

Future Prospects of Pakistan's Recognition of Armenia in view of Turkey-Armenia Rapprochement

Hamzah Rifaat Hussain

February 2022

Executive Summary

This policy brief examines the prospect of Pakistan according recognition to Armenia given the 2022 Turkey Armenia rapprochement efforts. This study considers key variables and factors such as the relationship between Azerbaijan and Armenia, the 2021- 2022 border crisis between the two countries and Azerbaijan recognizing Armenia concomitantly with Turkey as guiding principles of Pakistan's policy response on this issue. The following conclusions have been drawn from this study:

- Turkey's rapprochement efforts with Armenia in 2022 has not resulted in Turkey according diplomatic recognition to Armenia since talks had commenced.
- Azerbaijan's relationship with Armenia continues to remain tense despite the 2020 Russia brokered ceasefire with the 2021-2022 border crisis. Azerbaijan has not extended diplomatic recognition to Armenia and this is a more significant factor for Pakistan to consider instead of monitoring Turkey's rapprochement efforts with Armenia only.
- Pakistan has strategic relations with both Azerbaijan and Turkey and has not recognized Armenia in light of its historical stance. Diplomatic recognition must take into account its bilateral relationships with both countries and whether rapprochement efforts between the three countries are successful.
- Armenia supports India's stance on Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir which goes against Pakistan's diplomatic push to grant Kashmiri's their just right to self-determination in accordance with United Nations resolutions.

Issue to be analyzed

After decades of animosity, Turkey and Armenia sought to normalize relations with the first round of talks taking place in Moscow, Russia in January 2022.¹ There have been no diplomatic relations between the two countries for 30 years despite efforts to implement the 2009 peace accord.² Agreements centered on the resumption of flights and trade between the two sides however lingering issues such as the 1915 mass killings of 1.5 million Armenians continue to be major sticking points.³ Armenia has blamed the Ottoman Empire during World War 1 as responsible for what it characterizes as a genocide against Armenians whereas Turkey contests both the figures and such characterizations. Turkey's has also supported Azerbaijan from day one on the 2020 Nagorno Karabakh conflict which soured its relationship with Armenia.

Pakistan has deep strategic, economic and cultural ties with both Turkey and Azerbaijan with no diplomatic recognition of Armenia.⁴ Pakistan has maintained this stance due to solidarity with both countries. Islamabad's future stance towards Armenia is also dependent on the evolving relationship between Turkey and Azerbaijan with Armenia. Hence, it is critical to determine as to whether talks of rapprochement between Turkey and Armenia can pave the way for Pakistan's recognition of Armenia or whether other variables such as tense relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia are more important considerations. This policy brief seeks to examine this research question.

Analysis

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in 2022 stressed on taking important steps towards the eventual normalization of bilateral relations between Turkey and Armenia.⁵ These comments followed a ceasefire agreement brokered by Russia between Azerbaijan and Armenia with the aim of diffusing the 2020 Nagorno Karabakh crisis in November 2020.⁶ The process of

¹ Yildiz Yazicioglu, "Observers Welcome Dialogue Between Turkey, Armenia," *Voice of America*, January 14, 2022.

² Nona Mikhelidze, "The Turkish Armenia Rapprochement at the Deadlock," *Istituto Affari Internazionali*, Documenti IAI 1005, 10, 5, (2010), pp. 2-3.

³ Henry C. Theriault, "Genocide, Denial, and Domination: Armenian- Turkish Relations from Conflict Resolution to Just Transformation," *Journal of African Conflicts and Peace Studies*, no. 2 (2009): pp. 82-85.

⁴ Muhammad Fahim, "Pakistan and the Question of Recognizing Armenia: Pakistan Armenia Relations, The Issue of Kashmir and Nagorno- Karabakh," *Journal of South Asian Studies*, ISSN: 2308-7846, Vol.8, No. 2, (2020), 39.

⁵ Merve Sebnem Oruc, "Turkey to take further steps for improved ties with Armenia," *The Daily Sabah*, February 23, 2022.

