

Caucasus and Central Asia in Turkish Foreign Policy: The Time Has Come for a New Regional Policy

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Abstract : *After the end of the Cold War, the disintegration of the Soviet Union (USSR) and the emergence of new independent states in the Caucasus and Central Asia, Turkey was forced to restructure its regional policy concept and started a new pursuit in its foreign policy. Turkey has been in interaction with this transition geography and has a complex array of economic, political and cultural relations with its neighboring regions. Since the Justice and Development Party (AKP) assumed power in 2002, Turkey has been trying to follow a pro-active regional policy approach and solve existing problems with its “zero problems with neighbors” policy concept. This article focuses on the Turkish regional policy in Caucasus and Central Asia and provides an assessment of this policy. It argues that Turkey needs a new applicable, feasible and realistic action plan regarding the Caucasus and Central Asia in order to combine its normative outlook with the realities of the region. The article asserts that in order to enhance cultural, economic and political ties with the region, first, the necessary structural and institutional conditions have to be created.*

Keywords : Turkish Foreign Policy, Central Asia, Caucasus, Foreign Policy, Cooperation

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Introduction

The new form of the international politics after the end of the Soviet Union (USSR) was not easily recognized by the Turkish decision makers. Because of internal shortcomings and a lack of necessary foreign policy instruments, Turkey was not able to establish strong relationships with the countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia, which are perceived as one single region of utmost importance for the identity of Turkish Foreign Policy and the geographic imagination of Turkish political elites.

This perception of the Caucasus and Central Asia as not a homogeneous but a monolithic region is dominant both in the eyes of Turkish political elites and the Turkish people. However, this is not only a simple matter of understanding but also a factual result of intertwining historical, cultural, religious, political, geographical and linguistic ties and familiarities. Turkish public opinion is very much sensitive towards the Turkic communities of Central Asia and Caucasus for a number of reasons. First of all, the region is significant in terms of geography. Secondly, while Central Asia is perceived as “fatherland of ethnic Turks” or in other words, as the original land of the ethnic Turkic population, Caucasus is the real homeland of a significant immigrant population in today’s Turkey.

The term “Turkish” or “Turk” as it is used today denotes all citizens of Turkey. On the other hand, ethnic “Turks” in Turkey are those originating from the Ottoman Empire’s Turkish population (Bulgarian Turks and Thrace Turks) and other Turkish-origin populations living outside Turkey and outside the borders of the Ottoman Empire.¹ In general, the existing literature of International Relations and neighboring disciplines differentiates the term “Turkish” and “Turkic”. Similarly, “Turkic” populations of the Central Asia do not identify themselves as “Turkish”, which is how they are perceived in Turkey.

Discovery of the “Turkic” World and Central Asia

Central Asia, which had no place in Turkish Foreign Policy until the early 1990s, began to play a central role in its foreign policy from that time onwards as Turkey claimed kinship with the Central Asian communities. During the Cold War decades, the main concern of Turkish decision makers was the USSR in relation with the Central Asian peoples. During that period, the relations Turkey had with these peoples could best be described as minimal. In 1991, President Özal’s diplomatic visit to the USSR included not only Moscow, but also Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and other Union Republics. These visits revealed the rising interest in Turkey towards the newly emerging republics in the former Soviet South.² On 8 December 1991, the Commonwealth of Independent States were established and Turkey became the first state to recognize the newly independent Turkic Republics.³

As an important step for institutionalizing Turkey's regional policy and political orientation, Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA) has been established on January 24th, 1992 which was an entity aiming to deliver development assistance to these countries. TIKA's primary responsibility was to ensure Turkey's coordination with the Turkic Republics in the fields of economics, education, culture, art, history, research, language, alphabet, ethnography, tourism, administration, justice, security, communication, environment, science and technology.⁴ It shows Turkey's adaptation to the new international system in the post-Soviet era and is a mark of the priority and importance Turkey attaches to the countries of Central Asia. So, in Turkish Foreign Policy, a transformation occurred in the definition of its neighboring regions. Until 1990s Turkey's neighborhood included Balkans, Northeast Mediterranean and the Middle East; after 1990s, it is expanded to include the Caucasus and Central Asia as well.

Even so, relations between Turkey and the Turkic Republics were ambiguous. "This ambiguity [was] largely due to the wide gap between *tender interstate relations* and *supra-state institutions of integration*."⁵ Many academics and politicians believed that Turkey should have assumed political leadership in the newly emerging Turkic world. The leaders of the Turkic Republics also valued their close cooperation with the newly emerging "Turkic" geography. Furthermore, many different parties in Turkey believed that with its political structure and character Turkey could be an excellent model for newly established Turkic Republics in the Central Asian region. Accordingly, the US President George Bush (Senior) declared Turkey as a model for the Turkic Republics.⁶

This new attitude towards Central Asia also opened up an opportunity for close relations between Turkic Republics and European countries. The decision makers of the Turkic Republics were oriented towards applying the model of Turkish political system to their own states and declared this decision all together.⁷ They wanted to establish good relations with the international organizations and they believed that if they could make good use of Turkey's political relations with the Western countries, they could reach their aims more easily.

