

TURKISH PRESIDENT TURGUT ÖZAL'S IMPACT ON NURSULTAN NAZARBAYEV'S PERCEPTION OF TURKEY*

Nursultan Nazarbayev'in Türkiye Algısına Tugut Özal'ın Etkisi

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Abstract

Nursultan Nazarbayev as the founding President of Kazakhstan played a determinant role in the formation of Kazakh foreign policy. In this respect, the article examines Nazarbayev's perception of Turkey as a decision maker in foreign policy are based on observation rather than realities. Nazarbayev is aware of the fact that the national identity of Kazakhstan is divided between two competing poles; Russian and Kazakh, in a broader sense; Slavic and Turkic. From this perspective, Nazarbayev's perception of Turkey is significant as it is not only related to foreign policy but at the same time the national identity of Kazakhstan. The study argues that the President of Republic of Turkey of early 1990s Turgut Özal with his active diplomacy towards Kazakhstan contributed to the positive image of Turkey. The research concludes that close and reliable relations between Nazarbayev and Özal became the basis of a strategic partnership between Kazakhstan and Turkey.

Keywords: Turgut Özal, Nursultan Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Perception, National Identity

Özet

Kazakistan'ın kurucu Cumhurbaşkanı Nursultan Nazarbayev'in, Kazak dış politikasının oluşumunda belirleyici rol üstlendiği kesindir. Bu bağlamda, makale, Nazarbayev'in Türkiye algısını ele almaktadır. Çünkü inşacı ekolün iddiasına dış politika kararları gerçeklere değil algı üzerine alınmaktadır. Nazarbayev Kazakistan'ın ulusal kimliğinin Rus ve Kazak olarak, daha geniş kapsamda Slav ve Türk olarak yarışan iki kutba ayrıldığı farkındadır. Buradan hareketle, Nazarbayev'in Türkiye algısı, yalnızca dış politika açısından değil aynı zamanda Kazakistan'ın ulusal kimliği açısından da önemlidir. Çalışma, 1990'ların başında Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanı Turgut Özal'ın Kazakistan'a yönelik aktif diplomasi izlemesi Türkiye'nin olumlu imajına katkıda bulunduğunu savunmaktadır. Araştırmanın sonucuna göre, Nazarbayev ile Özal arasındaki yakın ve güvenilir ilişkiler Kazakistan ile Türkiye arasındaki stratejik ortaklığın temelini oluşturmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Turgut Özal, Nursultan Nazarbayev, Kazakistan, Türkiye, Algı, Ulusal Kimlik

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Introduction

There is no doubt that in the determination of Kazakhstan's view on Turkey and Turkish foreign policy, president Nursultan Nazarbayev has an enormous impact. Nazarbayev as the first president of the Kazakh nation is a constructor of Kazakhstan's national identity and at the same time the main architect of its foreign policy. Therefore, it is natural that his views are one of the important determinants of Kazakhstan's image of Turkey. Legally speaking, according to the Constitution of Kazakhstan, "The President of the Republic of Kazakhstan shall be the head of state, its highest official who determines the main directions of the domestic and foreign policy of the state."¹ So Nazarbayev's view on Turkey and his personal friendships with heads of states are very important in building bilateral relations. It will not be wrong to claim that in countries where the heads of states say the last word in decision-making, the level of relations between states is in ratio with relations between heads of states. In such conditions, the fact that how decision makers see the world in foreign policy formation is significant. Convergence in worldviews of decision makers determines the overlapping of state interests.

In this article, I will try to analyse Nursultan Nazarbayev's perception of Turkey. For this purpose, firstly I will examine his personal characteristics and his worldview. And then I will focus on relations between Turgut Özal and Nazarbayev and try to analyse how Nazarbayev perceives Turgut Özal, Turkey and Turkic World.

Nazarbayev's Factor in Kazakhstan's Perception of Turkey

Before we focus on Nazarbayev's role in the formation Kazakhstan's perception of Turkey, we should mention the national identity crisis of Kazakhstan. This problem was related to the demographic situation of the country. According to the data of 1989 population census, Kazakhstan's population was composed of ethnic Kazakhs, Uzbeks,

1 Article 40 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, http://www.kazakhstan.orexca.com/kazakhstan_constitution.shtml#3 Accessed on 7.08.2012

Uyghur, and Tatars who are Muslim Turkic people, as well as ethnic Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians who are Christian Slavic people. Kazakhstan's population in 1989 was 16,200,000 where Slavic people constituted 44% (ethnic Russians 37,8% of total population), and Turkic people composed about 45% (ethnic Kazakhs 39,7% of total population). Other ethnic groups like Germans, Koreans, Armenians, Kurds, and Greeks constituted about 10% of the total population.² The matter is that while the ethnic Kazakhs consider Kazakhstan as the continuation of Kazakh statehood which developed in the line of Hunnic Empire, Turkic Empires, Genghis Empire, the Golden Horde, and Kazakh Khanate but was interrupted by the Russian invasion and then the Soviet government. The Russians and Russified Kazakhs see the country as an artificial state engineered by the Soviet ideologists. Kazakhs and other Turkic-Muslim people consider Kazakhstan as part of the Turkic-Islamic world. While Russian and other Slavic Christian people perceive Kazakhstan as the extension of Russia. Under these circumstances, Turkey and the image of Turkey were evaluated by Nazarbayev as the balancing factor in the national identity issues. From this perspective, it is important to understand Nazarbayev's factor in the formation of Kazakhstan's perception of Turkey.

