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## **Problems of the Central Asian Republics**

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### **SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS FACE AND THE ROLE OF TURKEY IN THE CENTRAL ASIAN REGION**

#### **Introduction**

Along with the emergence of the newly independent Soviet Muslim periphery, the region, has started to be included in Turkish foreign policy agenda, too. Turkey was one of the first countries who recognised the independence of the Central Asian republics. Besides recognition Turkey has declared her willingness and readiness to give spiritual and material support to the newly-independent Central Asian republics. The attempts of Turkey were treated with pleasure by the mentioned republics. We should make it clear that in the beginning of the relations period not only the newly- independent Central Asian republics but also Turkey tried to develop intimate relations with these republics taking her multi-dimensional advantages into consideration such as compensating her isolation from the EU, enlarging its sphere of economic, cultural and political influence in the Central Asian region, developing cultural and social relations with these republics and safeguarding herself in this newly-emerged volatile region. According to Bal, the Turkish academic, “There are two reasons for Turkey’s interest in Central Asia and Caucasus (particularly in Azerbaijan). The first and most important one includes cultural issues such as ethnicity, religion, history and language. It answers the question, whether Turkey would be so interested in this part of the world if these republics were not Muslim in religion and Turkic in origin. The second reason includes security issues and Turkey’s international relations in general”. (Bal, 1998, p.59) However, after a while this sincere relationship has left its place to a more realistic understanding. Soon, while those Central Asian republics began to be aware of the fact that the solution of the harsh problems they face needs an ally politically, economically stronger than Turkey, and Turkey realized the fact that the economic potential and capability she has will not be able to cover the needs of those republics. So, from then on the relation between sides has placed itself on a more reasonable basis, and turned out to be more cultural-orientated pattern.

In the first part of the article, social, political and economic overview of the Central Asian Republics will be presented, in the second part social, political and economic obstacles that the Central Asian Republics face will be explained and in the last part the role that Turkey has played will be clarified.

#### **1. An Overview of the Region**

##### **1.a. The Geography**

“Where and what is Central Asia? Or Inner Asia? Are they the same or different? Reference to Inner Asia seems to be more American usage. Central Asia is the usual reference in Europe (and in the region itself)...but they seem to cover the same area.”. (Frank, 1992, p.5)

“The Central Asian region covers a vast area twice the size of Europe. Russians called it

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Middle Asia until recently; Kazakhs prefer their own area as Inner Asia. The common terminology of Central Asia would stretch from Southern Siberia to the Indo-Pakistan Peninsula in the North and South; Caspian Sea and Iran in the West, and China in the East (though some writers include Xinkiang in Central Asia because of the majority of the people are Uighurs)". (Ta han, 1993, p.56)

However, "...standard Russian definitions of Central Asian region, Srednyaya Aziya, or 'Middle Asia', exclude Kazakhstan from it as a separate entity, though the Kazakhs are, of course, a related Turkic people". (Hyman, 1993, p.289)

Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan (Persian origin) are five Central Asian republics which consist the Central Asian region. The region, which covers 4 million square kilometres land with the population of 50 million people, accounts for 20% of the total CIS area. Geographically, the largest is Kazakhstan, over a million square miles, with the population of 16.5 million people - 40% Kazakh, 38% Russian, 6% German and other ethnic nationalities. The most populous republic is Uzbekistan, with 20.5 million people, second homogenous republic in Central Asia following Turkmenistan, with 71% Uzbek population. Uzbekistan is also regarded as the pioneer republic among Central Asian republics with her cultural and historical potential. Kirghiz account for 55% of Kyrgyzstan's 4.5 million people -22% Russian and 13% Uzbek. Turkmenistan, with the population of 3.5 million people, consist of 75% Turkmen, 10% Russian and 10% Ukrainian. Tajikistan has over 5 million people, 62% Tajik, 25% Uzbek and 8% Russian. (see Av ar and Çolak, 1998, pp. 82-200; Batalden and Batalden, 1993, pp. 124, 136, 146-147, 157-158, 167-168)

### 1.b. Society and Politics

Most of the Central Asian population is Turkish origin and they are Turco-phone nations. Although they use different dialects, the languages they speak have similarities with the language used in Turkey. Moreover, all the Central Asian Turkic origin nations belong to Islam religion.

Social structure of the Central Asian republics still reminds us of tribal-type features. The relations are based on traditional values. The families are still the most important part of the Central Asian societies. Religion, traditional relations and nationalist feelings are dominant in unifying these societies.

The artificial borders drawn in 1924 and 1936 as the result of the attempt to keep the Southern region more obedient by the former Soviet Union are rather open to the potential territorial disputes. The ethnic disputes in these Soviet made republics arose following their independence since the peoples of these newly emerged republics believe that the land shaped and the territory given them by the former Soviet Union are not genuine.

Besides this, Central Asian societies have difficulties in adopting themselves to the necessities of the free market economy. The development of the rules and institutions of free market economies is rather slow in these societies. The difficulties experienced almost in all transition economies are felt deeply in these Central Asian republics. Due to the shortcomings in the juridical system; money laundering, drug trafficking, sex trade and other illegal activities have increased immensely.

As for the political culture of the Central Asian republics, it is hardly possible to speak of a deep-rooted political culture in these societies. Tribal loyalty is the most remarkable feature in political arena. Although the political leaders seem to be quite democratic in theory, they are rather authoritarian in practice. The political culture in these societies is based mainly on authoritarianism and nationalism. In fact, the dominant political culture in Central Asian republics pretends to be the natural outcome of the political culture in the former Soviet

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Union, which was rather authoritarian. And the very same feature could possibly be observed in the newly-emerged republics. (see Akiner, 1994, pp. 1-74 ; Dawisha and Parrott, 1997, pp. 1-65 and 201-408 ; Haghayeghi, 1995, pp. 101-164)

However, in order to be integrated in Western political and economic institutions for financial and social benefits after independence, the political leaders of these republics do try to pretend to be liberal and democratic. However, almost for all the leaders of Central Asian republics democracy is the secondarily important while securing independence occupies the top priority in their political agenda. In the words of Vaner, “ Democracy is not a dream that would never become real, however, it would always remain as a goal which is difficult to reach”. (Vaner, 1997, p.238)

Despite the prevailing influence of the mentioned authoritarian political culture which suppresses political opposition, there are still some groups which struggle for gaining political power. These are 1. Ex-communist party members 2. Newly-emerged democratic groups led by intellectuals 3. Islamist groups composed of fundamentalist-type clerics (Kimura, 1993, p.177) and 4. Nationalist groups reinforced by Islamic brand of nationalism.

