

Some methodological elements of the PhD Thesis: “The relations between Turkey and Armenia in the context of Ankara’s South Caucasian Policy (1991-2010)”

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The subject of the research

Turkey’s foreign policy has recently become increasingly ambitious in the regions such as the Middle East and the Central Asia. The same could be said regarding the South Caucasus, a region situated in the immediate vicinity of Turkey and with a high strategic, political and economic potential. The three countries of the region, namely Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, occupy a key place of the external relations of this regional power whose foreign policy has remained active and multidimensional since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the level of the relationship that Turkey established with these states is hardly the same: this divergence results first of all from the differences of these countries on historical, ethnic, economic, cultural, religious and linguistic aspects. For instance, the main reasons of Turkey’s privileged relationship with the largest country in the region – Azerbaijan could be explained with their closeness regarding their history, culture, religion and language. As a supplier and transit country of energy resources, Azerbaijan is also a vital regional partner for Turkey especially at the economic level.

Georgia is crucial as well in Ankara’s South-Caucasian policy. The political and economic cooperation established between

these two countries constitute an important part of the Turkish regional policy.

As to Armenia, Turkey is almost absent in a political and diplomatic life of this country. As a matter of fact, these two neighbours have not yet established diplomatic relations in the proper sense and their common borders are officially closed. There are various historical and political reasons for these “cold” relations between them. Despite these problems, there have been considerable changes in their bilateral relations in recent years. The process towards the reconciliation and rapprochement between two states led to the signature in Switzerland in 2009 of the diplomatic protocols on the re-establishment of diplomatic relations and the reopening of the borders. Regardless of the non-ratification of the protocols, this gesture could be considered as an essential step in the diplomatic history of these countries.

At the heart of the relations between Turkey and Armenia are naturally the Turkish and Armenian actors. The notion of the Armenian actor appears mainly in three dimensions for Turkey: The Republic of Armenia, the Armenian diaspora and the Armenians living in Turkey. From Ankara’s point of view, these three dimensions are interdependent since the interstate relations are undoubtedly affected by a larger framework of Turco-Armenian relations. Considering the growing influence of non-state actors in today’s international relations as well as the specific nature of relations between these two countries, the study of the Armenian diaspora and Armenian minority will be also included in our research.

In regard to Armenian representation towards the Turkish actor, the ambiguity remains there too. In fact, in the Armenian language the word employed for the *Turks* (from Turkey) and the *Azerbaijanis* (also called Azerbaijani/Azeri Turks), both of Turkic descendant, is the same. The emergence of the conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis over Nagorno-Karabakh which resulted by the Armenian occupation of

20 percent of Azerbaijani territory and the Turkish public opinion feeling a strong solidarity in regard to their "Turkic brothers" in fact strengthened the already existing representations of Turks and Armenians towards each other. So while placing the study on the regional level, a special attention should be paid to Turkish policy regarding this conflict as well as the place that Azerbaijan occupies in the Turco-Armenian relations.

Besides the vision of the regional actors such as Russia and Iran towards the South Caucasus, the role of global actors as the United States and the European Union, which are important players in the regional system in general and in Turkish-Armenian relations in particular, should also be mentioned. In fact, the United States and the EU have invested considerably to promote the Turkish-Armenian dialogue.

Several points of contention exist in the relations between Ankara and Yerevan which makes difficult the dialogue process. Firstly, the two countries have been disagreed for nearly a century on the question of massacres of Armenians under the Ottoman Empire, especially those of the years 1915-1917, which constitute a genocide for Armenia, the term rejected by Turkey. Armenia calls on Turkey to take responsibility for these massacres and frequently conducts a coordinated policy with the Armenian diaspora.