Interestingly, when I asked a bureaucrat working in the Administration of the President the question 'Who advises the president on Kazakhstani policy toward Turkey?', he said 'If the president had followed the advice on Turkey of people around him, today there would have been nothing as Kazakh-Turkish relations.'³ His answer shows that Nazarbayev plays a crucial role in the development of Kazakh-Turkish relations. The idea is that Kazakh-Turkish relations are developing despite the will of the ruling elite who is leaning toward Russia and against cooperation with Turkey. It is because the majority of Kazakh elite is alien to Kazakh culture thus alien to Turkic culture. Based on this, Turkey is perceived as 'the other' by the Kazakh elite while Russia is a home country whose culture and language represent

2 Qazaqstan Respublikasının Statistika jöinidegi Agenttigi (Agency on Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan), (2000) *Qazaqstan Respublikası Halqının Ultıq Quramı: Qazaqstan Respublikasındağı 1999 jılğı Halıq Sanağının Qoritındısı*. (National Composition of the Republic of Kazakhstan: Conclusion of the Population Census of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 1999) Almaty.

3 Interview with a bureaucrat from the Administration of the President Nazarbayev, 2.02.2012

their own culture and language.

Nazarbayev comparing with this Russified elite stands close to native Kazakh culture and language. As it is known Kazakhstan's population and elite as well, is divided as those who support Kazakhness and those who supported Kazakhstaniness. The most of bureaucrats and intellectuals who support the idea of Kazakhstani nation are far from the cultural values of Kazakh people and generally, cannot speak the Kazakh language. And those who support the idea of Kazakh nation are the representatives of Kazakh culture, literature, history and language and possess weak position in the decision-making process.

Nazarbayev who is the main architect of the idea of Kazakhstani nation, contrary to the expectation, is fluent in the Kazakh language, writes poems in Kazakh, plays dombra, and sings Kazakh songs. Nazarbayev is aware of the sensitiveness of both Kazakhs and non-Kazakhs. As defined by Olcott, proving himself to be a skilled politician, Nazarbayev was able to bridge the gap between the republic's two major nationalities.⁴ That is why Dugin described Nazarbayev as a Kazakh who revived the culture of his people and restored Kazakh statehood and independence, and at the same time as a Russian who internalised Russian culture, Russian science, and Russian and Soviet labour ethics.⁵ A similar view was expressed by Mikhail Gorbachev "Never forget that Nazarbayev is a man of two cultures. He is both Russian and Asian in his roots and outlook."⁶

Nazarbayev was born and grew up in the village,⁷ while "the majority of Kazak intellectuals today are either the first or second generation of their family to have been born and brought up in the city."⁸ In addition, he was born in south-eastern Kazakhstan, which was the last

4 Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, Second Edition, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford 1995, p. 259.

5 Akeksand Dugin, *Nursultan Nazarbayev'in Avrasya Misyonu*, Çeviren Lazzat Urakova ve Mehriban Gençkal, Yeni Avrasya Yayınlar, Ankara, 2006 p. XI.

6 Jonathan Aitken, *Nazarbayev and the Making of Kazakhstan*, Continuum, New York 2009, p. 247.

7 A. P. Zhitnukhin, *Nursultan Nazarbayev: Bez Pravykh i Levykh, Stranitsy avtobiografii, razmysleniya, pozitsii...*, Molodaya Gvardiya, Moskva 1991, p. 11.

8 Karen Odgaard and Jens Simonsen, "The New Kazak Elite", in Ingvar Svanberg (ed.) *Contemporary Kazaks: Cultural and Social Perspectives*, Curzon, Surrey, 1999, p. 19.

part colonised by the Russian Empire. Comparing with the northern part of the country south and south-eastern part preserved Kazakh culture and language.

Nazarbayev studied in a school where the education language was Kazakh. Even in 1956 when his school was closed due to a small number of pupils, he moved to a larger school. What motivated him was not fears of linguistic inadequacy but was “his deep-seated feeling of identity with his Kazakh roots and heritage.”⁹

When we compare the city with the village, the city represents Russian culture; and villages, or *awıl* as Kazakhs say, represents Kazakh culture. As it is also noticed by some authors “In contrast to the Russian-influenced towns, the rural areas became regarded as places where Kazak traditions had lain dormant in their original form.”¹⁰ Nazarbayev himself notes that “Kazakh *awıl* always remained the source of potential national revival and marker of national identity.”¹¹ Beginning from 1990 the number of bureaucrats recruited from urban places is increasing while the number of bureaucrats recruited from rural areas is constantly decreasing.¹² In 1994 bureaucrats from towns composed 36,3% of the elite, in 2002 it reached 57,8%.¹³

The other issue which makes Nazarbayev distinct than other elites is his age. He was born in 1940. Generally, people who were born in the 40s, compared with those who were born in 50s and 60s, are aware of Kazakh traditions, culture and worldview. It is because in 1940s people who witnessed pre-Soviet Kazakh culture were alive. After the Second World War, the Soviet Union became a superpower and further consolidated its population, the policy of Sovietization was accelerated. The people who were born in the 1950s and 60s, lived in the brightest period of the Soviet Union, which led to internalisation of the Soviet identity.