Turkish Foreign Policy was indeed able to respond to these expectations in an appropriate way, undertook a diplomatic function as a "door-opening and right-advocating" actor, and contributed to building a relationship between these new states and the Western political, economic and military organizations.⁸ The Central Asian Republics were able to make their voices heard in the Council of Europe, OECD, IMF, EU and NATO through Turkish intermediation. In 1992, all Turkic Republics except Kazakhstan became a member of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) thanks to the support of Turkish diplomacy.⁹

Institutional and Bilateral Relations in the Last 10 Years

Cultural and historical links between Turkey and the Turkish communities of the region simplify relations with Central Asia. Over 500 treaties signed with these countries have constituted a base for the development of the relations with the new republics in Central Asia.

A recent development which is closely related to the cooperation between Turkey and the Turkic Republics is that for the first time in the short history of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), chairmanship passed from Kazakhstan to Turkey. So, Turkey has assumed the chairmanship of CICA for 2010-2012 after Kazakhstan's chairmanship from 2001 to 2010. The Third CICA Summit presided by Abdullah Gül was held on 7-9 June 2010 in Istanbul.¹⁰ Abdullah Gül released a statement agreed to by 21 of the 22 participants in the conference which stated that “[a]ll member states, except one, expressed their grave concern and condemnation for the actions undertaken by the Israeli Defence Forces.”¹¹ As a part of the economic dimension of the CICA, the Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) Experts Meeting was held on 24 January 2011 in İstanbul. The CICA Economic Sub-Group Second Meeting and the CICA-IOM (International Organization for Migration) Workshop was organized on 30 May 2011 in Antalya. The 2nd and 3rd Special Working Group (SWG) and Senior Officials Committee (SOC) meetings under the Turkish Chairmanship were held on 25-26 January 2011 in İstanbul and on 31 May – 1 June 2011 in Antalya.

As is well known, CICA has 22 member countries, 10 observer countries and 3 observer international organizations and is an intergovernmental forum which aims to enhance cooperation, peace, security and stability in Asia. The idea of CICA was first proposed by Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev on 5 October 1992, at the 47th Session of the UN General Assembly. CICA's two founding documents are the Declaration on the Principles Guiding Relations among the CICA member states adopted at the First Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs held in Almaty on 14 September 1999 and Almaty Act, the charter of the CICA, adopted at the First Summit Meeting held in Almaty on 4 June 2002. CICA is a regional cooperation initiative like the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) which has its roots in the 1973 Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). Thus, Abdullah Gül calls CICA the “OSCE of Asia”.¹² Today, the Secretariat of CICA is located in Almaty, and while the Executive Director is Ambassador Çınar Aldemir from Turkey, Deputy Executive Director is Kanat Tumysh from Kazakhstan.¹³ The former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, Kanat Saudabayev, took the rotating chairmanship of the OSCE, which has 56 member states including Turkey and other Turkic Republics, in 2010 for a one year period.

Another important institution which promotes commercial, industrial and economic cooperation between Turkey and Turkic Republics is ECO Chamber of

Commerce and Industry (ECO-CCI) It was founded by Turkey, Iran and Pakistan in 1990 but today, the CCIs of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are also members of the ECO-CCI.¹⁴ The 15th Executive Committee and 11th General Assembly Meetings of ECO CCI were held in Tehran in February 2011. At the meeting, attended by delegations from Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, M. Rifat Hisarcıkıođlu, who served as the President of the ECO-CCI between 2007 and 2010, underlined the importance of cooperation for increasing the ECO internal trade, free movement of goods, removal of non-tariff barriers, operation of ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA), removal of visas, operation of Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA), harmonization of customs, and revitalization of the Silk Road. The Presidency of ECO CCI has been handed over to Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Mines. On the occasion of the ECO 11th Summit, Hisarcıkıođlu had bilateral meetings with the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, H. E. Roza Otunbayeva; Vice President of Turkmenistan, H. E. Tuvakmamed Dzhabarov and the Prime Minister of Kazakhstan, H. E. Karim Massimov.¹⁵

Linguistic similarities provide another dimension of cooperation between Turkey and the Turkic Republics. In the 9th Summit of Heads of State of Turkish Speaking Countries in Nakhchivan on October 3, 2009, the leaders signed an agreement for the establishment of the Council of Cooperation of Turkish Speaking States, also known as the Turkic Council. In September 2010, during the 10th Summit in İstanbul, the leaders decided to commemorate the date of signing (3 October) of the Nakhchivan Agreement as the Turkish Speaking States Cooperation Day, to appoint Turkish diplomat Halil Akıncı as the first Secretary-General of the Secretariat, and to locate the headquarters of the Council in Istanbul. The first summit of Turkish Speaking Countries Cooperation Council was held in Kazakhstan in 2011. Kyrgyzstan will host the second summit in 2012.¹⁶

