

ARMENIA-TURKEY EXPERT DIALOGUE GROUP POLICY MEMO

HIGHER EDUCATION COOPERATION BETWEEN ARMENIA AND TURKEY

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The Armenia-Turkey Expert Dialogue Group (EDG) was initiated in order to build on the civil society momentum and to prepare a list of confidence-building measures aimed toward the normalisation of relations between Turkey and Armenia. Composed of a group of experts from Armenia and Turkey, with backgrounds in politics, academia and civil society, the EDG has come together on numerous occasions mapping existing obstacles in various fields with a view to exploring appropriate confidence-building measures, one of which was assessed to be the field of education. This policy brief and certain recommendations detailed herein are based on the outcomes of the one-to-one meetings, round-table discussions with experts and academicians from the field of education both from Armenia and Turkey, as well as a number of pilot

projects with the engagement of educational institutions from both countries, with the guidance of the EDG.

The Armenia-Turkey Expert Dialogue Group is a joint initiative of experts from both countries with backgrounds in politics, diplomacy, academia and civil society who are committed to contribute to the Turkey-Armenia relations at different levels. The Dialogue Group has been convening since 2016. The overall objective of the Dialogue Group is to develop confidence-building measures aimed at the normalisation of relations between the two neighbours. Amongst other topics, the Dialogue Group is particularly intent on exploring opportunities and innovative ideas in trade and business, consular affairs, migration and education.

The lack of direct state mechanisms between Armenia and Turkey to establish and develop educational cooperation overlooks a considerable number of potential opportunities. Despite the existence of a number of international collaboration frameworks, institutional cooperation between Turkey and Armenia in the field of higher education has been rather limited. In the last decade, a number of civil society organisations and universities from both Armenia and Turkey have stepped up, creating channels of informal and formal education. All these efforts have significantly contributed to primarily creating individual ties. However, establishing direct and sustainable institutional ties in the field are likely to be promising as both Armenia and Turkey have their strong suits in higher education.

The exchange of expertise between educational institutions and academics from Armenia and Turkey can lead to both long and short-term benefits. Therefore, efforts are needed to encourage, facilitate and foster cooperation through existing international frameworks and direct opportunities between institutions in both countries. By laying

out the international institutional frameworks to which Turkey and Armenia are members, mapping the current situation of higher education in Armenia and Turkey, listing potential fields of cooperation and providing recommendations to the institutions and authorities in the two countries, this policy brief aims to shed light on possible avenues of constructive cooperation.

International Institutional Frameworks¹

Turkey and Armenia are part of a number of international institutional frameworks which enable collaboration and academic exchange among member countries and institutions.

Bologna Process

Both Turkey and Armenia are full members of the Bologna Process - European Higher Education Area. As part of the Bologna process, Armenia transitioned to a two-cycle (Bachelors, Master's) degree system, as well as credit accumulation and transfer system (ECTS).

Erasmus+

Armenia and Turkey are both engaged in the Erasmus+ programme. Turkey is among the Erasmus+ Programme Countries, which can fully take part in all Key Actions of the programme, whereas Armenia is a Partner Country and can take part in certain Key Actions of the programme, subject to specific criteria or conditions. The international higher education

dimension of the Erasmus+ Programme includes actions and mechanisms targeted at policy reforms, institutional capacity building, innovation and exchange of good practises as well as student and faculty exchange.

Within the Erasmus+ framework, the main area for possible cooperation between Armenia and Turkey is higher education exchange projects between universities and institutes. The opportunities under Key Action 1 and 2 include high-level integrated international study projects delivered by consortia; opportunities for students and staff of higher education institutions in Armenia and/or Turkey to undertake a learning and/or professional experience at a Programme or Partner Country; capacity building in the field of higher education projects promoting cooperation and partnerships and knowledge alliances and strategic partnerships between higher education institutions and enterprises.