The relations of these two states have been aggravated once again during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. This conflict, which began in 1988 as a result of the weakening of the Soviet Union, provoked a regional humanitarian crisis. The proclamation of Nagorno-Karabakh independence and the subsequent war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the past two decades has not only created a security vacuum in the region but has also conditioned relations between the two countries and their neighbours. Despite the implication of external actors (the Minsk Group of OSCE) in the process of peaceful resolution of the conflict, no progress has been made

so far. As a result, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains “frozen”, as are other conflicts in the former Soviet Union, such as those in Transnistria, South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Turkey officially recognized the independence of the Republic of Armenia on December 16, 1991, shortly after the declaration of independence by the latter. Official relations were not yet established when in 1993 Turkey imposed a blockade on Armenia in response to its occupation of Kelbedjar on Azerbaijani territory. Turkey, dissatisfied with the Armenian policy on genocide question and the non-recognition of Turkish borders, decides to close its border with Armenia as a sign of solidarity with Azerbaijan. From this period the Turkish-Armenian border remains closed.

In order to restore peaceful relations, Ankara imposes three conditions on Armenia. First of all, the current borders between these two countries must be officially recognized by the latter. The second condition is in regard to the Armenian question: Turkey demands Yerevan to stop its “allegations of genocide” in international forums. Finally, Ankara favours the resolution of the Karabakh conflict under the principle of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan.

Despite all these contradictions, Turkey and Armenia made a historic gesture by signing, on October 10, 2009, in Zurich, two protocols aimed at restoring diplomatic relations between the two countries and reopening the common border. In fact, Ankara and Yerevan have already been engaged in a secret diplomatic dialogue since 2007 with the mediation of Switzerland. But since 2008 has the dialogue taken a more concrete dimension. There was a positive development from the point of view of the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations at the same year: The Turkish President Abdullah Gül, despite the absence of diplomatic relations, accepts the invitation of his counterpart Serzh Sarkisyan to attend the football match in Yerevan as part of 2010 FIFA World Cup qualification. This would be the first visit of a Turkish

president in this country. Under the principle of reciprocity, Gül invited Sarkisyan to attend the match of October 14 of the same year in Bursa. This visit marked a new page in Turkish-Armenian relations, strengthening the hopes of reconciliation of the two countries. This establishment of the diplomatic dialogue of two leaders through a football match has been called “football diplomacy”.

As following this event, more precisely on April 22, 2008 the road map of bilateral relations was announced by the two countries. Although the content of this roadmap was not revealed, it was presented as a “guarantor” of the process of normalizing bilateral relations. Thus, the signing of the Turkish-Armenian Protocols in October 2009 was the logical continuation of this process. Although the protocols were not ratified by the Turkish and Armenian parliaments, they remain the only diplomatic documents signed bilaterally between the two states since 1991.

Research framework

This research focuses on the Turkish foreign policy implemented in the region of South Caucasus and namely in Armenia examining mainly the discourses and the behaviour of the former. Our research’s timeframe covers the period of twenty years between 1991 and 2010 which seems necessary to understand not only the Turkish foreign policy in general, but also the peculiar context of its relations built with the regional actors. However, a particular attention is paid to the period that will lead to a reconciliation and rapprochement between Ankara and Yerevan, precisely the beginning of the diplomatic negotiations in 2007 and the signing of the protocols of Zurich in 2009. It will be useful to study the elements that affected Turkish decision-making and led to signing these protocols as the decision in itself was not easy to take. There were and still are many oppositions to it, both inside Turkey and abroad. On the other hand, despite some progress there is currently a break in the

process of normalizing bilateral relations.

As for the study of the subject in the context of the scientific literature, research work in France and in general in Europe focuses mainly on issues such as Turkey's accession to the EU or its policy in the Middle East. With regard to the analysis of Ankara's foreign policy in the South Caucasian region or more precisely, the one conducted in Armenia, the existing research is generally framed by the study of the Armenian question and the Turkish responsibility concerning the massacres of 1915. As a result, there is a real gap in the in-depth analysis of Turkish-Armenian interstate relations from an empirical and theoretical point of view.

