into account the losses suffered during the war and the grave situation Armenia currently finds itself in, we can better understand why our positions at the negotiation table are so weak, and why the Diaspora criticizes the authorities of the Homeland for initiating the Armenian-Turkish process under such circumstances. At the same time, it should be acknowledged that under such conditions, the Armenian authorities are not always able to withstand external pressure. Otherwise, it is possible that rejecting negotiations and the normalization process might have led to another war, the consequences of which could have been even more disastrous. For this reason, fully understanding and sharing the concerns and apprehensions present within the Diaspora, the prerequisites for the initiation of the negotiation process are also understandable. It may be aimed at gaining time and prolonging the process until a

²⁵ More than ever, a solid Pan-Armenian unity based on national ideology is necessary, 19.11.2022.

moment when it will be possible to overcome the current difficult situation through joint efforts and to act from more favorable positions collectively.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be stated that the process of normalizing Armenian-Turkish relations has had a profound impact on Homeland–Diaspora relations and hinders their smooth development. This has considerably weakened the Armenian nation, preventing it from acting as a united front against common adversaries and from effectively addressing existing challenges. We can also observe that the opposing side, through its political strategy, is deliberately attempting to create divisions within Homeland–Diaspora relations, manifestations of which can be seen from time to time. In fact, we are witnessing a situation in which, as the process of Armenian-Turkish normalization develops, certain complications and problems simultaneously emerge in Homeland–Diaspora relations. The more progress is made in the first process, the more complex the situation becomes in the second.

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