The 7th term meeting of the Protocol on Turkey and Kazakhstan Joint Economic Commission (JEC), firstly held in 1995, convened in 2011 in Ankara.¹⁷ This Commission's objective is to improve trade relations between the two countries. Another agreement on common security was signed on April 14th, 2009 and a new cooperation was established in the field of suppression of crime, illegal drug trafficking and terrorism. Close relations between the two countries are also observable in mutual official visits. The friendly visit by Kazakhstan President Nazarbayev on September 30th, 2007 was a significant case in point. Turkish President Abdullah Gül paid a visit to Kazakhstan in reciprocity on December 15th, 2007.¹⁸ During President Nazarbayev's visit to Turkey in October 2009, a Strategic Partnership Treaty was signed between the two countries.¹⁹ Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan Yercan Kazıkhanoğlu paid an official visit to Turkey on 3 August 2011 which was Minister Kazıkhanoğlu's first official visit to Turkey.²⁰

Turkey's relations with Tajikistan were negatively affected by the Civil War in Tajikistan between 1992 and 1997. In order to strengthen the cultural and historical

bonds between Tajikistan and Turkey, a Turkey Information Center was established in the Russian-Tajik Slavic University with the support of TIKA. Cooperation in economy, trade and transportation, and existing relationship between two countries were anticipated to improve more in the future.²¹ The official visit of the Tajik President Emomali Rahmon to Turkey in January 2006 gave a fresh impetus to the Tajik-Turkish relations, during which an Agreement on the basic principles of friendly relations between Tajikistan and Turkey was signed. The 7th JEC between the two countries was held in April 2009, and Turkish State Minister Said Yazicioglu had talks and meetings with President Emomali Rahmon, Parliament Speaker Mehmedsaid Ubaydullaev, Prime Minister Oqil Oqilov and Turkish businessmen in Tajikistan. President Abdullah Gül flew to Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, in May 2009 for a three-day official visit at the invitation of Tajik President Emomali Rahmon.²² The First Tajik-Turkish Business Forum was conducted in May 2009 in Dushanbe in the margins of the official visit of Abdullah Gül to Tajikistan. In December 2010, in the course of the meeting of Rahmon with Gül on the sidelines of the ECO Summit, both parties have raised and successfully resolved many socio-economic issues, which ultimately gave an impactful and efficient result, and the Tajik-Turkish Business Forum was held with the participation of the presidents of both countries. They pointed out that Turkey will help Tajikistan in the establishment of Free Economic Zones (FEZ), construction of hydroelectric power stations, joint ventures in agro-processing, infrastructure development, and tourism among others.²³ In August 2011, the issues of trade and economic cooperation to promote trade between the two countries, and the revitalization of the Turkish-Tajik Business Council were discussed in a meeting in Istanbul, chaired by Ambassador Farrukh Sharipov and Chairman of the Tajik-Turkish Business Council Vedat Oflaz.²⁴

The basis of relations between Turkey and Uzbekistan is common security problems. The third meeting of Turkish-Uzbek JEC, launched in 1995, was convened in March 2008 in Ankara.²⁵ Among many support activities of TIKA to the Turkic Republics, 4 ultrasound machines have been delivered to Uzbekistan in 2011.²⁶ In April 2010, following the so-called “April riots”, a Crisis Center has been established at the Turkish Embassy in Bishkek, the capital and the largest city of Kyrgyzstan. The last meeting of JEC between Turkey and Kyrgyzstan was held in September 2008, and the one between Turkey and Turkmenistan was held in May 2009.²⁷

When we take Turkey’s cooperation efforts in the region into consideration, an important point that needs to be emphasized regarding Turkey’s bilateral relations in general and those with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan in particular, is that both Uzbek and Turkmen states are relatively reluctant to enter into multilateral cooperation. Because these two countries have problems with Kazakhstan and others, Turkey’s cooperation efforts cannot go beyond bilateral agreements. For instance, April 2010 riots in Kyrgyzstan were closely connected to the problems between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Thus, Turkey’s contribution to the solution of bilateral and multilateral conflicts emerges as a prerequisite for building a more efficient multilateral cooperation in the region.

Another important development in the region is the establishment of a Customs Union between Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia which came into existence on 1 January 2010. This is seen as a first step towards forming a broader EU-type economic alliance among the former Soviet states. Tajik and Kyrgyz leaders also voiced their interest in potentially joining the union. In addition, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia adopted the Declaration on the Eurasian Economic Integration at the first session of the Eurasian Economic Council held on November 18, 2011, planning to create a Eurasian Economic Union by 2015. The Declaration outlined the transition to the next stage of integration, and confirmed the intentions to start the process of formation of the Single Economic Space, the legal framework of which is formed by 17 trilateral agreements coming into force on January 1, 2012. So, a common market of services, capital and labor will be created within the Single Economic Space. Also coordination of macroeconomic indicators (such as foreign debt, inflation rate and internal tariffs) and issues of monopolies (single railway transport tariffs, single tariffs for oil and gas pipeline systems transportation) is planned to be agreed by 2015.²⁸ All these developments show how active Russia is in the region and underline the need for a new strategy towards the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Constraints and Opportunities

Turkey's regional integration policy towards the Central Asia aimed at taking common positions against regional problems and producing common policies through easing the existing linguistic and cultural differences, producing new areas of economic cooperation and making common policies in sensitive foreign policy issues such as Cyprus and Karabakh.²⁹ In order to solve their problem of isolation from international organizations and cooperation efforts, they preferred bilateral diplomatic relations instead of integrative models.