A number of attempts at joint applications to Erasmus+ have been undertaken by different institutions in Armenia and Turkey, with Eurasia International University (EIU) in Armenia and Middle East Technical University (METU) in Turkey being the pioneers to enter into actual academic exchange, by signing an agreement between 2014-2021. Throughout this period, 5 staff members and 6 students from EIU have had an opportunity to carry out an exchange programme at METU within Erasmus+. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the planned activities have become passive between 2020-2021, however, both of the institutions are willing to further their cooperation. Moreover, in 2019, MEF University in Turkey and the University of Architecture and Construction of Armenia (NUACA) submitted a joint Erasmus+ application. In the same year, Istanbul Bilgi University submitted a joint Erasmus+ application with three universities in Armenia - the Russian-Armenian University (RAU), NUACA and American University of Armenia (AUA). The projects have been approved and are waiting for their implementation in the upcoming years.

European University Association (EUA)

As the representative organisation of universities and national rectors' conferences in 47 European countries, European University Association (EUA) has 62 member universities from Turkey and 2 from Armenia, the National Polytechnic University of Armenia and Yerevan State University. EUA provides a platform for interaction amongst member universities and with EU institutions.

Thanks to the efforts of the Expert Dialogue Group, within the EUA platform, for the first time in 2018, an Armenian female vice-rector from NUACA got involved in the European Women Rectors Association (EWORA). As one of the main goals of EWORA is to increase women's representation in higher education, it can serve as an empowering tool for not only creating cooperation avenues, but tackling the gender imbalance in academia that can be noted both in Armenia and Turkey. According to statistics, in the 2019-2020 academic year, in Turkey the percentage of female academics was approximately 45%,² while in Armenia this percentage was about 41%.³ Despite these figures, women's equal representation at decision making and management levels in the higher education of both countries is still an issue. Therefore, the need to expand the engagement of women academics in not only this but other possible initiatives is evident.

Horizon Europe

Horizon Europe is launched by the European Commission as a research and innovation framework programme to be implemented from 2021-2027. It has come to replace the previous instrument of the same purpose, Horizon 2020 of which both Turkey and Armenia used to be members. As of November 2021, both Armenia and Turkey were granted Associated Country status within Horizon Europe and can now benefit from the programme under the same conditions as EU Member States with full access to the programme's funding. Serving as a wider platform for international cooperation, Horizon Europe encourages researchers and innovators from all over the world to build partnerships with non-associated third countries from both EU and non-EU countries. Within its strategic plan, Horizon Europe focuses mainly on research and innovation support and international cooperation in the fields of social sciences, humanities, gender, as well as technologies. The programme can provide a potential platform for academic institutions from Armenia and Turkey to smoothly develop joint initiatives in the fields of their common interest.

Mapping of Higher Education in Armenia and Turkey

Mapping in the field of higher education can provide guidance for possible cooperation paths, thereby extending the scope of academic collaboration between Armenia and Turkey.

Presently 26 state universities in Armenia, 4 of which are international and 33 private licensed universities, together with a number of educational institutions such as institutes and academies, provide higher education. In the 2019-2020 academic year 5,176⁴ international students were enrolled in higher educational institutions in Armenia. Meanwhile, there are 129 state universities and 74 foundation universities in Turkey. In the 2019-2020 academic year 185,847⁵ international students were enrolled in higher educational institutions in Turkey.

A number of students from both countries are enrolled in higher education institutions of the neighbouring country. In the 2019-2020 academic year, 8 students from Armenia were enrolled in universities in Turkey.⁶ In the same academic year, 6 students from Turkey were enrolled in undergraduate programs in Armenia. Some Armenian citizens studying in Turkey have been awarded the government-funded Türkiye Scholarships.

As outlined in the regulations set by the Turkish Higher Education Council (YÖK), foreign universities need to register with the Council in order to secure recognition and equivalence of diplomas they issue. Until 2015, among universities from Armenia, only Yerevan State University (YSU) and Gyumri Pedagogical Institute were included in the list of universities recognized by YÖK as they had registered during the Soviet period. In 2015, AUA's application for recognition was approved by YÖK through its standard procedure, and this institution was also included in the list. Diplomas issued by universities from Turkey are recognized in Armenia without a need for additional procedures.

