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An analytical study of geopolitical consequences of normalization of Turkish–Armenian relations

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ABSTRACT

In order to study the Turkey–Armenia relations in past and present times and their processes, the current paper, taking into account geopolitical views, tries to analyze the political and economic consequences of normalization of Turkey–Armenia relationships. With respect to the outcome of this research, it seems, expansion of such ties would benefit Ankara, only if the national interests of other regional states are taken into account. In other words, ignoring the interests of other regional states in the course of normalization of Turkey–Armenia relations would damage the Turkish interests and its relations with Azerbaijan and Georgia. From the point of views of influential regional powers, too, the possible consequences of expansion of Turkey–Armenia ties would accompany particular complexities. With the expansion of such ties, we may see a kind of balance of influence between profit seeking powers in the region.

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1. Introduction

Since the formation of modern Turkey, its relations with neighboring countries have become the longstanding debates in the country's foreign policies. Till recently, it has had very weak political and economic ties with its neighbors such as Greece and Bulgaria along western border; Syria and Iraq along its southeastern border and Iran and Armenia along its eastern border. Among adjoining countries, weakness in ties with Armenia, compared to others was completely felt or it is better to say that there were no ties as such. In fact, after the Armenia occupation of Nagorno–Karabakh in April 1993, Turkey closed its land and air routes for Armenia (Demirağ, 2005–2006: 75). From then onwards, the issue of Karabakh as the most important foreign policy issue of Azerbaijan that is very close to Turkey religiously, culturally, historically and linguistically, plays a determining role in Turkish relationship with Armenia. Moreover, Armenia still does not officially recognize Kars agreement aimed to demarcate boundary between Turkey and Armenia. Also, inclusion of the term "Western Armenia" in Para 11 of the independence communiqué of Armenia its territorial claim especially on a big part of eastern Anatolia has been a principal problem in the way of their bilateral relations. Another stumbling bloc in their relationship is the widening propagation of Armenian Diaspora in the international arena and its apparent claim of "Armenian

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Genocide" by Turks that has put enough international pressure on Ankara, politically and financially (Çandar, 2009). With respect to equations acquired for these tense relations that extensively influenced the national politics of each of these countries especially Armenia, after years of conflict and commotion, they have finally decided to normalize their bilateral relations with collective cooperation in the southern Caucasus. Although, the efforts remain ineffective so far and the process of normalization is in the state of suspension but there is no doubt that the continuation of this process and normalization of ties would accompany its own regional consequences. A glance on these could give wider perspective about regional and extra-regional ties in the southern Caucasus.

With reference to Turkish–Armenian differences as well as geopolitical problem governing the southern Caucasus especially the geopolitical problem of Armenia with Azerbaijan and its isolation by both Azerbaijan and Turkey that have had much influence on its shape and geographical location (Armenia has most of its borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan), have also impacted the regional strategic important in geopolitical equations of big powers especially its transit capacity in energy field, trade and financial transaction and over all regional security. It is bit natural that the ever growing importance of the southern Caucasus has necessitated a review of Turkish–Armenian relationship. Consequently, the current paper attempts to study and analyze the consequences of normalization of Turkey–Armenia relations, taking into account its geopolitical angle. Therefore, the main question of this paper is: what geopolitical consequences would accompany the normalization of Turkey–Armenia relations?

2. Research methodology

With respect to its theoretical essence, the actual method applied in this research is descriptive-analytical and for documentation and indexing, library and Internet materials have been used. In order to study the Turkey–Armenia relationship in the past and the present times and their processes, the paper, taking into account geopolitical views, tries to analyze political and economic consequences of normalization of such ties. Noteworthy, analyzing commercial ties of Turkey with southern Caucasian nations, due to inaccessibility to new resources, the above analysis could be based on 2003–2008 data acquired from the websites of the United Nations.

3. Theoretical bases of research

From geopolitical point of view, identification of geographical dimension of the research process is based on the logical calculation and the analysis process in the application of activities that have been left behind in the due course. By this way, geopolitical analysis of the region can be remembered as a suitable tool in assessing practical policies of governments (Dadandish, 2007: 77–78). However, the manner of geopolitical application overseeing the practical geopolitical knowledge aims to remedy human needs that it is constructed like other terms and theories to the extent that it is dependent on the world view, ideology, outlook and interests of users (Hafeznia, 2007: 1). Practical application of geopolitics or in other words, innate feeling of geopolitical possibilities and understanding its deep impact on political development enjoy long historicity. In reality, it is geopolitical insight that causes the moral heroism of a leader who leads people to the course he had not traveled before. By this way, new powerful countries emerged whose creators easily understood the geopolitical needs. In other words, only geopolitics could give political leaders essential insight to identify actual needs for proper understanding of the world. This knowledge establishes relations between politics and geography and frees politics from useless and meaningful theories that could probably entangle the political leaderships into unproductive and unreal desires. Geopolitics convinces leaders to take into account a united and integrated territory (Ó Tuathail, Dalby, & Routledge, 2003: 91–92). Therefore, unlike traditional, the modern geopolitics could be useful in boosting international cooperation and establishing peace. The modern geopolitical system emphasizes and concentrates on evolution of the political world as a system enclosed with different scales i.e. from local to national and to transnational level and a reciprocal spatial action and political process at all levels (national, regional and international) creates and molds an international geopolitical system (Cohen, 1994: 17).

4. Findings & research data

4.1. Turkey–Armenia relations & process of normalization of bilateral ties

Armenia that has the weakest relations with Turkey among its neighbors became independent in 1991 in the aftermath of the disintegration of erstwhile Soviet Union. Turkey was one of the first nation officially recognized Armenia on December 16, 1991 and even did not hesitate to send humanitarian aid to this newly independent country. In 1992, apart from selling food grains to Armenia, Turkey, with the reason that Armenia was facing oil sanction from Azerbaijan, removed its electricity problems (Demirağ, 2005–2006: 74). This issue was highlighted in a way that Turkey with such humanitarian posture aims at establishing direct relation with Turkish speaking nations in Central Asia through the Armenian and Azerbaijani territories hence; minimizes the growing pressure of the Armenian Diaspora in the global arena. Further, with the establishment of friendly relation with Armenia, Turkey wanted to minimize Russian influence Yerevan—a new step for resolving Karabakh problem. Even before recognizing the Armenian independence, the Turkish government, in April 1991 sent its ambassador in Moscow to Yerevan for talks aimed at boosting bilateral ties and showed its inclination to establish friendly relations with the newly Armenian government. That is considered as the first high level meeting with Armenians (Özbay, 2011: 3).

However, considering that all countries try to establish transit, trade, commercial, political and even military ties with powerful regional countries and those with strategic location, geopolitical realities including geographical location, historical and cultural commonalities, aptitude toward each other play important role in establishing these ties (Valigholizadeh & Zaki, 2008: 22). The first prime

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