

DISAPPOINTMENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN KAZAKHSTAN-TURKEY CULTURAL RELATIONS

ҚАЗАҚСТАН-ТҮРКИЯ МӘДЕНИ ҚАТЫНАСТАРДАҒЫ ТҮҢІЛҮДЕН ЖӘНЕ МҮМКІНДІКТЕР

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Resume

The aim of this study is to evaluate and reveal the disappointments and opportunities for the development of major projects set forth in the cultural relations between Kazakhstan and Turkey. This study will only be focusing on the disappointments and the opportunities by considering The Turkish Model, Great Student Project, Hodja Ahmet Yesevi International Turkish-Kazakh University and TRT Avaz TV channel.

Резюме

Осы зерттеудің мақсаты Қазақстан мен Түркия арасындағы мәдени қарым-қатынастардағы баяндалған ірі жобаларды дамыту үшін көңіл қалдыратын мен мүмкіндіктерін бағалау және ашып көрсету болып табылады. Бұл зерттеу тек түрік моделі, Ұлы Студенттік жобасы Қожа Ахмет Ясауи халықаралық қазақ-түрік университеті және ТРТ Әуездің телеарнаны қарау арқылы ТҮҢІЛҮДЕН мен мүмкіндіктері туралы фокустау болады.

1) Introduction

Even though a 24-year period, the time passed since Turkey's recognition of the independence of Kazakhstan (December 16, 1991), is not a long duration for the world history, it is a significant period of time for a state like Kazakhstan that is young and sovereign and that wishes to demonstrate its identity in both domestic and foreign policy and that wishes to be recognised. Kazakhstan has experienced serious problems in national structuring, gaining an international legal status for the demarcation of the borders, stating the long-term strategies as a new and independent state, in determining the economic structure and the security concept of the country, in holding together the ethnic diversity in the country in peace, in determining national interests and in observing social and class balance. It is located in a region where it is squeezed between Russia's grizzly bear and China's dragon and which is the focal point of America's conflicts. Therefore, Kazakhstan has been forced to pursue a stable foreign policy in order to protect the security of its borders and its independence. The understanding called multi vectoral in the literature has been in place as a necessity of this location.

2) Aims and Method

In the first period when independence was gained and there was a complex process, Turkey's importance for Kazakhstan was not always the same and it progressed at different levels in different periods. With the end of the bipolar world order, the unipolar world system encouraged the new worldwide order that adopted the free-market economy, changed military and economic balances, and encouraged participatory democracy and put emphasis on cultural values. Rather than addressing

the cultural relations between the two countries in the broadest sense, the study will focus on the disappointments experienced in these relations and the resulting opportunities; the Turkish Model, the Great Student Project, Hodja Ahmet Yesevi Kazakh-Turkish University and TRT Avaz TV Channel. In this sense, the scope of the research has been kept narrow, the emphasis has been put on the books, articles, internet articles written in Turkish and English and the interviews held during the field study the author carried out in Kazakhstan from March to July in 2014. The hypothesis of the study is as follows: Most of the projects carried out by Turkey in order to develop the cultural relations between Turkey and Kazakhstan have not yielded the desired results.

3) Theoretical Framework

It can be stated that there are many theoretical approaches such as realist, liberal and constructivist theories to explain the relations between foreign policy and culture. This study is based on the utilitarian liberal approach and according to this theory, the foreign policy of a country is determined by the civic actors who are able to set priorities for their interests rather than the structure of the international system. However, the utilitarian liberal approach contrary to other liberal IR-theories, gives the priority to the actors and to the link between their interests. In this theory, the rational actors do try to maximize their benefits in order to realise their aims and they choose the best options which enable them to get most benefits with minimum loss. The most important benefits and interests for all actors are directed at guaranteeing their right to live. This refers in reality to the material benefits that are realised by increasing salaries or extending authority in decision-making processes. Therefore all societal actors are driven by two devices of benefits that are power and plenty (Freund & Rittberger, 2001: 69-72). After Kazakhstan became independent, the ruling elites of the country embarked on demonstrating that different cultures and different ideas can live together in peace. In this sense, especially Nazarbayev has always advocated the importance of revealing the two countries' common culture and establishing cultural links between Kazakhstan and Turkey (<http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2010/10/20101005-1-1.pdf>).