⁶ Thomas De Waal, "Unfinished Business in the Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict," *Carnegie Europe*, February 11, 2021.

normalization between Turkey and Armenia however, commenced in January 2022 in Moscow which was encouraged by Azerbaijan's leadership.⁷ Senior bureaucrats in Baku during meetings suggested that better ties between Yerevan and Ankara can potentially smoothen Azerbaijan's own post war relations with a focus on regional connectivity and trade instead of war.⁸ Ongoing talks towards normalization has resulted in renewed importance of initiatives such as the Turkish Armenian Business Development Council (TABDC) of 1997 and as the only official link for public private partnerships in the corporate sector between Turkey and Armenia.⁹

Ongoing efforts of normalization between Turkey and Armenia comes after the end of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict of 2020 between Azerbaijan and Armenia which dates back to the end of World War 1.¹⁰ The territory is de jure part Azerbaijan although parts of the region include the internationally unrecognized Republic of Artaskh which is supported by Armenia.¹¹ The disintegration of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s resulted in ambiguity over the territory's status resulting in several episodes of ethnic violence, military maneuvers and independence referendums rejected by Azerbaijanis.¹² The 2020 conflict was the latest episode of this prolonged conflict which eventually came to a halt after a Moscow brokered ceasefire agreement stipulating that that both belligerent parties were to exchange prisoners of war and Armenian forces were to withdraw from occupied territories.¹³ The conflict ended with the leadership in Baku firmly in an advantageous position.

Throughout the war, Turkey lent unwavering support to Azerbaijan and denounced Armenian advances into its territory.¹⁴ This resulted in a souring of relations which dates back to conflicting narratives on the 1915 destruction of the Armenian population under the Ottoman

⁷ Ruslan Rehimov, "Azerbaijan supports normalization of Turkey-Armenia relations," *Anadolu Agency*, December 27, 2021.

⁸ Daily Sabah with AA, "Turkey- Armenia talks normalization rather than reconciliation," *Ankara*, February 13, 2022

⁹ Nazmi Gul, "The Turkish Armenian Business Development Council and Turkish- Armenian Economic Relations," *Insight Turkey*, Vol.6, No.2, (April- June 2004), pp. 148-155.

¹⁰ Corey Welt and Andrew S. Bowen, "Azerbaijan and Armenia: The Nagorno- Karabakh Conflict," *Congressional Research Service*, R46651, January 7, 2021, pp. 1-15.

¹¹ Patricia Carley, "Nagorno- Karabakh Searching for a Solution," *United States Institute of Peace Roundtable Report*, 1998, pp. 1-5.

¹² Lt. Colonel Artem Avdalyan, "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and the Right to Self Determination," *United States Army War College*, 2017, p.3.

¹³ Statement, Europe and Central Asia, "Getting from Ceasefire to Peace in Nagorno- Karabakh," *International Crisis Group*, November 11, 2020, pp. 2-3.

¹⁴ Svante E. Cornell, "Turkey and the Conflict in Nagorno Karabakh: A Delicate Balance," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 34, No.1, (Jan, 1998), pp. 51-72.

Empire which is disputed by Turkey. Numerous subsequent normalization protocols such as the October 2009 agreement were also not ratified as they were declared invalid by Armenia.¹⁵ However, in 2021-2022 efforts have been underway to bridge trust deficits through the resumption of flights between the two countries and lifting of embargoes which Armenia did in January 2022.¹⁶ However as mentioned by TABDC Vice Chairperson Noyan Soyak, these efforts are geared towards normalization instead of reconciliation.¹⁷

In Pakistan's case, Islamabad enjoys cordial relations with both Azerbaijan and Turkey while relations with Armenia have been poor. Pakistan is the only country in the world that does not recognize Armenia and there are no diplomatic relations.¹⁸ Additionally, like Turkey, Pakistan has expressed its unwavering support to Azerbaijan during the Nagorno Karabakh conflict of 2020 and denounced Armenian actions as aggression. According to former Ambassador of Pakistan to Turkey, Inam Ul Haq, Pakistan should consult Turkey prior to establishing diplomatic relations with Armenia.¹⁹ Recognition of Armenia would thus depend on several variables which require further examination.

