



center for
strategic
research

Republic of Turkey
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Turkic Republics Since Independence: Towards A Common Future

Prof.Dr. Ahmet DAVUTOĞLU
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Republic of TURKEY

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ahmet Davutoğlu was born in Taşkent/Konya in 1959. After completing his secondary education at Istanbul High School, commonly known as Istanbul Erkek Lisesi, he graduated from the departments of Economics and Political Science at Boğaziçi University, where he then went on to complete his M.A. in Public Administration and Ph.D. in Political Science and International Relations. He became an Assistant Professor in 1990 at the International Islamic University of Malaysia where he established and chaired the Political Science Department until 1993. He also lectured at the Institute for Middle Eastern Studies, the Institute for Insurance and Banking, and the Political Science Department's PhD programme of Marmara University as well as at the Military Academy and the War Academy. He was Professor of International Relations and Head of the International Relations Department at Beykent University from 1999 to 2004. He served as Chief Advisor to the Prime Minister and Ambassador at large during the 58th, 59th and 60th Governments. He was appointed as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the 60th Government of the Republic

of Turkey on 1 May 2009. He was elected as Deputy of AK Parti from Konya to the Turkish Grand National Assembly at the 2011 General Elections and reappointed as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the 61st Government.

He is the author of many books and articles on foreign policy and international relations in Turkish and English. His books and articles have also been translated into several other languages including Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Arabic, Persian, Greek and Albanian. Professor Davutoğlu is married with four children and speaks English, German and Arabic.

His publications include *Alternative Paradigms* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1993), *Civilizational Transformation and the Muslim World* (K.L.: Quill, 1994), *Stratejik Derinlik* (Strategic Depth) (Küre Yayınları, 2001) and *Küresel Bunalım* (Global Crisis) (Küre Yayınları, 2002). He has pursued a multi-disciplinary approach in his work on such fields as international relations, regional analysis, comparative political philosophy, and comparative history of civilizations.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
GREAT TRANSFORMATIONS AND CHALLENGES	3
HOW TO SHAPE THE FUTURE?	5
<i>The Nation-State Level</i>	5
<i>The Regional Level</i>	8
<i>The Global Level</i>	9
TURKEY'S POSITION	10

©All rights reserved

TURKIC REPUBLICS SINCE INDEPENDENCE: TOWARDS A COMMON FUTURE

During the Cold War, the structure of the bipolar international system, which was based on static polarisation, prevented Central Asian countries from exerting their remarkable historical and geographical influences on international politics. However, the dissolution of the bipolar world-system and the collapse of the Soviet Union have radically changed the geopolitical structure of Central Asia in respect of the distribution of power in the international as well as the Eurasian geopolitical systems. To assess the period since the independence of the Turkic republics, one must consider three great transformations at three different levels.

These are the geo-political, geo-cultural and geo-economic transformations that have been taking place within the region. Geopolitical transformation concerns the changes in the region's status in world politics after the Cold War. The geo-cultural transformation is tied to the historical transformation and cultural awakening, while the geo-economic transformation has been dependent on the changing demographic as well as economic dynamics of the region. Within the context of these three important parameters in flux, Central Asia has emerged as a new strategic space in the international system, undergoing a serious transformation. These transformations have had a severe impact on three major geographical regions, namely, the Balkans, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia and the Caucasus. Taking the historical systemic transformations into consideration, Turkish policymakers have closely followed the developments in the surrounding regions, to which they have attached special importance, since they are likely to have a lasting impact on Turkey and its future orientation. Turkey's involvement in the region seeks to ensure that there will be a smooth transition and that the developments will move in the right direction.

Turkey has considerable ethnic, cultural and civilisational ties with the peoples of these regions, which experienced the sharpest transformation in the aftermath of the Cold War. The Turkish society considers the peoples of the Balkans, Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus as their relatives and feels close to them. The idea of a common future is widespread in Turkey, and societal demands drive policymakers to follow up on policies that facilitate the transition of the Turkic republics in this critical period following their independence. It is impossible to avoid or turn one's back on these regions when one considers the strong public opinion.

Turkey's policies toward the area from Bosnia to Kyrgyzstan are based on the same general perspective. It is high time to make an assessment and look forward to a common future. One needs to understand the transformations taking place at regional and international levels. The dissolution of the bipolar world order and the collapse of the Soviet Union have created power vacuums in this region. During the early years of the post-Cold War era, Turkic republics achieved considerable progress in building state structures, and took steps toward institutionalising structures for democratic governance and economic development. However, there are still serious challenges to tackle in the future. I will outline the achievements of the new republics and the challenges waiting ahead, as well as suggest a number of policy alternatives. Following a discussion on these topics, I will also touch upon Turkey's position.