9 Jonathan Aitken, *Nazarbayev and the Making of Kazakhstan*, Continuum, New York 2009, p. 14.

10 Karen Odgaard and Jens Simonsen, “The New Kazak Elite”, p.23.

11 N. A. Nazarbayev, *V Potoke Istorii*, p. 237.

12 Sally N. Cummings, *Kazakhstan: Power and Elite*, I.B. Tauris, New York 2005, p. 68.

13 Zhumagul Saadanbekov, *Nursultan Nazarbayev: Zakony Liderstva*, Kültegin, Astana 2005, p. 337.

Sally Cummings by analysing age of Kazakh elite concludes that the average age of the elite is lower than that of heads of governments worldwide. He underlines that the youngest tend to be concentrated in the presidential administration and economic agencies, the eldest in the parliament.¹⁴ Saadanbekov by referring to the president of the Agency of State Service of Kazakhstan says that while the capital city moved from Almaty to Astana only 50% of bureaucrats followed Nazarbayev. It is obvious that the eldest people who did not want to leave their comfort stayed in Almaty.¹⁵

In this way, the birth place and time that is his childhood during which the character of Nazarbayev formed have important implications for decision making. It is obvious that Nazarbayev's own personal identity reflects the national identity of Kazakhstan. He represents both sides of the population. His projects like Kazakhstani nation and Eurasianism were introduced in order to prevent the country's dissolution into two poles. Keeping in mind both the personal identity of Nazarbayev and national identity of Kazakhstan now we can turn to the main topic.

Concerning Nazarbayev's image of Turkey, in one word we can say that although as many other Kazakhs he was aware that Turks share common culture and language, nevertheless, his image of Turkey was not different than that which was indoctrinated according to the official ideology. Turkey, as a country which was in the western bloc during the Cold War and as a NATO member, had an enemy image in the Soviet Union. Besides, it was generally described as backwards country. But with the end of the Cold War, all these perceptions began to change. It is worth to mention here that the active foreign policy of Turkish President Turgut Özal was determinant. Therefore, the relations between Nazarbayev and Özal are important to understanding Kazakhstan's perception of Turkey.

14 Sally N. Cummings, *Kazakhstan: Power and Elite*, I.B. Tauris, New York 2005, p. 59

15 Zhumagul Saadanbekov, *Nursultan Nazarbayev: Zakony Liderstva*, Kültegin, Astana 2005, p. 334.

The First Interactions between Turgut Özal and Nazarbayev

The change of the negative image of Turkey to the positive one was realised when Nazarbayev visited Turkey on the invitation of the Turkish president Turgut Özal in October 1990. It is important to note that this was the first visit of Nazarbayev to a foreign country as the head of sovereign state.¹⁶ The matter is that the visit took place just after Kazakhstan released the Declaration on State Sovereignty of Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic on 25 October 1990. As it would be in the case of independence a year later, the invitation of Turgut Özal was perceived as a strong signal to recognise Kazakhstan's statehood. Nazarbayev indicates that although the Soviet Union still existed, he was welcomed according to the protocol of the head of state.¹⁷ These kinds of signals are generally given to show that the guest is highly respected by the host. If we take into account that this was the first visit of Nazarbayev to Turkey the value of the respect is well understood. Here we should underline the personal role of Turgut Özal. His initiatives, charisma and decisiveness contributed a lot to the formation of a favourable image of Turkey in the mind of Nazarbayev. It means that personal relations between leaders of states can play a significant role in bilateral relations.

Nursultan Nazarbayev confesses “of course I was impressed with the real life in Turkey, with the progressive development of its economy and community. It was contrary to the official perception about this country in the USSR.”¹⁸ This statement means that the previous image of Nazarbayev on Turkey is replaced by a new one. Nazarbayev was not only impressed by the warm welcome of President Özal, but also with the real conditions in Turkey. This positive image of Turkey led to close cooperation between two countries. As Nazarbayev would later recall, “Exactly during that visit we cast the basis of further interaction with Turkey.”¹⁹

16 Nursultan Nazarbayev, *Na Paroge XXI veka*, Atamura, Almaty 2003, p. 193.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid., p. 194.

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

In 1991 when the dissolution of the Soviet Union was still out of the discussion, Nazarbayev while answering Russian journalist's question "Don't you think that foreign political and state leaders are too much interested in you and your position as the President of Kazakhstan? If it is so, how do you explain such phenomena?" having noted that the leaders of several foreign states are interested in Kazakhstan because they want to see Kazakhstan as stable, democratic state with strong economy which develops according to the way which is followed by the whole civilized world, stated that in his foreign visits and international conferences he has no ambitious aspirations. What is important for me, he said, is to find mutually beneficial ways of cooperation in order to improve the lives of people by the effective transition of our economy to market relations. Nazarbayev gives examples of his visit to USA and Korea. Then by underlining Turkish president Turgut Özal's visit to Kazakhstan, he states:

It is important to note that the people of Turkey and Kazakhstan have common historical and cultural roots, and traditions. By the way, there is a large minority of Kazakhs living in Turkey. They are also definitely interested in the revival of the cultural and economic relations with Kazakhstan. But of course, foreign businessmen are interested in our country due to the stable condition, the rich natural resources, and the firmness in transition to market economy.²⁰

In this way, Nazarbayev is saying that it is normal to develop cooperation with foreign countries and it is especially necessary when there is Kazakh community in that country.

The first official visit of Nazarbayev to Turkey was realised on 25 September 1991.²¹ This visit took place after the unsuccessful attempt of coup d'état in Moscow in August which accelerated the dissolution of the USSR. So, this visit, as compared with the first visit in October 1990, passed in more free and confident atmosphere. In addition, Turgut Özal until this time had already visited Almaty in March 1991,

20 A. P. Zhitnukhin, *Nursultan Nazarbayev: Bez Pravykh i Levykh, Stranitsy avtobiografii, razmyshleniya, pozitsii...*, Molodaya Gvardiya, Moskva 1991, p. 229.