The first variable is Azerbaijan's bilateral relationship with Armenia where both sides have no diplomatic relations.²⁰ Despite Russia's efforts which culminated in a ceasefire in 2020, hostilities between Baku and Yerevan have continued such as the 2021-2022 border crisis which started with Azerbaijani soldiers crossing into internationally recognized Armenian territory which has been denounced by the European Parliament, United States and France.²¹ The conflict has continued in 2022 as soldiers exchange fire with no end in sight.

Given that Pakistan's diplomatic relations with Azerbaijan are an important pillar of its foreign policy in Eastern Europe and Western Asia, recognition of Armenia as an

¹⁵ Hasmik Mkrtchyan, "Armenia scraps deal with Turkey designed to normalize relations," *Reuters*, March 1, 2018,

¹⁶ Nino Chanadiri, "Are Armenia- Turkey relations heading in a positive direction?" *New Eastern Europe*, February 4, 2022.

¹⁷ Daily Sabah with AA, "Turkey- Armenia talks normalization rather than reconciliation," *Ankara*, February 13, 2022.

¹⁸ Muhammad Fahim, "Pakistan and the Quest of Recognizing Armenia: Pakistan- Armenia Relations, The Issue of Kashmir and Nagorno Karabakh," *Journal of South Asian Studies*, ISSN: 2308-7846, Vol. 8, No. 2, (2019), pp. 39-45.

¹⁹ Ambassador Inam Ul Haq, "Whether Pakistan should recognize Armenia in light of current efforts at rapprochement between Turkey and Armenia." by Hamzah Rifaat Hussain, (Spring 2022).

²⁰ Gulshan Pashayeva, "The Nagorno Karabakh Conflict in the Aftermath of the Russia- Georgia War," *Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy Symposium*, 2009, pp. 2-15.

²¹ Jalina Porter, "Department Press Briefing – May 14, 2021", *U.S. Department of State*, May 14, 2021.

independent sovereign state should be considered a non-starter despite Turkey's efforts at normalization. Normalization initiatives between countries and ceasefire agreements were also under the purview of the Kremlin in Russia which in 2022 has been engaged in a conflict with Ukraine. Turkey's normalization efforts with Armenia cannot translate into Pakistan extending recognition to Armenia as the status of the talks remain uncertain. Furthermore, the tenuous environment of Eastern Europe, Azerbaijan's ongoing conflicts with Armenia on the border and Pakistan's historical stance of supporting Azerbaijan are other key factors to consider.

Policy Recommendations

1. Pakistan should officially subject recognition of Armenia to Azerbaijan and Turkey's recognition of the same as well as de-escalation from Armenia in the 2021-2022 border crisis.
2. Unfolding regional dynamics in Eastern Europe with the Ukraine crisis of 2022 must be monitored closely as Russia facilitated normalization efforts between Turkey and Armenia.
3. Unfolding dynamics from the 2021-2022 border crisis between Armenia and Azerbaijan must be monitored closely to ascertain as to whether there would be an improvement in relations between the two sides. That should guide Pakistan's diplomatic response of recognizing Armenia.
4. Armenia has supported India's position on Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) as stated by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. This goes against the fundamental pillars of Pakistani foreign policy which is to ensure the just right of self-determination to the Kashmiri people under occupation. Armenia may moderate its stance and neutrality on IIOJK if Pakistan recognizes it.
5. Turkey's normalization efforts with Armenia in the form of the Moscow dialogue of 2022 should be constantly encouraged by Pakistan for sustainable peace in Eastern Europe/ Western Asia. However such normalization efforts in the absence of Azerbaijan following suit should not prompt awarding recognition to Armenia.

