



AIMING TO TRANSFORM KNOWLEDGE INTO STRATEGY IN EURASIA: THE EURASIAN RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The Eurasian region gained special importance after the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The region attracts the attention of the great powers with its socio-economic, cultural, political and security aspects and the energy resources it possesses. Nowadays, particularly the struggle between the West (mainly the U.S.) and Russia over the region, the Eurasian politics followed by Russia, the Eurasian politics of Nursultan Nazarbayev, the President of Kazakhstan, and the Turkish geopolitics in Eurasia have become a much-discussed topic. Despite the fact that Turkey has improved its political and economic relations with Europe, at the same time it seems impossible for Turkey to ignore Asian countries because of its geopolitical position. However, along with its various opportunities, the region has been trying to solve some serious internal problems.

The problems faced by the post-Soviet countries during transition to a market economy process show that there are some issues which need to be addressed separately for each country. The transition process has brought radical changes in political institutions, economic structures and foreign relations of the countries in the region. Moreover, the Eurasian countries are still experiencing longstanding political, economic and ethnic problems and the risks posed by these issues. The existence of interest groups (political-economic) that remained from the socialist period, the economic structures, which were strengthened as a result of the transition period, high unemployment rate, continuation of high dependence on Russia in many respects, inequality in income distribution, poverty and other issues are seriously important matters to be discussed for stability in the Eurasian region.

Moreover, perspectives of some regional countries' membership to the European Union and related problems, the potential for expansion of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEA), as well as Russia's persistent stance for the EEA require redefining the security, foreign policy and foreign trade strategies of the Eurasian countries, and cause changes in the relations of these countries with other regional and non-regional powers. The dynamic nature of the region and the increasing interest of the regional and non-regional players have kept different integration intentions on the agenda as well as the EEA. These kinds of quest for integration in the Eurasian region attracts the attention of regional experts and

academics. Therefore, the transition processes of the Eurasian region carry many opportunities and risks for Turkey. In this context, it is essential for Turkey to examine the transformation processes in the region carefully. On the other hand, it is also important for the Eurasian countries to determine an accurate perspective for their future relations with Turkey both bilaterally and regionally.

The Eurasian Research Institute (ERI) of Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International Turkish-Kazakh University jointly established by Turkey and Kazakhstan is a research institute, aimed to produce knowledge and to analyze and transform this knowledge into strategy. Therefore, the above-mentioned important issues come to the forefront in the scope of the Institute's research activities. The purpose of the Institute is to conduct research and support projects that will contribute to peace and stability in the Eurasian region, where different communities and cultures coexist, with the idea that "conducting joint projects will contribute to the development of common feelings and common ground".

Since 2014, the ERI has been trying to contribute to the process of finding prudent and reasonable ways to resolve the problems in the Eurasian region by producing knowledge and making analysis without any ideological and political purposes, in today's world where axis shifts have been taking place in various aspects. The mission of the ERI is to conduct scientific research and make strategic recommendations on the Eurasian region in general and Turkic-speaking countries and communities in particular. The vision of the Institute is to become one of the major internationally recognized research institutions on economics, finance, energy, international relations, security, transportation, technology, education, culture, art, linguistics, religion, philosophy, sociology, politics, history, archaeology and environment in the world. In this respect, the Institute carries out its activities within the framework of three following working groups: 1) Economics, Finance and Energy Research Group; 2) Politics, Foreign Policy and Security Research Group; 3) Society and Culture Research Group.

Within the last two years, the Institute's most important publishing activity has undoubtedly been the publication of books and reports. Until today, 8 books and 2 reports including topics such as foreign policy, energy, economy and history, have been published in four languages (Kazakh,

Russian, Turkish and English). Analyses, discussion papers and articles are published within the scope of the Research Groups of the Institute, as well. To date, 66 analyses, discussion papers and articles have been published.

Beyond being a scientific research institute, the ERI, sometimes as if a think-tank when necessary, makes some publications. In this context, the Institute publishes policy briefs, e-bulletins and comments online and shares these publications with research institutions, academicians, bureaucrats and politicians in the region. To date, a total of 121 policy briefs and 430 comments covering the current events in the Eurasian region have been prepared by experts of the Institute. A monthly "Asya Avrupa: Haber-Yorum (Asia Europe: News-Comments)" journal has been published by the Institute since January 1, 2016. The journal includes interviews, policy briefs, comments and news about monthly activities of the institute. Printed "Asya Avrupa: Haber-Yorum (Asia Europe: News-Comments)" journals are sent free of charge to all government institutions, universities and missions in Kazakhstan.

The activities of the Institute continue in a wide spectrum including seminars, conferences, congresses, symposiums, workshops, forums, certificate programs, courses and cultural activities. 59 seminars, 5 round tables, 1 forum, 3 congresses, 2 symposiums, 3 workshops and 1 summer school have been organized so far. In addition, the Institute provides fellowships for young academics who are making master or doctoral degree at the Kazakh universities in case they write a chapter of their thesis as a Project of the Institute. The aim here is to support young academics financially in Kazakhstan.

The ERI has created a unique model. In order to structure a research institute within a university, it is vitally important to provide the financial, administrative and academic autonomy of the Institute. Otherwise, institutions may have problems in their academic publications, keeping up-to-date and flexible action, and it may be difficult for them to compete with other research institutes / think tanks. As a result, again it should be emphasized that the ERI is aware of the fact that the continuity of the current stability of the Eurasian region is very important for the regional countries as well as for the peripheral countries, and aims to carry out researches contributing to cooperation, peace and stability in the Eurasian region both today and in future.