### 1.c. Geo and Eco Strategically Importance of Central Asia

As for the strategic importance of the region, we might say that Central Asia has always been geopolitically and geoeconomically important due to its location and natural sources.

According to Solodovnik; “Geopolitically, this region is a core part of the world’s biggest continental landmass, normally referred to as the Heartland, which is totally reliant on good will of the adjacent powers to enjoy free access to the sea to maintain worthwhile and profitable land trade as in the times when the Great Silk Route used to be operational. Only this factor may ensure free and unhampered communications on land for the nations of the region, thus increasing their geopolitical vulnerability”. (Solodovnik, 1993, p.58)

In fact, the geostrategic importance of the region reached its peak in the 19th century due to the vital position of the Silk Road. The famous silk roads, which ran north to south and east to west through it, were among the first important economic and trade links joining Arab, Oriental and European civilizations. In the 19th century, the region was a point of collision between the Russian and British empires vying for strategic control of India. (Chavin, 1994, p.160 and see Hopkirk, 1990)

The four Turkish origin republics in the region continued to bear geostrategic and geoeconomic importance during the Soviet rule. Geoeconomically, the region was regarded as vital for the Soviet Union. For example, Uzbekistan was the most important cotton producer whose production of cotton accounted for two-thirds of the total production in the Soviet Union. Kazakhstan was the second natural gas and oil producer, the third coal producer and also one of the major fuel and power centres. In terms of the total value of products of agriculture and husbandry, Kazakhstan was the third among the former Soviet republics. Turkmenistan produced over 10 % of all natural gas exported by the former Soviet Union. (see Kimura, 1993, pp.132-142)

After the dismantlement of the Soviet Union, due to the emerged power vacuum, natural gas and oil potential in the region has led the economic power rivalries in Central Asia. The region is regarded as one of the world richest storehouses of raw materials and the Caspian Sea region as the second oil and gas supplier after the Persian Gulf. (Razov, 1997, p.59) Kazakhstan, “land of opportunity” (Conway, 1994, p.164), Turkmenistan “considered by many to be Central Asian Kuwait” (Nissman, 1994, p.183) and Uzbekistan are three important republics which have quite high oil and gas reserves. It is supposed that while Kazakhstan has 95 billion barrels oil reserve, Turkmenistan has 34 billion barrels oil reserve.

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It is also remarkable that Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are among the most important 20 countries, rich in natural gas. Turkmenistan, which has the world's third largest natural gas reserves, is a country rich in natural gas with its proved 4.5 trillion cubic metres natural gas reserve. (Pala and Engür, 1998, pp.23-27) Under these circumstances, it might be argued that "in the next century, the Caspian Sea and the regions adjoining it could become the largest supplier of oil and gas to Asia and Europe". (Gökay, 1998, p.49)

Depending on the oil and gas potential of the region, geopolitical rivalry has turned into ecopolitical rivalry in Central Asia. (see Forsythe, 1996) The power struggle in the region reminds us of the struggle realised in the Middle East at the beginning of the 20th century. The so called "Caspian Gamble" (The Economist, 1998, p.1) is based mainly on two goals: 1. The share of the oil and gas areas and 2. The setting up of the pipeline routes. (Gökırmak, 1996, p.178) This all leads to both the inter-regional competition and international power rivalry to define the major locations of the region's oil and to transfer this oil to the world markets.

In addition to this, the region is also geopolitically and geoeconomically important for the Russian Federation. First of all, it is very easy to reach European and Middle Eastern countries via Central Asia for the Russian Federation. Furthermore, the former Soviet Union had established two military bases in the region to be use when needed. The bases are still important for the Russian Federation against the powers which claim to gain sphere of influence in the region. (Mütercimler, 1993, p.37)

Kazakhstan has been one of the republics which handed over the nuclear weapons of the former Soviet Union together with the Russian Federation, Belorussia and Ukraine. As for the natural sources, particularly in terms of oil and gas, it seems highly probable that the Russian Federation would adopt firm opposition against the states which attempt to penetrate into Central Asia in order to direct eco-policies of the region.

Despite this promising economic prospect of the Central Asia, the region has various problems which might affect its future stand. In the following part, we would give the details of the problems.

## 2. The Problems Central Asian Republics Face

Following the independence, the newly-emerged Central Asian republics faced severe problems caused partly by internal and partly external difficulties. Since these problems might affect Turkey's relations with these republics in the future we would explain the problems they face under this title.

### 2.a. Russian Federation

Russian Federation should be regarded as the successor of the former Soviet Union since she follows almost the same foreign policy. The sphere of influence of the former Soviet Union continues to be the sphere of influence of the Russian Federation. Since the Russian Federation sees the territory of the former USSR as extremely important for her domestic and foreign politics she tries her best to keep the Central Asian region, where the newly-independent republics are located, under her influence as much as possible. Russian Federation assumes that she is totally responsible for the political and military security and stability on the territory of the former Soviet Union. (Winrow,1995, p.32) So, the mentioned assumption of Russia leads her to adopt Near Abroad policy which directly limits domestic and foreign policy initiatives of Central Asian republics. The reasons of the Russian Federation in forming such a foreign policy doctrine are based on the following leading

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motives; (Gökırmak, 1996, pp.161-162)

- a. To keep the political and military developments in Central Asia under control since these developments represent important for her own political and military future,
- b. To defend the rights of the Russian minority living on the territory of the Turkic republics and to help them obtain strategic administrative positions in these republics,
- c. To prevent probable development of ethnic and religious movements in the near abroad, which would destroy her political and national unity,
- d. To be one of the most important share holders in extraction and exportation of oil and gas in the region,
- e. To continue to use the region as the agricultural raw material store house,

Furthermore, Russia's interest in controlling transport lines to the Middle East, Far East and the West and also the nuclear weapons in Kazakhstan might be included in the reasons of forming Near Abroad policy.

