

## The Impact of Turkey's Domestic Resources on the Turkic Republics of the Caspian Sea

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper examines how Turkey's domestic resources, which are Turkey's historical, cultural and political relations with the Turkic states and Turkey's economic interests in the region, affect Turkey's foreign relations with Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Findings show that the Turkic Republics' interest in Turkish development model gradually declined starting from the 1990s. The hypothesis that the stronger socio-cultural ties between Turkey and the Turkic states are the closer the foreign relations are between Turkey and the Turkic states is applicable to all five republics. In the field of business the study finds that Turkish economy follows a similar pattern in its relations with the Azerbaijani and the Central Asian market. Common policy goals of Turkey and the five states led Turkey to establish close foreign relations with these five regional countries. The hypothesis that the more Turkey has business interests in the Caspian Sea Region the more Turkey will have closer foreign relations with Turkic states is mostly apparent in the case of Azerbaijan. In the area of energy politics Turkey has its strongest link with Azerbaijan. Besides being strong economic partners Turkey is Azerbaijan's biggest supporter in the region against Armenia.*

**Key Words:** *Turkey's foreign policy, Caspian Sea Region, Turkic republics, domestic sources of foreign policy*

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## 1. Introduction

After the break up of the Soviet Union a geopolitical vacuum emerged in the Caucasus and Central Asia and this area became an important ground for competition of several actors. The US, Russia and China are the three great powers that emerged to fill this vacuum. Turkey, with its mostly pro-Western policies, entered the scene as a middle power. Iran and Pakistan are the other two actors involved in this region with their pro-Russian and pro-Chinese policies.

Turkey, on its side, has an ethnic, cultural and historical appeal to the regional countries. Moreover Turkey, with its secular and democratic regime, offers a development model to these countries in their struggle to get rid of the Soviet legacy and integrate themselves to the global system. I built my theory around the idea that Turkey's domestic sources of foreign policy affect Turkey's foreign relations with the Turkic countries in the Caspian Sea Region. My independent variable is domestic sources of Turkey's foreign relations with the Turkic countries, which are Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan from Central Asia and Azerbaijan from the Caucasus and my dependent variable is Turkey's foreign relations with these countries. Domestic sources are divided into three categories, which are Turkey's historical, cultural and political relations with the Turkic states and Turkey's economic interests in the region. My question for this paper is to see how Turkey's domestic sources of foreign relations affect Turkey's foreign relations with the regional countries. This study seeks to find which of the Turkish sources of foreign policy causes successful and close foreign relations with the Turkic countries.

Given the mutual expectations and enthusiasm of Turkey and the Turkic countries, in terms of establishing close and cooperative political and economic relations with the break up of the Soviet, I hypothesize that;

- The stronger the socio-cultural ties are between Turkey and the Turkic states the closer the foreign relations are between Turkey and the Turkic countries.
- The more Turkey has business interests in the Caspian Sea Region the more Turkey will have closer foreign relations with Turkic countries.
- The more Turkey has common policy goals with the Turkic states the more Turkey has closer foreign relations with Turkic countries.

## **Theoretical framework and literature review**

### **Theoretical framework**

Apparently the traditional separation of domestic politics and foreign politics may have some advantages but today, especially with increasing global communication and transportation networks, the study of political science does not isolate domestic politics from foreign politics. In other words, it is hard to draw a strict line between domestic and foreign politics in current international system which offers intense interactions between states. London (1956) gives a great example to explain this relation. He argues that "for-

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eign and domestic politics resemble the positive and negative components of electric current; eliminate one and the other will not function, they produce power only when combined." (London, 1965) In accordance with the theory of this paper London argues that "in any political system domestic issues have an important bearing on the management and substance of foreign policy." (London, 1965) This study is directly based on London's approach and seeks to find the influence of domestic sources of Turkish policy on Turkey's foreign relations with the regional countries and the strength of this influence.

The theoretical framework of this study is strengthened by Rosenau's linkage politics. Currently political life has changed with almost the virtual interaction of national and international politics. According to Rosenau's linkage politics, "recurrent sequences of behavior that originate in one system are reacted to in another." (Rosenau, 1969) Although Rosenau "acknowledges the importance of policy boundaries" he adds to it that "both national and international boundaries are becoming central to daily lives." (Rosenau, 1969) The initial stage of a linkage is called input and the latter stage is called output. In this thesis paper, the inputs are Turkey's historical and cultural ties and political relations with Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, Turkey's business interests in the Caspian Sea Region and the output is the interaction between Turkey and these states. We may call this output as foreign relations as well.

Linkages are universal concepts. One set of linkage that is applied in this paper is ideology. This linkage offers that "policy formation-implementation is ideological". (Rosenau, 1969) In this paper the ideology, which was supposed to hold the Turkic states together, is pan-Turkism and the general boundary of this ideology is mainly Turkey and also the Central Asian countries. Turkey's further sets of functionalities which influence the domestic policies of the regional countries and which are utilized in this study are Turkey's diplomatic services, secular and political doctrines, exchange of goods and students.

