

TURKIC REPUBLICS IN THE TWENTY-SEVENTH YEAR OF INDEPENDENCE

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Ayse Colpan Yildiz and Murat Yilmaz (eds.), *Turkic Republics in the Twenty-Seventh Year of Independence*. Ankara, 2018, pp. 465.

The book “Turkic Republics in the Twenty-Seventh Year of Independence” was edited by Ayse Colpan Yildiz and Murat Yilmaz. As one of the most recent works in this field, this book, with its interesting range of contents, is very important for the Turkic world. It represents an important continuation of various academic studies and publications on Turkey and the independent Turkic Republics.

In the words of Victor Hugo, “a book is wider than the world because it adds thought to matter”. Thus, we need to have a wider and deeper knowledge of the Turkic world, which covers a vast geography from the Altai Mountains in the east to the Balkans in the west. Providing a comprehensive analysis of the 27-year period of independence of the Turkic Republics, the book sheds light on the relations of the Republic of Turkey with Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan in the post-independence period and evaluates the political, economic and social transformations of these countries, as well as their global and regional foreign policy approaches. In addition, the fact that the authors are experts who have lived in the Turkic Republics or who have worked there for many years increases the originality of the book by further enhancing the depth of the research and the diversity of the resources used.

Azerbaijan and Central Asian countries have been under pressure from the totalitarian Soviet regime for nearly 70 years. In the introduction to the book, the editors underline that the problems faced by these countries in the post-independence processes for political, economic and social transformation stem from the bureaucratic structure of the Soviet Union. In addition, some of these countries’ problems stem from today’s structural conditions. This dual approach makes the book different from other studies written on the subject. Moreover, the editors note that despite the fact that the countries had been under the Soviet regime for 70 years, they continued to protect their national values and identities in different ways. The editors also examine the importance of the search for national identity in the independence process as it relates to both state- and nation-building.

The chapter “Turkey’s Relations with the Turkic Republic in the Twen-

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ty-Seventh Year of Independence: The Role of Institutions” focuses primarily on the historical background of the relations between Turkey and the Turkic Republics over the course of five periods. It is noteworthy that the periods covering 1991–2018 are explained by comparing them with the milestones of Turkey’s Central Asia policy and the process of reshaping Turkish foreign policy. The developments in relations between Turkey and the Turkic Republics are examined through the institutional structures at four different levels, including national, bilateral, regional and global dimensions. In this context, information is given about the corporate structure, vision and activities of the national institutions established by Turkey such as the Turkish International Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), the Yunus Emre Foundation and the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB). Additionally, it is stated that Turkey’s Maarif Foundation, founded in 2016, may increase its presence and activity in the region. Educational institutions have been established through bilateral agreements between Turkey and the Turkic Republics such as Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International Kazakh-Turkish University and Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University. Examining the importance of these educational institutions in Turkey’s relations with the Turkic Republics is remarkable in terms of further development of the institutions as Turkey’s most persistent and strongest investments in the region. Regional organizations such as the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States (Turkic Council), the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TURKSOY), the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic Speaking Countries (TURKPA), the International Turkic Academy, the Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation and the Turkic Business Council, as well as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and the Eurasian Islamic Council are of great importance in Turkey’s relations with the Turkic Republics. Therefore, mentioning these organizations in the book is also important for the study of the historical development of these institutions. It is also noted that the global organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), of which both Turkey and independent Turkic Republics are members, as well as NATO, the European Council and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, where some Turkic Republics and Turkey are members, have contributed to the development of relations between Turkey and the Turkic Republics.

In the following chapters, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan are discussed in detail under several subheadings respectively. In the introduction to these chapters, which offer a brief history and basic geographical location of each Turkic Republic during or before the Soviet Union, their national political struggles are explained in parallel with the problems of the Soviet Union during the disintegration period. Under the first subheading, the political system, administrative and managerial structure, legal order, political institutions and organizations, political transformation processes of each Turkic Republic, the main problems they face in this framework and their important success areas are examined. Under the second subheading, the language, history, education, religious and cultural policies, and the national education system are discussed. In addition, the sociocultural developments which occurred while the Turkic Republics were in search of national identity during their independence years, the main problems faced in this context and their important achievements are also discussed. Under the third subheading, the demographic and ethnic struc-

ture of the Turkic Republics is given with statistical data. The results of the diaspora and migration policies, religious life, the main problems faced in this framework and their important achievements are analyzed. Under the fourth subheading, the economic transformation policies of the Turkic Republics, the economic structure of the countries, the dynamics of foreign trade, the prominent sectors, the main problems faced in this framework and their significant achievements are evaluated through various statistical data. Under the fifth subheading, the independent foreign policy approaches of the Turkic Republics on a global and regional scale, the main factors affecting their foreign policies and geopolitical developments, the relations they have developed with global and regional organizations and great powers, as well as the main problems and important achievements within this framework are examined. According to the book, as an example of success in this context, taking into account the balance of power between global and regional actors, the post-independence Turkic Republics' pursuit of an independent multilateral foreign policy has provided great opportunities for the stability and economic development of these countries.

In summary, the book "Turkic Republics in the Twenty-Seventh Year of Independence" presents the 27-year independence process of the Turkic Republics with the most recent developments. In addition, the inclusion of Tajikistan, which is outside the concept of the Turkic world but which has common historical, religious and cultural characteristics as well as a geographic neighborhood with the Central Asian Turkic Republics, is another feature of the work. In this respect, this work is more comprehensive than others. Therefore, Turkey and Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan with their geopolitical and geostrategic importance and rich underground natural resources are certain to continue to be the subject of similar studies. Thus, the book "Turkic Republics in the Twenty-Seventh Year of Independence" is an important academic reference point for future studies. However, the absence of a conclusion seems to be a shortcoming for such an academic study. The inclusion of a possible conclusion covering current developments in relations between Turkey and the Turkic Republics could further enhance the book's comprehensiveness. Furthermore, an important subject to be examined in future works is the regional integration between these countries. Since their independence, the lack of political-military and commercial-economic strong regional integration between the Central Asian Republics continues to be a problem for countries in the region. In conclusion, this work with its diverse content may attract not only academics, researchers and students primarily interested in Turkey and the Turkic Republics but also laypeople.