It is remarkable that the newly-independent Central Asian republics do not seem to be willing to oppose Russia's desire to have influence on them. In fact, the reason is quite clear. These republics have still intensive relations with the Russian Federation. They are aware of the fact that their foreign economic relations would go into bankruptcy without Russia since most of their foreign trade is with the Russian Federation. They also believe that Russia is the most important guarantor in every field, from military to political issues. At least, they support the idea that Russia would never give up the Central Asian region depending on her military, security and political interests in their own region. For this reason, they never dare to eliminate Russia but try to stabilize their relations with her.

## 2.b. Power Rivalry in the Region

Independence obtained by the former Soviet Southern states without having had to struggle for it as a kind of gift following the dismantlement of the Soviet Union brought about both positive and negative results. The power rivalry started in 1991s, in the Central Asian region has been one of the negative outcomes of the mentioned unexpected independence. "The speed with which independence came gave no time to Central Asian leaders to formulate policies towards their neighbours. Thus their relations with the rest of the world were dominated not so much by what they wanted, but by what the rest of the world desired to do with Central Asia". (Rashid, 1994, p.209) The newly-independent Central Asian republics which used to be ruled by the former Soviet Union's central power felt themselves as "The Five Young Orphans" (The Economist,1997) in the very beginning of the independence. An immense power vacuum occurred suddenly. Parallel to this power vacuum, a new great game together with its geopolitical and geoeconomic dimensions emerged. (Ahrari, 1994, p.525) As the result of the decrease in Russian presence in the region, both the international such as U.S., Japan, China and regional states such as Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, India; seeking for geopolitical and geoeconomic advantages; started to take their place in this new great game. They all have come with their own priorities and they all want to re-orientate the Central Asian republics according to their own preferences. So, these new Central Asian states, which are economically weak, politically immature and unstable and ethnically rather mixed, are subject to be directed or absorbed by the mentioned international or regional powers. (Brzezinski, 1998, pp. 40-53)

These re-orientation attempts by the international and regional powers also prevent the Turkic republics in the region from developing their internal and foreign policy principles by themselves. On the one hand, this annoys the nationalist and Islamist circles and causes social

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discontent and on the other hand, makes these republics dependent on external powers.

## 2.c. Economic Deficiencies

“Any student of the economic and social problems of the developing world will find in Central Asia the characteristic features of economic underdevelopment - the totality of factors hindering the transition to self-supporting and balanced economic growth and the formation of an industrial society. There are several indications of this. First, the disintegration of economic structures has hindered the development of forces of production. Second, the very low mobility of labour, capital and other resources has prevented the shaping of optimum and organizational forms of production. Third, there is low productivity, overpopulation, mass poverty, and poor quality labour resources. Fourth, an acute ecological crisis has developed because of the incomplete development of the industrial economic system”. (Alexandrov, 1993, p.106)

Due to the reasons mentioned by Alexandrov above, Central Asian republics face serious economic problems which can only be solved in the long run. It is not surprising that the source of the economic problems in the region are rooted in communist era. The communist system which benefited from the agricultural richness and natural sources of the former Soviet states and which left them unable to set up their own economic institutions made these countries economically restarted. “Central Asia’s newborn states are simultaneously are suffering from three separate - though related - painful developments: the collapse of the command economy, with its highly interdependent system of production, trade and payments; the sudden independence from Russia, the giant core of the system; and the continued dependence on Russia, which itself is gripped by economic and political crisis”. (Islam, 1994, p.157)

The mentioned three negative factors, which are regarded by Shafiqul Islam as the factors which mainly cause economic deficiencies in these republics also lead other negative results in the economic field. These may include:

1. High inflation rate,
2. Declining living standards,
3. Shortcomings in liberal market economy structures and norms,
4. Lack of skilled staff in administration of economy,
5. Insufficient man capital necessary for economic development,
6. Problematic money and banking system,
7. Slow privatization,
8. Massive monopolization of the economy,
9. Lack of capital,
10. Absence of consistent economic aid from industrialized countries since the industrialised countries refrain from investing in these republics assuming that they are located in politically and economically unstable and risky region. (Kona, 1999, p.89)
11. Insufficient transport lines,
12. Obstacles in importation,
13. Limited foreign exchange regulations etc.

The prevailing problems in the economic field directly reflect themselves on domestic and foreign policy and social life, and make economic interdependence stronger and political, social and economic development slower.

## 2.d. Ethnic Disputes

The ethnic disputes in the region consists one of the most threatening problems. At present, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are the most well known states which integrated themselves in ethnic disputes. Tajiks would like to take revenge of their exclusion from the territory of today’s two main cultural centres of Central Asia, Samarkand and Bukhara now included in Uzbekistan. Moreover, Uzbeks lay claim to all of the Farghana Valley which includes Kirghizstan’s Osh region and part of Tajikistan’s Khojent region (former Leninabad). Uzbeks

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also claim parts of southern Kazakhstan and eastern Turkmenistan. (Gürel, 1993, pp.13-14) Along with the increasing social discontent, decreasing living standard and continuing political deterioration, the mentioned ethnic disputes might rise.

