Kazak-Turkish Cooperation in the Field of Education
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Abstract
The Kazakh-Turkish relations since the very beginning were promising. In the first years of the independence, Kazakhstan’s prior aim was to be recognized by and to integrate into the world community. In this regard Turkey played indispensable role. “For the young states of Central Asia and Caucasus, close cooperation with Turkey first of all provided independency from Russia, the possibility of convergence with European institutions and the USA, and economic aid of Turkey and that of its Western allies as well.”† Beside the fact that Turkey supported Kazakhstan in all international organizations, it became a window of Kazakhstan to the world. As vice-minister of foreign affairs of Kazakhstan in 1990s Sailau Batirsha-uli put it “Kazakh elite had to understand that the world does not just consist of the Soviet Union. For that purpose they had to see abroad. But the problem was that the foreign language most of them could speak was only Russian. It was not so reasonable to send them to Europe or America. Here Turkey was good option as Turkish language was similar to Kazakh language.” ‡© 2014 Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).
Peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of CY-ICER 2014.

Keywords:

Introduction
Turkey was the first country to recognize Kazakhstan on 16 December of 1991 after half an hour it declared its independence. In fact Kazakh-Turkish direct relations started in October 1990 after Kazakhstan accepted ‘The Declaration on State Sovereignty of Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (KazSSR)’ which established “the supremacy of the Constitution and laws of the Kazakh SSR within its territory over the laws of the Union”§. Despite the fact that the Soviet Union was still in action, on the invitation of the Turkish President Turgut Özal, Nursultan Nazarbayev who was the First Secretary of the

1 Sailau Batirsha-uli’s interview to the author. 2.02.2012.
‡ The Declaration on State Sovereignty of Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic http://portal.mfa.kz/portal/page/portal/mfa/ru/content/policy/chronicle/02
‡ Ibid.
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Peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of CY-ICER 2014.
doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.07.385
Communist Party of Kazakh SSR at that time, visited Turkey. Nazarbayev then wrote “it was my first experience of conducting negotiations as a head of the sovereign state. Exactly during that visit we established the basis for further cooperation with Turkey.” On 15 December 1990 ‘Memorandum between the Government of KazSSR and the Government of Turkey was signed. On 15 May 1991 between KazSSR and Turkey “the Agreement on Cooperation” was signed, where parties expressed their wish for further widening and deepening of bilateral cooperation in political, trade-economic, scientific-technological, environmental, cultural, humanitarian, informational and other spheres on the long-term basis. On 16 May of 1992 Kazakhstan opened its embassy in Turkey which was its first embassy abroad. Moreover, Turkish embassy to Kazakhstan was the first embassy opened in Kazakhstan. “Turkish diplomat Argun Özpay was the first ambassador to present his letter of credence to President Nazarbayev.” Bilateral relations developed steadily and in 2009 reached the strategic partnership.

**Cooperation on education**

The cooperation in the field of education occupied upper place in the bilateral relations. Kazakhstan as new country had to modernize its education system, prepare qualified specialists and train competitive employees. From Turkey’s perspective, the aim of the Turkish foreign policy was to support the independence of newly emerged Turkic republics, build close relations with them, and help them to integrate into international system. To reach this aims a proper strategy was worked out. As Köksal Topton, the ministry of education of Turkey in 1990s expressed it “We decided that the strongest, the most durable and promising project would be investment in the field of education.” In other words, cooperation in education became the important instrument of Turkish foreign policy toward the region.