GREAT TRANSFORMATIONS AND CHALLENGES

The first great transformation has been the geopolitical restructuring, which is still in progress. The most distinctive physical feature of



the Central Asian geography is its considerable distance from the seas and oceans of the world. This landlockedness has had two major impacts on this area throughout history. First, this geography gave birth to great empires that moved toward the seas. The reign of Timur and Genghis are two prominent examples of this geopolitical feature. Second, it had come under the imperial hegemony of outside powers. These imperial traces have been more visible in the past 200 years. A clear example is the Great Game, which resulted from the British-Russian rivalry in this area. Russia as a land empire and the United Kingdom as a sea power established a rivalry, which left its mark in terms of cultural and economic structures.

A similar struggle for influence took place in a broader context and affected this region during the bipolar rivalry between the Soviet Union and the powers of the U.S. and NATO. While the Soviet Union represented land power, the latter block represented a sea coalition. The Cold War rivalry had considerable impact on

this and the neighboring regions. Following the Cold War, the patterns of political geography and geopolitics here had changed dramatically. One may conclude that this region is free from the imperial domination of the past 200 years, and that a geopolitical area of opportunities has emerged after the dominance of outside powers or their own khanates and empires of the earlier periods. The new geopolitical structure is in the making, and it has its own dilemmas. Therefore, the new geopolitical structure of the region requires closer scrutiny.

Secondly, there is a great geocultural transformation underway in this region. One must pay attention to the historical and cultural background and the geopolitical memory of this part of the world. Central Asia, which originated from migration movements, gave birth to big cities and civilisations. Samarkand and Bukhara are the best examples of these historical phenomena. This region hosted great civilisations and had considerable impact on neighbouring basins of civilisations. Central Asia

is a center of cultural and civilisational mobility, which influenced Iran through the Seljukids, India through the Ghaznavids and Babur, China through the Mongols and Kubilay, and the vast Russian steppes through Timur and Altinordu.

There must be an effort to recreate the Silk Road through widespread railroads, transportations lines, energy corridors, oil and gas pipelines and communication networks.

However, Central Asia is not a passive region, but an active, determining and directive one. The passivity of the region is a matter of the past 200 years. It faced the risk of forgetting its language, religious beliefs and traditions under the Soviet cultural imposition and differentiation. The peoples there struggled against cultural silencing in their homes, streets and cities during this period. After years of passivity, there has emerged a possible area of cultural integration through common language, concepts, and shared urban culture. In this context, the emergence of new cities signals the birth of new cultures. For instance, the birth of Astana is a sign of cultural awakening in Central Asia. The beauties and energy of cities such as Baku and Ashgabat are hallmark developments signifying the new cultural and civilisational vitality and unity within this area.

The third great transformation is the changing geoeconomic dimension of the region, including its demographic challenges. The Silk Road, which connected this region to the oceans, is known for its powerful economic role throughout world history. The Silk Road was the geopolitical reality of Central Asia. As a large geographical space, Central Asia is a vital economic bloodline that connects China from one ocean to another, and most of Asia to India, the Mediterranean and Europe. When the importance of the Silk

Road declined, the Central Asian economies became peripheral economies on the margins of major world economic activities. It was again a peripheral economy under the dominance of the Soviet Union. The cotton grown in Uzbekistan was processed and sold in Moscow. The same was true for the Turkmen gas that was marketed in Moscow alongside other products of this region.

However, we are now on the eve of a major transformation. There must be an effort to recreate the Silk Road through widespread railroads, transportations lines, energy corridors, oil and gas pipelines and communication networks. The most serious challenges to this geoeconomic transformation are its demographic problems. The number of people populating Central Asia is comparatively low, considering its geographic area. Kazakhstan equals Europe in its size, but its population is little more than 1/15th that of Europe. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have the same challenge, particularly when one considers the massive populations of neighbouring China and India. Parallel to addressing the issues of economic development, these countries will need to devise policies to ensure an upward trend in demographic figures.

HOW TO SHAPE THE FUTURE?

How can we plan for the future and take necessary measures, while considering the challenges presented by these great transformations? One may address these challenges at three different levels: national, regional and global.