Today's international system as Rosenau argues "is linking polities ever more firmly" (Rosenau, 1969) than before. For example; different countries from the far East to the far West are involved in the post-Soviet region with their policies. Furthermore, these policies in pursuit of different goals, somehow, are interlinked. As this study is going to show the post-Soviet international system brings different policy options towards the Caspian region for different countries.

For Turkey, the break up of the Soviet Union means exercising political influence by offering Turkish political and economic system as a development model. For the Western countries, particularly the US, being a major actor in this newly emerging region is crucial to prevent the spread of Iranian fundamentalism. Turkey, in this context, as an ally of the US, could avoid the US's such concerns by acting as a stabilizing factor in the region. From a Russian perspective, it is important for Russia not to lose Russian dominance in its "backyard" and to have control over the pipeline routes. China, on the other hand, wishes to realize its economic calculations on the pipeline routes to transport oil and gas to the country.

## Caspian Sea Region



Source: Energy Information Administration

### Literature review

With the break up of the Soviet Union Turkey's presence was felt heavily in the region. Turkey took its place in the "New Great Game" (Kleveman, 2003) with its constructive policies such as 'Turkish entrepreneurs' attempts to establish schools, business and cultural centers, to give scholarships to students, to supply educational materials or to appoint teachers and imams, who lead prayers in mosques, to the places in need. Unfortunately these contributions of Turkey have not been recorded in an organized and chronological fashion. One of the few sources giving extensive information on Turkey's contributions in the region is TICA. Another limitation of doing research on the Caspian Sea Region is that the information on the current relations between Turkey and the Turkic Republics is scarce. The literature mostly talks about Turkey's interactions with the five Turkic states at the initial stages of their independence. At this stage we can find numerous works explaining Turkey's and the newly independent countries' enthusiasm to establish close relations and cooperation. However it seems like this enthusiasm has declined starting from the mid-1990s.

**History and Culture:** Findley's book, *The Turks in World History*, traces Turkic peoples' history starting from early period's steppes to today's nation states. This work sheds light on the history of Turks for non-specialists considering it as a part of the history of humanity. The author answers the question of "what the most distinctive large-scale pat-

ternings in politics, culture, society or economy and how things differ for Turkic peoples who somehow avoid incorporation into these patterns." (Findley, 2005)

Hostler's book, *Turkism and the Soviets*, gives us extensive knowledge on the origins and characteristics of the Turkic peoples of the world. It is a sufficient source to learn about a significant manifestation of the Turkish issue, pan-Turkism, which concerns Anatolia and the Turkic speaking areas of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republic as well as other Asiatic territories. The author discusses the emergence and development of pan-Turkism in the post-Soviet region.

**Politics:** The two strong sources on Turkey's relations with the Turkic Republics are *Turkey's relations with the west and the Turkic Republics*, and *Turkey in Post-Soviet Central Asia*. Bal's main concern is to argue whether Turkish development model, which offers a secular, democratic and multi-party political system, and a liberal economy integrated with global economy, is an appropriate model for these republics. He presents how enthusiastic the Turkic leaders were to support this model in 1991 and how this support began to decline by the end of 1992. This is the first study which gives detailed information on the initial interactions between Turkey and the Turkic Republics. Winrow's *Turkey in Post-Soviet Central Asia* is a short study on the same topic. Winrow informs us about Turkish foreign policy towards the Turkic republics from the demise of the Soviet Union until 1995. Winrow gives place to the First and Second Turkic Summits and the results of these summits.

Jung and Piccoli study Turkish politics with a pan-idealistic approach as well. In their book, *Turkey at the Crossroads*, they analyze Turkish politics in view of the Ottoman-Turkish submerged legacy. They link the current political problems of Turkey to this legacy. Moving from this perspective the authors see Turkish policies in Central Asia and the Transcaucasus as the revival of pan-Turkism.

In the last days of the Ottoman Empire Young Turks, who initiated the reform movement of the Ottoman administration in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the two principal exponents of pan-Turkism, Ziya Gokalp and Yusuf Akcura, pursued purely pan-Turkic oriented policies. Also, during the Second World War, pan-Turkist groups in Turkey supported the Germans in their war against the Soviet Union with the hope to defeat Soviet troops and free Turkic peoples of Central Asia and Caucasus from the Soviet command. These were two different time periods when pan-Turkism was popular in the Ottoman Empire however it may be not be accurate to justify Turkey's policies in the Caspian Sea Region by referring to pan-Turkism.

In my view, naming Turkey's involvement in the region through its development organizations, and Turkey's efforts to get closer to the Turkic people as signs of pan-Turkism is misleading. Although there have been some marginal groups who advocate that the ideology through which Turkey pursues its policies in the region should be pan-Turkism, dominant Turkish centrist leaders of the Turkish political life do not support such pan ideals. Centrist politicians are aware of the negative implications of such policies. It is the apparent prediction of Turkish leadership that such "pan-Turkic oriented foreign pol-

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icy creates virtual state of war in Central Asia considering many ethnic Turks living on the territory of Iran, China and Russia.” Moreover Turkic people, who have lived under the Soviet command up to 1990s, do not want to see another “big brother”.