21 Abdulvahap Kara, *Turgut Özal ve Türk Dünyası: Türkiye – Türk Cumhuriyetleri İlişkileri 1983-1993*, IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, İstanbul 2012, p. 144.

therefore some friendship and certain common language had already emerged between two leaders.

From the perspective of a new country, visits of foreign leaders and visits to foreign countries are always evaluated as the factor of strengthening of legitimacy and sovereignty of the new subject of international politics. During this period, the Soviet Union has already collapsed and most of the Soviet Republics including the Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan had declared their independence. But Kazakhstan was the last republic to declare its independence due to several factors such as the long seven thousand kilometre border with Russia and the large Russian population in the country. Kazakhstan almost declared its independence after the official dissolution of the USSR on 8 December 1991. Nevertheless, while Turkey did not hurry to recognise the independences of other Turkic countries, Ankara was the first to recognise Kazakhstan's independence declared on 16 December 1991.

In the recognition of Kazakhstan by Turkey no doubt Turgut Özal played crucial role. Within the domestic politics of Turkey Özal introduced new discourses as 'Turkic World from Adriatic to Chinese Wall' and '21st century will be the era of Turks'.²² These sayings display the euphoria prevailed in Turkey. Generally, the disintegration of the Soviet Union was perceived by Turkish politicians as a new chance given to Turks. As the reflection of this understanding Turkey became active player in the post-Soviet space.

To return to the first official visit of Nazarbayev to Turkey, during the visit Özal himself went to the Esenboga Airport of Ankara to welcome his honourable guest. Moreover, Özal provided an audio cassette with Kazakh songs through Kazakhs in Turkey and made a surprise to Nazarbayev when they got into the car. Nazarbayev exclaimed: 'I thought I arrived at Ankara. But I am as if in Almaty.' Özal as an answer said: "of course, this is your country, you are not in the foreign

22 Mehmet Seyfettin Erol, "Avrasyacılıktan Türk Avrasyasına: Türk Dünyasının Değişen Jeopolitiği", Mehmet Seyfettin Erol, Yavuz Güler (der.), *TÜRKSAV Türk Dünyası 25 Yılığ: Tahliller, Değerlendirmeler, Öngörüler, Özeleştireler*, Akçağ, Ankara 2016, p. 199.

country, you are in your home country.”²³ This kind of gesture contributed to the friendship between Nazarbayev and Özal and then to deepening of Kazakh-Turkish relations.

Interestingly, during this period from Kazakhstan's perspective, there was Russia and its emerging leader Yeltsin who considered Central Asia as a burden to its economy and tried to distance itself from this region. On the other side, there was Turkey and its leader Özal who considered Central Asia as an opportunity and tried to utilise every possibility to develop its relations with the region. Under these circumstances, even for Nazarbayev, who was against the collapse of the Soviet Union and struggled until the last moment, and in fact still is struggling to hold the Soviet republics together, Turkey's support to his young nation in these anarchic international relations, which was not familiar with him, was indispensable. Nazarbayev well understood and valued this warm support of the brother nation.

In the final analysis, the first interaction between leaders is always important. Especially when we consider a new country which needs recognition of its sovereignty and support, the first interaction becomes twice important. Turgut Özal's personal interest and support of Kazakhstan became the basis of close relations between Nazarbayev and Turkish presidents and thus between Kazakhstan and Turkey.

Nazarbayev's Perception of Turkey

When we examine Nazarbayev's personal view on Turkey, it is easy to notice a special place of Turkey in his mind. It is because of Turkey as a semi-periphery country, in Wallerstein terms, has successfully passed economic reforms which Kazakhstan was about to start. To learn from Turkey, which is cultural, geographically and economically close to Kazakhstan, is easier and more fruitful than to learn from the Western developed countries. In a comparison of the Western model of development with Eastern one, Nazarbayev noted on 16 December 1991:

“I have to say that our orientation toward East is not

23 Ibid., p. 146.

only due to the geographical location of the country, ethnic closeness and common culture, though they possess underestimated the importance, but due to the condition that the market experiences of these countries are applicable for us. Our problems for them are much clearer than let's say for high developed countries of the West. Contacts with China, Turkey, Korea and Singapore even today are giving results."²⁴

That is why in his very first book published in 1992 *In the Way of Freedom and Democracy* he emphasises the important place of Turkey and President Turgut Özal in the economic and political reforms of Kazakhstan.²⁵ This is the explicit reference to so called Turkish model which was on agenda of post-Soviet Turkic states in early 1990s.²⁶ It seems that Turkish statesman really understood conditions of the new post-Soviet republics. For example, Turgut Özal in his address to the Kazakh parliament having noted that Turkish people view the reforms being realised in sovereign Kazakhstan with understanding made emphasis on stability by stating "We are especially pleased that there is stability in your country. This condition gives the opportunity to build a real democratic society and clearly defined market economy."²⁷

Nevertheless, concerning Turkish model, it must be noted that for Kazakhstan it was considered as one of the models among others. As it was discussed earlier, Kazakhstan defined itself as a Eurasian country with its own way of development which combines Western, Eastern Asian, Russian and Turkish models of development.²⁸

There is no doubt that Nazarbayev was impressed by Turgut Özal's economic reforms, but before that as the '*Elbası (il başı) – Father of Nation*' who played the crucial role in the establishment of the Re-

24 Quoted in R.M. Kaliev, *Respublika Kazakistan i Sovremenniy Mir* (the Republic of Kazakhstan and Modern World), Elorda, Astana 2000, p. 120.