Turkish-Armenian relations get locked based on Karabakh issue. However, Azerbaijan does not support Turkey in Cyprus issue. At this point, there is an imbalance. Therefore, Turkey, in terms of its new Caucasus foreign policy, needs a more "realistic" approach which takes first of all its own benefit into consideration. Another point is the existing conditions of regimes in the Turkic Republics. As in the Middle East, democratic norms have to be put on the agenda in the Central Asia and Caucasus as well. This is an integral part of Turkish normative foreign policy approach. Taking into account similarities between the regimes of Russia and other post-Soviet states, Turkey can gradually gain influence in the region parallel to democratization of these regimes.

The very presence of the rival expectations caused some catastrophic difficulties for Turkey in the realization of its own political vision over the Central Asian countries. Turkey's proposals in the 1990s to establish a common market including Turkey and Central Asia and adopting Turkish Lira as the common official

currency did not attract much interest. As a major player of the region, Russia's attitude towards Turkey's Central Asian foreign policy was another obstacle in front of Turkey and concern for Turkish ideals.

Many of the Central Asian policy makers abstained from supporting Turkey in Cyprus issue and Azerbaijan in Nogorny Karabakh problem, which is another indicator of the difficulty of converging competing foreign policy approaches of Turkey and the Central Asian countries; despite the aim of Turkish Foreign Policy to create an integration platform under the ceiling of "Turkic Republics Summit" similar to the EU or North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

The failure of Turkey to develop adequate policies towards the region can be explained with reference to several reasons. The first causal reason is the difference between Turkic policy makers' perceptions and Turkey's unfounded expectations. The second and the more practical one is that Turkey's shortage of adequate economic power to meet the economic requirements of these new states led to the failure of Turkish aspirations towards this region.

However, Turkey's overall post-Cold War foreign policy approach later gained a multidimensional character unlike its initial attempts immediately after 1991. This time, Turkish policy makers' approach to integration has not been a maximalist one, and it accepted active Russian involvement in the region as a natural consequence of deep strategic power calculations concerning the region.

The cornerstone of Turkish Foreign Policy towards the Turkic Republics was to build strong lines of communication facilitated by linguistic similarity. Linguistic kinship as agreed by Turkish and international sources has been a central element of cultural cooperation.³⁰

Ideologies and other ideational and historical factors that influence the perceptions of decision makers enable a subjective interpretation of reality. In other words, decision makers always perceive "what exists" on the basis of "conditionally corresponding to absolute reality".³¹ In this context, the linguistic similarities between Turkey and the Turkic republics in the region – in other words, national awareness among the Turkic population – gave rise to attempts to make use of it. Late Ottoman historians referenced to the Ottoman language as a Western branch of a bigger language family.³² Gaspıralı İsmail Bey, a Crimean Tatar and one of the most important thinkers of Turkish nationalism, anticipated a "unity in language, idea and action"³³ through his writings in *Tercüman* newspaper. He aimed to prove his belief in the Turkishness of all Turkic populations.³⁴

In the current decade, Turkish Foreign Policy makers recognized the fact that differences in perceptions constructs the main obstacle in Turkey's relation with the Central Asia. The shift from euphoric, enthusiastic and sentimental policy attitudes to a more realistic and constructive policy line towards the Caucasus and Central Asia is not likely to be smooth and easy, but it is an ongoing project under the assertion of the new foreign policy line.

With the 2000s, both rhetoric and practice of foreign policy evolved and gained a multi-dimensional, dynamic and active nature. The policy of “zero problems with neighbors”, in particular, which was formulated by Ahmet Davutoğlu, accelerates the process of improvement of Turkey’s relationship with its neighbors. With the “strategic depth” policy of Ahmet Davutoğlu, Turkey developed a new foreign and regional policy vision which leaves behind the transition country perception and adopts a central country identity. According to Davutoğlu, there are three methodological principles (a visionary approach to issues instead of a crisis-oriented attitude; basing Turkish Foreign Policy on a consistent and systematic framework around the world; and adoption of a new discourse and diplomatic style prioritizing Turkey’s civil-economic power, in other words soft power) and five operational principles driving Turkey’s Foreign Policy (balance between security and democracy; zero problems with neighbors; proactive and pre-emptive peace diplomacy; multi-dimensional foreign policy; rhythmic diplomacy).³⁵ Regarding the principle of consistency, Davutoğlu underlines that “Turkey’s vision for the Middle East is not in opposition to its approach in Central Asia or in the Balkans, [Turkey’s] approach to Africa is no different from [its] approach to Asia.”³⁶ According to the theoretical framework drawn by Davutoğlu, geographically there are three “regional areas of influence” (hinterland) circularly surrounding Turkey’s main land; (i) near land basin (the Caucasus is under this category); (ii) near maritime basin, (the Black Sea and the Caspian are under this category); (iii) and near continental basin (the Central Asia is under this category).³⁷

Turkey’s new geographic imagination with the perception of central country led it to follow a foreign policy which is based on international legitimacy, ethic principles and harmony of strategic interests.³⁸ The concept that security policy includes the foreign policy is being replaced with the opposite concept of de-securitization of the foreign policy which enables a pro-active foreign policy. Furthermore, the weakening of the so-called “regime of tutelage”, in other words the decrease of military’s political role meant a new period, which made it possible to develop new alternative strategic approaches towards taboo subjects like Karabakh issue.