Aras's *The New Geopolitics of Eurasia, and Turkey's Position*, is an effort to create a guideline for Turkish foreign policy in Eurasia. In his book, Aras analyzes the new geopolitics of Eurasia focusing on the roles of the newly involved actors in this area following the break up of the Soviet Union. The author discusses Turkey's position in this region to provide insights for the future of Turkish foreign policy towards the region. The author claims that “for the first time in its republican history, Turkey seeks to develop a sphere of influence with its pro-Western and secular orientation in the region.” (Aras, 2002) Aras also studies Turkey's energy politics, pipeline route selection in particular, in the region. However the author's argument that all parties involved in the energy game can benefit through cooperation needs to be supported by tangible evidence.

Similarly Chufirin's *The Security of the Caspian Region*, is a study focusing on the geopolitical aspect of the region. This book takes an innovative approach to analyze regional issues with a concentration on the geopolitical environment. Like Aras, Karaosmanoglu describes Turkey's economic considerations in the area of oil and gas reserves.

Turkey's relations with the Turkic states cannot be understood excluding Russia. In this respect this thesis utilizes some works on Russian involvement in the region with a particular focus on Russian-Turkish relations. One of these works is D. B. Sezer's article, *Turkish-Russian Relations: The Challenges of Reconciling Geopolitical Competition with Economic Partnership* which explores the Turkish Russian relations mostly in terms of economics starting from the 1980s. These two countries have traditionally belonged to two different continental systems however their relations have been shaped by a combination of cooperation and competition over the past decade. Akturk's article, *Turkish-Russian Relations after the Cold War (1992-2002)* examines this cooperation between Turkey and Russia in the post-Cold War restructuring. The author proceeds by giving references to international relations theories. The author's argument is that the retreat of Russian threat allowed for the possibility of Turkish-Russian cooperation. (Akturk, 2006)

Lastly Aydin's *Foucault's Pendulum: Turkey in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, is a great source discussing Turkey's position in the Caspian Sea basin. It introduces Turkey's challenges and opportunities which were born after the emergence of eight independent states in Central Asia and the Caucasus in a clear way. The author's prediction is that “although economic and political conditions in the region are unlikely to stabilize for some years, it is without doubt that Turkish policymakers will continue with their efforts to create new networks of interdependency between Ankara and the regional capitals”. (Aydin, 2004)

**Educational Policies:** Demir, Balci and Akkok make a great contribution to the literature with their article, *The role of Turkish schools in the educational system and social transformation of Central Asian countries: the case of Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan* consid-

ering the scarcity of documentation on Turkey's educational policies in the region. They suggest that "all throughout history the educational process has been perceived as a very influential agent of the socialization process with the power to shape, reshape, refresh or build the social and psychological environment" (Akkok, Ayse and Demir, 2000) Moving from this theory they explore the role of Turkish schools in transforming society in Central Asia. Considering the good reputation of these schools throughout the region one can conclude that Turkish schools have made a positive contribution to the future of Turkic countries.

Another work on Turkey's Educational Policies in the region is Yanik's *The Politics of Educational Exchange: Turkish Education in Eurasia*. (Yanik, 2004) This article assesses Turkey's educational exchange programs as a foreign policy tool. It examines Turkey's public and private educational ties with the Turkic populations of Eurasia. The author discusses the roles of Turkey's educational activities in the Turkic peoples' cultural reorientation. This work gives the reader an idea of education's importance which is a tool of soft power in helping people identify themselves beyond giving descriptive and statistical information.

**Business:** The majority of the Turkish business interests in the Caspian Sea Basin lie in the energy field. Aras and Foster, in their article, *Turkey and the Azerbaijani Oil Controversies: Looking for a Light at the End of the Pipeline* talk about the oil controversies in the Caspian basin with a particular focus on Turkey's involvement. This article suggests that the collapse of the Soviet Union has caused a great shift in Turkey's foreign policy. From a political perspective Turkey acted to spread the model of Turkish government and society. From an economic perspective, Turkey has always wanted to take the advantage of the mutual development opportunities that cooperation can create.

For Turkey, economic opportunities include "guaranteed access to vital energy resources, lucrative oil transport revenues, as well as increased diplomatic clout and strategic importance."<sup>iii</sup> For the new republics these opportunities include the prospect of attracting investment and technological expertise, as well as of establishing a secure route for distribution of their products to the West. Particularly Azerbaijan, a Turkic-speaking former Soviet possession that shares borders with Russia, Georgia, Armenia, and Iran, has attracted the greatest interest of Turkey among the newly independent states. The authors argue that "the source of this interest is not only the linguistic, ethnic, religious and cultural affinity shared by Turkey and Azerbaijan, but also the tremendous oil reserves possessed by the tiny Caucasian state."<sup>iiii</sup>

There are some Turkish scholars who contribute to the literature by focusing on particular pipeline projects which are in Turkey's interest. In this context Bacik's *The Blue Stream Project, Energy Co-operation and Conflicting Interests*, analyzes the discussions about the Blue Stream Project which envisages the transportation of Russian natural gas to Turkey. Bacik argues that "Turkey has contributed to the emergence of an energy regime in Eurasia by connecting itself to the major energy markets through complex energy proj-

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ects". (Bacik, 2001) Furthermore Oztun and Hepbasli's article, *Natural Gas Implementation in Turkey. Part 2: Natural Gas Pipeline Projects* is a comprehensive source for Turkey's natural gas demand and natural gas pipelines in which Turkey is involved.