4) The Turkish Model

The advent of the Central Asian Turkic states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan) as a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union led Turkey to look for a new direction for its cultural policy and in order to develop the relations with these countries on a cultural level, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) and the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TÜRKSÖY) were established on January 24, 1992 and July 12, 1993 respectively. Relations between the two states showed great improvement as a result of the mutual visits of the heads of state. While the Turks living in other countries were not on the agenda in Turkey before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, with the independence, it was claimed by Nazarbayev that the 21st century would be the century of the Turks and a Turkish world stretching from the Adriatic to the Great Wall of China was being highlighted. Kazakhstan was content with the support of Turkey with which Kazakhstan shared a cultural and historical past and it declared that it looked to Turkey in order to bring together the people under a common denominator (Bal, 2001: 24). Turkey found support from people living in Turkey with the emphasis on Turkishness. This was supported by the Western world, and especially by the USA.

In the USA's point of view, the power vacuum emerged with the dissolution of the Soviet Union could be bridged by a country like Turkey that is Sunni Muslim but also secular, democratic and pro-

Western. The problem was what kind of a model would be used and there were two different models: Turkish and Iranian models. The Western powers favoured the Turkish model. For example, in 1990, Graham Fuller stated that a Turkish Peoples Union will be born in a way in Central Asia and Azerbaijan. He argued that Turkey would play a crucial role in that development. The then-president of the America, George Bush, showed Turkey as a secular and democratic state for the countries in the region (Bal, 2000: 206). In 1992, the Secretary General of the NATO, Monfred Worner, specified that they attached importance to Turkey as they did not want the Islamic fundamentalists to get stronger in the region (Raşid, 1996: 246). Visiting the region after former USSR countries became independence, US Secretary of State James Baker expressed that the regional countries had to take example of the secular Turkey in their internal and external strategies to be formed (Hunter, 1996: 157-159).

Even Russia, being left alone with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and going through a transition period, did not see Turkey as a threat and believed that support for the Turkish model would not be an assistance for the pan-Turkic policies (Sagadayev, 1994: 242). On one side, there was Turkey that presented itself as a model country for these republics with the support of the West and USA despite the existence of Russia. On the other side, there were republics that had almost no connection with the world beyond the borders of the Soviets and therefore, that wished to establish connections with the world and gain a status and keep up with the change. For example, İslam Kerimov, the president of Uzbekistan with which the relations are strained today, stated that there were a lot his country would learn from Turkey and Kyrgyzstan President Askar Akayev expressed that Turkey was guiding the Central Asian republics and Nazarbayev stated that the 21st century would be the century of the Turks and thus, they expressed their initial support to this model (Demir, 2003: 171). According to Satpayev (2001: 113-126), these states did not even show any reaction in terms of their own political and economic interests in the international arena when Turkey supported the idea of the great Turkism stretching from the Adriatic to the Great Wall of China.

The late president of Turkey, Turgut Özal, paid utmost importance to the Turkish model discourse and on this occasion, there emerged an axis expansion in Turkish foreign policy. It was strongly emphasized that Turkey was a bridge between the West and East, the relations to be established with the Turkic states would provide advantages in relations with the European Union (EU) and the USA and for this reason, Turkey would play a key role for the important actors intending to come to the region thanks to its historical, linguistic, religious and cultural kinship. There emerged a new market for Turkey in terms of an economic point of view, Turkish businessmen were the first to go the region and especially the foreign investors could come to the region and established companies under the leadership of the Turkish entrepreneurs (Yılmaz, 2014: 28-40). So, with the Turkish model, Turkey would evaluate the fact that the region was rich in gas and oil and maybe through this model, it would be able to deliver the regional energy resources to the Western markets.

