



PRESS RELEASE

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CRRC-Armenia and AIPRG Round table discussion on “Armenian-Turkish Relations: Challenges and Perspectives”

On Saturday, December 9, 2006, the Caucasus Research Resource Centers - Armenia (CRRC-Armenia), in cooperation with the Yerevan office of the Armenian International Policy Research Group (AIPRG), organized a roundtable discussion on “Armenian-Turkish Relations: Challenges and Perspectives”, which was moderated by political analyst Richard Giragosian. The round table was initiated by an independent Turkish think-tank TESEV (Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation) that is implementing a project entitled, “The Normalization of Turkish-Armenian Relations”. This TESEV project seeks to address the problems between the two countries and to come up with policy proposals for decision makers on both sides, with an overall objective of proving that the normalization of relations constitutes a win-win situation.

The event was held at CRRC-Armenia premises and attended by a number of participants (27), including representatives from leading Armenian academic, scientific and public institutions, NGOs, and some journalists. Opening the meeting, Heghine Manasyan, CRRC-Armenia director and AIPRG fellow, presented a brief overview of the CRRC and AIPRG, explaining their activities and upcoming events. In particular, she cited the CRRC Data Initiative and Training programs and the AIPRG’s ongoing research on the possible consequences of the Armenian-Turkish border opening, including a subsequent AIPRG conference on the issue to be held in Yerevan in January 2007.

Following the opening of the meeting, Mr. Mensur Akgün, TESEV Foreign Policy Program Director, and Mr. Richard Giragosian, international analyst and AIPRG Fellow, introduced the framework of issues of Armenian-Turkish relations that were to be discussed during the meeting. The meeting focused on three specific areas of Armenian-Turkish relations, beginning with the key question of what should be understood from “the normalization of relations”?

Second, the meeting then addressed several “problem areas” in Turkish-Armenian relations, including the border, and its recognition, the economic consequences of its closure, and the possible outcomes of reopening the border for both sides; the effects of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict on bilateral and multilateral relations; the current situation in the region; the latest developments in negotiations over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict; and the effects of the Armenian genocide issue on Armenian-Turkish relations, looking at both mutual perceptions and the Diaspora factor.

The third issue addressed in the meeting was an analysis of Armenia’s Euro-Atlantic integration process and its possible effects on bilateral relations and regional stability (Armenian policy regarding NATO, Armenia’s place in ENP). Much of the focus on these broader issues also included an interesting look at the scale of change within Turkey as well.

The discussion was held in a friendly and professional atmosphere and raised substantial interest among

the participants and sparked a number of questions, observations and suggestions, including the fact that Turkish policy toward Armenia had largely become “hostage” to Azerbaijan, with Turkish foreign policy options for its possible “normalized” relationship with Armenia having become subject to considerations of Turkey’s relations with Azerbaijan in general, and over the Nagorno-Karabakh issue in particular. The discussion also emphasized the importance of dialogue and exchange between independent experts from both Armenia and Turkey and the need for future collaboration, and studies on possible scenarios for the future course of Armenia-Turkey relations within a broader perspective of the next 15-20 years.

The Turkish participants noted that the economic and commercial opportunities may present the most feasible start to a “normalization” of relations, with the economic incentives serving as dynamic catalysts for beginning a fresh approach to the complexities of Armenian-Turkish relations.

While the meeting was an important step forward in terms of a deepening of dialogue and exchange, the participants agreed that it was merely a first step toward an effort to break down misperceptions and misunderstandings on both sides of the issue. And perhaps most notably, while the Turkish participants never questioned the historical legitimacy of the Armenian genocide issue, there was a stress on the need to focus on educating and engaging Turkish society on the issue, rather than continuing with an international diplomatic recognition effort alone.

The meeting, one of several scheduled during the Turkish group’s visit to Yerevan, offers a sense of hopeful enthusiasm that the level of engagement can continue, to both overcome the intransigence of some Turkish officials and to exploit the Armenian government’s positive offer of establishing relations with no preconditions.

CRRC are a network of resource and training centers established in 2003, in the capital cities of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia with the goal of strengthening social science research and public policy analysis in the South Caucasus. A partnership between the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Eurasia Foundation and local universities, the CRRC network offers scholars and practitioners stable opportunities for integrated research, training and collaboration in the region. For more information on CRRC activities, and a complete list of our independent advisory committee members, please contact:

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The Armenian International Policy Research Group (AIPRG) is a nonpartisan, nonpolitical association that researches and encourages the discussion of public policy issues in Armenia and the Diaspora. AIPRG aims to consolidate the existing Armenia-related expertise by bringing together accomplished researchers and practitioners who specialize in economics, political science, law, and government affairs.

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