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Politics, Foreign Affairs and Security

- During his address to the nation, the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbaev, announced plans to delegate some of his powers to the Parliament and Government Ministers. According to the draft constitutional amendments prepared by the special working group, which was appointed in January, the Parliament would be empowered to choose the Government Ministers including the Prime Minister. Moreover, the new constitutional amendments would give Government Ministers more power and responsibilities to achieve social and economic development, while the President would focus mainly on strategic matters, foreign policy and national security.
- During the meeting of the leaders of the Progressive Democratic Party Erkin Kyrgyzstan, Taza Kyrgyzstan Party and Ishenim party, the sides signed a Memorandum on the establishment of a "shadow government", which would act as a constructive opposition to the current Government.
- During his official visit to Ashgabat, the Deputy Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan, Saidikram Niyazkhodjaev, held political consultations with high-ranking officials of the Foreign Ministry of Turkmenistan. Prospective directions of further development of bilateral relations were discussed during the meeting.
- During his official visit to Dushanbe, the EU Special Representative to Central Asia, Ambassador Peter Burian, and the President of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon, discussed current state and prospects of further expansion of cooperation between Tajikistan and the European Union focusing on issues related to multilateral cooperation within the frameworks of the EU Multi-Indicative Program 2014-2020 for Tajikistan.
- According to the joint statement signed by Russia, Turkey and Iran at the Syrian talks held in Astana, the parties agreed to create a trilateral mechanism to observe and ensure full compliance with the ceasefire, which has been in place since late December. Moreover, the three regional powers also agreed that rebel groups, which represented the opposition in Astana, would take part in a new round of the UN-led peace talks next month in Geneva.
- The Ministry of Defense of Russia reported about a joint aerial operation in Syria's Al-Bab populated area in the province of Aleppo conducted by the Russian Su-24M attack aircraft, Su-

35S fighter jets, as well as the Turkish F-16 and F-4 multirole fighter aircraft against Daesh targets. As a result of the airstrikes, 58 targets of Daesh terrorist group were destroyed.

- The Ministry of Defense of Mongolia reported that the country's Armed Forces hosted a joint military exercise entitled Peace Winter-17 with the United States Special Operations Command Pacific (SOCAPAC). It was also stated that soldiers from 150th, 330th and 350th units of the Mongolian Armed Forces took part in the joint exercise.

Economy, Finance and Energy

- The Energy Minister of Kazakhstan, Kanat Bozumbayev, reported that the country agreed to continue talks about a tax dispute with the Karachaganak consortium led by Shell and Eni despite the arbitration proceedings. In 2016, Kazakhstan filed a \$1.6 billion claim against the consortium developing the Karachaganak gas condensate field disputing over calculations of the parties' shares in the field's output.
- The Head of National Gas Company of Iran, Hamid Reza Araqi, declared that the country could cancel gas pipeline deal with Pakistan due to long-delayed construction works. Iran should build a pipeline with a length of more than 180 km to complete the Peace Pipeline project.
- During his official visit to Moscow, the Spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, Behrooz Kamalvandi, and the Head of Rosatom, Alexey Likhachev, signed two agreements of cooperation in nuclear sphere, including the production of stable isotopes and nuclear fuel. The parties also discussed the plans for construction of two new power plants at Bushehr's scale.
- The First Deputy Minister of Finance of Tajikistan, Jamshed Karimzoda, reported that in 2016 over \$214.5 million would be spent on construction of the Rogun Hydropower Plant, which is \$25.2 million decrease compared to \$239.7 million allocated for these purposes in 2015. The Rogun Hydropower Plant is planned to be put into operation in December 2018.
- According to Azerbaijan's Economy Ministry, the country plans to open a trading house in Belarus in the first quarter of 2017 in order to promote the export of competitive Azerbaijani goods.
- During the meeting of the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination

(ICWC) of Central Asia held in Ashgabat, the ICWC member states discussed results of the vegetation period of 2016, as well as withdrawal limits and predictive mode of reservoir cascades for 2017 in the Syrdarya and Amudarya rivers that affect water availability for irrigated areas.

- During the official visit to Kabul, the Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan, Abdulaziz Kamilov and the President of Afghanistan, Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, discussed directions of the further development of bilateral cooperation. Moreover, on the sidelines of the visit the parties signed a bilateral trade and economic roadmap aimed to increase the two countries' trade turnover up to \$1.5 billion. In January-October 2016, trade turnover between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan amounted to \$429 million.
- The Head of the Baku office of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), Ivana Duarte, announced about EBRD's plans to finance 130 km of road on the M2 highway between Ganja, the second largest city in Azerbaijan, and the Georgian border. The M2 Highway is a part of the East-West corridor, which is expected to open up flow of goods via the Silk Road in early 2017.

Society and Culture

- The Deputy Transport Minister of Russia, Sherali Ganjalzoda, reported that Russia and Tajikistan have agreed to lift restrictions on flights performed by the Tajik Somon Air to four Russian cities, namely, Krasnoyarsk, Krasnodar, Ufa and Orenburg.
- According to the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Kazakhstan, 16,417 families or 33,754 ethnic Kazakhs returned to their homeland in 2016 and have received the status of oralman. Over 65.5% of repatriates arrived from Uzbekistan, while 24.9% of oralmen came from China. The share of repatriates arrived from Turkmenistan and Mongolia totaled 3.2% and 2.7% respectively.
- The official opening of the State Forensics Center under the Ministry of Justice of Kyrgyzstan took place in Bishkek. The remodeled facility was financed by donations from the United States and carried out by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Since 2014, the U.S. State Department has provided the Ministry of Justice nearly \$1.5 million technical assistance.