Academic Cooperation Opportunities between Armenia and Turkey:

Based on subject specific discussions and meetings held within the Expert Dialogue Group, a number of potential fields of academic cooperation between Armenia and Turkey have been identified, namely Turkish and Ottoman studies, music and arts, archaeology, architecture and design as well as information and communication technologies. While some of these fields have already registered considerable progress, there are others that still need to be explored and/or promoted.

To date, one of the pronounced fields of exchange in academia has been Turkish and Ottoman studies. Though a number of study visits, offline and online language courses have been organised in this field, there is still a need and interest to further academic exchange and develop joint initiatives. In Armenia, there are three major institutions that provide **Turkish and Ottoman Turkish studies** - the Turkic Studies Chair at YSU, the Institute of Oriental Studies at the National Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Oriental Studies at RAU. AUA's Open Education office offers Turkish classes as an elective course. In Turkey, there are a few institutions offering **Armenian studies**. Erciyes University in Kayseri and Ankara University have departments of Armenian Language and Literature. Boğaziçi University and Kadir Has University provide Armenian classes as an elective course as part of their Modern Languages programmes.

Upon the recommendations of the Expert Dialogue Group, endeavours were carried out in the field of **architecture** as well, by starting institutional collaboration between MEF University in Turkey and NUACA in Armenia. As a result of mutual academic study visits, a number of lecture series and two summer schools for architecture students were organised between 2018-2019. In the summer of 2018, within the framework of MEF University's Design and Build Studio,⁷ a group of five students and two professors from NUACA were hosted at MEF University in Istanbul, being paired with two professors and nine students from MEF.⁸ Together they designed and built a playground for the Armenian migrant children living in Istanbul. A three-week counter visit was conducted in Yerevan in the summer of 2019, with the participation of 10 students and 2 professors from MEF and 16 students and 2 professors from NUACA. This time the participating students from the two neighbouring countries designed and built a playground at Direct Aid Association (DAA) Hospital School, where children aged 2 to 17 continue their education while receiving treatment for their chronic health problems.⁹ Building on the success of these efforts, there is an interest to expand this cooperation to other related fields, in particular design, by involving other institutions as well.

Information and communication technologies education is one of the most promising and attractive fields to be fostered between Armenia and Turkey. The field is developed in Armenia with significant know-how and skilled labour in software and programming. With its growing programmes in technology education Armenia can be a hub for academic collaboration between Armenia and Turkey. Certain organisations in Armenia such as TUMO and Lori COAF Smart Center provide technology education to thousands of young students in areas such as web design, robotics, animation, film, etc. Their

unique focus on technology education for children of a young age may prove to be a meaningful avenue of cooperation with interested institutions in Turkey in higher education or for students at younger ages.

Information and communication technologies are one of the most attractive areas for the young generation in Turkey which is why foundation universities are especially very enthusiastic to offer ICT programmes. State universities are focusing on computer sciences and computational sciences and have strong academic staff in these areas. This capacity has also been supported by the establishment of Technology Development Zones in university campuses in Turkey where academic staff have their own R&D companies. Recently 10 universities have been defined as “Research Universities” in Turkey, to be funded under a different system.

In light of the considerable number of initiatives in the field of **music and arts** implemented by various CSOs and individual experts from Armenia and Turkey, it would be constructive to institute cooperation in this field with the involvement especially of conservatoires, leading musical schools and orchestras or choirs in both countries. Certain commonalities between various musical traditions, genres and instruments in Turkey and Armenia could also provide a meaningful approach for cooperation, both in academia and on stage.