25 Nursultan Nazarbayev, *Özgürlük ve Demokrasi Yolunda: Otobiyografi, Demeçler, Görüşler, Amaçlar*, Hotama Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul 1992, p. 234.

26 Mehmet Seyfettin Erol, "20. Yıldönümünde Türkiye-Türk Dünyası: Sorunlar, Arayışlar ve Gelecek", *TÜRKSAV Türk Dünyası 20 Yıllığı: Tahliller, Değerlendirmeler, Öngörüler, Özeleştiriler*, BS, İstanbul 2011, p. 44.

27 'Qazaqstan – Türkiya: Dostuğımız bekiy tüsedı', *Halıq Kenesi N69, 10 Sawır, 1993 j.*

28 *Kazakhstan Strategy 2030.*

public of Kazakhstan, he was impressed by the dare reforms of the founder of the Republic of Turkey Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. He doesn't hide his admiration: "I respect Mustafa Kemal Atatürk very much and appreciate him. When my country gained its independence, one of the first books I read was about Atatürk's life and his reforms. We made a statue for this great person in one of the most beautiful places in Astana."²⁹

During the opening ceremony of this statue, Nazarbayev emphasised that nobody must be annoyed that in Astana there is a statue of Atatürk who was the founder of a strong Turkey in the region after Ottoman Empire.³⁰ In his book, *Kazakhstan's Way* Nazarbayev writes 'When we started building our country, I have read carefully biographies of many persons who founded their country. They are the first president of Turkish Republic Kemal Atatürk, 31st president of the USA Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "father of Chinese reforms" Deng Xiaoping, Malaysian ex-prime-minister Mohathir Mohammad.'³¹ In his another book dedicated to the new capital of Kazakhstan Astana *In the Heart of Eurasia*, he made reference to the experience of Turkey when 'General of Turkish Army Mustafa Kemal Atatürk moved the Capital city in 1923 from Istanbul which was the Capital of Ottoman Empire to Ankara which was the centre of national liberation movement against Entente forces. Then it became the capital of dynamically developing Turkey'.³² No doubt that Turkish modernization was considered by Nazarbayev as one of the options. Nazarbayev underlined that the experience of Turkey in democratisation and economic and social development is an example for Kazakhstan.³³

To sum up, Turkey was always a source of inspiration for any new emerging nation in the Islamic world. Kazakhstan was not an exception from this. Nazarbayev as the founding leader of the new nation tried to imitate and learn from Turkish leaders such as Kemal Atatürk.

29 Erdal Şafak "Astana'da Atatürk Anıtı", *Sabah Gazetesi*, 19 Ekim 2009.

30 *Atayurt Dergisi* Kış 2010, Sayı 3.

31 N. Nazarbayev, *Qazaqstan jolı*, Qarağandı 2006, p. 11

32 N. Nazarbayev, *Ewraziya jüreginde*, p. 38.

33 'Speech of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev during the visit of the President of Turkish Republic Turgut Özal', 1993, quoted from Prof.Dr. Mehmet Saray, *Türk Devletlerinde Parlamento, Demokrasi ve Atatürk*, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, Ankara 2008, p.114.

In terms of economic and political reforms, Turgut Özal was an important figure for Nazarbayev. Thus, the Turkish model which was on the agenda in the early nineties was considered by Nazarbayev as one of the significant options.

Nazarbayev's Perception of Turgut Özal

To come back to Nazarbayev's relations with Turgut Özal, Nazarbayev writes that he knew a lot about Turgut Özal's reforms which raised Turkish economy from the collapse. Nazarbayev shares the view that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk created Turkey as a modern state, and Turgut Özal made it modern in an economic sense.³⁴ As the first president of Kazakhstan and its reformer Nazarbayev learnt both from former and latter.

Nazarbayev reminds that Turkey under Özal leadership launched reforms to build the economy of free market through privatisation, openness, and state regulation of economic processes. He notes that after Özal privatised small and middle enterprises, all these enterprises became rentable, the effectiveness of production increased and conditions of workers improved. Nazarbayev also mentions his policy of drawing foreign investment, the policy of making Turkish lira convertible, his struggle with the black market and first free economic zones.³⁵ In fact, all these reforms and policies were applied by Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan. Both as admiration and wish for Kazakhstan he underlines "Turkish businessmen and entrepreneurs became self-confident and began to believe in their ability to compete with the West."³⁶ This is an important point which confirms that for Nazarbayev the economic success of Turkey constituted a model of economic development.

When we come to political issues, some sort of misperception and misunderstanding can be observed between Nazarbayev and Özal. Nazarbayev's misperception of Turkey occurred in the first summit of Turkic states organised in Ankara in 1992. The matter is that Kazakh leader refused to sign the declaration prepared by Turkish side which

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

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

stated: “we move in the direction of integration with Turkey due to our common historical roots, commonality of culture and language, and mentality.”³⁷ I think the term ‘integration’ was misunderstood as ‘union as if uniting with Turkey’. The reason is that Nazarbayev misperceived Özal as Turanist. He notes that Özal’s visits to Central Asian states were not only related to the necessity of building good relations with new states but for certain extent was related with the wish to realise the idea of Kemal Atatürk, to form a strong union of Turkic states. “He was the follower of Pan-Turkism, the idea of great Turkey, which will unite whole Turkic world from Baikal to the Mediterranean Sea and Dunai.”³⁸ Within the Turkish domestic politics, Turgut Özal did not represent pan-Turkist groups. Nevertheless, his support of new Turkic states and his discourse of Turkic world and Turkic integration convinced Nazarbayev that Özal was a devotee of pan-Turkist ideas. Even today in proactive Turkish foreign policy towards Turkic World and other regions is associated with Özal.³⁹