As a tool of the new concept, TIKA has an important mission. According to the figures released by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TURKSTAT) and State Planning Organization of Turkey at the end of 2003, official flows from Turkey have amounted to \$3.8 billion, \$98 million of which was spent by TIKA as technical assistance to partner countries. 47 % of TIKA’s aid went to Kazakhstan, 13 % to Azerbaijan, 9.4 % to Turkmenistan, 30.6 % to others.³⁹

As Bülent Aras puts it “[t]hrough TIKA, Turkey has provided technical assistance for Central Asian countries since their independence, and TIKA’s role has only grown under the auspices of Turkey’s new foreign policy vision.”⁴⁰ 53% of Turkey’s Official Development Aid (ODA) in 2009 (665 million USD) went to Central Asia and the Caucasus. Looking at the Turkish ODA figures for the 2006-

2009 period, it is seen that a proportion of over half of all ODAs went to Central Asia and the Caucasus consistently. In 2009, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan were among the three largest recipients of Turkish aid, with 67.72 and 62.53 million USD respectively.⁴¹ It shows the relevance of these regions for Turkey. These funds sponsored projects in economic and industrial infrastructure development, the health and education sectors, academic cooperation between Turkish and Eurasian universities, and internship programs in Turkey for the Central Asian and Caucasian university students, Turkish language programs, and the promotion of business and trade.⁴²

Cooperation in science and technology is another leading sector in the existing relations. Turkey established two universities in the region, *Hoca Ahmet Yesevi University* in Kazakhstan and *Manas University* in Kyrgyzstan. Turkey supports these universities in academic and financial terms. However there is a problem regarding the legal status of *Hoca Ahmet Yesevi University*, and this problem between Kazakhstan and Turkey has not been solved to the full extent yet. Turkey has to look into this matter. Another important point related to these universities in the Turkic states is the problem of corruption and its reflections to these universities. In this context, Turkey provides scholarships of higher education to students from the Turkic communities. Opening of over 100 schools by the Turkish Ministry of Education and by civil societal organizations has been the positive and successful projects of this policy.⁴³ However, it can be said that Turkey, at least at the level of higher education, has to give priority to enhancement of the scholarship system for successful students from the Turkic countries rather than establishing universities in these countries.

President Abdullah Gül was accompanied by representatives of the Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB) and a large number of business people during his visit to Turkmenistan in December 2007.⁴⁴ Inter-regional bilateral trade volume is expected to increase and doubled from 2003 to the year 2009, jumping from 3 billion dollars to 8 billion dollars. Besides, Turkey also guarantees the transition of energy resources and protection of the independence of the countries in the region.⁴⁵

Within the framework of new foreign policy, while Turkey has a pro-active policy and takes initiatives in the region of Central Asia and Caucasus, it also tries to keep its good relations with Iran and Russian Federation which are the other relevant actors in the region. Strengthening the independence of Central Asian countries, contributing to the formation and structure of states, helping the economic and political transition of these countries in order to sustain peace and stability and the improvement of relationship with these countries on the basis of sovereign equal and mutual interests are the main principles of the Turkish Foreign Policy towards Central Asia and Caucasian regions.

Instead of a policy of competition with Russia, pursued in the first decade after the disintegration of the USSR, Turkey has adopted a new foreign policy which

aims cooperation with Russia in its relations with the Central Asian countries. Turkey also desires to have good relations with the EU and the USA, which are global actors with interests in these regions. Today, Turkey-Russia relations improved a lot in terms of trade volume, visa exemption, and tourism, but it cannot be said that there is cooperation between the two countries regarding the Central Asia. Turkey has admitted Russian dominancy in the region. Therefore, “neutralizing” Russian influence in the region can only be a long-term aim for Turkey.

Turkey especially aims to improve its relations with the region by developing trade oriented relations and by diversifying and deepening the present institutional basis. In short and medium term, Turkey has to give priority to trade and cultural relations. Activities of Turkish nongovernmental organizations in the region, such as establishing schools and publishing newspapers have to be supported. To sum up, today Turkey and Russia are not two cooperating regional powers in Central Asia and Caucasus. Especially, in the Caucasian context Turkey and Russia have structurally different points of view regarding the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Regional Constellation and Strategic Perspective

As a consequence of the rich resources they possess, in particular of hydrocarbon energy, the Caucasus and Central Asia have become the focus of interests for regional and global powers. For many experts, after the collapse of the USSR, a new great game has started. The main aim of the “new great game” is to become an energy terminal that transfers the hydrocarbon energy resources to the world markets. Especially oil pipelines that are planned to transfer the fossil energy resources to Europe can be considered a potential and significant source of conflict of interests between Turkey and Russia.⁴⁶

