

## *From the Desk of the Editor*

In a geostrategic reality that includes conflicts on every side, Turkey's role in bridging differences, tipping scales or preserving its neutrality has not been easy to define nor follow. In this issue, Turkish Policy Quarterly takes a look at various flash points in Turkey's neighborhood, including Iran, Sudan, Abkhazia, Ukraine, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Turkey's involvement in democratization struggles in the region is another theme examined in this issue of TPQ. Conflict zones aside, Turkey's impact on the spread of ideas in its neighborhood –by virtue of increased trade, liberal visa regimes, culture and educational links– is on the rise. Nevertheless, the attention span, level of involvement and commitment of Turkish intellectuals and NGOs in democratization and governance debates in these countries falls short of its potential.

Around seven years ago, Turkish policy makers in Ankara introduced new rhetoric to the ongoing debate regarding Turkey's role in spreading progressive values in its neighborhood. But in recent years, to maximize economic and political dividends from its neighbors it appears to have proven more expedient for Ankara to stay at arms length regarding debates about the democracy deficits of its counterparts. Exceptions, of course, exist however are mostly confined to cases where Muslims are “wronged” by non-Muslims – ranging from violations of the rights of Uigurs in China, or Turkish minorities in European countries, to the plight of Palestinians.

It is often rightly pointed out in Turkey that Western “democracy promotion efforts” have lost credibility and influence in recent years, with cynicism having seeped into a once upbeat vision of democratic values spreading eastwards. Rather than pointing fingers though, the question of how to best contribute to the making of a better future for the societies neighboring Turkey deserves an insightful debate. Democracy may not be spreading eastwards in a neat wave, but progressive values and expectations for objective information, basic rights, and opportunities are. Though Ankara may opt to distinguish between how Turkey copes with such demands domestically and how it views the advent of such demands abroad, pressure for alignment is likely to surface.

On 4 March 2010, the United States House of Representative's Foreign Affairs

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Committee approved the Armenian Genocide Resolution (HR 252) with 23 to 22 votes. Once again Turkey entered the month of April with a “Caucasus conundrum”. The protocol-based normalization process with Armenia has been unraveling since mid October 2009. The resolution in Washington reignited debates in Turkey about the possible consequences of the U.S. recognizing genocide, and went so far as to blaze a manifold of hypothetical calculations regarding the opportunity cost of Turkey downgrading strategic relations with Azerbaijan, Israel, or the U.S. The drama revealed how disturbingly vulnerable some fundamental anchors we take for granted in Turkey might be.

Ankara’s realization that the protocols for establishing and developing relations with Armenia are set to neither “tame” Armenians’ genocide recognition campaigns, nor inch the resolution of the Karabakh conflict forward has left the process without fuel in Turkey. Turkish policy makers would arguably risk incurring losses both in domestic support and in terms of regional strategic dividends if Ankara were to proceed in ratifying protocols that upset the already fragile balances in the Caucasus by striking a blow to Azerbaijan’s interests. Simultaneously, the debate in Armenia is centered on how to best deal with Turkey’s dragging its feet. Armenia could charge ahead and ratify the protocols in its own parliament or withdraw its signature, formally marking the derailment of the process. In any case, it is clear that what is regarded by Ankara as a “constructive pause” in the normalization process may very well be unsustainable.

Turkish policy makers now regularly highlight their belief that only progress in resolving the Karabakh question could lead to a positive cycle of events which would contribute to regional normalization. With deadlock persisting over Karabakh, Turkey and Armenia may need to resign themselves to “baby steps”, rather than a “package solution” like that which the Protocols envision. This prospect is strengthened by the fact that the political maneuver space of both leaderships is set to narrow with Turkish parliamentary elections looming in 2011, and Armenian parliamentary and presidential elections in 2012 and 2013 respectively. Moreover, as 2015 nears (the centennial of 1915) tensions are also likely to heighten.

Though the ties and exchanges forged through civil society initiatives do not *resolve* bilateral diplomatic deadlocks, in the longer term they transform the context within which decision-makers function, increasing the chances for bold political decisions. Though there is more progress to be made, the liberal seg-

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ment of Turkish society that can be self-critical when it comes to the wrongs of the Turkish state, has widened in recent years. Though such Turkish intellectuals are appreciated in Armenia and have contributed to breaking the view of the monolithic “terrible Turk” among Armenians, this path is not a one-way street. For Armenians to face up to the plight of innocent Azeri’s in the context of the Karabakh conflict will be part and parcel of the normalization of regional mind-sets. Neither attempts to “legislate” history in parliaments around the world, nor efforts to put a lid on debates about history via intergovernmental commissions, will curb the natural progression and interplay of ideas and emotions. Already in Turkey, facing up to the tragedy inflicted upon Armenians in Anatolia by Ottoman Turks during the First World War has stirred latent memories among the descendants of the well over two million Balkan Muslim and Circassians who, in face of ethnic cleansing, sought refuge in Ottoman Turkey between 1850 and 1914.. As dialogue between civil groups intensify, the intertwined nature of identity, memory and conscience of the different nations in this region will inevitably surface, rendering the black-and-white images of history unsustainable.

Entering its ninth year of publication, this issue of TPQ marks the start of a renewed and more colorful façade. This new image also reflects the fresh dynamism and energy in our expanding team. In addition to the makeover of TPQ’s cover, we enter 2010 with exciting plans for a series of roundtables scheduled to take place in Istanbul, Ankara, Brussels and Washington DC with the support of the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation. Partnership with the European Stability Initiative on content and Turkish Daily News on outreach will continue to enrich TPQ throughout 2010, while we have also stepped up our ties with the Atlantic Council of the United States and the Brussels-based Euractiv. You can now follow TPQ on social media such as Facebook and Twitter as well, while a more interactive TPQ website is in the works. We look forward to hearing more from our readers –including both their ideas about policy issues as well as feedback to TPQ articles– via these platforms in the months ahead.

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Diba Nigar Göksel