Although they are not many in number, some authors have studied business relations between Turkey and the Turkic countries bilaterally. For example, Dikkaya and Keles, examine Turkish investment in Kyrgyzstan, in their article, *Foreign Direct Investment in Kyrgyzstan*. This article analyzes FDI characteristics in Kyrgyzstan in a case study context and provides suggestions for FDI issues.

It has been only sixteen years since the countries of this region of the world gained independence. However the number of studies on the Caspian Sea Region is expected to increase in the coming years. Although the existing literature is limited it has been quite helpful and intriguing for this paper. The literature makes a great contribution to this paper by explaining the ethnic, cultural and religious ties between the Turks living in Turkey and the Turks living in the former Soviet Union and projecting the history of modern Turkish Republic and the five post-Soviet republics. The literature on politics contributes to this paper by examining the achievements and shortcomings of Turkish policy towards Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan from the enthusiasm and optimism of 1991-92 to the realism of the mid-1990s.<sup>iv</sup> Works focusing on energy politics are utilized to address Turkey's economic and security interests in the Caspian Sea Region.

### **Major findings and discussions**

This paper reveals that both Turkey and the five Turkic republics were eager to expand their relations in every field into future cooperation following the break up of the Soviet Union. During the time period between 1991 and 1993 Turkey had its closest relations in the Caspian Sea Region. In these years official and work visits occurred and several agreements on economic, scientific and technical cooperation were signed.

Turkish leaders were quite satisfied that the ex-Soviet states had approached the Turkish development model with great willingness. Since the characteristics of the Turkish economic and political system were supposed to integrate these states with the rest of the world, it was crucial for the states of Central Asia which were described as "periphery", "isolated" or "landlocked" to connect to the global system in this new post-Soviet international system.

The Turkish model offered a Western type of political and economic system. The common features of this model are a secular and democratic political system, liberal economy and closeness with the West. For these features Turkey had credibility in the eyes of the five Turkic republics. Moreover the US presence in this region had positive impacts on Turkish policy. The US's major concern in the area was to prevent the spread of radical terrorist activities and to limit the Iranian influence in both political and economic terms. Turkey, in this context, as an ally of the US, could avoid the US's such concerns by acting as a stabilizing factor in the region. For Turkish policy makers, on the other hand, a US



dimension, supporting Turkey's economic and political interests, is quite attractive. In the view of this background information on Turkish-American agreement, we can better understand US's moves towards supporting Turkey. From a policy perspective, the US supports Turkish development against Iranian influence. Turkey offers its model of secularism in a mostly Muslim population, parliamentary democracy and a free market economy.

These republics' political leaders all expressed their wish to follow the guidance of Turkey in their path to democratization and marketization and extended their goodwill and desire to be close partners with Turkey in the future. They have a communist political culture separating them from democratic societies and they looked to Turkey in their efforts to establish democratic systems. As Kazemin and Ajdar stated "there is an elite class that was reared and socialized in a highly restrictive and controlled Soviet system." (Ajdari and kazemi, 1998)

Turkey was quite attractive for Central Asian Republics as a strong member of the Western alliance. As political observers state "throughout 1991–1992 nearly all Central Asian leaders mentioned that they perceived Turkey as the model to follow since they believed that their relations with Turkey could ease their entry in to the Western world; those countries established an extensive network for cultural, economic and, to a degree, military cooperation with Turkey." (TICA 1996) Moreover having gained independence, many Caspian states became determined to move away from Russian influence. The means that would be used to realize their wish would be to seek to enter the Western alliance and to strengthen their solidarity. Turkey would be the bridge between the Turkic states of Central Asia and the West. Turkey was supposed to attract foreign investment and to build contacts between the sides by using its familiarity with the culture and similarity of the language. Consequently this would contribute to the economic development of the countries by providing capital and sophisticated technology. Another way of looking at the Turkic countries' willingness to join the Western alliance is that countries like to act in the same direction with the compatible states as the best policy option to preserve themselves. As London mentions it, "many of the newer states which undergo a stage of rampant nationalism have no choice but to affiliate with others of similar interest." (London, 1965)

Numerous speeches of Turkic leaders of the period emphasized that they had chosen Turkey as the leading country to help them integrate with the rest of the world. It was reflected in these speeches that common ethnic, historical and religious ties explained their preference for Turkey as the best country to help them in their transition from Soviet rule to independence. Turkey shares a friendly history rooted in the Ottoman Empire with those countries. Their ethnic commonality as Turks dates back to 2000 BC from origins in inner Asia and they all speak Turkic dialects. Adding to these assets they are the members of the same religion, Islam. For example the Kirghiz president Akayev saw Turkey as "the morningstar of the Turkic world showing guidance to other Republics" (Bal, 2000) or Azeris consider Turkish people in Turkey as part of their nation. As Aras says "The historical and linguistic ties Turkey maintains with much of the region allows for it to be perceived as a model for these countries to leave their Soviet past and enter today's society

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in their unique identities.” (Aras, 2002) Turkey enjoyed the privilege of its common ties with the Turkic countries in easily establishing the initial contacts with these countries. In other words Turkey’s past experiences with regard to the Caucasian and Central Asian region served as strong references for its role as the major actor in the future.