Since we come across the name of Uzbekistan republic very often in terms of ethnic disputes, we might presume that the main source of the ethnic problems is Uzbekistan. However, this assumption would be one-sided. It is evident that Uzbekistan has made herself marginalized by trying to set up hegemony or superiority on other Central Asian republics but when we take the potential ethnic disputes in the region into consideration we would realise that Uzbekistan is neither the first nor the only source of the ethnic disputes. The following items make it clear that ethnic disputes in the region at present are based on both the past and present experiences. These may include:

#### Ethnic Disputes Caused by Soviet Policy

Moscow has designed the borders of the Central Asian republics arbitrarily and artificially and this made the present republics ethnically heterogeneous. The borders of the republics have been changed about 90 times since 1921. While these changes secured Soviet Union's unity, they made the republics ethnically fractious. Additionally, "...the Soviets contributed much to the process of ethnic differentiation in Central Asia by the national delineation, and subsequent educational, cultural and social policies, creating new political and educational elites which do not have a vested interest in a unified Turkistan..." (Khazanov, 1994, p.147)

#### Ethnic Disputes Caused by Rising national Consciousness

After the communist era, we all have witnessed the rise in national consciousness and nationalist feelings. The newly-independent republics openly emphasize their independence through reinforcing their flag, religion and newly emerged independent lands against any outsider. At present, they are proud of being Kazak, Kirghiz, Uzbek and Turkmen. So, they try to isolate other ethnic groups by excluding their culture, religion and ethnicity.

#### Ethnic Disputes Caused by New Brand National Identities

Following the independence, these newly-emerged independent republics have had strong tendency toward searching for a new identity on their independent lands. They believe that these new brand identities only belong to them. In this process, there is no place for ethnically different groups. They are determined not to share their own culture, religion and ethnicity with the other ethnic groups. This mentioned "otherness" is neither a new notion nor a new policy. Any country in the world, who declared its independence after such a long time of domination, first represents opposition then harmony.

#### Ethnic Disputes Caused by Feeling of Superiority

Instead of cooperating with each other, they struggle for gaining superiority by making other republics or ethnic groups in the region accept its own culture, policies and religion which they see more attractive and dominant than other cultures, policies and religion in the region. So, this negative attitude also fuels the ethnic disputes and makes the region more vulnerable and fragile.

However, compared to Caucasus region the Central Asian region is much more stable in terms of ethnic disputes due to the lesser degree of urbanization, priority of Islam above ethnic consciousness, strong role of clan identity, lack of political mobilization, prevailing

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nomad traditions, lack of national heroes and histories and the authoritarian rulers who try to suppress nationalists for the well being of their leadership. (Kubicek, 1996, p.94)

As a result, it might be argued that more democratization, social stabilization, political maturity and developed economy might relax ethnic disputes in the region.

## 2.e. Lack of Cooperation

After the end of the Cold War, the new international political system is largely based on the notions such as unity, globalism, interdependence and universalism in every field from economy to politics. Instead of categorising the countries having similar characteristics into one group against another group of countries for the sake of ideology or political purposes, the world has started to be regarded as one big region, containing small or medium-sized regions or other sub-regions. (see Kona, 1999, pp.117-134)

However, it is just the opposite for the Central Asian republics. Neither the preconditions for setting up regional cooperation nor their economic, social and political potentials allow them to initiate such a regional cooperation. In order to realise their incapability in establishing such a regional grouping, we first mention the preconditions for setting up a regional cooperation.

a. First of all, the countries aimed at setting up a regional cooperation must have some common ideals such as economic, cultural, political or social development or all together. The same countries should also develop mutual understanding among themselves.

b. The countries which intend to set up regional cooperation must determine a pioneer country which is more willing to develop a regional cooperation and also which is better off in the fields of economy, politics and society. Once they have chosen such a leader, they should refrain from vicious struggles among themselves which would certainly destroy the planned cooperation.

c. The countries willing to set up a regional cooperation must be the developed or developing countries. In other words, the countries which would like to form cooperation should have political and economic power. This political and economic power would also prevent political and economic desires of other countries which have the intention of enlarging their sphere of influence. It should be kept in mind that cooperation leads strength but cooperation formed by the weak leads nothing.

When we apply the preconditions necessary for setting up a regional cooperation, we would realise that the cooperation would remain a kind of ideal rather than reality for the Central Asian republics. The reasons may include:

### Lack of Cooperation Caused by Priority of Territorial Integrity and State Sovereignty

Although the Central Asian republics have same ideals these ideals are completely different from the ideals necessary for setting up a regional cooperation. They largely focus on territorial integrity and state sovereignty. While these two constitute the top priority; economic development, political maturity, cultural and social unity remain as secondarily important issues. It seems that they have no intention of setting up a cooperation without solving the mentioned two important problems.

### Lack of Cooperation Caused by Struggle for Leadership

It is hardly possible to determine a leading country which is socially, economically and politically better off to initiate such a cooperation since these republics are almost on the same economic, social and political levels, which are not promising at present. Even if they

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choose such a leader, each one of them would start competing for obtaining leadership later. Due to their nomadic feature, none of the Central Asian republics accept the superiority of each other. They believe that these four have no more than each one of them has, of course Russia being exceptional.

Professor Martha Brill Olcott explains this phenomenon with the following words: “Regional cooperation in Central Asia was always more ideal than real. But the post-Soviet diplomatic strategies of the Central Asian leaders have pushed their republics even farther apart. When Central Asian leaders meet among themselves... they find little of substance on which to agree. Under Soviet rule the leaders competed for Moscow’s favour. Now they are competing for investment from a far greater pool, and each is striving to define the uniqueness of his republic”. (Olcott, 1992, p.126 and Olcott, 1996, p.145)

Lack of Cooperation Caused by Lack of the Power of Establishing Co-operation

It is evident that when they set up cooperation, the result would not be satisfactory since these newly-independent republics still suffer from political immaturity, social disorder and economic shortcomings though their attempts and potentials. So, they lack the power of setting up a regional cooperation.

