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Nov 04, 2016 by [Senem Cevik](#)

The “Ethos Gap”: A Challenge or an Opportunity for Turkey’s Nation Brand? (Part 2) ^[1]

Note: *This blog is part 2 of a 2-part series. Part 1 can be found [here](#).*

The second area of Turkey’s ethos gap is in relation to the Kurdish question and the confrontations with Armenians and Alevis – longstanding conflicts inherited from the Ottoman Empire. These disputes influence Turkey’s global reputation and challenge the vision of its highly idealistic values-driven foreign policy discourse. Recognizing the importance of seeking resolutions to these concerns, Ankara initiated the Kurdish reconciliation process two years

ago.

Despite occasional setbacks, Turkey is dedicated to the peace process, with significant strides being made on the cultural and political front in regards to the Kurdish question. In addition, the Armenian opening was initiated with the persistent efforts of the AK Party government and is based primarily on cultural heritage conservation, such as returning confiscated land and properties, support of minority institutions, and the renovation of churches. For the first time in 99 years, Turkey has participated in an official liturgy by the Istanbul Armenian Patriarchate.

Yet there is still an unaddressed ethical predicament facing Turkish-Armenian relations post-2015. Turkey's vocal position on Israel's crimes against Palestinians and liberal use of the word "genocide" to describe the degree of violence of Israeli operations against Gaza discredits the state's own approach vis-à-vis the Armenians. Similarly, Turkey's historical participation in oppressing its Alevi population in the Dersim, Tunceli, and Sivas atrocities and through the lingering discriminatory discourse in the political and social spheres constitute a fundamental societal question, which needs to be answered. The Sunni character of the state religious structure has long caused discontent amongst the Alevi population. In attempts to bridge this gap, the AK Party administration has held meetings with various representatives of the Alevi community, but with minimal legislative progress or commitment. The socio-political prejudice against the Alevi population persists in Turkey and Turkish political rhetoric, all of which makes the government's position hard to manage and impossible for it to gain traction. Ultimately, deconstructing these key historical issues is vital in Turkey's search for a pluralistic society. Ironically, the ethos gap manifests itself not in what the state apparatus does, because it has improved its policy. It is, in fact, the rhetoric of what the political elite and/or bureaucrats say at times that discredits Turkey's progress.

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The third area in relation to the ethos gap is the contemporary domestic limitations on human rights, freedoms, and the rule of law. Issues surrounding the interpretation of freedoms have negatively affected the national image of Turkey in the Western imagination and have raised concerns regarding its democratic credentials. The government's exercise of control over social and print media--such as the short-term Twitter bans--has also furthered these concerns. The Gezi Park protests, unsettled corruption allegations against the government, and charges against the Gülenist formation infiltrating into the state have prompted an increasingly polarizing political rhetoric. Prosecuting violence against women and hate speech have not improved Turkey's standing either. Mass discontent over interference in the lifestyle of Turkish citizens' choices has also contributed to a discrepancy between discourse and interpretation and implementation of basic human rights.

Turkey's domestic policy and foreign affairs are interrelated and are both heavily influenced by political rhetoric. The discrepancy between these yields an ethos gap, exemplified by a

domestic political rhetoric which undermines policy through rhetoric that eschews the global in favor of the national. This gap sends mixed messages to global audiences in regards to Turkey's nation brand.

Recognition of the ethos gap and the adoption of a liberal democratic tradition will likely eliminate the gap's adverse effects and become an opportunity for Turkey to consolidate the ethos component of its nation brand. Narrowing the discrepancy between rhetoric and action rests on refining foreign policy. Further, narrowing the ethos gap will help facilitate Turkey's efforts in establishing itself as a niche actor in humanitarian diplomacy efforts. Traditionally, diplomatic efforts should be guided by the notion of practicing what one preaches. In the Turkish context, it is more of a matter of preaching what it practices and furthering its practices to complement the humanitarian and ethical nation brand. Despite the challenges and opportunities posed by Turkey's ethos gap, global hypocrisy on moral and ethical issues undermines the ability for other nations to evaluate or judge Turkey on moral grounds. Nevertheless, it is up to Turkish policy makers to find a balance between an idealistic discourse and policy implementation in the process of nation branding.
