
**FOLLOW-UP PROJECT: THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF OPENING THE
BORDER BETWEEN ARMENIA AND TURKEY**

Summary of the Round Table Meetings in Armenia, November 2007

In November 2007 [Armenian International Policy Research Group](#) (AIPRG) launched its regional round tables in the marzes (regions) of Armenia within the follow-up project on the Conference entitled “The Economic and Social Consequences of Opening the Border between Armenia and Turkey” organized in Yerevan on January 13-14, 2007. The meetings were organized with financial support of Eurasia-Armenia Foundation and our regional partners: Gyumri Student Councils, YCAP regional offices in Aragatsotn, Ararat and Armavir marzes, Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly of Vanadzor and the Local Government Offices (the mayors of Davitashen and Haygyugh). The meetings were followed by a concluding round table organized in Yerevan with the help of the Civil Society Institute on December 03, 2007.

The aim of these visits was to present the key findings of January conference as well as the results of AIPRG’s visits to Turkey ([Istanbul](#) and [Ankara](#)) and Georgia ([Tbilisi](#)). It is worth to mention about the big interest of the people from the regions in this issue regardless of age and affiliations. As a result, the meetings were widely covered by the regional mass media and actively attended by representatives of local government, academy, and NGOs overall attracting more than 170-200 people.



As expected, each meeting had a unique nature determined with the specific region where the round tables were held and the participants' interests:

Shirak Marz. The audience distinguished with its apparent economic background and interest in the methodology of the research carried out within the project. There was a proposal by one of the participants to compare the costs of goods in Kars and Gyumri to see the differences and to pay attention to the ways how an economic cooperation between the Republic of Cyprus and Turkey takes place and use this practice as a model for Armenia and Turkey. Almost all the participants emphasized the importance of establishing cooperation between Turkey and Armenia through tourism. Also some of the participants had been in Turkey previously and emphasized the possibility that Turkey might become a bigger market for Armenian goods and migrant workers vis-à-vis Russia.



Lori Marz. The meeting was very unique in the sense of NGO sector representativeness. The participants were very interested in having clear understanding of mutual benefits of Armenia and Turkey after having an open border and whether it is imbalanced or balanced. The participants asked a lot of questions regarding current indirect economic cooperation between Armenia and Turkey and the ways it is being implemented. The participants were posing questions about further consequences for Azerbaijan after the border of Armenia is open with Turkey. In this context, Mher Baghramyan, AIPRG Senior Research Associate presented the [Phased Strategy for Opening Armenia's Western Border](#) proposed by AIPRG Fellows, Karine Torosyan and Richard Beilock. There were representatives from the academic community with economics and history backgrounds. The local TV station of Vanadzor had a coverage of this meeting.

Aragatsotn Marz. The round table was mostly attended by the youth of the region. It was interesting to get acquainted with the ways the border was perceived by the participants in sense of history and the Cold War and the priority economic cooperation spheres proposed by them after listening the presentation on the key findings of January conference prepared by Mr. Baghramyan. It was again proposed to become engaged in tourism and energy sector cooperation, taking into account Armenia's current energetic capacities. Compared to the other meetings the inhabitants of this region are people whose predecessors left Ottoman Empire a century ago after and/or before the Genocide. Hence there was a more resistant stance towards opening strategies. The meeting was held in Davitashen village's mayor's office.

Armavir Marz. As it was planned, our regional partners have invited regional NGOs and local government representatives. After the presentation of the key findings, an active discussion started among the round table participants especially concerning the advantages and disadvantages of having an open border with



Turkey taking into account how close one of the routes connecting Armenia with Turkey (through Margara community) is located in this marz. The participants were also interested in current developments and trends in Armenian and Turkish «relations» and potential obstacles for economic cooperation to which Tigran Mkrtchyan, AIPRG Executive Director, answered by bringing examples from the latest political announcements and mutual reactions, results of the meetings in Turkey and other regions of Armenia.

Ararat Marz. The meeting was specific in sense of having representatives from different communities from the region. Taking into account that Ararat marz is mainly distingushed

by its agricultural capacities and provision of high-quality products, the audience was very interested in discussion of establishment of cooperation in the sphere of Agriculture and how it could impact on the reduction of monopoly. There were some concerns expressed during the meeting regarding the export of human resources (migration) from Armenia to Turkey and its further impacts. An interesting viewpoint was expressed by one of the participants regarding the possibility of coming across with opposite picture which is emigration from Turkey to Armenia taking into account lower economic development level of the eastern provinces of Turkey in comparison with Armenia.



Yerevan. Following the logic of the series of the held meetings and having a huge database of viewpoints and ideas on this issue collected during the regional meetings and round table discussions in Turkey, AIPRG organized a concluding round table discussion in Yerevan with the help of Civil Society Institute aiming to summarize the

regional meetings and present the key findings of above mentioned January 2007 Conference to the interested parties. There were more than 30 participants at the meeting, including students, lecturers from different universities of Armenia, representatives of International organizations and NGOs, analysts and a journalist from Turkey (Hurriyet Daily). The participants touched upon several important issues regarding the consequences of the export of financial capital from Turkey to Armenia and legislative background of the issue, about the difference of GDPs between the western and eastern provinces of Turkey, how the same economic effect of border opening can have positive or negative influence depending on the way it is interpreted or used, what type of costs both countries pay from the closed border, what an importance the border will gain after it is open for Armenia and how this fact could

be used in politics and finally what is the meaning of keeping political sanction towards Armenia, when the dynamics of this sanction decreases.

It is also worth to touch some of the general ideas which were being discussed during almost all the meetings, e.g. the viewpoint to observe Turkey not as a homogeneous phenomenon taking into account the differences between the provinces of Turkey, the quantity of the population and ethnic minorities living in the territory of Turkey. Another common idea expressed by the participants of the discussions was that the border between Armenia and Turkey goes beyond its physical existence and it is a barrier both in psychological and historical sense for both countries.

One of the dominating ideas of the meetings was the necessity of having good relationships with the neighbors and open borders in case we are aiming to gain both economic and democratic development in both countries that would normalize the relations between Turkey and Armenia. It was also emphasized that the Track 2 diplomacy is important. It is equally important for the state representatives to be engaged in mutual dialogue more audaciously and less timidly.