

The Turkish - Armenian Dialogue Programme, a joint initiative by the International Hrant Dink Foundation and Heinrich Böll Foundation, was launched in May 2009. In the light of the recent developments between the two countries, the Project aims at addressing the problem of lack of information that exists due to a disconnection of many years.

Media is the most effective mean of communication to raise awareness in both communities. To this end, 10 journalists from each country who work at prominent newspapers with high circulation are invited to join the program and to make one-week mutual visits within the same year where they interact with their peers and also with representatives of NGOs, prominent businesses, ministries, members of the community and politicians to learn more about the country. Throughout the programme, various guests are invited to join the journalists during their lunch and dinner times with a view to help journalists gain a deeper understanding of the respective country

One of the most significant elements of the programme is the fact that it creates a space for the participating journalists to mingle with the crowd on the streets so as to let them study better the mentality and life conditions in the respective country, rather than simply sitting at the hotel. In this way, journalists find the chance to develop empathy and get closely acquainted with their neighbour, a country that is very close to them yet very far away due to the years of disconnection.

Within the framework of the programme, 10 Journalist from Turkey went to Armenia in May 2009 and attended meetings and had discussions in the cities of Yerevan, Gyumri and Vanadzor. There were also meetings with the representatives of prominent media agencies, as well as non-governmental organisations which briefed the participants on Armenia. Journalists also visited cities and villages located on the Turkish border and conversed with locals and prepared their newsstories and reports.

In return, 9 columnists from Armenia came to Turkey in October 2009 to visit Ankara, Bursa and Istanbul where they held various meetings. They had talks at the ministerial level and watched the Turkey-Armenia World Cup soccer game in Bursa. During their 7 day stay, the participants had the chance to contact the Armenian community in Turkey and also had a reunion with their colleagues who had previously visited them in Armenia under the programme.

As a result of these two events that took place in the first year of the programme, a virtual communication network has been established to exchange information and news among the participating journalists.