Then what was the reason for this model to fall off the agenda two years after its introduction? What is the reason of the disappointment that is the subject of this study?

The Turkish model was providing a state model based on a secular system, adopting the liberal democracy and free market economy. However, why the leaders of these countries adopted centralist and authoritarian management approaches and turning their authorities into a determining position contrary to this model have not been understood by Turkey. Rather than identifying the dynamics and

structural characteristics of the region, Turkey tried to have its own values adopted in an unplanned manner. Turkey assumed that the historical connections, linguistic and cultural proximity would offer advantages and in parallel with this, it would be the determining force of the region.

With the dissolution of the USSR, the overly optimistic approach of the Turkish statesmen spread to the bureaucracy and as a result, no specific policy towards the region was produced. Not taking into account the sensitivities of the region, the statesmen at the helm of the Turkish foreign policy turned a blind eye to the potential options for the region just relying on the political and emotional discourses. Reflecting the Turkish model as a political discourse just like a domestic issue rather than presenting it as a state model had an adverse impact on the Central Asian Turkish states. The perception of the Turkish model as a new custodian and Turkey's failure to express that it saw the countries in the region as equal and equivalent partners rather than being a custodian were criticized by especially Kerimov and Nazarbayev (Yılmaz, 1996: 165-166). For example, issue of Turkish union, which started to be talked about in that period, is told by Ahmet Dağduran as follows and this anecdote is an evidence that the Turkish statesmen did not take into account the sensitivities of the region (Yılmaz, 2014).

“When Özal offered to establish a Turkish Union at a meeting, all the leaders responded by saying “OK, Let's establish it!”. But Nazarbayev raised objection to this. Özal asked why you did not want it. Nazarbayev said that: “We are not a completely independent country now; we do not have a currency of our own. We depend on other countries to sell our oil and we are now weak. We do not have banking, insurance, government ministries and municipal systems. We must establish them first. If the Turkish Union was established today, it would be born dead. We must discuss this after we get stronger.” The late president Özal accepted this and he had TİKA established in order to make stronger the infrastructure of these countries.”

5) The Great Student Project

We must not overlook the fact that there was a change in the Turkish foreign policy at the time of the dissolution of the Soviet Union while analysing the cultural relations between Kazakhstan and Turkey. Protecting its national interests during the Cold War by aligning with the Western Bloc and forming its foreign policy on the Western axis, Turkey was forced to make radical changes in the policy orientation with the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Up until the process of the independence of Kazakhstan, Turkey was careful to carry out all the relations with this country over Moscow (central) but it gradually started to direct its focus from the central to Kazakhstan. And the culture ministers of both countries came together in Almaty in October 1990 and they signed a range of agreements not only on culture but also on education, transportation and tourism (Head Council of Education and Morality, 1993). As a requirement of these agreements, Great Student Project was initiated in order to establish a brotherhood bridge and ensure cultural unity by teaching Turkish and the Turkish culture. It was not limited to Kazakhstan; it was for all the Turkic states that gained their independence in that period.

Essentially thought as an education policy, this project played a key role in the development of the cultural relations between the two countries. In 2009, in a graduation ceremony held within the scope of this project, the Kazakh student Olzhas Sartayev, a graduate of the Middle East Technical University, spoke in the name of the graduating students and told the following, emphasizing what

he learned culturally: “The education we obtained in Turkey opened new horizons for us. It changed the way we look at the life. I am returning to my country as someone who loves Turkish culture and who is in love with it.”(<http://www.meb.gov.tr/buyuk-ogrenci-projesi/haber/3504>).

According to Türk (2014:137) the main objectives of the great student project:

- To develop the existing relations between the Turkic world and Turkey and establish an eternal friendship bridge.
- To bring up a new generation that is friendly towards Turkey and to increase the cultural relations through this young generation.
- To meet the need for trained manpower to expand the Turkish education.

