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Армянский центр стратегических и
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**PSYCHOLOGICAL PECULIARITIES
OF THE “NORMALIZING”
ARMENIAN-TURKISH RELATIONS**

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PSYCHOLOGICAL PECULIARITIES OF THE “NORMALIZING” ARMENIAN-TURKISH RELATIONS

Just as in autumn of 2008, which was politically full of discussions over the Armenian-Turkish dialogue, in the year 2009, too, the developments concerning the Armenian-Turkish relations were the overwhelming topic in foreign relations.

The social and political debates and approaches of these historical events, however, also include irrational and emotional assessments. But the common historical past of the Armenians and the Turks, and the contact on which they are presently attempting to normalize the bilateral relations, **unequivocally and objectively assume irrational or subjective assessments, assumptions, and commentaries.**

Turkey continues to conduct a hostile policy against Armenia. And the tactic and strategy of such policy is zealously carried out solely by one country, Turkey. Naturally, there is an inconsistency in the informational, psychological, and ideological domains of the two negotiating countries. Thus, the fact that the Armenian-Turkish discourse has lived is a motivating circumstance for the “enemy image” portrayed toward the Armenians to be more actively preached in Turkey, and even if this is not carried out by the country’s authorities—and even though throughout this time, and in connection with the Karabagh issue, its prime minister Erdoğan has continued to label the Armenians as “occupiers.” By way of numerous provocative and artificial means, the Turkish media, state, and the authorities create various opportunities and make use of disinformation in order to carry out a national propaganda, whose axis is enmity against the Armenians and other Christian people. And the following news item is the most recent such example: “On the initiative of the National Education Committee of Istanbul, books, CDs, and videos were prepared in which, together with Armenia and Mountainous Karabagh, Kirkuk, Mosul, Erbil, Batumi, Nakhijevan, and Cyprus were included into the map of Turkey.”¹

In Armenia, meanwhile, such deliberate propaganda is not carried out and, what is more, tolerance is propagated with respect to the “enemy image” toward the Turks. During the public discussions the “promised” emphasis concerning the normalization of the Armenian-Turkish relations should have been the protocols that were initialed in Zurich on August 31. But the level of the public debates—including community discussions held in the marzes (regions)—were **intentionally** portrayed as a debate over the **necessity of opening the border** between Armenia and Turkey. And as expected, the average citizen viewed the course of these discussions as a fight or intolerance between those favoring the opening of the border and those advocating a “closed” border. **The objective of such tactic by the authorities, that is, the artificial “obstructing” of public awareness, is to deviate from giving a national “accent” to these relations.** And the debates over the open or closed borders primarily contain a **social factor** because the Armenian society, which experienced an economic downfall as a result of the 5-day Russian-Georgian war in 2008, personally felt the consequences of closed roads, and therefore Turkey became a possible alternative, so that the Armenian public would have had a relatively more rational disposition toward the Turkish president Gül’s visit and the concept of opening the borders. Making use of this fact, the Armenian leadership directed and still directs toward exclusively the physical “opening of the border.” Even in this case, however, the reactions and the seeming “enthusiasm” are ambiguous.

The historical roots behind the creation of an enemy image have different subjective and objective motives, and these roots are on different levels among the Armenians and the Turks. The latter's operations toward exterminating the Armenians, at the turn of the 20th Century, have changed a lot in terms of national awareness. For numerous years the Armenians have lived with the victim's psychosis and the psychological awareness of a loss—that of human lives, economy, social ties, and a homeland. The Armenian refugees who settled in other countries experienced mental hardship, strain, and psychological pressure as a result of the victim's psychosis. And on different occasions the deep emotions still aggravate further rather than “alleviating.”