As mentioned above Turkey’s offer of a Western type of development model received positive responses and this gave hope to Turkey to become a major player in the region. However one disadvantage for Turkey in its historical past was the possibility of leaning towards pan-Turkism, the ideology to unify all the Turks. Turkic peoples’ reactions to pan-Turkic tendencies have always been negative.

The five post-Soviet republics were against any kinds of pan-movements at a time when they were trying to build their own nations and identities. Rather they were fans of Ataturk who pursued territorial policies with his famous motto “Peace at home, peace in the world”. For example Turkmen leader Saparmurat Niyazov was an admirer of Ataturk and he even called himself as Turkmenbashi, which has the same meaning with Ataturk, the head of Turks. Ataturk’s nationalist principle was distant from pan-ideals. Ataturk acknowledged that the origin of the peoples of today’s Anatolia was in Central Asia but he never advocated pan-Turkism, which is the ideology of the union of all Turks. Ataturk rather pursued nationalist policies focusing on the development of the country. Actually Turkic leaders’ admiration of Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkey, increased Turkey’s credibility in the region. In opposition to Ataturk’s nationalist principle, pan-Turkism suggests that the gathering of all Turkic people of the post-Soviet region under the control of the same state. The pan-Turkist policies of Enver Pasha, who saw himself as the ruler of a realm embracing Chinese Turkestan, Russian Turkestan, Kazakhstan and Afghanistan, and who was the commander of the 3rd Caucasian Army in the WW I, brought Turkey to a complete catastrophe. Thousands of qualified Turkish military troops were killed in their struggle against the Soviets to help Central Asians free themselves from Moscow’s authority. This is an important event that holds an unfortunate place in Turkish historical memory. Additionally the defeat of Turkish-German alliance against Soviets put an end to Turkey’s pan-Turkist adventures. These historical events explain political leaders’ distance towards pan-turkism. Except some marginal groups Turkish official policy has never supported any pan-Turkic formations.

The hypothesis that the stronger the socio-cultural ties are between Turkey and the Turkic states the closer the foreign relations between Turkey and the Turkic countries are is applicable to all five republics. The Turkic states welcomed Turkey’s educational and cultural policies with great willingness. In all the republics Turkey has been actively implementing educational policies. The role of education is crucial in transforming the economic, political and cultural systems of the former Soviet Republics. Turkish Ministry of Education and some private groups have opened high schools and universities in these states. These schools have been able to build up good reputation throughout the region. Students gain awards from the international scientific contests. Most importantly they contribute to the reformation of society as turning into very well behaved and responsible students.

From a policy perspective, educational projects can be considered as a tool of Turkish foreign policy. As Yanik mentions the goal is “to create a stratum of people who will be well versed in Turkish culture and language, which then would act as a bridge between their countries and Turkey.” (Yanik, 2004) Other scholars like Akkok and Balci also foresee that “these schools will serve the political and economic goals of Turkey in relation to the Central Asian countries.” (Akkok, Ayse and Demir, 2000) Graduates of these schools are perceived as the pioneers to establish successful foreign relations with the West and Turkey as well. In short the politics behind the Turkish schools and student exchange programs is the improvement of political and cultural relations between Turkey and the republics.

Turkish schools are among the favorites in the region. In these schools students meet the Western economic and political culture. They learn English, which allow them to work in any part of the world. It is significant for students to learn about market economy at a time of their countries' transition from a centrally planned economy to market economy. Among the schools founded by Turkey, especially vocational high schools serve to realize this goal. Students learn the essentials of market economy, which is something these students are not familiar with as being individuals raised up in a socialist system. Additionally it is a great opportunity for students to use new technologies since ex-Soviet republics have fallen behind the developments in agriculture and industry. Vocational high-schools also provide skilled manpower for the factories as well.

Parents are also quite satisfied with the behavioral changes they observe in their children. The identity formation of both the students and the states give people a hard time. From this problematic period emerges the use of drugs and alcohol. Thankfully the educational training, given by devoted Turkish teachers, ameliorates this crisis of society. The common characteristic features of the students are “being well-bred, hard working, honest, goal oriented, self-disciplined and rational individuals who appreciate the modern way of living.” (Akkok, Ayse and Demir, 2000) These schools have had a positive influence on the shaping of the students' identity. As Akkok, Balci and Demir say parents think that those schools “seemed to fill a value gap which has emerged in the transition period.” (Akkok, Ayse and Demir, 2000)

Like education, culture is another field that Turkey gives importance to achieve its policy goals. As London notes “the advantage of cultural exchange probably is the contact it creates and the possibility that some stereotyped prejudices old or new can be eliminated.” (London, 1965)

One major goal of Turkey in the area of culture is to promote the Latin alphabet and Turkish language. All republics except Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan changed their alphabets. A common alphabet would ease any kind of relationship whether it is political or economical and a common language would strengthen the Turkic identity and bring people closer. The switch from Cyrillic to Latin may also be interpreted as a move away from the Russian sphere of influence at a time when they want to position themselves in the post-Soviet space and they want to implement their own unique identities.