The Great Student Project remained to be called with the same name between 1992 and 2012 and it was attached to the Department Turks Abroad and Related Communities in the aftermath of 2012 and it was renamed as Türkiye Scholarships. While the undergraduate students were paid 195 TL, the graduate students 220 TL in 2009, significant improvements were made and it was increased to 550 TL for the undergraduate students, 800 TL for the graduate students, 1.100 TL for doctorate students and 2.000 TL for researchers ([hwww.turkiyeburslari.gov.tr/index.php/tr/turkiye-burslari/burs-olanaklari](http://www.turkiyeburslari.gov.tr/index.php/tr/turkiye-burslari/burs-olanaklari)). Initially thought for the Turkic states, the program was later broadened to cover the Balkans, Middle East and Africa. When it was first started in 1992-1993, 10.000 scholarships were given including 7.000 for higher education and 3.000 for the secondary education. 23.000 students were paid scholarship as of the end of 2012 but 5.019 of these students were able to graduate. By 2008, the number of graduates increased to 7.300. As of the end of 2012, more than 43.000 students took the scholarship but the number of graduates remained 10.500 in total (Türk, 2014: 135-140).

As of the end of 2013, the number of Kazakh students who benefited from this project and got educated in Turkey is 518 and up to now, a total of 1.050 Kazakh students have been graduated (www.meb.gov.tr/bakan-avci-kazakistanin-ankara-buyukelcisi-tuymebayevi-kabul-etti/haber/6494). That's to say, the rate of graduation is lower for the Kazakh students. As can be seen, one fourth of the students could graduate between 1992 and 2012. Students living adjustment problems to the country and the education system, their failure to overcome these problems due to the insufficient level of language and the inadequacy of the scholarship fee can be shown as the leading causes. A number of committees were established within the Turkish Higher Education Council in order to ensure the sustainability and quality of the project in Turkey. One of the reasons of the disappointments, the subject of this paper, is that the “committee could not maintain the relation with the graduated students”, which is one of the duties of the committee (HEC, 2000: 125). Yıldırım (Interview: 2014) expresses the disappointment as such:

“We held an alumni meeting for the students educated in Turkey in the residence of our Ambassador last year. What is wrong with this? For example, the Russians collect the people educated in Moscow and carry out such things. We tried to do the same thing. We (Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centre) carried out the meeting and about 250 graduates turned up but we spoke to at least one thousand people. Most of them stated they were not graduated. They asked why we asked them these questions and most of the graduates did not even say they graduated from universities in Turkey. They do not have any problem if they work at the private sector but if they work at a public institution, they shun away. As a matter of fact, we believe that these are the

people we can establish connections but they hold back. The fact they are graduated from the Turkish universities, and they shun away from disclosing this is not Turkey's problem; however, it impacts the foreign policy of Kazakhstan towards Turkey.”.

Suggestions

1. The ministries of both of the countries must sign a mutual agreement and the Kazakh authorities must notify the Turkey's Embassy in Astana about where and at what position the students who were educated in Turkey and then returned to Kazakhstan are employed.
2. The Turkey's Embassy in Astana must bring together the scholarship holders, who return to Kazakhstan after graduating, at the Embassy and as a requirement of the monitoring and evaluation process, it must request assistance from them as cultural ambassador.
3. A protocol must be signed between Turkish Republic Education Ministry and the private universities in Turkey and the Kazakh citizens must get education in the private universities at most 2500 USD annually.
4. The number of scholarship quota allocated for the Meskhetian Turks living in Kazakhstan must be increased by half so that these people would be more willing to come to Turkey for education.

6) Ahmet Yesevi Turkish-Kazakh International University

In order to develop the city of Turkistan in Kazakhstan, its foundation was laid on June 6, 1991 and as the Turkistan State University, it was turned into a university owned by both of the states with the "Cooperation Agreement in the Fields of Education, Science, Culture and Sports." It gained its current name with a new agreement on the October 31st of the same year. The objective of the establishment of the university is to revive Turkistan, an ancient science and culture centre, and to establish a strong bridge shaping the future of scientific and cultural relations among the Turkish states and communities. As required by its Regulations, the rector is appointed by Kazakhstan and the deputy rector by Turkey. It has 11 faculties, one college, 2 Centres and 6 Research Institutes. The Rectorate is in Kazakhstan and the Presidency the Board of Trustees is in Ankara. About 10 thousand students are educated in the Ahmet Yesevi University, 4.600 of them from Turkey and 1.000 from the Turkic states and communities other than Kazakhstan and more than 900 academic staff work at the university (Ayu Katalog, 2014: 6-16).