Depending on the explanation above, we should agree to the opinions of S. Enders Wimbush: “I do not rule out the possibility of a single, politically united and economically integrated Central Asia... I have to admit that I think it is a fairly remote possibility in the near future. I believe that we will witness serious and determined efforts to integrate Central Asia in this way. I think that this will not be in the long run successful as other kinds of integration, ...” (Wimbush, 1996, pp.121-122)

## 2.f. Nationalism

Although nationalist movements have not reached threatening level, nationalism constitutes one of the potential problems that the Central Asian republics face at present. National consciousness is becoming wide-spread especially among the intellectuals living in more urbanized areas compared to rural inhabitants. While national consciousness is still defined by religious and regional affiliations and membership in extended families among rural inhabitants (Dawisha and Parrott, 1994, p.81), the very same features are defined by historical background, political culture, ethnic connections and cultural values among the Central Asian intellectuals.

As for the ruling elite, nationalism refers to the combination of two different notions which contradict with each other. They apply nationalism through intolerance and undemocratic behaviour on the one hand and adoption of Western culture and democracy for their people on the other hand. (Ahmet, 1995, p.57)

Following the independence, the peoples of Central Asia have become quite enthusiastic about expressing and emphasizing their national identities. The reasons are various, these may include:

Nationalism Caused by Soviet Policy of Russification and Sovietisation over Central Asian People

Their feelings related to exist in Kazak, Kirghiz, Uzbek and Turkmen nations were underestimated in order to create a single Soviet society for 70 years. After the independence, fuelled by the desire of building independent nations, some nationalist movements emerged. “These popular movements are essentially anticolonial, reformist and nationalist”. (Hunter, 1990, p.325) They are anticolonial since they are completely against the colonial tendencies;

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they are reformist since they support nationalism together with political, social and economic reforms and they are nationalists since they use the power of nationalism to foster their newly-won independence against any state's probable enlargement policy and also to reinforce the power of their newly-emerged, independent national identities against the former identities imposed by the Bolsheviks.

#### Nationalism Caused by Revenge of the Past

The Central Asian republics benefit from nationalism in taking revenge of their past. They believe that through using nationalism, they may taste the proud of being first class citizenship on their own lands against Russian minorities living in their own territories. In other words, they believe that they may compensate for their undermined position during the Soviet rule by making the Russian minorities accept their privileges after independence.

#### Nationalism Caused by Uneven Economic Development

The economic backwardness in the newly-independent Central Asian societies also lead the Central Asian people to a deeper interest in non-materialistic values such as religion, family relations and nation. By doing so, they try to compensate for their shortcomings in other fields. The peoples of Central Asia are in the same position after 1990s. Along with the decreasing Russian influence they have had to form their own market economy institutions and the norms. Since these republics were used as the raw material store house in the Soviet era they couldn't realise their own economic activities. (Hunter, 1996, pp.66-67) So, along with the independence they have to overcome all the economic difficulties by themselves. This certainly causes discontent in Central Asian societies.

It might be argued that the Central Asian people unable to tackle these economic problems direct their interests to other issues which they regard more important. Nationalism which increased after 1990s is among one of the notions which the Central Asian people would like to maintain strictly.

#### Nationalism Caused by State-building Process

In all state-building processes rapid development of national consciousness is usual. The mentioned process works more rapidly if the peoples of the newly-established states lived under the influence of a great hegemonic power for years, having been deprived of religious, cultural and national feelings. Under these circumstances, the newly obtained values such as land, state, nation, culture and religion become more and more important. So, in Central Asian republics nationalism is regarded as a social phenomenon which can accelerate and foster state-building and nation-building processes.

#### Nationalism Supported by the Leaders

The Central Asian leaders try to reinforce their political power by giving nationalism a special status. By doing so they are also encouraged by the people since the people of the newly-emerged republics naturally support the ones who share the same feelings with them about nationhood. However, the pro-nationalist stand of the Central Asian leaders should not be viewed as the single factor which fuel nationalism in these newly-born Central Asian republics since there are some other factors such as lack of democracy, economic backwardness, superpresidentialism etc. which make us assume that nationalism will rise in the Central Asian region in the long run. For this reason, we support the assumption of Katz that "...nationalism in the post-Soviet states will recede as a result of democratization, economic development, or other positive factors, but it is highly doubtful this will occur anytime soon". (Katz, 1994, p.327)

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## 2.g. Authoritarianism

Authoritarian way of behaviour of the Central Asian leaders represents contradiction with the Western idea of democracy. While the leaders emphasize the importance of democracy for their new republics they continue authoritarian type of leadership inherited from Soviet Union. More or less, all the Central Asian republics seem to be administered similar to the previous totalitarian communist regime. (Gumpel, 1994, p.24) The reasons of authoritarianism in Central Asian republics may include:

### Authoritarianism for Enlarging the Authority of the Political Leaders

Since the beginning of their independence, the leaders of the Central Asian republics have given importance to authoritarian way of leadership. By doing so, they both try to foster their power and extend duration of their power. The following quotations reflect how the Central Asian leaders use nationalism in order to enlarge their authorities:

“Each of the Central Asian leaders has chosen to try to strengthen his authority and increase his popularity by espousing a secular model of leadership. Kazakhstan’s Nursultan Nazarbayev sees himself of the leader of a new Asian economic “dragon”, while Kyrgyzstan’s Askar Akayev presents himself as heading an Asiatic Switzerland. Turkmenistan’s president, Saparmurad Niyazov, has had himself proclaimed “Father” of the Turkmen people, and ... Uzbekistan’s Islam Karimov paints himself as adjust ruler forced by circumstances to employ authoritarian measures”. (Olcott, 1994, p.150)

“Foreign observers often seem to forget that all Central Asian leaders want to maintain and strengthen their hold on power, because, rightly or wrongly, they believe the future of their countries depends on the realisation of their programs for modernization, development and the creation of a sense of statehood. All of these leaders have had different ideas on the best way to achieve these goals”. (Brown, 1996, p. 8)

### Authoritarianism for Holding the Country Together

As mentioned before, following the dismantlement of the Soviet Union both nationalist interests and religious upheavals increased. It is evident that these tendencies are functional in two ways: On the one hand they present a kind of safeguard against any state who would threaten their national unity and on the other hand they create a kind of security umbrella against any social discontent or political diversity which would give harm to their national unity and political development. So, the political leaders of the Central Asian republics use authoritarianism to hold the society together against external powers and probable internal conflict. By doing so, they keep the society under their control and they foster their leadership.

