

Identity Politics of Turkey Towards Central Asia

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Abstract

If we consider that identity is shaped in an objective frame formed by geopolitical, historical and cultural factors (Gadjiyev, 2013, p. 1-21), it will not be possible to draw a predictive scenario analysis without comparison of past and present situation of identity based on Central Asia relations of Turkey and Russia that providing antithesis integration models to each other in historical context. So, this paper aims to find out reasons and outcomes of Turkey's foreign policy in Central Asia based on Turkic identity and also difficulties while applying so. Thus, previous research outcomes will be used to highlight the concept. Also, Central Asian states attempts towards integration will be analyzed.

Keywords: Central Asia, Turkey, Russia, identity, Turkic world

1. Introduction

Selchuq Empire and Ottoman Empire marked Turkey's foreign policy based on identity. So, in both historical periods, any activities in Central Asia towards improving linguistic and ethnical relations remained limited. Also, in republican period of Turkey, to remain closely for 'National Oath' objections and to prevent negative attitude of Soviet leaders, any relationship with Central Asia has been stopped. In Cold War period, limited and controlled relationship with Central Asia has been provided via Moscow. This situation shows that Central Asian public has been shaped according to Russia's interest in frame of identity.

As a sample, Hooman Peimani analyzed Turkey's relation with Turkish ethnical folk in Central Asia as:

Since Selchuq Turkmens' migration, we can not speak of a strong relation between Turkey and Turkish ethnics in Central Asia. Even, they direct themselves into west and restrengthen to establish Ottoman Empire, they lost their power and interest in Central Asia. Because, Ottoman Empire applied its foreign policy for expansion into west, also Balkans and Arabian Middle East. So, Ottoman Empire preferred partial relations with Central Asia on religion. On Soviet period, Russian controlling over the region has deprived Turkish existence in Central Asia (Peimani, 1998, p. 47-48).

As seen, Turkey's dissociating in the region, postponing Central Asia as a foreign policy privilege and integration strategy with the West have given voice to Russia to shape the region based on its identity. In this case, it is assumed that, Russia has provided more advantages and taken one more step than Turkey.

If we analyze current situation, we observe that Turkey tries to renew identity in the region basing on relations (including language and ethnics) and tries to build a strong bridge via Turkish Council in Istanbul. But, the first summit of Turkish Council on 21th of October, 2011 showed that Turkish Council is at the bottom of the ladder while renewing identity in the region as based on Turkic world and dissociation of Central Asian states between their politics and their perception on Turkic world identity.

2. Scenarios on Turkish Identity in Central Asia

We can speak about two scenarios to follow Central Asian states' politics on Turkic world identity: The first scenario consists of the members of Turkish Council, which are anticipating to develop Turkic world. The second scenario consists of states that put front their security and economic interests with assertion of 'no-participation in any blocs'. Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan can be counted in the first group. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan can be counted in the second group. Conversely, states in first group consider balanced multilateral foreign policy with Turkic world,

instead of a strong Turkic world identity. In other words, Central Asian states that of faced Soviet period, has approach on development of Turkish Council for their own national interest and security concerns, instead of ideological perception. This situation can prevent a strong framing that of solving problems of Central Asian states and can provide different approaches of member states about several regional and international problems. On the other side, we argue that there is lack of Turkic world identity perception in Central Asian states' public eye. To support our argument, we will base Kazakhstan as a sample. Kazakhstan is one of active member of Turkic world integration movements. On 2013, a social research has been applied on Kazakh citizens about identity as a development model. 1600 participants have attended this research as consisting of all cities in Kazakhstan. One of important question in the research was about which country has to be choosen for identity in the case of foreign policy and development model. Question has been prepared as comparing with one applied on 2005. Answers given on this question has been summarized in Figure-1, below.

As seen, this research shows which country has been counted as sympatic for Kazakh citizens in the frame of foreign policy and identity. If we compare the results with the one applied on 2005, we consider that sympathy on Turkey has been reduced on 2013. On contrary, sympathy for Russia has been raised by the effect of Customs Union and Single Economic Area. The outcomes of this result is that 'Kazakh public has no intention on sampling of any states' according to first group of Kazakhs in listing. This group is called as 'nationalist' and they form majority. The second group supports identity structuring with Russia as being of Slav and Orthodox country. Second group represents of Kazakh citizens, who believe that Slav culture forms Kazakh identity partly and thus there must be combined efforts with Russia. Third group consists of Kazakh citizens with a westernized identity perception. They argue that western values should be dominant in the country. Fourth group consist of Kazakhs, who argues an identical identity structuring with China. If we consider that China will provide a governmental scholarship for 30000 youngsters in the region (Agimbekov, 2013), we can foresee that there may be new generation as caring of cooperation with China in medium-term. This situation may endanger Turkic world identity and Eurasian identity. In short, Kazakh citizens' sympathy over Turkic identity has been reduced and this lines up after Islamic identity in Figure-1, below. On the other side, if this research was done in other Central Asian states, the result would not change.