The word ‘cooperation’ is important in this context. Although we are analyzing educational policy of Turkey towards Kazakhstan, which means that the subject of the study is projects, initiatives, and aid made by Turkey, this policy cannot be successful without consent of the other part, in our case Kazakhstan. For that purpose, Turkish governments should be cautious not to harm bilateral relations as any change in political relations has potential to disrupt Turkish initiatives in the field of education. As twenty year experience showed, without cooperation of its partner-country, Turkey’s official institutions even non-official groups can do nothing. In this regard, Uzbekistan’s case is good example to illustrate how the deterioration of political relations could end all investments in that country including education. Accordingly, rather to speak of one-sided Turkish education policy towards the region, it is reasonable to define the subject as the bilateral cooperation in the field of education. On the other hand, a political relation by only itself does not mean anything. Political relations must be underpinned by economic, cultural and educational relations. For the bilateral relations to be more durable, the relations between peoples of two countries should be constructed. More people involved in bilateral relations, more the political relations are stable. Common values, common sense of identity are becoming more and more determinant in foreign policy.

In this context Turkey’s investment in education was correct strategy. Especially when we take into account the fact that though post-Soviet Turkic countries defined themselves as Turkic, brother nations to Turkey, they and particularly Kazakhstan were torn from their Turkic roots. The Tsarist Russian and Soviet assimilation policies forced Kazakh people to leave the orbit of Islamic-Turkic civilization and enter into the orbit of the Slavic-Russian culture. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan found itself in the identity crisis. To overcome this

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**Nursultan Nazarbayev, Na Paroge XXI veka , Atamura, Almaty, 2003, p. 194**


**K.K. Tokayev, Pod stygom nezavisemosti, Almaty, Bilim 1997, p. 509.**

**K. Tokayev, Svet i Ten’. Astana 2007, p. 199.**


*** Yüksel Kavak & Gülsün Atanur Baskan ‘Educational Policies and Applications of Turkey towards Turkic Republics and Communities’ Hacettepe Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi 20: 92 -103 [2001]**

†‡ The concept of ‘torn country’ which was applied by Samuel Huntington to Russia, Turkey, and Mexico can be also applied to Kazakhstan. See Samuel P. Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order, Simon & Schuster, New York 1996. Chinghiz Aitmatov’s concept ‘Mankurt’ was introduced to describe those Kazakhs who forgot not only their history, culture but especially language which is the main indicator of a certain identity. See Chinghiz Aitmatov, The day lasts more than a hundred years, Indiana University Press, 1983.
identity crisis Kazakhstan’s leadership welcomed foreign support which could help to reconstruct Kazakh nation’s Turkic and Islamic identity.

Kazakhstan supported all official and non-official initiatives of Turkey in the field of education. Even more, Kazakh leadership did not close down Turkish schools in the country, established by non-governmental organizations, whose aim said to be to train generation with pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic sentiments who can then disrupt constitutional system of the country. Further we will examine the interests, incentives and motifs behind the Turkish initiatives and elaborate main projects in the field of education.

Official initiatives

The Republic of Turkey was built on the ideology of Turkicness. While the Ottoman Empire was declining, Turkism alongside with Islamism and Westernism was proposed as consolidating ideology to rescue the country. The founders of the Republic embraced Turkism and Westernism, but abandoned Islamism. Although in the official level Turkicness was limited by Turkishness, i.e. citizen of the Republic of Turkey is defined as Turk, thus localizing ‘Turkicness’; in general understanding ‘Turkish’ conceived as Turkic, due to the fact that in modern Turkish language there is only one word ‘Türk’ which means both Turkish and Turkic. Because of this, the emergence of new Turkic states was perceived with great expectations. This new circumstance could end the loneliness of Turkey. In words of Samuel Huntington “Having rejected Mecca and then being rejected by Brussels, where does Turkey look? Tashkent may be the answer.” Thus the Turkish foreign policy towards Turkic world was analyzed as a tool which could resolve identity crisis of Turkey itself.

Turkey in official level built its relations with the new Turkic countries on the legacy of the Turkic civilization. Turkey acted as a big brother who could lead and protect Turkic world. Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) was established to support first of all Turkic Republics and communities. The revelations of this understanding in education are ‘Great Students Project’ and ‘the establishment common universities’ in our case ‘Hoca Ahmet Yesevi International Kazakh-Turkish University’.