After the summit, Nazarbayev stated, “Kazakhstan is and I am personally as the president elected by the Kazakhstani people absolutely sure that if we establish different association on the ethnic, cultural or political level, then not only make peoples of our states converge but make them more diverse from each other.”⁴⁰ This statement means that Nazarbayev was against the politicisation of Turkic civilisation. On the other hand, he was cautious about Russian reaction to the hasty convergence of Kazakhstan with Turkey. In other words, Nazarbayev preferred more balanced and evolutionary convergence with Turkey.

Another statement in the declaration to which Nazarbayev was against, was the sentence that ‘in the summit, the situations in Karabag, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Bosnia, and Cyprus were discussed.’⁴¹ Obviously, Nazarbayev tried to avoid any statements which have the possibility to contradict with Russian interests. Another explanation can

37 Ibid., p. 195.

38 Ibid., p. 196.

39 Mehmet Seyfettin Erol, “11 Eylül Sonrası Türk Dış Politikasında Vizyon Arayışları ve “Dört Tarz-ı Siyaset”, *Gazi Akademik Bakış, Cilt 1, Sayı 1 Kış 2007*, p. 37.

40 “Ankarskaya deklaratsiya – za mir i sotrudnichestvo v regione”, *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda No.253, 3 Noyabrya 1992 goda*.

41 Abudlvahap Kara, *Turgut Özal ve Türk Dünyası: Türkiye – Türk Cumhuriyetleri İlişkileri 1983-1993*, IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, İstanbul 2012, p. 212.

be that to sign such declaration can be understood as taking sides in the mentioned conflicts. After the summit in the press conference, Nazarbayev stated concerning Karabagh problem in which Kazakhstan tried to be mediator “We listen to both Armenians and Azerbaijanis. The scientific approach is necessary. It should not turn into a war of militants. The conflict doesn’t necessitate the solidarity of Turks. The third part should not interfere into the conflict. It must be resolved by the dialogue of two sides.”⁴²

As Turgut Özal was perceived by Nazarbayev as a Turanist, the word ‘integration’ in the declaration meant for him “the abandonment of just gained independence, cutting the traditional ties with neighbors (i.e. Russia – D.A.), taking in our shoulders another ‘big brother’ in place of just got rid of ‘big brother’.”⁴³ Nazarbayev instead of “integration” proposed “economic, humanitarian, and political cooperation” and “to reconstruct torn relations in civilised way, by respecting just gained independence and sovereignty of each state.”⁴⁴

Nazarbayev concludes his thoughts about Özal that he understood that we needed exactly this kind of relations: equality, friendship, mutually beneficial relations.⁴⁵ Maybe because of this emphasis on rationality Kazakh-Turkish relations did not experience ups and downs and developed steadily. The proverb in Kazakhs which says: ‘to say thin and to find fat (about sheep)’. It means a low expectation leads to a high discovery, or on the country, high expectation leads to disappointment. Nazarbayev was against the sentimental revolutionary development of relations, he was for the rational evolutionary development of relations. The fact that the term ‘integration of Turkic states’ was ironically coined by Nazarbayev in mid-2000s shows that he chose the right tone of approach. Shirin Akiner indicates that Nazarbayev understood the potential of the Turkic World.⁴⁶ A correct assessment would be that Nazarbayev understood the potential in the early 1990s, but

42 “Ege’den Çin’e Türk Birliği” Tercüman, 2.11.1992. quoted in Abudlvahap Kara, *Turgut Özal ve Türk Dünyası: Türkiye – Türk Cumhuriyetleri İlişkileri 1983-1993*, IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, İstanbul 2012, p. 214.

43 Nursultan Nazarbayev, *Yüzyıllar Kavşağında*, Ankara 2012, p. 217.

44 Ibid., p. 197.

45 Ibid.

46 Shirin Akiner, “Evolution of Kazakhstan’s Foreign Policy: 1991-2011”, in *Journal of Central Asian and Caucasian Studies* No:6, USAK, 2011 p. 10.

time was needed to pronounce and realise its potential. When we analyse the acceleration of institutionalisation of integration within Turkic states after Nakhchivan summit of 2009, where Nazarbayev acted as the main supporter of these projects, then it is apparent that Nazarbayev's views on Turkic world coincide with that of late Turgut Özal.

Nazarbayev's Perception of Turkic World

In relation to Nazarbayev's perception of Turkey, it is reasonable to look to his perception of the Turkic world as well. Turkey as the country which was built on Turkic (Turkish) identity was the main power of the Turkic world. In fact, Turkic identities of the new post-Soviet Muslim states are closely related to the Turkey's activism and emphasis on common Turkic civilisation. One can argue that Turkey played the role of an accelerator of Turkic identities of the new states. In other words, it is due to the Turkey's discourse of Turkic world, the new states of the region internalised the Turkic dimension of their identities.

In Kazakhstan's case, Turkic features represent one part of its identity besides the Russian. This Turkic-Slavic/Kazakh-Russian identity of the country was defined by Nazarbayev as Eurasian. To define Nazarbayev's Eurasian discourse in brief, for him Eurasianism means Slavic-Turkic synthesis. In foreign policy, this idea of Eurasianism constitutes the basis of the multi-vector foreign policy of Kazakhstan. Both in domestic politics and foreign policy Nazarbayev's Eurasianism serves to prevent the crises of national identity the country.