While the results are quite clear, it would be utopical to argue that people in the region will identify their foreign policy according to Turkic world identity. Our view is that Turkey could be a sample for states in the region with its Islamic identity and can raise this effect via Islamic identity. Additionally, we assume that, in short and medium term, Central Asian states will not prefer to integrate with Turkey with its Turkic world identity. Also, we assume that relations between Central Asia and Turkey will be shaped according to interests and security perceptions.

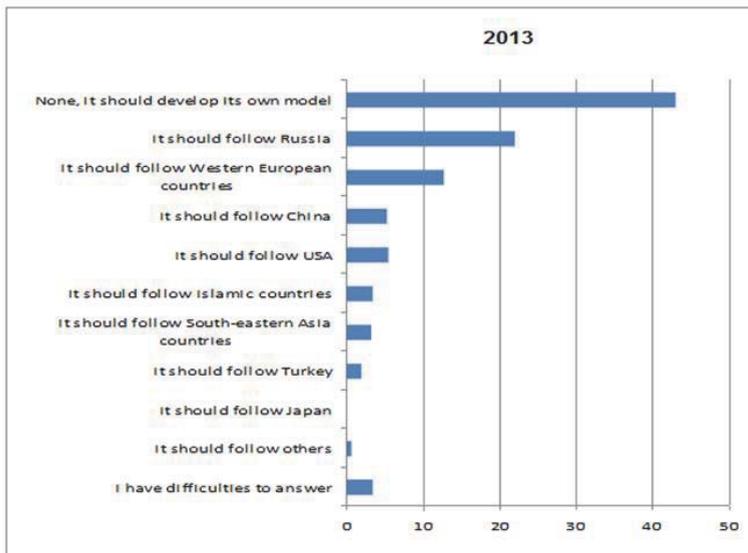


Figure 1: An analysis of Kazakh citizens's answers for question of ' which country should be sampled in the concept of identity and foreign policy priorities?' (Ileuova, 2013, p.13-14))

3. Main Obstacles of Turkic World with a Strong Turkish Identity

To support our argument, we can mention about three main topics based on SWOT analysis. The first is historical process of Turkey and Central relations; second is Turkic world states' problems between themselves and the third is outsider factors.

As for the first, relation between Central Asia and Turkey at beginning of 1990 can be given as sample. In this period, Turgut Özal aimed to implement to form United Turkish States, as centering Turkey from Adriatic Sea to the Great Wall of China (Kazansev, 2008, p. 48-49). But in this period, Turkish speaking leaders expressed that they do not want a second big brother and their intention is to continue relations on equal base with whole states (Nazarbayev, 1996, p. 216-217). Even now, Central Asian states implements their foreign policy regarding to this view. The result is that Central Asian states will not adopt an attitude as Turkey or Turkic world identity oriented. On contrary, these states will continue balanced multilateral foreign policy and they will care of Turkey and Turkic world as part of this policy.

As second, we strongly emphasize that Turkish speaking states-without solving bilateral problems among each other-, Turkic world integration process can not eventuate. Problems among Turkic world states can be counted as below:

- (i) Disagreement between Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan about Caspian Sea status and its negative effect on bilateral relations prevent integration of Turkmenistan in Turkic world organizations.
- (ii) De facto leadership discussions between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in the region can be counted as second. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan signed a strategical partnership agreement on 14th of June, 2013 ("Uzbekistan i Kazakhstan podpisali dogovor o strategičeskom partnijorstve", 14.06.2013). This agreement can not mean that there will be no competition between two states and all problems are solved. On contrary, this agreement consist of regional security problems and assumes common operation against any treatment and danger coming from Afganistan after 2014 and also joint cooperation towards water conflict in the region (MGIMO; Kazansev, 2013, p: 5). In other words, competition view of public is still not over.
- (iii) Still, untrusted relationship between Uzbekistan and Turkey continues. Peeved attamept on Turkey by Islam Karimov, leader of Uzbekistan, reflects Turkic world organizations as standing away from Turkish integration efforts (Malaşenko, 2012, p:44).
- (iv) Enclave problem between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and hostility of both public towards each other is another problem. Additionally, there are disagreements about hydroelectric plants and this puts water conflict on stage, which effects Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations negatively (Ivanov and Naumkin, 2013, p:35).