Great Students Project

Turkey, since 1992-93 education year, in the basis of bilateral agreements with concerning countries, launched ‘Great Student Project’ which aimed to provide scholarship to 10 000 students from Turkic countries and to give them opportunity to study in Turkish universities. The aims of the project were to promote the level of education in Turkic Republics and Communities, to help to meet the need of qualified specialists, to bring up a generation friendly to Turkey, and build durable bridge of brotherhood and friendship in Turkic world. Although the amount of scholarship decreased from 8195 in 1993 to 1548 in 1998, Turkey despite all economic difficulties in the country did not stopped this project. The total number of students studied in Turkey till 2010 composed 27 383. Besides this project, there are dozens of students who come to Turkey by their own means. Until 2010 anyone who proves that he or she has Turkic origin was considered to be in equal terms with a citizen of the Republic of Turkey in payment of tuition fees. The Consulate of Turkic Republics and associations of Turkic communities provided this ‘certificate of Turkicness’ (Türklük Belgesi).

From Kazakhstan’s perspective, Turkish scholarships were considered as important opportunity to increase the level of education. Until 2011 Turkey was the country which provided the most number of scholarships for Kazakh citizens. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Education of Kazakhstan, until 2013 within the Great

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888 Ibid.
889 Ibid.

The statement of ex-minister of education of Turkey Nimet Çubukçu. ‘Büyük öğrenci projesi’ http://www.memurlar.net/haber/157356/
889 Turkey annually provides 125 scholarships. Russia, which until 2009 provided only 40 scholarships annually, increased it in 2010 to 96, and in 2011 to 145. Bilim jane Ğilim Salassındaği Halıقارалыq Intımaqtaştyq. Qazaqstan Respublikası Bilim jane Ğilim Ministrlıgı 2011.
Student Project, 954 Kazakh citizens graduated from Turkish universities and 504 citizens are still studying. These numbers only reflect those who graduated. However, there are many who came to Turkey to study and could not graduate the universities. Since 1992, 3150 Kazakh citizens studied in Turkey. The statistics show that only 30% of students finish their education.

Although Kazakhstan in 1993 launched its own program ‘Bolashak’ (Future) to train youth abroad, Turkey remained as one of the main destinations of Kazakh youth. Kazakhstan’s leadership did not restrict its citizen from studying abroad. In this regard, Turkey was preferred by Kazakh families with middle income. If we take into account that the idealist people in the history generally came from middle income families, most probably graduates from Turkish universities contribute a lot into the development of their country.

The general observation is that the Turkish graduates are patriots and nationalists. Many Kazakhs, who could not speak Kazakh language before they came to Turkey, learn it here because of the public pressure. In Kazakhstan not to speak in Kazakh is normal, but in Turkey where people perceive you as a brother with whom they share common origin and language, not to speak your mother tongue is a shame. Moreover in Turkish public there is constant flow of information that Kazakh people were exploited and assimilated by Russians and Soviets. All these circumstances make Kazakh youth rediscover its roots which are Turkic in fact. Generally speaking, ‘Great Student Project’ is contributing into strengthening of Kazakh identity.

Hoca Ahmet Yesevi International Kazakh-Turkish University

This university was established in Kazakhstan in accordance with the agreement between the Government of Kazakhstan and the Government of Turkey in 1992. Today university has 11 faculties and one high school where 16 000 students study, 4000 of whom are from Turkey, 750 are from other Turkic countries and communities, and the remains are Kazakh. Approximately 70 000 students graduated the university until 2013. The university is situated in town Turkistan (Yassı) in the south Kazakhstan where the tomb of Ahmet Yesevi, the great spiritual leader of Turkic world, is located. Turkistan was small, back-warded town during the Soviet period. Due to its ideological importance, intentionally very limited investment was made during that time.