Besides, it is not surprising that Russian Federation supports this stand of the Central Asian leaders and that the Central Asian leaders willingly follow the authoritarian way of leadership in the former Soviet Union since both are intended to remove conflicts in the society and remain in power for long years through adopting authoritarianism. It might be argued that Russian Federation will continue to support the prevailing authoritarianism in the new Central Asian states because it does offer a chance to “keep the lid on” and avoid turmoil. (Fuller, 1994, p.146)

### Authoritarianism as the Inheritance of Communist Nomenclature

The totalitarian way of rule has been effective during 70 years. The first aim of the ruling elite was that they could succeed in holding the Soviet society which was composed of

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various ethnic nationalities together only by the help of this policy. After the breakup, it is rather artificial to argue that the Russian Federation and the newly independent states are secular and democratic since they reflect the features of post-totalitarian regimes. [1] It is evident that partially due to the necessities of the status quo and partially due to the impact of the former communist era, they still continue to apply the rules of the authoritarian system. So, we might present a supportive idea for our assumption that "...the non-Russian communist nomenclature of the Central Asian republics made a reasonably successful transition from being the guardians of Marxist-Leninist ideology to nationalist leadership. This is partly due to the strength of their power-base, rooted in traditional patron-client and clan affiliations,..." (Strategic Survey 1991/92, p.153) As a result, we should admit that as long as authoritarianism continues, transition to democracy in these republics may take longer time than it is expected and possibly remain as a kind of ideal.

## 2.h. Islam

In fact, religion has an independent status having the mission of reinforcing both the individuals and societies. "Particularly, Islam which has a more direct relation with the social structure, compared to Christianity, has the functions of designing and guiding the structure of the society, safeguarding the individuals and transferring the ideological and cultural values to the society". (Mardin, 1993, p.91) So, Islam religion, having the mentioned functions, is automatically integrated in the profane matters.

As for the stand of Islam in the Central Asian societies after the demise of the Soviet Union, we might say that Islam, the religion of the majority of the Central Asian people, has been trying to compensate for its negative past experience. In addition to this, "...with the demise of Soviet institutions and ideology and the persistence of economic crisis, Islam, even its fundamentalist variant, could well become a powerful political force in Central Asia, as disillusioned people cast about for a sense of direction". (Menon and Barkey, 1993, p.72) The reasons of the Islamic awakening in these societies may include:

### Islam As a Mediator to Have a Social Identity

In general, religion is a mediator for people to have a social identity. The peoples of the Central Asia, who had lived with collective social identities for 70 years and who had left aside their Kazak, Turkmen, Kirghiz and Uzbek identities, have begun to feel the necessity and power of religion after the breakup of the Soviet Union. Following their independence, Islam has started to be regarded as a value which fosters to have unique Kazak, Turkmen, Kirghiz and Uzbek identities in independent Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kirghizstan and Uzbekistan.

### Islam as a Distinguishing Factor

Islam is also regarded as a distinguishing factor in getting the Central Asian Muslim population to feel different from the majority Slav population in the CIS. "People instinctively felt it was Islam which is not just a set of religious beliefs but a way of life and civilization - that made them different from the Russians, whose rule they had never accepted as legitimate". (Mirsky, 1992, p.334)

### Islam As a Constraining Symbol Against the Extended Russian Role

Furthermore, Islam is regarded as a constraining symbol against the probable extended role of the Russian Federation by the Central Asian people. "Today Islam may emerge as a barrier

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against extended Russian role in Central Asia in as much as Islam is becoming a defining item of the political agenda". (Peker, 1996, p.81)

Islam As the Most Important Social Value in Traditional Societies

Like in all traditional societies in which cultural, religious and social symbols are appreciated more than material symbols, the status of religion is prestigious for the Central Asian states which reflect the features of traditional structure.

Islam As an Overemphasized Social Value Against the Former Russian Policies

The revival of Islam may also be based on the policies of the former Soviet Union related to any religion except Orthodoxy. "During the Soviet period Islam has been completely eliminated from the public life: mosques, medreses and other religious establishments had disappeared dramatically. Entire religious life in the Soviet Union was kept under strict control of the government, while any slightest manifestation of the national and religious consciousness among the non-Russian people was considered as flagrant nationalism and fundamentalism...In the minds of the ordinary Russians Islam had been associated with backwardness, fundamentalism and even terrorism. But, in spite the all, Islam is considered by its followers as a part of national culture and as a way of life. This gives Islam special status, compared to other religions". (Kadir, 1996, pp.48-49)

The Soviet Union administration had classified the Muslims living in Russian territory in three groups: Fanatics who were following Islamic ideology strictly despite they were not many quantitatively; ordinary Muslims and the indeterminated. The Soviet leaders regarded the Muslims as reactionaries who opposed progress at least in the Soviet Union. (D'Encausse, 1992, p.17-51) So, according to the explanations, it may be argued that the Muslim peoples, who were isolated from the society and scorned during the Soviet period, want to perform their Islamic belief and emphasize Islam religion in society after the breakup of the Soviet Union.

However, this over emphasized stand of Islam religion in Central Asian states brings about the emergence of a serious problem: the probable rise of some fundamentalist powers such as Iran in the Central Asian region. It might be argued that Iran, looking for the ways of enlarging its influence in the region, might use Islamic sentiments to realise this aim. This would mean that, the Central Asian states provoked by Islamic sentiments would not be able to complete transition period with success and would be deprived of democratic regime.

