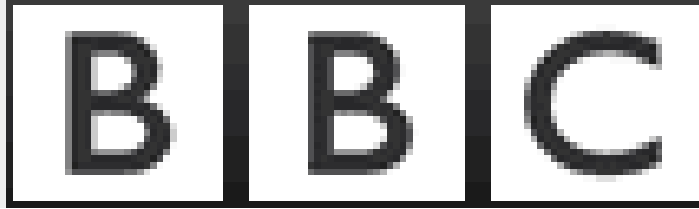


ARMENIA/TURKEY: SO CLOSE YET WORLDS APART


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Category: [Opinions](#)




 By Mark Grigoryan, [BBC](#) , 9 december 2009


 The village of Margara, in the Armavir Province of Armenia, lies on the edge of the world. For the villagers their world ends by the River Arax. On the other side is Turkey – a country that is unknown, maybe hostile, big and alien.

There is a bridge that spans the banks of the Arax. From Armenia one can see the other side of the  bridge. There is a big red Turkish flag, a huge poster showing the outline of Turkey, and a large portrait of the founder of modern Turkey, Kemal Ataturk.

To stand next to the flag, one has to drive northwards, to neighbouring Georgia, cross the Georgian-Turkish border and then come back from the Turkish side – a 500km journey to cover a distance one could throw a stone across.


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Crossing the divide

The villagers of Margara have never crossed the border between Armenia and Turkey. In fact, they can't even greet their Turkish neighbours with a wave, because that would be a violation of a  border convention.

During the Soviet period it was the most strictly guarded border of the USSR, as Turkey was a member of Nato. Despite opening briefly at the beginning of the 1990s (when the USSR collapsed and Armenia gained its independence) the border remains firmly shut.

Now, however, the villagers are bracing themselves for the opening of the border.

Dreams without borders

"I want to see my grandfather's house," says Nikolay. "I was told he was handsome and had a big house. I just want to see it once."

✘ Villagers are already thinking about how they will sell their agricultural products in the markets of Igdir, or along the Turkish Black Sea coast. "It's so difficult to take stuff to Georgia and sell it there," villagers say. "We'd be better to do business with the Turks rather than with Georgians."

Fifty-year-old Nazik, who lives 100m from the border, is planning to maximise profit. "You can make money at your doorstep," she says. "Maybe someone would like to leave his car near my house, or buy cigarettes, or have a glass of mineral water."

And prices of real estate are growing rapidly. She says: "Almost every day people from Yerevan visit with a view to buying a house. Some offer 20,000 Dram, some 50,000 Dram, and others even more."

But it still remains nothing more than a dream. Whether Nazik will have the opportunity to make money is in the hands of politicians living in remote capitals, who may know little about the villagers of Margara.