The opportunities for cooperation are not limited to the above suggested fields and there are many other areas of advanced academia in both countries. It is worth noting that Armenia has registered considerable advancement in the fields of mathematics, physics, chemistry, medicine, engineering, information and communication technologies¹⁰ while in Turkey engineering, economics, art and design and architecture are generally considered among the more popular fields of study in higher education. For a list of the universities in Turkey, you may visit, for a list of the main universities in Armenia, you can visit this link.

Recommendations

In an effort to further educational cooperation between Armenia and Turkey, based on the framework of the Expert Dialogue Group, the following recommendations/measures can be taken by educational institutions and individual specialists as well as the governments of both countries. It is noteworthy that the increased use of online platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic might pave a way for more creative and innovative initiatives to be undertaken.

To the higher education institutions, research centres and CSOs in Armenia and Turkey:

- Encouraging universities from Armenia and Turkey to initiate and implement more academic exchanges and joint projects through the various actions of international institutional frameworks.
- Encouraging and facilitating interaction between university representatives from Armenia and Turkey on international platforms.
- Providing support mechanisms especially for women academics’ involvement from Armenia and Turkey on international platforms.
- Encouraging academics from both countries to be involved in a counterpart university as an additional supervisor for thesis/dissertation works of Master and/or PhD students.
- Encouraging universities from Armenia and Turkey to sign bilateral cooperation agreements to initiate and implement joint projects such as summer/winter schools, summer camps, discussions and exhibitions.
- Encouraging academics from universities in Armenia and Turkey to develop joint publications.
- Encouraging organisation of regular and/or annual academic conferences, forums on topics of common interest.
- Establishing concrete partnerships for the study of Ottoman and Turkish language and literature in Armenia, targeting students, scholars and researchers working with Ottoman and Turkish language sources, archival documents, manuscripts and epigraphic material by
 - encouraging academic exchanges, joint study and research programmes in Ottoman Turkish;
 - exploring the possibilities of cataloguing and restoring Ottoman manuscripts including those written in Armenian letters;

- encouraging translation of such works into Armenian and modern Turkish;
- exploring the provision of Ottoman and Turkish language instruction and resources in Armenia and the provision of Armenian language instruction and resources in Turkey.
- Establishing partnerships for education and joint research in high-tech sciences including informatics, physics, engineering, software, programming, animation, robotics.
- Initiating joint tailor-made programs and courses in the field of political science and international relations, particularly on Caucasus studies.
- Exploring opportunities of academic collaboration in the fields of music, cinema, art history and archaeology.
- Exploring possibilities of joint programs in a third country for mid-career students and/or professionals.
- Developing joint Master's and/or PhD programmes in the fields of common interest.

To the governments of Armenia and Turkey:

- Encouraging Armenian institutions to register with the Turkish Higher Education Council to ensure diploma recognition.
- Initiating discussions with YÖK to facilitate the process of granting accreditation as well as diploma equivalency for universities in Armenia.
- Facilitating procedures for joint Master's and/or PhD programmes in the fields of common interest.

- 1 Armenia and Turkey: an Overview of Relations and Prospects for Normalisation, Artak Ayunts, Talha Köse, Burcu Becermen, March 2019, Hrant Dink Foundation Publications, pp. 40-41.
- 2 Higher Education in Numbers - Council of Higher Education, Turkey.
- 3 Statistical Booklet, Women and Men in Armenia, 2020.
- 4 Higher Education, The Social Situation of RA 2019.
- 5 Number Of Universities - Council of Higher Education, Turkey.
- 6 Higher Education Statistics 2019-2020, Turkey.
- 7 Design and Build Studio is a curriculum-based programme aimed at exploring the power of building and co-producing in architecture education with a social impact component. For more information see: <https://www.fada.mef.edu.tr/Portfolio>.
- 8 Architecture Students from Armenia and Turkey Built a Playground in Istanbul.
- 9 Architecture Students from Turkey and Armenia Designed and Built a Playground in Yerevan.
- 10 Study in Armenia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia.

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