According to Ahmet, "the future of the Islamic fundamentalism in the region depends on the direct or indirect intervention or influence of the regional powers". (Ahmet, 1994, p.58)

So, it is pretty realistic to assume that as long as the Islam religion leads the Central Asian peoples and societies to keep their traditions strictly and bans them to adopt new norms, Western-type democratization, secularization and modernization which the Central Asian republics are determined to realise may hardly become real.

### 3. The Role of Turkey in the Region

In the very beginning of independence Turkey, which has cultural, historical, religious and linguistic ties with the Central Asian republics, presented itself and was presented by the West as a political and economic model with its secular state, pluralistic democracy and free market economy for these republics. Bahri Yılmaz, professor at the Bilkent University in Ankara, explains this with the following words: "One central idea was the introduction of the "Turkish model" in the countries of both regions. This is based on three main pillars: secularism in an Islamic society, a Western-style pluralistic-democratic system, and a free

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market economy. The model was not only intended as a frame for the future political and economic development for these countries, but also a catalyst for their ‘Westernization’”. (Yılmaz, 1994, p. 94) Furthermore, Turkish decision-makers strongly supported the idea that the West should back Turkey in this process. According to Ö ütçü, “There is a widely held view that the West should explore ways and means of contributing to the process which Turkey started in respect of setting a Western-style model to the newly emerging democracies”. (Ö ütçü, 1994, p.108) Encouraged by both Western image and its own position, Turkish officials have had high expectations in the region in the first two years of relations and they spoke of setting up a Turkic world stretching from Adriatic to China Wall and a Turkic Common Market.

However, with the Ankara Declaration, agreed upon following the Ankara Summit attended by the leaders of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in October 1992, the mentioned high expectations left their place to more realistic ones. Following the Ankara Summit, the Ankara Declaration was published. The Declaration mentioned only the need for cooperation in the fields of culture, education, language, security, economy, juridical and parliamentary matters. Furthermore, the Ankara Declaration made no reference to the formation of a Turkic Common Market or Turkish Bank. Additionally, the Participants also made no firm pledges with regard to the construction of new oil pipelines. (Winrow, 1995, p. 20) Since the Ankara Declaration, only rather small part of the plans have been materialised.

Currently, neither Turkey nor the Central Asian republics seem to be pleased with the result. It is probable that the reasons of disappointment emerged as the result of relations developed up to now are based both on Turkey and Central Asian Republics. So, first of all, depending on the experiences since 1991 we will discuss the reasons of unsatisfactory level of the relations between the Central Asian republics and Turkey. These may include:

### 3.a. Economic Deficiencies of Turkey

Central Asian republics believe that one-sided economic cooperation may foreclose other economic cooperation alternatives with other states. They are aware of the fact that when they concentrate only on Turkey or when they give Turkey the priority to initiate and develop economic relations they narrow their possible economic benefits instead of enhancing it. They are much more interested in improving economic relations with the industrialized countries which they believe that they may gain more benefit from. When we take economic incapacities of Turkey into consideration we should admit that the economic relations which these republics would set up with industrialized countries may be more advantageous for them.

Compared to industrialized countries Turkey still represents more agriculture-based country which feels the need for foreign economic assistance strongly. Despite the fact that Turkey has been adapting itself to the requirements of free market economy after 1983, still there are shortcomings in economic field. Under these circumstances, Turkey is incapable of satisfying the economic demands of Central Asian republics. So, these republics are right to assume that one-sided economic relations with Turkey might foreclose their possible economic relations with other states.

### 3.b. Turkey’s Internal Political Limits in Cooperation Process

The Central Asian republics might support the idea that Turkey has some political and economic limits in cooperation process. The plasticity in internal politics and economic

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deficiencies of Turkey may all lead the Central Asian republics not to cooperate fully with Turkey.

As we all know, stable relations necessitate stable political process and stable economic development. But, on the contrary, Turkey goes under political changes very often. The decisions made by the political party in power related to the internal and foreign policy issues are subjected to be changed by the successor governments. The governments change so fast that the then political party in power is not able to see the political results of its period.

Although Turkey follows almost the same foreign policy strategy in Central Asia since the beginning of their independence, the mentioned political instability and plasticity in Turkey might lead the Central Asian republics to be much more careful about developing satisfactory relations with Turkey and prevents Turkey from following a determined/stable Central Asian policy.

### 3.c. Hesitation Toward the Cooperation with any “Big Brother”

The Central Asian states, like any state who gained independence newly, might be against cooperating fully with any state which might make them live under its political, economic or cultural influence. Since the experiences in the past, such as the role of Soviet Union as the “Big Brother”, resulted negatively, now they are more cautious toward the relations that might possibly end with cultural, political and economic domination.

Although the then Prime Minister, Süleyman Demirel, declared that it is beyond Turkey’s purpose to gain economic, political and cultural power in the region (Landau, 1995, p.222), the extremist political discourses realised by some political party leaders might have forced these republics to presume that Turkey might take the responsibility of a new “Big Brother” in the new “Great Game” through developing relations. In fact, particularly in the very first years of relations certain nationalistic and religious circles like pan-Turkish orientated Nationalist Action Party or Islamic orientated Welfare Party discussed about the setting up of a bloc or union of Turkic nations under Turkey’s leadership that eventually would become a powerful and prestigious political actor in forging the new international order. These political parties who advocated the mentioned policy differ only in their ideology while the former presents itself with its nationalistic ideology the latter emphasizes its religious ideology. (Kramer, 1996, p.114)

Despite the fact that Turkey has changed its rather fanatic foreign policy discourse toward the Central Asian republics and converted this discourse into more realistic style after 1992, the Central Asian republics still refrain from cooperating fully with Turkey.

### 3.d. Lack of Satisfactory Strategy Toward Central Asian Republics

Turkey has been in strategic chaos since it has started to set up relations with the Central Asian republics. Although Turkey decided to realise some policies and determined the target for the Central Asian region, the means to reach the target have always remained inadequate. In fact, the reason of the mentioned dissatisfactory policy is that Turkey does not define any specific cooperation area and develops rather multi dimensional cooperation plans. We come across this negative reality in the relations with Central Asian states. Since 1991 Turkey have initiated many attempts in the region but could not conclude these. For this reason, the promises given to the Central Asian republics could not be kept completely and this made the Central Asian republics disappointed about Turkey.