The Nation-State Level

The first challenge occurs at the level of nation-states. The years between 1989-91 were an exciting period that led to the independence of the Turkic republics. The new republics gained their independence beginning in August 1991. From Turkey's foreign policy perspective, their independence was a significant desirable



development. In this respect, it is time to evaluate the period since then and reflect on the future without avoiding the challenges.

The new republics first attempted to consolidate their territorial unity and national sovereignty. They strengthened their state structures and established unquestionable sovereignty in their countries. The only exception to the territorial sovereignty is the situation in Azerbaijan, whose territories of Nagorno-Karabakh and several other districts are under occupation.

The second major progress was achieved by the establishment of new cities. Marking their achievements in state building and development, brand new exemplary cities have emerged in the new republics.

Thirdly, they worked to strengthen economic independence and establish functioning national economies by using their economic and geographical advantages. There has been considerable progress in this realm. Each nation-state has its own distinct advantage. Azerbaijan is the only republic in the Caucasus that has the geographic advantage of being situated between

the Caspian Basin and Europe. Uzbekistan has civilisational centers such as Samarkand and Bukhara, and possesses a large population compared to the other republics. Kazakhstan sits on a vast landmass that connects the geographic area between Asia and Europe. It would be impossible to develop a Eurasian policy without taking Kazakhstan into consideration. Kazakhstan has a special position and an advantage with its rich natural reserves and large geographic area. Turkmenistan also has rich gas reserves and a welfare level comparable to Switzerland with its small number of population. Kyrgyzstan is at the center of all transit geopolitics in the region. It occupies a central place in Central Asia and has relations with the powerful regional countries of China, Russia and several other Asian countries. The new republics have these particular advantages, which may facilitate their transition processes. They attempt to use their advantages at national levels to pave the way to a brighter future.

What are the challenges? An analysis of the Turkic republics since their independence requires attention to the present and future



challenges. The future will be shaped not only by their achievements thus far but also by their ability to deal with challenges. The first challenge is the mismatch between the Central Asian territorial borders and its local identities. The loose line between those identities creates tension and poses several challenges. In Kyrgyzstan, the Kyrgyz national identity and citizenship coexist with local Uzbek, Kyrgyz and Tajik identities. There are other groups in the country, who are not named Kyrgyz, while being Kyrgyz citizens. This situation is not unique to Kyrgyzstan. The whole region is interconnected in the same manner, with the presence of ethnic groups crossing national borders. The peoples there have lived together and shared the same places and the cities. When there was political turmoil in Kyrgyzstan, this led to conflict between the Uzbeks and the Kyrgyz in Ferghana Valley. The sensible attitudes of regional countries and constructive outside assistance, such as Turkey's involvement, reversed the trend for conflict and the problem was solved. One must underline Uzbekistan's sensible and constructive policies in circumscribing and solving this problem. If

outside intervention had not occurred along this sensible line, then Kyrgyzstan would have turned into a battleground for region-wide ethnic clashes. This episode reminded us once again that the success of Kyrgyzstan's parliamentary democracy is important not only for itself but also for the whole of the Central Asian region. The geopolitical volatility led us to watch the developments in Osh and Jalalabad with considerable worry during the crisis.

After the creation of national economies, the new republics should come together and form a joint economic zone to ensure the rise of stronger economic structures within the region.

What must be done is to keep working on harmonising the citizenship identity with the local identities. This is necessary in order to expand the intrinsic culture of peace and foster an understanding of living together among the peoples of Central Asia. At a pre-election peace

conference at Issyk Lake, where all concerned parties had gathered, I made the observation that: there are more than 20 ethnic and cultural identities in a small country such as Kyrgyzstan, and that these cultural identities are sources of variety, richness and strength. The preservation of these identities is not against the citizenship identity of a nation-state. On the contrary, they should be taken into consideration when defining a nation-state's identity. This is a challenge, but achieving this is the only way to prevent conflict among brothers and sisters. There must be a delicate process for strengthening the national identities without harm to local identities. The consolidation of national sovereignty would benefit immensely from any progress made in this process. During this process of reconciling citizenship identity and local identity, the regional actors must also be aware of the geopolitical volatility and the interconnectedness among the regional actors.