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Apart from its ideological and political aspect, adopting the Latin alphabet is practical as well. On this practical side the Latin alphabet is often cited as important for computer compatibility. As Nazarbayev told to the Assembly of Peoples, "Latin script dominates in communications". The young and old generations are affected by this switch in different ways. It is hard for old people, who are the least likely to learn English, to adapt to the new alphabet.

The young generation, on the other hand, has less difficulty in learning Latin alphabet. Turkey had a similar experience of adoption of a new script. One of Atatürk's reforms was to change the Arabic script with the Latin script in 1938. Like the people in Central Asia, the young Turkish generation found themselves cut off from their cultural past resulting from the script change. Turkic peoples of the region experience the same hard transition as well. The future generations will feel foreign to their literary heritage since the vast majority of literature is in Cyrillic.

Turkey also puts emphasis on institutions which would increase peoples' consciousness of common Turkic values. Turkey especially offered courses on Turkish art and opened Turkology departments in universities. It was Turkey's hope that its contributions in this field would lead to partnerships in economic and political fields. Turkey funded projects like printing books or conferences on pan-Turkism not to revitalize the ideology but to strengthen Turkic identity which would lead to a rapprochement of Turkic peoples. Local people were quite satisfied with Turkey's contributions in the cultural field. The Turks of the Soviet Union have also been aware of their common origin with those in the Turkish republics. This has not been destroyed through time.

As it is apparent from the factors listed above Turkey is in a more advantageous position than any other country in the world in terms of integrating with the region and exploiting the potential of the region with its cultural closeness and familiarity of the language.

Central Asia is an honored region in the Islamic world with its cities of Bukhara and Samarqand. These cities, which have important Islamic teaching and learning centers and where famous religious figures have lived, are directly linked with the Islamic culture. Historically the people of the Eastern Turkish world have been affected by the developments and initiatives from Istanbul, the former capital of the Caliph and the Turkish sultans. These people were drawn toward Islamic culture and society.

However the offensive period under Soviet control has weakened this link. For example; Kendzior states that "the Soviet regime had succeeded in curtailing religion in Uzbekistan by removing its outward manifestations: closing mosques and medreses; banning sacred texts and languages; outlawing non-state-sanctioned religious leaders and congregations." (Kendzior, 2006) Now that the regional countries are free from Soviet rule, people returned to learning their faith as they had in the past. People of the region have made their needs well known to Muslim communities outside the region. To meet this demand, the Turkish Ministry of Religious Affairs and some voluntary organizations sent thousands of books on Islam. Today the Turkish Republic, which is the inheritor of the Islamic civilization, still has influence over the cultural and religious lives of the Turkic people and pays attention to these peoples' demands. Fuller says that "As a result there is a

profusion of literature in local Central Asian languages about Islam and its meaning.” (Fuller, 1998)

Generally speaking the strong interest towards Islam is not a consequence of political Islam emerging from the region but rather it is a way to improve solidarity between people. In support to this idea Fuller says that “the nomadic traditions of Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan all emphasize traditions of folk Islam.”<sup>vi</sup> Islam also has the function of strengthening nationalism. In this respect Kazakh President has mentioned that “Islam could serve to strengthen a sense of Kazakh nationalism.”<sup>vii</sup> Eventually a combination of Islam and nationalism is likely to evoke an awareness of a shared civilization.

With regard to Turkey’s economic interests in the region Turkish trade relations in the Caspian Sea Region started in 1992. We find that Turkish economy follows a similar pattern in its relations with the Azerbaijani and Central Asian markets. The values indicating the total costs of trade volumes are quite close to each other. The only two countries which reached trade volumes above average are Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan with the former having a \$1 billion trade volume and with the latter having a \$800 million trade volume in 2005.

Trade analysis reveals is that Turkey’s trade volume with each of the five Turkic countries shows an increasing trend only after 2001. This is the result of the two economic crises: 1998 financial crises of Russia and 2001 economic crisis of Turkey. Foreign trade of the ex-Soviet states was dependent on the Russian economic situation. During the 1998 economic crises in Russia, people of the region preferred to buy Russian products, which were cheaper than Turkish products. Presumably half of the Turkish companies operating in the region were closed. Turkey also experienced a strong financial crisis in 2001 and this led to the contraction of the economy. Interest rates and public debt were high and economic growth was volatile. This economic weakness was inevitably reflected in Turkey’s foreign trade and investment.

One common theme that attracts attention when Turkey’s investment capacity in the region is considered is that Turkey enjoyed the privilege of exploiting the Central Asian Market in the absence of serious competitors. Post-Soviet Turkic countries are still in a transition from Moscow’s command economy to a liberal economy. There are unstable tariff systems, unsatisfactory banking services and they lack regulating laws. Some of them have long done business by using their local monetary unit, which does not exactly match the value of Turkish lira and this may result as loss of money for Turkish businesspersons. These types of structural problems prevent big companies from doing business there. Moreover they do not want to take the risk of doing business in an unstable environment where they encounter high inflation rates, low output, red tape and bribery, which are the common problems in the regional countries. Another difficulty is to find qualified labor force. It is a significant problem because mostly it depends on how qualified workforce is to take progress in running successful production. The regional countries offer cheap workforce but businesspersons complain that employees are not working in the way they should work. (Dikkaya and Keles, 2006) This is a significant issue that needs to be resolved before demanding that foreign investors engage in business in the area.

