

# WE NEED ARMENIA

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By ETYEN MAHÇUPYAN, Published in Today's Zaman, Istanbul, 12 September 2008

We are passing through an era when the nation-states are losing the capability to solve their problems with traditional policies. Use of force, provocation for conflict and unilateral gain models are no longer valid.

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We are passing through an era when the nation-states are losing the capability to solve their problems with traditional policies. Use of force, provocation for conflict and unilateral gain models are no longer valid.

The biggest reason for this is that the universal norms embodied in human rights have created a new concept of legitimacy. In other words, the foreign policy moves that do not comply with today's concept of legitimacy will backfire even if they are made by powerful states. This inevitably forces nation-states to assume a fair approach based on common interests in order to expand their influence.

Abdullah Gül's visit to Armenia represents Turkey's attempt to adapt to this new atmosphere. It is not surprising for the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) to assert itself in foreign policy after being trapped in domestic politics. Indeed, the foreign policy moves concerning the issues that involve Syria and Iran were peaceful attempts to ensure common peace and stability.

Yet, we should not forget that behind these moves are the dreams of Turkey's conservatives for recreating the Ottoman experience. For this group, the Ottoman world's most brilliant manifestation today is the Pax Ottomana. Today, the AK Party management's desire to become a world player once again, or at least a major political player in our region, is obvious.

Coupled with the new concept of legitimacy, this longing for becoming a "big country" has redefined Turkey, at least in its own eyes, as a "problem solver." It was a golden opportunity for the reproduction of the Ottoman legacy as Turkey realized that it does have a good chance in a power-based crisis among nation-states to take a leading role. Now, Turkey not only has the chance to wave the flag of peace, but is also surrounded by a number of small countries refraining from conciliation.

This approach also works well with two important strategies. One is a foreign policy rule that Turkey has recently learned. According to this rule, the more you deviate from the requests of your powerful allies without disrupting their strategies, the more profitable this will prove. In doing so, your relative importance increases, and at the same time, you widen the political sphere in which you operate. If your allies make moves showing that they have failed to adapt to the new global concept, it will be easier and more productive for you to talk about peace, flexibility and dialogue.

The second strategy was simply the result of a perception of threat. Turkey is NATO's terminal point against Russia, and one of the

~~main targets of our foreign policy is not to cause deterioration in our relations with this country on which we are vitally dependent with regards to energy.~~

When we bring the pieces of the puzzle together, we see that it is possible for Turkey to become a powerful player in its own region, and it can do this by following the models that stress cooperation, though this may be against the wishes and interests of the West. Indeed, this is the very strategy Turkey is currently implementing: to seek multidimensional partnership that includes Turkey in the Caucasus and the Middle East and to make Turkey an indispensable regional player again.

Yet, the sine qua non for this dream is that Turkey should be able to have and maintain individual relations with every country in the region based on trust. At this point, there is only one weakness for Turkey, as everyone knows: Armenia. Keeping its border gates closed and refusing to establish diplomatic relations with Armenia not only makes Turkey weak in its region, but also adds to the Western perception of Turkey as a country that is incapable of having good relations with its neighbors. For this reason, we could say the AK Party government has long been seeking to launch a new dialogue initiative with Armenia, and, as a blessing from fate, the football match has been seized by the government as a golden opportunity.

Indeed, from the first day, it was obvious that Gül was eager to accept Sarkisyan's invitation, and his close circles did not hide his intention. The South Ossetia and Abkhazia crisis in Georgia has proved once again that Turkey's strategy was quite correct. This is because this crisis, in addition to creating a confrontation between Turkey and Russia, might force us to act as a "small country" for a long time if the crisis grows bigger. The Caucasus Cooperation and Stability Platform is a move made to remove this negative possibility, but will also be meaningful in the long term. Its success depends on a quick improvement of relations with Armenia.

The current conjuncture has brought new opportunities for Turkey in a spectrum ranging from changing mentalities to threat perceptions. Yet Armenia should not serve as a black hole in this spectrum. It is for this reason the president eagerly accepted the invitation and the possibility of normalization finally emerged.