From this perspective, Nazarbayev bases his policy towards Turkey and Central Asian states on the place of the Turkic world in Eurasian continent. As it is known, the Turkic world was always a linking bridge between people and cultures. Nazarbayev writes "when I call to realise our common cultural-historical destiny, I don't mean breaking away and isolation from other cultural poles... Exactly this Turkic-Islamic world will become the bridge which will enrich cultures of the peoples of the following civilisation systems: a) West; b) Arabic-Ira-

nian world; c) Russia; d) China.⁴⁷ According to Nazarbayev, Turkic people acting as a single entity can affect the geopolitics of the region as an equal subject, not as a passive element.⁴⁸

This strategy was formed and pronounced in the first Turkic summit. In his speech in the summit, Nazarbayev stated that “The historical cooperation of people does not necessitate the isolation and partition on the basis of brotherhood bonds.” Further, he elaborates this statement: “Turkic people since ancient times tried to create their history together with other ethnos and people united with the destiny. We have been living for centuries together with all humankind who were born and developed in Asia, our Great Mother.”⁴⁹ In short, there is an implicit reference to the Eurasian identity of Kazakhstan who has close relations with Russia. Nazarbayev warns that in his cooperation with the Turkic world, he should take into account the reality of Russia. Indeed, none of the Turkic states represented in the summit has so much dependence on Russia as Kazakhstan.

On the other hand, in the mind of Nazarbayev Turkic world was a component part of Asia. As it is known just before the Turkic summit in 1992 Nazarbayev in his speech in 47 Session of General Assembly of the United Nations pronounced to establish Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA). He reiterated this proposition in the Turkic Summit. Nazarbayev made emphasis on the phrase “Turkic portion of Asian garden”. In his interview with a journalist after the second Turkic summit in 1994 in Istanbul, Nazarbayev clarifies his interests in Turkic summits as follows:

“First of all, I consider the Istanbul meeting in the context of my idea of gathering Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia. This is the only reason. All meetings, regional contacts which contribute to the realisation of this idea, and as you know all participants

47 N.A. Nazarbayev, *V potoke istorii*, Atamura, Almaty 2003, p. 112.

48 Ibid., p. 114.

49 “Kazakistan Cumhuriyeti Devlet Başkanı Nursultan Nazarbayev’in Türk Dili Konuşan Ülkeler Devlet Başkanları Zirvesinde yaptığı konuşma 30 Ekim 1992, Ankara”, in *Kazakistan-Türkiye Dostluk ve İşbirliğinin 20 Yılı*, Kazakistan Cumhuriyeti Ankara Büyükelçiliği, 2012, p. 55.

of Istanbul summit are members of the Conference, for me have prior meaning. That is why I attend this kind of regional activities."⁵⁰

To come back to the first summit, in his speech Nazarbayev mentions about four models of actions for Turkic states. The first model is to develop convergence of people without hesitation. In the first model, the priority is given to culture and economy. In the words of Kazakh president "We will not try to put our interaction into the political frame, this process will continue on its natural way." The outcome will be the emergence of a general Turkic market. The second model discussed by Nazarbayev is to search for more coordinated methods of economic and political cooperation for the interests of Turkic people. This model means institutionalisation of relations. The outcome will be the emergence of an international organisation. The third model aims to create the regional institution which is larger than the Turkic realm. In other words, it means to extend the Turkic realm in the Asian garden. The fourth model is to build peace, stability and security in the whole Asian continent. The first step in this direction is Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia. Nazarbayev says that "The fourth model comparing with others has its advantages. Maybe this path will not give results immediately. However, it covers our interests, interest of people living with us together, and interests of all our neighbours in the Asian continent."⁵¹ It is apparent that Nazarbayev is trying to make stress on Asianness rather than on Turkicness.

In conclusion having noted that the decisions of Turkic leaders can be misinterpreted by others, Nazarbayev proposes to conclude another document, besides common declaration, as an address to Eurasian states and peoples inviting them to peace. He states that "The document will be an evidence of our wish to peace."⁵² Nazarbayev in his interview to a Turkish journalist during the Turkic summit stated:

50 Irina Bektiyarova, "Interview with Nursultan Nazarbayev", *Ponorama*, No.41, 22 Oktyabrya 1994 goda.

51 "Kazakistan Cumhuriyeti Devlet Başkanı Nursultan Nazarbayev'in Türk Dili Konuşan Ülkeler Devlet Başkanları Zirvesinde yaptığı konuşma 30 Ekim 1992, Ankara", in *Kazakistan-Türkiye Dostluk ve İşbirliğinin 20 Yılı*, Kazakistan Cumhuriyeti Ankara Büyükelçiliği, 2012, pp. 56-58.

52 Ibid., p. 59.

If Timur and Bayazid had not fought against each other, the history would have been different today. So now we have to institutionalise the feelings of brotherhood and cooperation in such way that it would hug all Asian nations. For that purpose, I propose Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia.⁵³

Despite all handicaps of the first summit, the meeting can be considered as successful. The most important point of the Ankara declaration was that the leaders expressed their firmness to meet in a constant way, so this first summit was beginning of the series of Turkic summits.⁵⁴ These summits strengthened the notion of the Turkic world. All the countries who were represented at the summit confirmed their Turkic identities. In Kazakhstan's case, Turkic identity is balancing the Russian identity in the country while Kazakhstan's relations with Turkey and Turkic world balances Russian influence in the country.