Turkey’s geopolitical position makes it ideally situated to be an energy hub. In the mid-1990s Turkey and Russia reached an agreement on the Blue Stream Pipeline, completed in 2002 and formally inaugurated in 2005, which brings 16 billion cubic meters (bcm) of Russian gas annually to Turkey under the Black Sea. There are also pipelines running from both Iraq and Iran that connect to pipelines within Turkey.⁴⁷

Turkey is also an energy consumer. According to the Energy Information Agency (EIA), Turkey consumes approximately 618 billion barrels of oil per day and has contracted to import 1.8 trillion cubic feet of natural gas for 2010. (...)”Turkey currently purchases gas from Russia and Azerbaijan, and it has negotiated repeatedly with Turkmenistan—both for gas for its own use and for gas to flow through to Europe.⁴⁸

The economic aspect of Turkish-Russian relations depends highly on Turkey's need for fuel and energy resources. At the same time, Turkey's energy dependence on Russia grows day to day. Today, Turkey meets nearly three-quarters of its demand of fuel and energy resources from Russia.⁴⁹ Turkey's need for gas also increases and is "expected to reach 55 bcm in 2010 and 82 bcm in 2020."⁵⁰ Regarding both domestic demand of Turkey and its transfer to other countries, the *Mavi Akım* (Blue Stream) Project involves 1,250 kilometers of pipelines interconnecting Russia (Dzhugba) and Turkey (Samsun and Ankara) through a pipeline going under the Black Sea.⁵¹ Therefore, there is an absolute need for the permanence of stable political relations between Russia and Turkey when Turkey's energy resource dependence to Russia is considered.

Furthermore Turkey is an integral part of the global energy market. Russian energy schemes in Turkey have the potential to provide Moscow access to markets in Greece, Spain, Italy, and even North African countries.

Because of the strategic importance and the position of Russia in the region and in spite of the Turkish decision makers' vision that the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) petrol line is the only and the best alternative, alternative pipeline routes are also taken into consideration. In terms of economy, ecology and strategy, the BTC had several obvious superiorities to the Russian Noworossisk pipeline. First of all, while the annual capacity of the Noworossisk port was 30 million tons, the Ceyhan terminal showed superiority with its 120 million tons capacity. Moreover, the Russian port in the Black Sea, depending on the weather conditions, showed activity 87-100 days in a year; on the other hand, Ceyhan terminal was capable of serving at full capacity all year long. With its three times more tanker capacity, Ceyhan pipeline was again preponderant to the Noworossisk.⁵² Turkey's control of the Bosphorus made it crucial to Soviet/Russian oil exports from the Black Sea port of Novorossiysk. The Bosphorus is among the three busiest shipping lanes in the world. If the 25 percent of all Russian oil exports go through the straits; tanker traffic in the Bosphorus will increase exponentially and the by-pass of the dense traffic would not be possible.⁵³

The EU and USA's proposal is for Nabucco, which would take Caspian, and perhaps Iranian, gas through Turkey to Central Europe. The pipeline will link the Eastern border of Turkey to Baumgarten in Austria –one of the most important gas turntables in Central Europe– via Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary. When completed the 3,300 km pipeline's annual capacity will be 31 bcm. The construction of the pipeline is supported by the 2009 Intergovernmental Agreement signed in Ankara. The Nabucco shareholders are OMV (Austria), MOL (Hungary), Transgaz (Romania), Bulgargaz Holding (Bulgaria), BOTAS (Turkey) and RWE (Germany) and each shareholder holds an equal share of 16.67% of Nabucco Gas Pipeline. Nabucco's problem is the availability of gas to fill the pipeline. Azerbaijan by itself does not currently have enough gas to fill both Nabucco and South Caucasus or Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) Pipeline.⁵⁴

Regional Security and Conflicts

Within the new line of Turkish Foreign Policy, Turkey aims to sustain peace and stability within its neighborhood. Davutoğlu has described the style and orientation of the AKP government's "new" foreign policy in accordance with certain principles mentioned above, which direct Ankara's attention to Turkey's neighboring regions and the various activities that Turkey needs to pursue to develop good relations with them.⁵⁵ For Turkey, the major challenge from the Caucasus and the Black Sea is the supply and transshipment of energy, plus concerns over Russia's resistance to NATO's expansion in those regions. With respect to the Caucasian states, there are the additional concerns of Azerbaijan-Armenian relations, the Georgian war and the developing relations with Russia.