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An important business field where mostly Turkish entrepreneurs work is building construction. Turkish people usually built hotels and airports. This can be interpreted as a way to make the cities like Tashkent or Manas more attractive and welcoming to foreigners. The regional economies were mostly based on the agricultural industry and farmers were producing raw materials for Russia and they have fallen behind technological developments during the Soviet rule. In relevance with this situation one of the major product groups that Turkey exports to these countries are electronic devices both partial and as a whole. Another major product of Turkey's exports is automobiles resulting from the situation that post-Soviet governments cannot respond to the enterprises in automobile industry and cannot respond to the demand for passenger automobiles. Many new cars are foreign, exclusively Audi, Mercedes or Volvo. On the other hand Turkey mostly imports commodities like copper, leather, silk, mineral oil and cotton from the Turkic countries. Turkey uses cotton, leather and silk for its textile industry which has an important place in Turkish industry.

Turk Eximbank has done much to stimulate trade and business links in the region. One point that is common to all five republics is that they received Eximbank credits from Turkey for their national development projects. Looking at the used partition of the credits given by Turk Eximbank to the Turkic countries from 1992 to 1998 one can see how much these countries were in need of economic aid. These credits were used for national development projects and financing trade. Also they were used for purchasing emergency needs like medicine and food. Turkey was comfortable in giving hard cash since these credits were guaranteed under state guarantee letters. This was a mutually beneficial deal for the republics and for the Turkish entrepreneurs. While the republics found a funding source to realize their projects, Turkish exporters received Eximbank credits for their short term projects. Turk Eximbank encouraged businesspersons to invest in the region.

Common policy goals of Turkey and the five republics led Turkey to establish close foreign relations with the regional countries. Turkey tried to give military aid to the Turkic republics of Central Asia in their struggle against terrorist groups which have the capacity to destabilize governments to threaten international security and which are mostly located in Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Turkey's aid substantiated in the form of sending military equipment and money and also Turkey offered training the military servicemen through NATO. Particularly after 9/11 Turkey and the regional countries turned out to be strong partners by signing military agreements within the scope of global war against terrorism.

The hypothesis that the more Turkey has business interests in the Caspian Sea Region the more Turkey will have closer foreign relations with Turkic countries is mostly apparent in the case of Azerbaijan. In the area of energy politics Turkey has its strongest link with Azerbaijan. Moreover, in the area of energy politics, the US shows significant support for Turkish interests. The US acknowledges Turkey's concerns for the Bosphorus Straits which is exposed to shipping congestion and environmental risks resulting from the

inconvenient way of the transition of oil in large amounts. As Chufirin notes “ since 1995 the US government has assertively backed this route not only to show support for Turkey but also because it believes that such a pipeline enhance economic and political ties in the region and cement its independence from the undue influences of Russia and Iran.” (Chufirin, 2001)

Not only oil but also natural gas is exported from Azerbaijan. The two profound projects that Turkey was able to realize are the Baku-Tbilisi Ceyhan Oil Pipeline Project and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum Gas Pipeline Project. The BTC Project serves to the interests of Turkey in two ways: It is the first constructed pipeline which bypasses the Bosphorus Straits and Turkey has the privilege of earning transit and operating fees from this project since the pipeline passes through Turkish territory.

The Bosphorus connects the Black Sea with the Sea of Marmara, and the Dardanelles links the Sea of Marmara with the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas. This Turkish waterway is quite busy because of supplying Europe with oil from the Caspian Sea Region. Increasing number of tankers from the Black Sea can lead to accidents in the narrow straits. It has become quite risky to use the Bosphorus Straits as an energy transition corridor and Turkey does not want to take this risk anymore by letting pipeline routes pass through the straits. The BTC Pipeline, on the other hand, extends from the Azeri-Chirac-Guneshli oilfield of Azerbaijan to Georgia and from there to a terminal at Ceyhan on the Mediterranean coast of Turkey.

Turkey has the strongest energy link with Azerbaijan. Not only oil but also natural gas is exported from Azerbaijan. Turkey needs natural gas for domestic consumption and Turkey's first gas supply from Azerbaijan's Shah-Deniz-Guneshli field started to flow in 2007.

Turkey's choice of Azerbaijan as an oil and gas exporter country proves that common socio-cultural ties are important for Turkey in doing business with other states. Turkey can buy oil from Russia and Iran as well. However Turkey is not comfortable with these two countries as much as it is comfortable with Azerbaijan. Russia worked to undermine the Ottoman control in the Balkan region as Sezer says “by acting as the patron liberator of Balkan peoples most importantly of Greeks and Serbs.” A second point that causes the two countries nourish negative perceptions of each other is that Russia has never supported the nationalist awakening of the Turkic Muslim people in the early 20th century.

Cultural patterns of Turkey and Russia are quite different with the former based on an Ottoman-Islamic heritage and the latter based on a Christian- heritage. Moreover there is a 500-year history between Turkey and Russia and they are considered to be “archrivals.” (Akturk, 2006)

As far as Iran is concerned Turkey is not enthusiastic to engage in business relations with this country considering the conflicting relations between Iran and the US, which is a strong ally of Turkey. Additionally, unlike Azerbaijan, Turkey is different from Iran in terms of ethnicity and religious sect. Iranians are Persians and mostly Shia while Turkish people are mostly Sunni.