On the other side, Uzbekistan's attempts and its foreign policy cast shadow on Turkic world integration. As known, Uzbekistan is a state that defends autonomous development without any dependency to any integration blogs. Also, Uzbekistan is against to a stronger state rather than itself in Central Asia. This situation and its peeving on Turkey prevent its membership on Turkic world integration process. Because of that, raising effect of Turkish Council in Central Asia and also in international arena is related to Uzbekistan's (as the country having geopolitical importance in the region) membership. Without Uzbekistan's membership in Turkic world, integration process will complicate integration of Turkic world countries based on identity. This situation would be beneficial for strong regional or non-regional states for simplifying to block Turkish identity and Eurasian identity based integration via Uzbekistan.

Turkish Council without Turkmenistan also weakens the organization. As known, since 1995, Turkmenistan continues to follow impartial policy, as accepted by international society (UN). Thus, Turkmenistan do not participate any integration movement not only in Turkish Council, also in post-Soviet arena. Conversely, Turkmenistan has active membership in CIS and this shows that impartial policy of Turkmenistan is not an obstacle for membership in several organizations. Although, Turkmenistan is rich for its underground national sources and it has less national power comparing with other neighbouring countries. This is the reason why Turkmenistan prefers to stand away integration movements in Eurasia, just because of not to have any constraıt by powerful actors and to stand as a strong country. But, if it is aimed of a strong Turkic world, then Turkmenistan should be under Turkish Council framing by balanced strategical movements. However, we observe that members of Turkish Council do not place emphasis enough and do not provide diplomatic efforts on this topic.

As third, Central Asian states are surrounded by Russia, China and Iran as regional powers and those states are against to a strong Turkic world based on Turkish identity because of their own security and interests (Laumulın, 2009, p.191-198). So they try to prevent this structuring by indirect diplomatic methods (Lukyanov; 17th of August, 2013).

On the other side, USA as a global power would not support a Turkic world having a real Turkish identity. USA supports Turkey's initiatives if Turkey corresponds positively according to USA's interests and security (Vestnik MGIMO; Kazansev, 2012, p:155). On contrary, when Turkey follows any policy as independent and autonomous from Atlantic,

then it is observed that USA prevents Turkey to step that of expanding large fields. In other words, USA never support a strong Turkey in world politics and never want a Turkic world based on a strong Turkish identity, which is not directed according to USA's global interests. But, we can also assume that USA would support Turkic world organizations, just to balance regional powers in Eurasia (Laumilin, 2006, p: 194-198).

So, all these factors written above limits integration process. Since Turkey has limited power to solve those problems, the solution is relevant to long-termed diplomatic strategic moves.

When we analyze Turkey's strategic moves in last term, we observe that Turkey is step away from Atlantic block and getting closer to Eurasia. As a result of that, Turkey has been accepted as a dialogue partner of Shanghai Cooperation Organization ("Tursiya stala tryetim partniyorum po diyalogu ŞOS", 26.04. 2013) and we assume that Turkey may provide an active cooperation with members of Customs Union that of formed under Russia's leadership ("Tarasenko & Kuznesova", 25.07. 2013) and may apply for membership in this union in long-term (Nazarbayev predlozil prinyat Tursiyu v Tamojennii soyuz, 24.10.2013). So, we can foresee that Turkey will develop its cooperation with Customs Union and in medium term, may sign agreement based on privileged status.

4. In Final Words...

As stated above, Russia tries to strengthen its power and authority in near abroad systematically after Putin's leadership since 2000. Because of that, Russia's attempt to recover itself in the region should not underestimate. On contrary, economic and security initiatives should begin to balance its power in Eurasia.

In this regard, Turkey should:

- define its concrete vision based on historical mission
- provide new organizations and additional staffs
- have serious, trustable, decisive and deterrent position
- not appease its 'new near abroad policy'
- play the game with its rule and should work through clearly its desiciveness for its interests.
- emphasize Ottomans and Seljuq's as a continuity source related to its historical depth.
- understand well the meaning of Seljuq's emphasis in foreign and domestic policy and should develop a model regarding to this emphasis
- review its current strategy and reorganize it on realistic tools
- provide new foreign policy perspective and strategy compatible to new process.
- develop crisis management center and politics
- provide a flexiable perception riposting conjunctural illicts
- urgently transform its policy based on balanced multilateral foreign policy
- be consistent for its foreign policy based on 'action and discourse'
- urgently fill the gaps on intelligent and information flow
- define itself clearly by new media structuring, counter psychological operations and actions
- speed up works for strategy centers and rethink about specific parameters regarding those centers.
- be in harmony with its nation, history and self values and should guide itself the discourse of 'national, independence and a strong Turkey'
- should provide programmes to strengthen 'its national soul'
- provide time, peace and stability to achieve all those goals.

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