Conclusion

To conclude Nazarbayev's thoughts about Özal, he says that "As a person who knew Özal very closely, I can say that he was charismatic, he could create the atmosphere of trust. He was a politician with deep knowledge, wise and humane."⁵⁵ Regarding Özal's death, Nazarbayev notes that his death indicated the end of one of the important phases of the Turkish history. "Turgut Özal as the architect of 'Turkish miracle', the follower of the free development of the economy, real brave reformer was a worldwide recognised leader."⁵⁶ Nazarbayev highly evaluates Özal's foreign policy understanding. According to him:

Turgut Özal was well-known as a great politician in foreign affairs. After Turkish political relations with the countries of Near and the Middle East, and countries of the former East bloc, and then with newly independent states warmed, the measures to establish the basis

53 Taha Akyol, "Tarihi Dönemeç", *Milliyet*, 1.11.1992. Quoted in Abudlvahap Kara, *Turgut Özal ve Türk Dünyası: Türkiye – Türk Cumhuriyetleri İlişkileri 1983-1993*, IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, İstanbul 2012, p.215.

54 http://www.turkkon.org/docs/10_AnkaraBildirisi1992_1.DevletBaskanlariZirveBildirisi.pdf Accessed on 7.10.2013

55 Nursultan Nazarbayev, *Na Paroge XXI veka*, Atamura, Almaty 2003, p. 198.

56 Ibid.

of economic cooperation were taken.⁵⁷

In the final analysis, it is this economic dimension of foreign policy that was the common point of the two leaders. Both Nazarbayev and Özal give priority to the economy. Özal's foreign policy is generally described as merchant's foreign policy, while Nazarbayev's foreign policy based on drawing investment into Kazakhstan. In addition, Nazarbayev's slogan in reforms 'economy first, then politics' is also fit to Turgut Özal's understanding. Both leaders believe that economic integration leads to political cooperation thus guaranteeing regional security. In domestic reforms both believe that economic one should lead and political one should follow. Turgut Özal in his interview to a Kazakh journalist answering the question on multi-party system stated the following:

45 years passed since we adopted the multi-party democratic system. You also will certainly transit to democracy. But the multi-party system is a very delicate issue. There should be no place for anarchy. Before the transition to democracy, the order should be established. I think you will face difficulties if you decide to transit to democracy immediately. Therefore, these problems should be solved respectively one by one. The economy also should be improved. If the economy is left behind, it will be difficult to transit to democracy. The economy never should be left behind. Firstly, the economic condition should be improved.⁵⁸

This kind of similarities between two leaders formed the mutual understanding and trust. In addition, Özal's sincere attitude towards Kazakhs strengthened his image in Kazakhstan. Özal was a charismatic leader and was loved by Kazakh people. During one of his visits to Kazakhstan, a journalist asked him "How many Kazakh are there in Turkey?"⁵⁹ Turgut Özal's answer impressed Kazakhs very much. Özal

57 Ibid.

58 Erjan Wayis, "Türük Respublikasının Prezidenti Turgut Özal: 'Qazaq halqına bar jaqsılıq tileymin'", *Haltq Kenesi* N52, 17 Naurız 1993 jil.

59 There is a small Kazakh diaspora in Turkey with population of 5000 to 15000 who migrated in 1950s from today's Western China (Xinjiang). They were welcomed by Adnan Menderes government and were settled to Kayseri, (Develi ilçesi Sin-delhöyük and Musa hacılı köy), Konya (İsmil and Zengin köy), Niğde (Ulukışla ilçesi Altayköy), Aksaray (Sul-

said, “Including me, there are 70 million Kazakhs in Turkey.”⁶⁰

Nazarbayev concludes his memoirs about Özal with the following sentence “I highly value the support of Turkey and of Özal given to Kazakhstan. We will never forget that this country was first to recognise our independence.”⁶¹ As the expression of this appreciation and of his friendship, Nazarbayev attended Özal’s funeral. Unfortunately, he was the only Central Asian leader to do so. During the funeral, Nazarbayev described Özal’s death “as a great loss of the Turkic world.”⁶² Later in the same year as a sign of thanks to Kazakh nation and debt to him, one of the main streets of Almaty, the capital of Kazakhstan at that time, was named after Turgut Özal.

To sum up, during the presidential term of Özal, Nazarbayev’s perception of Turkey was formed. In this respect, his friendship with Özal positively contributed to Nazarbayev’s perception. In fact, on this perception, Nazarbayev built his policy towards Turkey. This perception is the basis of Nazarbayev attitude towards Turkey. In the following years, Nazarbayev’s relations with other Turkish presidents were based on this perception. From this perspective, we can argue that the close and reliable relations between Nazarbayev and Özal functioned as the basis of bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and Turkey. In 2009, this relation was coined with the term “strategic partnership”.

tanhanı), Manisa (Salihli) and Istanbul (Zeytinburnu).

60 Seniha Üner, Hüseyin Güngör “Türkiye’de ben dahil 70 milyon Kazak yaşıyor” *Atayurt Eğitim, Kültür ve Ekonomi Dergisi* Kış 2009 sayı 1, s. 14.

61 Ibid.

62 Taha Akyol, “Özal’a Saygı”, *Milliyet*, 22.04.1993. Quoted in Abudlvahap Kara, *Turgut Özal ve Türk Dünyası: Türkiye – Türk Cumhuriyetleri İlişkileri 1983-1993*, IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, İstanbul 2012, p. 243.

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