In the early 1990s, Azerbaijan and Armenia fought a brutal war over the ethnically Armenian territory contained within Azerbaijan. Because of the conflict, 6,500 Armenians and 20,000–25,000 Azerbaijanis were killed; 412,000 Armenians were expelled from Azerbaijan; and 186,000 Azerbaijani Turks fled from Armenia. "Turkey supported Baku and closed its borders with Armenia in protest. (...) [t]he government in Yerevan, in the hopes of reopening its borders, (...) attempt[ed] to unfreeze relations with Turkey. What has come to be known as football (soccer) diplomacy began with an invitation to Turkish President Gül from his Armenian counterpart, Serzh Sarkisian, to attend a world cup qualifying soccer match between the two countries."⁵⁶ The warming up nature of the developing relations between Turkey and Armenia is also compatible with the new line of Turkish Foreign Policy. "This possible thaw in relations between Turkey and Armenia is important for several reasons. First, it might allow Ankara to mediate between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Second, it would also represent a major foreign policy success for Turkey and enhance Ankara's regional role. Third, a look at a map of the region would show that Armenia could well be a possible site for the future Nabucco pipeline, should the situation in Georgia remain unstable."⁵⁷

Another conflictual area and concern of the Turkish Foreign Policy decision makers is Georgia. Tensions rose throughout spring 2008, between Georgia and Russia on the night of August 7/8 of that year. As Carol Saivets puts it clearly;

A ceasefire was declared after five days, leaving large areas of Georgia heavily damaged and Russian troops occupying regions outside South Ossetia and the other breakaway province, Abkhazia. (...) Welcoming the ceasefire, Erdoğan announced a major diplomatic initiative labeled the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform. The organization would bring together Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russia, and Turkey, with the United Nations as a patron, and its goal would be to foster peace, democracy, and stability in the region. Babacan added a few weeks later that Turkey saw the proposal as a mechanism through which the states in the region could discuss "cooperation opportunities" and "concrete

measures, particularly confidence building ones. (...) Turkey's EU aspirations and its membership in NATO ran directly counter to its need to protect its relationship with Russia. (...) When its NATO ally, the USA, asked permission for two naval vessels to enter the Black Sea to provide humanitarian assistance to Georgia, Turkey hesitated but ultimately agreed. Ankara also gave permission to other NATO ships to enter through the Bosphorus for NATO exercises. The Montreux Convention, which governs the passage of ships through the straits, provides for such ships to be in the sea for no more than 21 days.⁵⁸

When it comes to the improvement of relations with Caucasian states, Turkey should consider the relations with Russia in the same way. “The deepening of political dialogue between Russia and Turkey dates back to the signing of the Eurasia Action Plan in 2001 between the then foreign ministers, Ismail Cem and Igor Ivanov.”⁵⁹ Since 2001, political dialogue intensified and ascended the relationship to higher levels. As Suat Kiniklioğlu and Valeriy Morkva point out;

Turkey and Russia are in full agreement in their views vis-à-vis their immediate regions. Ankara and Moscow share apprehension about US policy toward Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Moreover, Turkey's recent emphasis on 'normalization with the neighborhood', [the] concept [of] Davutoğlu significantly contributed to this convergence of positions. [Davutoğlu] views Turkey as a pivotal state at the center of the Balkans, Black Sea, Caucasus, the Middle East and the Mediterranean regions. From a Turkish–Russian perspective, Davutoğlu's vision provided the Turkish government with the intellectual legitimacy to pursue the acceleration of the ongoing rapprochement and deepen the bilateral relationship [with Moscow]. (...) The deepening of Turkish–Russian relations also reflected upon the two countries' multilateral dealings on a variety of platforms.⁶⁰

Another important aspect of the relations between Turkey and Russia is Turkey's potential to influence Muslim populations both inside and outside Russia. In 2008, approximately 25 million Muslims live in Russia. By improving its relations with Muslim countries in the year of 2005 with observer status, Russia attended the Organization of Islamic Conference.⁶¹ “Ankara also extended crucial support to Moscow's desire to obtain observer status at the Organization of the Islamic Conference.”⁶² This means that Turkey can be seen as a mediator between Russia and Muslim peoples of Caucasus, the Central Asia and the Middle East.

Russia is the most powerful actor in the region. After the 2011 Georgian protests which were a series of anti-government protests against President Mikheil Saakashvili, Saakashvili stated that he believed the protestors were backed by Russia, and that they provoked the violence. Armenia, on the other hand, which tries to have friendly relations with Russia, Iran and the Western powers has tense relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan because of the dispute over the Armenian Genocide and the recent war over Nagorno-Karabakh, and is open to be affected by

Russia. Any probable solution of problems between Armenia and Turkey would lead to the decrease of Russian influence on Armenia and be a development contrary to Russian interests in the region.

In the recent history of Turkish-Armenian relations, one of the most important events is that Turkey lifted restrictions on Armenians entering it in January 2002. This was a historical development parallel to Turkey's "zero problems with neighbors" policy. However, the Turkish-Armenian border remained closed. Therefore both flow of workers and land trade between two countries continue mainly via Georgia thanks to the abolishment of visa regime, the Free Trade Agreement and the new border crossing system enabling citizens of both countries a border-crossing without passport between Turkey and Georgia. "Protocol on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Turkey" signed in Zurich on October 10, 2009 is a very big chance, which can contribute to the normalization process of relations between the two countries. However neither Turkey nor Armenia could put this protocol into practice mainly because of Karabakh issue.⁶³ The rationality of this stance has to be questioned and Turkey has to play a pro-active role regarding this problem.

