
Business Ties Key To Turkish-Armenian Détente, Discussion Group Says

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order to improve political and social relations, according to business leaders meeting at a roundtable discussion Thursday in Istanbul.

Armenian intellectuals, however, believe Turkey must still make other efforts to improve relations, such as opening borders with Armenia and better coming to terms with contentious historical events.

"If we do not face our histories and create common values, we will not be able to create a common future between the Armenian and Turkish societies," said retired Armenian Ambassador Davit Hovhannisyan.

The collection of intellectuals and business leaders gathered Thursday at Istanbul Kultur University for the "Turkey-Armenia Policy Discussions" event, which was organized by the school's Global Political Trends Center, the Eurasia Partnership Foundation and the United States Agency.

Hovhannisyan said both societies should meet - especially within a university setting - and force their leaders to normalize relations.

Discussion on Turkey's close border with Armenia has been avoided by the European Parliament but is still a significant aspect of solving the issue between the two countries, according to Gegham Manukyan, a journalist from Armenia's Yerkir TV.

"As Armenians, we fear that the Turkish government's moves in the Armenia-Turkey issue will fail to be more than [a pretense at being] in favor of a solution," said Manukyan, expressing the doubts of some Armenians about Turkey's foreign policy.

Turkey's improving relations with its southern and eastern neighbors began as a result of its increased economic relations with these countries, according to Noyan Soyak, the Turkey representative of the Armenian Industrial Businessmen's Association.

Although many Turkish firms are using raw materials that come indirectly from Armenia, they fear mentioning the fact openly because they risk an Azerbaijani boycott, he said. "These relations should be done openly and we should make success stories from these relations."

Tanju Bleda, a retired ambassador, agreed with Soyak, saying Turkish businesspeople could develop economic and trade-based relations with Armenian business leaders living outside Armenia as a start.

The participants of the meeting, including members of the media and former civil servants from Armenia, are expected to pay visits to Turkish parliamentarians and public employees during visits on Friday.
