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TURKEY-KAZAKHSTAN: MULTI-DIMENSIONAL COOPERATION

Kazakhstan is the first Central Asian country which seized upon a well-tempered policy line regarding its relations with Russia, the United States and European countries after it gained independence. Astana comes to the fore with its proactive foreign policy and prospective economy. And especially for the last couple of years, Astana has been promoting an rapprochement policy toward Turkey.

Even though both countries had different priorities on their own agendas at the initial stage, relations between Kazakhstan and Turkey have developed steadily since the establishment of formal bilateral ties. Although outweighed by American and Russian influence up to 2009, relations with Turkey became more prominent in the post-2009 era in Kazakh foreign policy considerations. On the other hand, while Turkey's foreign policy toward Kazakhstan has been conducted in line with Turkey's overall policies regarding Central Asian affairs, Astana has gained considerable significance in Turkish foreign policy considerations over the last couple of years.

Relations between the two countries have been progressively developing between the 1990s and 2000s. In addition, the Strategic Partnership Agreement that was signed between Astana and Ankara in 2009 brought bilateral relations to a different, higher state. Leaders began to use the Ankara–Astana line more frequently in order to demonstrate the importance they attribute to one another. Nazarbayev's visit to Turkey on October 11–12 is one of such instances.

Kazakhstan from the perspective of Turkey

Turkey occupied a less than prominent place on the foreign policy agenda of Kazakhstan as the latter was more oriented toward Russia in particular, as well as the United States and China. As for Turkey, which aimed to integrate and open the closed economies and social structures of Central Asia to the rest of the world as its fundamental foreign policy objective toward the region, it couldn't take advantage of Russia's relative inactivity throughout the region until the 2000s. The situation was indeed due to the conjunctural status of both countries throughout the transitional period. However, the policy line pursued by Turkey toward Central Asia after 2001 was reciprocated on the part of Kazakhstan in particular.

Kazakhstan is considered an important country in Central Asia from Turkey's perspective. Such a designation is not directly related with Ankara's own preferences but the constant repositioning of the region, which is a truly dynamic one. Bilateral relations have evolved into a different shape since the 1990s. Therefore Astana is today endeavoring to position its relations with Turkey on more pragmatic and higher grounds when compared with the initial stage in relations based on an ethnic discourse.

Kazakhstan is the only country in the region with which Turkey developed positive ties and rendered bilateral relations sustainable. And the former has been taking firm steps accordingly over the last couple of years. For instance, leaders began to shuttle back and forth between Ankara and Astana in order to demonstrate the significance they dedicate to one another with the Strategic Partnership Agreement signed in 2009.

The Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) is the most prominent proof of cooperation between Turkey and Kazakhstan in the international arena as both countries are emerging as important actors within their regions. Turkey has been holding the chairmanship of CICA since 2010, and the conference identified maintaining security and trust while avoiding war and conflicts throughout the Eurasian landmass as its fundamental goal in accordance with the foreign policy visions of both countries.

Nazarbayev as the «unifying figure»

Kazakhstan's domestic dynamics constitute a major reason why the two countries have accommodating relations unlike Turkey's recent relations with other Central Asian countries in the

fields of foreign policy and economic cooperation. Although considered an authoritarian leader, Nazarbayev became a unifying figure, a «symbol» which is an important factor in the development of bilateral ties. His efforts in maintaining stability within the country and driving changes in the socio-economic field overwhelmingly contributed to the actualization of the abovementioned goals to a certain extent.

Nursultan Nazarbayev initiated economic reforms that were necessary for all Central Asian countries relatively successfully in the first years of independence. He even invited many Western experts to take part in implementing those reforms in his country. In addition, Astana has pursued a policy of privatization. Therefore Astana was able to build a functioning economy despite having some difficulties in confronting crises from time to time. Kazakhstan's existing energy resources were also utilized in this direction. Hence, while criticized by international circles because of being unsuccessful in political reforms, Nazarbayev created a unique system thereby preserving a strong economic model under the umbrella of an authoritarian regime.

Kazakhstan's growing economy provided Turkey with the opportunity to invest in the region. The level of bilateral trade currently equals 4 billion dollars, and it will hopefully be lifted up to 10 billion dollars. The Strategic Partnership Agreement signed in 2009 also raises the bar for bilateral relations accordingly. On account of Kazakhstan being the primary oil and natural gas producer in Central Asia, it is highly possible to foresee a rise in Kazakhstan's contribution to the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline. It is observed that the acceleration currently gained in economic relations requires further diversification in fields of investment. Turkey's desire is to advance developed economic ties, with the construction sector currently at the outset, as relations need to be intensified and expanded toward sectors such as mining and energy.

In conclusion, Turkish–Kazakh relations have been flourishing smoothly up to today. Bilateral relations were indeed revitalized as a consequence of both countries' rising profiles of political and economic strength within their respective regions in the post–2009 period. On the other hand, both sides are aware of the fact that bilateral relations are yet to reach a satisfactory level and are still in need of being further intensified, when one considers the obviously prospective potential of social and political affairs between the two nations. Here, it is important to keep in mind that Turkish–Kazakh relations are fairly unmatched as of yet, considering the regional context.

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