Another challenge is to strengthen the consolidation of national sovereignty in the new republics through effective and functioning democratic structures. As has been widely accepted worldwide, there are no alternatives in today's globalising world to paying attention to people's demands for good governance and respecting universally acknowledged fundamental rights. Democracy is now a universal value. As the flow of history drew the Soviet Union out of history following the Cold War, countries having difficulty in instituting democratic structures would face severe problems in due course. Countries should trust in their own people and be ready to reshape their governing structures in a way that will reflect the people's will. The state structures will be stronger once they have been equipped with democratic structures. There have been positive developments in Central Asia in terms of the

spread and institutionalisation of democratic values and structures. There should be a decisive move towards further democratisation and state-society harmony in Central Asia to join hands and work together for a better future.

The Regional Level

Secondly, we need to look at the regional level. One must focus on several issues at this level. First, there is the issue of direct interaction and interdependence among the regional countries. It is almost impossible to talk about economic, cultural and political isolation for any of the new republics in the region. The interconnectedness and volatility can easily pass on the instability in one country to the others. Therefore, there is an urgent need for the dominance of a common culture of political stability within the region. The

Turkey's approach to the region is based on rational strategic planning that draws on serious analyses of the transformations at multiple levels.

challenge is to form a jointly shared regional consciousness. In this regard, a concrete step has been taken by the establishment of the Turkic Council.

The presidents of Turkey, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan signed a deal in Nakhchivan to form a council of Turkic republics. The significance of this is that the signatory countries see their stability and economic and cultural futures interwoven and that they will do the necessary planning on this platform. The spirit of solidarity and mutual understanding exhibited in the working of the Council also encourages other countries to join it in the future, while working towards the creation of a common cultural consciousness.

Economic development is important for the political stability in the region. The problem here lies in the economic structures inherited from the Soviet era. Soviet-style planned economy is almost an anathema to sustainable independent economic structures, for it has never had the



purpose of bolstering the independence and self-sufficiency of these states. The underlying notion of this economic system was to mobilise all resources towards the realisation of a unified Soviet ideal. There flourished no complementary structures to process the agricultural or natural resources of the Central Asian republics. Consequently they lacked the capacity for selling manufactured products. Given this structural legacy, the countries encounter difficulties in creating their self-sufficient national economies.

It goes without saying that national economies cannot be established without regional economic integration. Whether it concerns energy reserves or production sectors, there must be cooperation among the regional states to better utilise infrastructures such as transportation lines and railroads. It would be pointless to say that Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan had excellent railroad networks unless they connected with each other. Connections to sea routes and access to countries in all four directions are only possible by connecting the national networks within the region. Similarly, fighting against the depletion of water resources, which is already a

serious problem among Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, requires a regional arrangement. After the creation of national economies, the new republics should come together and form a joint economic zone to ensure the rise of stronger economic structures within the region. Last but not least, there is also a need for region-wide cultural projects. Priority should be given to the development of scientific projects, joint universities, and educational projects. TÜRKSOY (The International Organization of Turkic Culture) has made considerable progress towards cultural integration and should continue with new projects in the region.

The Global Level

Thirdly, there is the global level. In today's world, whatever your strength is, on your own or in your region, you can hardly exercise your power if you do not have a global level impact with your policies. Remembering that Central Asia is at the heart of global geopolitics, the Central Asian countries as a geopolitical unit should make a more determined input into the processes that are shaping global politics. There are two options

for the states in this region. The first is to turn inward and remain apart from the outside world. The second is to get involved in global affairs with the self-confidence born of the legacy of past empires in Central Asia.

If the first one is chosen, the result will be the pacification and marginalisation in the political and economic processes of global affairs. The ultimate end might be that the regional countries end up on the losing side. Enver Hodja (Hoxha) tried this option in Albania during the Cold War and we know the result. In today's world of communication and interdependence, it is nearly impossible to isolate oneself from global developments. The only feasible option is to follow the second choice and integrate with global processes. There has been considerable progress in terms of Central Asia's integration into the international community, which has been reflected in the fact that Central Asian countries have undertaken leading roles in some international organisations of Europe and Asia.

Turkey pursues a multi-dimensional policy for fostering bilateral relations, promoting regional cooperation and ownership, and benefitting from coordination and cooperation with international actors in Central Asia.

The peoples of the Turkic republics should not forget their weight in history. The 16th Century in world history was shaped by the states they established. Ottomans, Safavids, and Baburs left an enormous legacy of states established by different members of these peoples. They should emphasise that they will have their say in today's global affairs. The historical memory and the current conjuncture are ripe for regional countries to rise to such a role, if there is the will to do so, and to unite forces for a stronger role at the global level.