Even though the existence of this university is related to the education between the two countries, judging from the broader framework, it can be thought that it serves a lot to the development of the cultural relations.

The fact that the Turkish and Kazakh students educated at this university learn the language and culture of both of the countries and convey them to the people around them and take on significant positions in ruling their countries is quite effective in the development of the cultural relations. Acting on the idea that the cooperation between the two countries will bring friendship and fraternity between the peoples, a large segment of the community that acts on the pure nationalistic feelings does not raise any criticism as regards the current status of the university, geographical conditions and the investments (webarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/2003/10/28/363659.asp). I wonder to what degree this university fulfils its obligations as stated by Atatürk: “we must trace back our roots and we must be integrated in our history interrupted by the events.” Such questions are not asked: Is it really an international university? Does it address the whole of Kazakhstan? As a matter of fact, most of the

students come from the villages of the city of Turkistan; the number of international students is low and thus, the level and efficiency of the school is low (<http://akademikperspektif.com/2014/12/23/kazakistan-turkiye-iliskilerinin-egitim-kultur-ve-diplomatik-acidan-gelisimi-1991-2014/>). The city and the university had experienced many deficiencies until 2000s and the region of Turkistan was underdeveloped. With the new millennium, the infrastructural works were attached importance and both of the city and the university started to develop as it was understood that the university was crucial for the development. Expressing his experiences as regards the region, Yıldırım (Interview: 2014) says that:

“I first came to Kazakhstan in 1996 and the geography I saw was totally different. I worked at Ahmet Yesevi University for 3 years. I worked at Shimkent region and when I returned, I thought that here would be just like Afghanistan. Electricity, gas and security were very serious problems. There were big problems such as the unemployment, the failure to pay the fees and mafia, that’s to say, there was a primitive life. I had the opportunity to go back to the city of Turkistan in 2007 and the country I saw this time was a completely different country. A new country has been built and a new system has been established and the life is going well.”

In addition, there is a duality in the management of the university. The order of importance changes as the rector is a Kazakh and the deputy is a Turkish. The management is directly appointed by Turkey just like the Manas University. As the university is in the city of Turkistan, there are not many students from such big cities as Almaty and Astana. Ahmet Yesevi University must open campuses in Almaty and Astana. It must open a Faculty of Management Sciences and Economics in the city of Astana where there is the Kazakh administrative structuring and a Faculty of Medicine and Engineering in Almaty where there is a great number of students.

7) TRT AVAZ TV Channel

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the advent of the independence of the states constituting the Turkic world, Turkey established some TV channels under the leadership of the state-owned Turkish Radio and TV Corporation (TRT) in order to develop the communication and the cultural relations with the countries in the region. The first attempt was the TRT INT for the Turkish workers living in Europe. However, due to the low quality of the broadcasting and the programs only in the standard Turkish used in Turkey, the channel could not address large segments and TRT Türk channel was established in its place in 2009. And in 1993, TRT Avrasya channel started to broadcast programs towards both Central Asia and the Caucasus (Türk, 2014: 161). Addressing 27 countries, 13 autonomous republics and nearly 250 million people, TRT Avaz channel started to broadcast on March 21, 2009. With the programs especially in Azerbaijani, Kazakh, Kirghiz, Uzbek and Turkmen, the channel would present something common to the Turkic peoples of Central Asia (TRT Annual Report, 2013).