### 3.e. Lack of Knowledge

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It is widely held view that in order to establish healthy economic, political, military or social relations with any state it is inevitable to know this state's past and also its behaviour patterns towards the developments well. As mentioned before, the peoples of the Central Asian republics are Turkish origin, Turko-phone nations and belong to Islam religion. Despite these mutual points, we should admit that the historical knowledge related to the Central Asian republics is rather limited in Turkey. Taking the vital importance of social, cultural and political knowledge in reaching economic and political targets in the region into consideration, the academic circles should focus on the issue and Central Asian Institutes should be established at universities.

### 3.f. Russian Federation

As mentioned before, Russian Federation regards these newly-independent republics as the federative states living on the extension of former Soviet territory and economically, politically and socially dependent on it. In fact, the reality approves this assumption. These republics realise most of their foreign trade with the Russian Federation. The number of Russian minorities living in Central Asian republics is also rather high. Moreover, the number of the Russians on executive levels is increasing day by day since the capital of the educated people who would take over administration is below average in the mentioned republics. Furthermore, Central Asian republics which lived under social, political, economic and cultural influence of the Soviet Union for years, are not in favour of excluding the Russian factor and depending on the economic reasons they do not want the Russian Federation to isolate itself from the Central Asian region.

So, they are against any attempt that would antagonise Russian Federation. They are aware of the fact that pretty intensive economic, political, social and cultural cooperation with any other state which might downgrade the importance of the Russian Federation before them might bring disadvantages instead of advantages. This can be generalised for any country, not only for Turkey. For this reason, they are trying to be very cautious while they are setting up or developing any kind of relation/cooperation with any state except for the Russian Federation.

### 3.g. Lack of Western Support

It is quite obvious that Turkey is unable to cover the needs of the Central Asian republics through its available economic potential. In order to realise the planned relations with them, a kind of supplementary assistance is necessary. If Turkey provides Western support for these republics, the planned relations and cooperation process may work more properly.

However, especially the industrialized states do not want to make investment in the region assuming that the region is risky and they are not going to have advantages as a result of these investments. So, it is hardly possible to argue that a great deal of Western support has been realised in the region up to now. The negative outcome of the lack of Western support directly reflects itself on the relations between the Central Asian republics and Turkey. Turkey being rather inadequate to support these republics fully and these republics being keen on Western orientation particularly in terms of economic assistance, might prefer cooperating with the industrialized Western states to cooperating with Turkey.

### 3.h. Regional and Global Power Rivalry in the Region

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The existence of various states which would like to enlarge their sphere of influence in the region might also affect the level of the relations between Turkey and these republics. Due to the various policies that the external powers want to impose on these republics, Turkey can not perform its own policies in the region independently.

Despite the mentioned problems that prevent Turkey and the Central Asian republics from developing intensive cooperation with each other, Turkey represents some advantages for the Central Asian republics and the Central Asian region. These might include;

First of all, Turkey's existence in Central Asia is necessary against the fundamentalist countries which would like to take place in the newly-shaped perspective of the region. Iran, partly couraged by its cultural ties and the bottleneck in its economy, is quite effective in the region. Taking the Islamic awakening in the region after 1991s into account, we might argue that the influence of Iran in the region may bring about religious extremism among Central Asian peoples. So, Turkey with its secular state model, free market economy and pluralistic democracy (despite obvious handicaps in three of them) may be a kind of barrier against any probable Islamic exploitation to be realised by fundamentalist states in search of influence in the region.

Secondly, Turkey is necessary in the region to direct American support to the Central Asian republics. Compared to other states which are in the power rivalry in the region Turkey's ties with the U.S. are on the highest level. This close relationship with the U.S. might also be advantageous for the Central Asian republics. Although the U.S. is not taking place in the region actively but trying to control the region from a distance it would never accept the dominance of any hegemonic power on these republics. For this reason, Turkish influence in the region may be crucial for the Central Asian republics in gaining American economic support.

Thirdly, Turkey, among other regional actors, is the country which has integrated itself into Western economic and political institutions most. The mentioned point also represents an advantage for the Central Asian republics. Turkey, having close relations with the Western states, might help the Central Asian republics gain economic and political support necessary for their political (democratization, secular state and society) and economic (free market economy) developments through providing various channels of communication with the industrialized Western states.

Last but not the least; Turkey is necessary for the Central Asian republics which lack the rules, principles and institutions of secular state, pluralistic democracy and free market economy. Among the regional powers which intend to obtain advantages from Central Asia, only Turkey is secular, democratic and has established the rules of free market economy despite shortcomings. So, it is highly possible that Turkey might represent a model for these republics in state-building process and transition to free market economy.

## Conclusion

The emergence of Turkish interest in the Central Asian region began with the geopolitical changes appeared in the former Soviet South geopolitical area following the disintegration of the Soviet Union. After the disintegration five states in Central Asia declared their independence and began to develop foreign relations with the states outside the region. Encouraged by the mentioned changes Turkish decision-makers began to show interest toward the region and this resulted in the orientation of Turkey toward the Central Asian states which it abandoned since Bolshevik Revolution and establishment of Turkish Republic. Despite the mentioned motivating factors which encouraged Turkey to be more Central

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Asian-orientated, approximately two years later, Turkish decision-makers realised that policies adopted for the Central Asian region began to be ineffective due to some specific external and internal reasons. So, high hopes left their place to unreliability and disappointment.

Among the reasons which made Turkey's policies over the Central Asian region and Central Asian states ineffective, we regard lack of strategy development and scenario planning as the most important reasons. It can be argued that if Turkey had developed strategy models for the region and the states in the region and if she had planned some future scenarios in regard to them, all other reasons which made Turkey ineffective in the region would not have been very influential over Turkey's policies.

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