TURKEY'S POSITION

There has been significant progress in the last decade towards eliminating the limitations that have bedeviled the relations between Turkey and the Turkic republics at psychological, institutional and theoretical levels. First, the emotional reactions have been reconciled with rational policies. Some policy initiatives have been developed which will help improve Turkey's relations with the countries in the region and help them deal with the internal and external challenges that they encounter. The new framework of Turkish foreign policy and its regional policy approach have overcome an important deficiency. Recently, the increase in the number of research centers and experts speaking the languages of the region, the acceleration in the successful business forums of business organisations, and the activities of Turkey-based non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the region have gone a long way toward leaving theoretical and institutional inefficiencies behind. In the second decade of the 21st century, Turkey has adopted a competent policy in Central Asia, and established an institutional framework that can take action together with public institutions and the NGOs, in conformity with this policy.

Turkey has improved its relations with the countries in the region. Turkey's approach to the region was based on several principles, such as: abstaining from destructive competition and aiming at cooperation in the Asia-Europe region; harmonising its regional interests with the European Union (EU) membership process; and its trans-Atlantic alliance relations. Meanwhile, in its policy towards the region, Turkey will work at various levels to maintain its capability to understand, make use of and influence the intra-regional factors that will have permanent implications for the region. The Central Asian peoples have entered the most intense and comprehensive process of transformation in their history. In this regard, an approach that cannot



adequately take into account the psychological and socio-cultural characteristics of the Central Asian peoples, their internal dynamics, mutual interdependencies, leadership and elite formations, cannot produce permanent impact, but only cause a few temporary sparkles.

Turkey's approach to the region is based on rational strategic planning that draws on serious analyses of the transformations at multiple levels. Turkish policy makers understand regional volatility and global challenges, and project a cooperative future through the use of political, economic and cultural mechanisms. Turkey possesses great potential for helping build a common future, which fosters stability and prosperity for the peoples in the new republics and Turkey. The interests of international actors in

Central Asia, as well as the regional perspectives, should be taken into consideration, while developing a future-oriented vision for the region. Turkey pursues a multi-dimensional policy for fostering bilateral relations, promoting regional cooperation and ownership, and benefitting from coordination and cooperation with international actors in Central Asia. Turkey's official policy is strengthened by civilian initiatives and business activities. Turkey's burgeoning civilian capacity serves to enhance Central Asian capacities ranging from education to economic structures. Turkey will stand by the Turkic republics, who are in an intense transformational process, and maintain its support for bilateral, regional and global platforms through the understanding of the abovementioned foreign policy and in the consciousness of a common future.

Center for Strategic Research of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey (SAM) is a think-tank and a research center which is chartered by law and has been active since May 1995. SAM was established as a consultative body to provide Turkish Foreign Policy decision makers with scholarly and scientific assessments of relevant issues, and reviews Turkish foreign policy with a futuristic perspective.

SAM conducts research, organizes scholarly events relevant to the ever expanding spectrum of Turkish Foreign Policy in cooperation with both Turkish and foreign academicians, its counterparts from around the world as well as various universities and government agencies. SAM provides consultancy to the foreign ministry departments as well as some other state institutions in foreign policy issues while also establishing regional think-tank networks.

In addition to its role of generating up-to-date information, reliable data and insightful analysis as a think-tank, SAM functions as a forum for candid debate and discussion for anyone who is interested in both local and global foreign policy issues. Increasingly, SAM has become a center of attraction since it successfully brings scholars and policy makers together for exchange of ideas in panels, in-house meetings, seminars and training programs for young diplomats.

SAM has a widening range of publications. Along with its traditional publication, Perceptions, which is a quarterly English language journal that hosts distinguished Turkish and international scholars within its pages, SAM recently initiated Vision Papers which expresses the views of H.E. Prof. Dr. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, and SAM Papers that will cover the current debates of foreign policy by various scholars.

With its commitment to contribution to the body of knowledge and constructive debate particularly in Turkish Foreign Policy, SAM will continue to serve as an indispensable think-tank and research center given its role promoting interaction and mutual benefits among the MFA, NGOs, other think-tanks and the broader scientific community and hence strengthen the human and intellectual capital of Turkey.

Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs Center for Strategic Research
Dr. Sadık Ahmet Cad. No. 8 Balgat- 06100 Ankara / Turkey
www.sam.gov.tr strategy@mfa.gov.tr
Tel: (+90) 312 292 40 76 Fax: (+90) 312 253 42 03