Conclusion

As it is described by Davutoğlu, Turkey needs to interact with the neighboring regions in a way that, with particular reference to its war on terrorism, "balances" the security challenges from abroad with "democracy" at home. Turkish Foreign Policy makers need to work with its neighbors to reduce problems to "zero" and to "develop relations" with immediate and more distant neighbors. It needs to engage in "multi-dimensional" foreign policy and "rhythmic diplomacy," hence the concept and emphasis on Turkey as an "actor."⁶⁴

With respect to the stated idea, in order to develop the integration with the Caucasus and Central Asia, Turkey has to take into consideration the other actors that have active role in the region and to construct strong ties with the countries in the region. Turkey's new foreign policy has moderate and more realistic goals to achieve in the Central Asian region. Instead of regional competition, it aims to strengthen its relations with the region by sustaining cooperation. With regards to the Central Asia and Caucasus, we may count many sources of instability with and in the region like Azerbaijan-Armenian problem, terrorism, radical Islamist movements, drug trafficking and the conflict between Georgia and Russia in the north Caucasus. Beside all of these, the "new great game" that is played in the region over hydrocarbon energy recourses between the regional and global actors also needs attention. When it comes to the transportation of energy resources from Central Asia and Caucasus to the European market, Turkey gains significant importance. The Central Asia and Caucasus are perceived as a single monolithic region that offers opportunities for the

energy interests of Turkey and represents Turkey's increasing strategic importance. Within the framework of new foreign policy, while Turkey has an active policy and takes initiative in the region of Central Asia and Caucasus, it also tries to keep its good relations with Iran and Russia who are the main actors in the region.

Turkey adopts a new foreign policy which aims cooperation, or at least good relations instead of competition with Russia regarding its relations with the Central Asian countries. An important point which has to be emphasized here is that cooperation or good relations does not mean total submission, obedience, or admission of Russian dominancy in the region. What is important at this point is to formulate a realistic framework for cooperation rather than being bogged down by ideological restrictions. In addition, Turkey also wants to have good relations with the EU and the USA which are the other main actors in the region. Turkey especially aims to improve its relations with the region by developing trade oriented relations and by diversifying and deepening the present institutional basis. In order to sustain stability and peace in the region, it aims to construct strong economic and cultural linkages with the conflictual areas. For example, the strong economic ties with Armenia may be more effective in developing a solution to the Karabakh problem. On the other hand, institutionalization and cooperation with Russia and the Central Asian countries both ensures the success of the attempts of Turkey regarding the transfer of hydrocarbon energy resources and may be an effective tool for sustaining peace and stability in the region. What is more, the development of cultural, economic and political relations enables Turkey to act as a soft power which is able to instill its own values to its neighbors.

It is important to emphasize that the Caucasus and Central Asia no longer have to be a stepchild within the new Turkish Foreign Policy. Turkey urgently has to put forth a new realistic road map after making a decision about its priorities and primary problems. In this context, regional issues have to be taken into consideration according to these priorities. First, the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations has to be put on the agenda because this strategic tension affects Turkey's relations with other actors such as the EU and the USA. Second, the influence of Russia in the region should not be underestimated. The Turkic states' integration with Russia gradually deepens and there is even talk of Russia creating a "new Soviet Union".⁶⁵ The question what role Turkey can play in this context has to be asked and answered in a realistic manner. Today, Turkey's position can be seen as a kind of "regression". In order to overcome this "crisis", a new cultural policy is needed which does not impose a strict identity and perceives the Turkic peoples as they are. This new cultural policy has to integrate Russia into the game. For example, learning Russian language, inter-university relations, and student exchange programs at the level of secondary education have to be encouraged. Turkey also has to support the Turkic states in terms of religious education. Third, Turkey's difference from Russia has to be underlined. Turkey has to contribute strongly to the democratization process in the Caucasus and Central Asia. A normative framework has to be formulated and temporary solutions have to be abandoned.

The importance of the Eurasian Economic Council has to be underlined again, which was the first step towards forming a Eurasian Economic Union, an EU-type economic alliance of former Soviet states that is planned to be created in 2015 and that aims to create a Single Economic Space. The first session of the Eurasian Economic Council was held in November 2011 one year after the establishment of the Customs Union between Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia in 2010. Additionally, Tajik and Kyrgyz leaders voiced their interests in joining the organization. In addition, Turkey has to include Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan to its integration efforts. The relations between the Turkic states and Russia have to be observed day by day, and if necessary Turkey should try to obtain observer status at the Eurasian Economic Council. Turkey has to overcome obstacles preventing it from being an influential actor in the region.

Factual, structural and institutional conditions of enhancement of cultural, economic and political integration have to be created. Turkey has to encourage free trade and Russia must not be excluded. The establishment of the Turkic Council in 2009 was a very significant development. However, the main obstacle here is the difficulty of combining Turkey's normative goals with the realities of the region. A liberal cooperation attempt has to be made rather than staying within an ideological straightjacket. To sum up, Turkey needs a new applicable, feasible and realistic plan of action regarding the Caucasus and Central Asia, and the Turkic Council is the most appropriate platform to achieve these goals.

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