TRT Avaz is a cleverly thought-out project that started with the attempts and budgets of Turkey; broadcasts extensive historical, cultural and educational programs; broadcasting educational documentaries at the quality of films, brings the Turkic world through various contests (Türkvizyon). But the biggest problem is that it does not address the whole Turkic world. It was established in order to ensure a union in language and thought under a common denominator and that’s why Avaz, meaning voice, was chosen as its name. This channel can reach a limited number of people in the

region to which it wishes to address through special antennas and broadcasting. Under these circumstances, there is a perception that the channel is broadcasting for the people living in Turkey and it is promoting the Turkish culture to the people living in Turkey. For example, if the people living in Kazakhstan do not watch such programs as “Atayurttan Anayurda” (From Fatherland to Motherland), “Turandakiler”, “Atamekan” (Fatherland) and “Türk Dünyasından İzler” (Traces of the Turkish World) that tell the stories starting from Kazakhstan and stretching to Turkey. If people are not aware of the existence of such a TV channel, that means there is a great disappointment here.

While the inaugural ceremony of the TRT Avaz was being held, the then President Abdullah Gül (www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/170/47824/cumhurbaskani-gul-trt-avaz-avaz-avaz-butun-turk-dunyasina-seslenecek.htm) expressed that: “TRT Avaz will address the Turkic world in a loud way.” However, as far as the observations are concerned, this channel addresses the people in Turkey in a loud way. I lived with both the Kazakh and the Ahıska people living here during my field study I carried out in Kazakhstan. Neither the Kazakh nor the Ahıska Turks are aware of the existence of the TRT Avaz TV. During 4 months I stayed in Almaty, I did not ever and never see a program of the TRT Avaz TV. People have to buy a satellite; otherwise, they have no chance to watch the channel. I did not come across any piece of news regarding the TRT Avaz in the newspapers of Egemen Kazakhstan, Jas Alaş and the Astana Times I looked into for my study. It is obvious that there is a promotion and recognition problems out there.

Suggestion

1. The TRT Channel must open a representative office in Kazakhstan just like in Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan so that Turkey will be promoted here and Kazakhstan’s history and culture will be promoted in Turkey.
2. The independence of Kazakhstan, as the independence days of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, must be broadcast live on TV in Turkey through this representative office.
3. The Türkvizyon song contest, the version of the Eurovision in Europe, must be broadcast on all the TV channels of the Turkic states as it promotes Turkish and the Turkish culture in the international arena and unites the Turkic world.

8) Conclusion

Language, religion, history and cultural ties between Kazakhstan and Turkey lay the foundation of an emotional involvement between the peoples. It is a must to cooperate in the legal basis on the existing relations as the emotionality option is out of question between the states. In order to develop the cultural relations, as stated by Ahmet Alyaz (<http://akademikperspektif.com/2014/11/22/katiad-ve-kazakistanin-turkiye-politikasi/>), we are now required to attach attention to public diplomacy rather than the state diplomacy. The more we achieve to bring closer our peoples and introduce them to each other, the faster we will be.” The Turkish Model could not be implemented due to such reasons as the sensitivities of the region were not adequately taken into account, the bureaucrats of the Turkish republic pursued very ambitious policies towards Kazakhstan after their independence and the personnel working in the region were not experienced and competent enough. Even though Turkey did something good to carry out the Great Student Project, it failed to get the desired results. It cannot still carry out a systematic work as regards the communication with the scholarship holders who were educated in Turkey and then returned to their countries. What I mean by the system is an efficient

monitoring and evaluation mechanism. It is a mystery that on which platform the results obtained as a result of such a project have been discussed.

How much Hodja Ahmet Yesevi University is known and preferred in the region and at the international platform, the segment that it addresses and the claim that the location of the university impacts the development of the university are the issues that need to be discussed. While discussing whether or not Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centre reflects its real potential, it would probably be advisable that this institution establish an expert team for the projects to realize the objectives through a new structuring and it be supported financially and morally not only by Turkey but also by Kazakhstan. As to TRT Avaz TV channel, it is a well-thought project established in a view to bringing closer the Turkic world and Turkey. However, the most crucial problem is that the channel cannot address the Turkic world and therefore, leads to disappointment with its current status.

Key Words: Kazakhstan, Turkey, Cultural Relations, Disappointments, Opportunities

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