Theoretical framework

Since our research focuses mainly on the analysis of Turkey, we will reflect more on the role of Turkish foreign policy in the diplomatic rapprochement. While analysing this process, several questions can be asked: What factors influenced the Turkish decision to normalize relations with Armenia and to sign the protocols? How to explain the inconsistency of Turkish foreign policy in the process of rapprochement as despite the signing of the diplomatic documents, these two countries have not yet established official diplomatic relations?

The precepts of constructivism emphasize the historical and social context of relations between states, as well as the notions of identity and perception, without neglecting the importance of national interests[\[1\]](#). *For the constructive approach, identity essentially constructs the world so that perceptions of a state towards the others is defined by its identity .*

It is however essential to consider two epistemological elements while establishing the link between the independent variable (identity) and the dependent variable (the orientation of foreign policy)[\[2\]](#). First, we must consider

identity as an element that has a constitutive, not a causal role. In other words, it is necessary to think about how and why “a particular identity makes certain types of state behavior possible and probable?” Secondly, a particular identity is not understood in the same way by all the actors and in all the times: its content, on the contrary, can vary according to the period, the context and the actors.

Our assumptions can be formulated as following:

1. From point of view of the theoretical tools of constructivism, we affirm that Turkish foreign policy is to some extent influenced by its identity. Without seeking a causal link with the change of identity and the change of Turkish foreign policy, we nevertheless consider that the strengthening of a certain aspect of identity (Western, Muslim, Turkish etc.) can make some decision-making possible which was not so before.
2. We consider that the importance of identity and perception is even much more emphasized in Turkey's South Caucasian policy, particularly the policy conducted towards Armenia.

Inspired from constructivist thought in our research, we thus admit the idea that identity influences the perception of the other by rendering a certain type of behavior of the State probable, possible, or on the contrary, more difficult to undertake. In order to explain the role of identity in Turkish foreign policy, it is therefore necessary to contemplate on the articulations between the Self and the Other in Turkish identity, especially from the point of view of our research topic, as this Other is rather often represented by Armenians.

Indeed, the fact of insisting on identity as central element in the analysis of Turkish foreign policy seems to us quite relevant. This notion is even more pronounced in Turkish foreign policy conducted in Armenia and throughout the South Caucasian region. The relations between Turkey and Armenia,

and more generally between Turks and Armenians, seem overburdened with some historical problems. For each of the parties, the neighbour is conceived as a danger to identity. As a result, without explaining these nuances, our research may not capture the importance of the subject's psychological and sociological dimensions. Apart from the short period of Armenia's independence between 1918 and 1920, relations between Armenia and Turkey as independent states did not exist before the break-up of the Soviet Union. However, already more than a century old, the debate on the reality of the events of 1915 provoked relations marked by a certain mutual hostility which strongly marks the foreign policies of the two countries.

In this regard, the research question can be formulated as below:

To what extent the Turkish-Armenian diplomatic rapprochement is the result of the change in Turkish perception towards Armenia?

Research methodology

The main element of our research is the state; in this case, Turkey and Armenia. So the analysis is mainly applied at the state level however without neglecting the weight of local actors especially those in Turkey (in bordering regions as Kars and Iğdır) in the decision-making process.

Regarding the methodological basis of our research, it refers to the set of different paradigms commonly used in the social sciences. We decided to use the elements of the paradigms such as the causal scheme, the systematic approach and the comprehensive scheme (hermeneutics).

The causal scheme that helps us to look at the causes of "cold" relations between Armenia and Turkey is widely used in the social sciences and more specifically in International Relations. To apply this method in order to reveal the

causality, it is necessary to study the phenomenon by the correlation of cause and effect. The explanatory factors play a determining role in this theoretical scheme[\[3\]](#).