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## Conclusion

Looking back over to this study it is unlikely that Turkey will become a leading superpower in the region. Turkey lacks the necessary economic and financial resources to have a major influence in the region. Nevertheless the Turkish government initiated various activities directed towards the development of the regional countries. Turkey offered training services, educational and cultural assistance to the republics. Turkey gave scholarships to the Turkic students and gave them the opportunity to receive their college and graduate education in Turkey. Turkish programs were broadcast by satellite and Turkish development agencies opened numerous cultural centers in the region. However these policy efforts are insufficient, as Fuller says, "to reorient the Republics toward Turkey". (Fuller, 1998)

Findings showed that both Turkey and the five Turkic republics were enthusiastic to carry their relations in every field to future cooperation following the break up of the Soviet Union. The time period between 1991 and 1993 was the period when Turkey had its closest relations in this region. In that period official and work visits occurred and several agreements on economic, scientific and technical cooperation were signed.

Turkey was in a more advantageous position than any other country in the world in terms of integrating with the region and exploiting the potential of the region with its cultural closeness and familiarity of the language. However the Turkic Republics' interest in Turkey gradually declined starting from the 1994s. One reason for their declining interest in Turkey is that the original expectations were not met. Winrow notes that "Turkey initially had made unrealistic promises and proposals by offering up to \$3 billion in support to the Turkic states." (Winrow, 1995) Turkey had given promises beyond its capacity. Also Turkey's offer of economic success was questionable since Turkey had its own economic problems at home. In this context some scholars offered that these republics may have more to gain from the western industrialized nations in terms of economic development models and technical advice than they will gain from Turkey. (Clawson, 1998) Other than the West there are the industrializing nations of East Asia which also offer successful economic models. The Turkic leaders' hiring of Korean economists serves as an example of their appreciation of the advantages offered by East Asian countries.

Actually given Turkey's economic and political expectations it is not reasonable to expect Turkey to be a superpower like Russia. Moreover, given the problematic domestic environments of the republics, not only Turkey but also none of the regional states has the resources to give full support to their economic development. Above everything, the republics need to seek solutions for poverty and turmoil prevailing in their territories.

The recent Turkish political atmosphere shows that it is more important for the AKP government to work for long term and stable relationships than to try to fulfill exaggerated expectations. The AKP government puts more emphasis on economic cooperation than cultural similarities. We can say that today Central Asian politics is less central to Turkey than before. But the question is at what level Turkey will maintain interest in the region in the future. Is Turkey likely to revive its initial enthusiasm towards the region or

is Turkey going to be distracted by its busy foreign policy agenda?

A number of points need to be considered before one can make a prediction. The future of Turkish foreign relations in the region will mainly be determined by the pipeline selected for oil and gas transportation from the Caspian Region. The crucial states, in this regard, are Kazakhstan with its oil reserves and Turkmenistan with its gas reserves. Will Turkey be able to transport natural gas from Turkmenistan or will Turkey be able to realize its Kazakh oil transportation project as a back up to the BTC pipeline?

Also Turkey's future politics will be affected by the actions that Azerbaijan and Armenia will take towards the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Will the Azeri and Armenian side be able to agree on a settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and normalize their relations? Turkey as the strongest ally of Azerbaijan is likely to support Azerbaijan fully while at the same time Ankara wants to improve its relations with Yerevan. It is unlikely to resolve this conflict until the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians give up claiming their unapproved independence over the enclave and Azeris accept some limitations over the same territory. With a resolution to this conflict, Turkey will be able to strengthen its relations with Azerbaijan.

Uzbekistan is criticized in the fields of human rights and democracy. The progress made in these fields will accelerate the development of Turkish-Uzbek relations. However Uzbekistan's human rights records include serious violations of the right to freedom of religion, expression, association and assembly.<sup>viii</sup> Although Turkey shares Uzbekistan's concerns about Uzbekistan's security threats and supplies aid and military education to this country<sup>ix</sup>, Uzbekistan's weaknesses in the areas of democracy and human rights are likely to impede Turkish-Uzbek relations in the long term. Therefore it is important to answer the question of how and when Uzbekistan is going to ameliorate the domestic situation in human rights and democracy.

Despite the risky business environment in Kyrgyzstan, Turkey is a key economic partner of Kyrgyzstan. Thus Kyrgyzstan wants to strengthen its relations with Turkey. The question is whether Turkey and Kyrgyzstan will be able to institutionalize their economic relations through a joint economic commission as both sides plan to form an economic cooperation organization.

An important issue, which is raised by this study for future exploration, concerns identity. The regional countries are under the influence of different identities. As Ajdari and Kazemi mention "these countries borrowed several critical elements from three Islamic groups; religion from Arabs, administration and bureaucracy from the Persians, and military from the Turks." (Ajdari and Kazemi, 1998) The question is whether each of the republics will preserve their own unique nationalities or whether they will be a part of the Western system or a Russian-centric system.

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