In today's Turkish society, the hatred toward the Armenians has penetrated into diverse social strata. In the “competition” to be seen as the most nationalist, the “competitors” demonstrate a fiery image of the enemy. The notion that the Turkish political elite is the bearer of a more European system of values is somewhat of a myth because, in the case of a smallest provocation, the Turkish public's spirit—which was at the source of the formation of the national “ego,” at the beginning of the 20th Century, and possesses a hang-up of low esteem and aggressive reactions—is ready to come out from within this elite. “The natural consequence (in this case, the formation of the Turkish national “ego”—Armine Ghazaryan) of this delay became the desire to quickly fill the gap, and this desire took the form of an open aggression against the remaining ethnic groups.”ⁱⁱ So, is the fine and flexible Turkish diplomacy an illusion or a reality? If we accept this fact, the thesis becomes true according to which the diplomatic matters concerning the Armenians moreover contain emotional and subjective elements, and the Armenian-hating Turks come out from the mental depths. If the myth of good diplomatic skills is untrue, the vividly expressed enmity, again in the case of the Armenians, openly exists from the highest to the lowest social strata. Accordingly, having Armenian roots is the greatest offense and the most dangerous fact, not just among the Azerbaijani but also the Turkish governments and the political elites. Such argument, whether a true or a false piece of information, is perilous and renders its subject “a reject” and even leads all the way to political and psychological “annihilation.” So as to withstand the provocations and the truth, the politician—regardless of status—“defends,” with every possible avenue, against the “demeaning and crushing fact” of having Armenian ancestry. There are numerous such examples, including Turkey's president, who “had gone” all the way to Europe and, when he was accused of having Armenian lineage, during the normalization process of the matter with the Armenians, he used every means to justify himself but, in so doing, he did not demonstrate a civilized tactic.

As a result of the necessity for self-defense to resist against group pressure, a need emerges toward possessing, mastering, and manifesting the same group spirit. In general, the individuals find common language more easily than the groups and societies—whether it is ethnic, religious, or international. The psyche of every individual has several levels of identity: national, religious, inherent to a social group, and individual. **During contact among separate individuals, the national, professional, and even religious identity usually plays second fiddle, whereas during contact among groups, the culture, nation, and religion become more important.** Sometimes the types of identity collide, and the personal experience shows that, on the individual level, the opposite person is someone similar in terms of concerns and characteristics, but the individual is compelled to accept his or her group's attitudes, the formula or stereotype of the group's identity, i.e., “the Turk or the Armenian is an enemy.” **The need to be identified with the nation is more important and significant than the personal approach because that**

is the person's nature. According to Erik Erikson, the person's needs include the inclusion into any group and the guarantee of the feeling of self-protection with those group values, even if the given group is asocial and comprises drug addicts or criminals. Case in point: If I am Armenian and my "group" recognizes the Turks as the enemy, this is the "truth" for me, and irrespective of having the best of relations during individual contact with any Turk. For the person the group rejection is the most important crucial and social factor, to which **the person "sacrifices" several elements of individuality in return for feeling as being a part of a unity or a whole.** Certainly, however, there are **exceptions.** Such individuals who demonstrate certain "dissidence" possess a high-level self-determination, and they are important for the improvement of the societal life. As working example we can make note of several writers and scholars who are pursued in Turkey because of their "dissident" views with regard to the Armenian-Turkish relations. For such people the truth and historical justice are more important than group affiliation.

From the general psychological perspective, enmity harms, first and foremost, the person in whom this enmity has formed. But does being psychologically self-determined and forgiving, in resolving this particular Armenian-Turkish matter, likewise cause us harm? If the opposite side, namely the Turks, possesses a huge "energy" supply of enmity, it might be feasible to give up one degree of improvement, if the question concerns the preservation of the nation and the sort, which perhaps is lower in the "pyramid" of needs yet, it is a priority need. The apprehensions are linked to the following several peculiarities of the Turkish people:

- 1) The Turkish religious fanaticism and the continuing adherence of pan-Turkism, if we avoid the "enemy" terminology, at the very least "preach" or secure intolerance toward the Christian people, and specifically the Armenians.
- 2) Turkey's population surpasses that of Armenia twenty-five times and, in the case of a continuing "preaching," it is naturally impossible to controllably and completely remove the "enemy image" of the Armenians that exists inside the Turkish people.
- 3) The asymmetric developmental level of the Turkish state and population also makes it difficult to manifest tolerance toward the Armenians.
- 4) By recompensing the psychological "defensive" with concocted "offensive," the denials of the fact of the Genocide do not allow the taking of steps toward self-contemplation. The people living with self-defense mechanisms have a basic minimum chance for self-purification, which in itself possesses psychological pressure as well as ousting and psychological denial of the reality.

The media also play a huge role in the dissemination of the negative stereotypes of the "enemy image," and this role leads to tangible results by way of group involvement. It is naïve to think that in order to secure a visible breakthrough in the Armenian-Turkish relations, in a couple of years, the authorities would make use of the widely viewed television to "deafen" the social "nationalism," and thus achieve social tolerance during the talks with the Turks. In other words, **all PR efforts "blow up" when, whether or not one likes it, the Turks' "enemy image" is used with the aim of creating a more "noteworthy" and "unacceptable" image for domestic politics.** By the use of a negative campaign, the very same media can associate the internal "enemy," the "dissident," or the opposition with the Turks, or accuse them of manifesting tolerance toward the Turks. This ambiguous policy plants more "seeds" to the already-existing public distrust toward the authorities. The leadership's *modus operandi*, the limited domestic

information, and the most diverse and all-inclusive information coming in from abroad cause an equivocal public disposition ranging from apathy to anxiety.