The author has also used the systemic method in the present research. This methodological approach seemed necessary for understanding the functioning of the system and the interdependence of these elements. As for the international system, obviously the elements of which it is constituted are also interdependent. If we start from the example of Turkish foreign policy in Armenia, several elements of the international system can influence it: the US policy, the question of EU accession, the Russia's influence in the South Caucasus region, the Armenian Diaspora's campaign about the recognition of Armenian genocide, the relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan and the Turkish position towards the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict etc.

We have also made use of the hermeneutical scheme that allows us to understand "the meaning of human and social actions"[\[4\]](#). The method will be very useful to decipher the behaviour of Turkey and Armenia, analysing in particular the perception of oneself and the other of these two states.

Another useful method in our research is the genetic approach that explains the historical aspects of the subject. This approach helps us to study more deeply the problems in Armenian-Turkish relations by examining its origins.

As for the research methodology, we have chosen qualitative methods that seem more relevant to the social sciences in general and to international relations in particular. The participant observation, the exploration of the existing literature, the analysis of the content and semi-structured interviews are manifested as the effective methods to thoroughly explore the subject of the present work.

As part of the bibliographic research, several types of sources have been used to carry out the research: it should be

pointed out an extensive use of the primary sources as treaties and international agreements, official speeches delivered by the main political figures of Turkey and Armenia as well as the parliamentary debates held especially in Turkey. Semi-structured interviews with the officials of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and experts specializing in Turkish-Armenian relations, the actors in the political, diplomatic and economic fields on state and local levels are of great importance especially in order to have a complete overview of the process of diplomatic rapprochement. As we conduct the research on the Turkish foreign policy and its perception towards the South-Caucasian region, we chose to implement our field work mainly in Turkey (Ankara, Istanbul, as well as borderland regions Kars and Iğdır). Eventually some interviews were conducted in other countries too as in Azerbaijan, Georgia, France and Netherlands[\[5\]](#).

Exploring the existing literature in different languages – such as English, Azeri, French, Russian and Turkish allows us not only to enrich our knowledge, but also to reveal the different points of view on our subject. Since the absence of knowledge in Armenian language is a limitation of our research, we tried to compensate it with the consultation of the Armenian documentation written in Russian, English and French[\[6\]](#).

[\[1\]](#) For this research, the author made a large use of the following works written on the aspects of constructivism: Nicholas Onuf, *World of Our Making*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, 1989, 341 pages; Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, 429 pages; Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of It,” *International Organisation*, vol. 46, 1992, pp. 391-425; J. Ann Tickner, “Identity in International Relations Theory. Feminist Perspectives” in Yosef Lapid et Friedrich Kratochwil, *The return of culture and identity in IR theory*, Londres, 1996, pp. 148-151; Ted Hopf, “The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations

theory,"*International security*, vol.23, n°1, summer 1998, pp.171-200; Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in international politics*, 1976, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1976, 445 pages; Jutta Weldes, "Constructing National Interests" in *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol 2, n°3, 1996, pp. 275-318; Shibley Telhami et Michael Barnett (dir.), *Identity and foreign policy in the Middle East*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2002, 207 pages; Robert Frank (dir.), *Pour l'histoire des relations internationales [For history of international relations]*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 2012, 756 pages.

[2] Shibley Telhami et Michael Barnett, "Introduction: Identity and Foreign policy in the Middle East" in Shibley Telhami et Michael Barnett (dir.), *Identity and foreign policy in the Middle East*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2002, p.17-18.

[3] Raymond Quivy, Luc Van Campenhoudt, *Manuel de recherche en science sociales [Textbook of research on social sciences]*, 3 éd., Dunod, Paris, 2006, p.85-86.

[4] *Idem*, p.90.

[5] The fieldwork in Armenia was unfortunately impossible to implement.

[6] The main flaw of the consultation of Armenian literature written in other than Armenian language is that it is mainly intended for the readers of the outside world. However, given the historical background, the documents written in Russian to some extent can be considered an exception.