From strategic point of view, common Kazakh-Turkish University would have been much more fruitful, if it had been established in intellectual centers like Almaty or Astana rather than in rural area, back-warded periphery. Nevertheless, although Turkish side had to build everything from zero, the names ‘Turkistan’ and ‘Ahmet Yesevi’ were very symbolic. From Kazakhstan’s perspective, it was in its interests to establish the university in Turkistan, because the coming investment to the university would develop the town and the region. On the other hand, the major cities of Kazakhstan were preoccupied by Russian culture, while in the periphery, Kazakh culture was predominant. So it would be easier for Turkish side to find common language and introduce their education. In addition, the South Kazakhstan is populated much more densely than other regions. In the final analysis, the establishment of the university in Tukistan helped not only to increase the level of the education but also to develop the most densely populated region of the country.

Non-official initiatives

Besides official institutions, Turkish non-governmental organizations also rushed the region to reconstruct Turkic and Islamic identities. There were two groups: Turkists and Islamists. While Turkists underlined Turkic solidarity, Islamists tried to revive religious values. Turkists were represented by the ‘Foundation of Turkic World Studies’ (Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Vakfı) and Islamists were represented by so called ‘Gülen Movement’. Both groups aimed to transform the society by educating youth. From this standpoint both have enlightening mission in what they sincerely believed.

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Kazakhstan’s agreements on international cooperation in the field of education and science

Bilateral Cooperation in the Field of Education and Science

Yüksel Kavak & Gülsün Atanur Baskan, ibid.

Kazakhstan’s agreements on international cooperation in the field of education and science

http://www.yesevi.edu.tr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1&Itemid=118


The difference between two is that Turkists explicitly pronounced that they work for the Turkic ideals as it was in parallel with the official rhetoric of Turkey. Islamists never explicitly stated that they have religious agenda. On the contrary, the net of schools of Gülen Movement use English as education language, teach natural sciences, and computer technologies. What they are doing is to bring up a generation who are aware of their religious and as well as national values, and at the same time who can understand the modern world. So the aim is to modernize the Kazakh community with the preservation of traditional values. In this sense, Gülen Movement resembles the Jadidist movement of nineteenth century led by Ismail Gaspirinski who aimed to modernize Turkic communities of Tsarist Russia. Unlike Islamists, Turkists “insisted on using Turkish as education language, despite the fact that the demand of the community was English.” In addition, while Turkists tried to replace Russian language with Turkish as lingua franca, Islamists did not hesitate to teach Russian in their schools. The Foundation of Turkic World Studies established two Turkology departments one in the Abay Kazakh State University, in Almaty, the other in the Korkut Ata State University, in Kızılorda. The foundation also has three schools, one in Kentaw, the second in Turkistan, and the third in Kızılorda. The Gülen Movement which established ‘Kazakh-Turkish Education Foundation’ (Kazak-Türk Eğitim Vakfı - KATEV) in 1997 has one university named after Süleyman Demirel, in Almaty, one Economic College, in Taraz, and 30 schools all over the country. Thus non-governmental organizations constitute important place in cooperation in the field of education between Kazakhstan and Turkey.

Conclusion
Viewed from Turkey, Turkish foreign policy toward Turkic world is seen as if Turkey entered the region with great expectations and returned with deep disappointments. However, viewed from Kazakhstan Turkey’s position in the region of Central Asia is strengthening. Especially when Kazakh-Turkish relations are analyzed, Kazakhstan became the most reliable strategic partner of Turkey in the region. In this context, the cooperation in the field of education constitutes the considerable part in the bilateral relations. Both governmental and non-governmental organizations of Turkey are contributing into the improvement of education level of Kazakhstan. The Kazakh leadership did not question the origins of the Turkish initiatives. Rather Kazakhstan pragmatically evaluates the Turkish initiatives according to the results of the established institutions. In spite of their ideological motives, Kazakhstan did not stopped cooperation with Turkey, as in the final analysis they helped to modernize its education system. From Turkish perspective no matter what are their origins, any Turkish project of education in Kazakhstan, strengthens its presence in the country. The outcome is that Kazakh-Turkish relations get more stable and stronger.

Ibid, p.832.
http://www.katev.kz/?p=content&cl=hakkimizda&i=8