“Several phenomena are characteristic for perception in conflict situations. One phenomenon is the ‘attributed misrepresentation.’ The real meaning is that any operation by the other side is explained as an ‘evil intention.’ This phenomenon was fairly vividly depicted by the American psychologist R. White, who called it the ‘satanic image of the enemy.’ Correspondingly the ‘satanic’ is always on the other side, whereas the personal conduct is perceived as the truth.”ⁱⁱⁱ By studying the course of the discussions among the Armenian society, we can separate the aforementioned “formula’s” another, additional alternative; here the “satanic side” is not just one:

- 1) The Turkish side, which certainly pursues its very huge interests and, naturally, they are the direct opposite of the Armenian people’s interests, and it can not be trusted on any matter.
- 2) The Armenian side, which is the other “satanic” side, is a private authority. It can not be trusted; if it has initiated something, the latter must have another meaning or basis; it is explained by the lack of legitimacy; it is dangerous; and all of its decisions are instructed from the “outside,” and this can not be driven by the national interests.

What is the problem? What is the reason behind the huge distrust toward the authorities, if we disregard, for a moment, the matter of legitimacy?

The problem is the asymmetric nature of the Armenian-Turkish relations and the ensuing fear. All through the talks process the Turkish government and the diplomats dealing with the Armenian-Turkish relations are attempting to “preserve” their domestic audience. If a diplomat prepares to sign or actually signs under a document, the other diplomat carries out an anti-Armenian campaign, from the highest international bodies—such as the United Nations—to the daily media, and does not forget to address his or her rhetoric message to the people. The asymmetry is the fact that the Turkish diplomats understand very well the importance of securing a domestic audience, **the need to prove—to the nationalists—their vigilance** and, at the same time, they continue to establish diplomatic ties with the Armenians. Those statements, with their tactic, are also messages to Armenia—and Azerbaijan, likewise—not only in connection with concrete facts, like the Mountainous Karabagh issue, but are also geared toward deepening the Armenian public distrust toward the “will” of the national leadership, causing dissidence, and ultimately the weakening. To note, the Turkish secret services need not exert great efforts, in the 21st Century, to receive information on Armenia’s domestic political situation because nowadays everything is “open.”

In the meantime, an even based on the concern for not losing voters in the next elections, the Armenian diplomatic “department” finds nothing appropriate to comment for or provide to its public. And how is the Armenian leadership encouraging its “audience?” So far, it is solely carrying out a passive defense and “preaching” to its people to “not take” those statements “seriously.” The Armenian halls of power do not believe that the asymmetry exists here as well, since the body politic is aware of the Armenian-Turkish **processes** and **compares the aggressive and “threatening”** Turkish statements and, as a result, it not only becomes **subdued** but also its **feeling of distrust intensifies**. If with these statements the Turkish officials were trying to secure social tolerance toward their steps taken and to guarantee the likelihood of their return to power in the future, and to also be seen democratic, the manifestation of the Armenian officials’

democracy, on the other hand, were the directed and simulated public debates. Beyond this, the informational sources are “kept” under the shroud of secrecy, and this **supposes certain mysterious surroundings** and, against this background, the societal problems are more psychological and have a greater emotional shade.

We need to acknowledge that vigilance does not belittle or “disqualify” us, especially if the opposite side is even more vigilant. The tension of preserving one’s own sort does not disparage us, particularly since the **asymmetry in the Armenian-Turkish relations is everywhere**.

P.S. Another stereotype, that of “being defeated,” is now added to the Armenian-Turkish relations and, in the circulating myth called the “football diplomacy,” the game’s reinforced score is 2-0 in favor of Turkey, and already for the second time.

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ENDNOTES

ⁱ <http://azg.am/AM/2009100308>; in Armenian

ⁱⁱ Akçam, T., *Turkish National Identity and the Armenian Question*, Moscow, 1995, page 10; in Russian

ⁱⁱⁱ Lebedyeva, M.M., *Political Resolution of Conflicts*, Moscow, 1999, page 51; in Russian