

FORMER SOVIET SOUTH PROJECT

TURKEY IN
POST-SOVIET
CENTRAL ASIA

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CONTENTS

Summary	vii
About the author	viii
Acknowledgments	ix
1 Introduction	1
2 Historical background	5
3 Turkey and the break-up of the Soviet Union	10
4 The emergence of a 'gigantic "Turkish" world'? The road to the first Turkic Summit	16
5 Both sentiment and self-interest: the road to the second Turkic Summit	22
6 Economic interests	32
7 Competition and cooperation? Turkey, Russia and Iran	42
8 Conclusion	51

SUMMARY

As the Soviet Union unravelled Turkish officials suddenly assumed a great interest in developments in the Central Asian Turkic republics – namely, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan. In spite of common historical, cultural, linguistic and ethnic links, in practice Turkey had paid little attention to these territories until the final months of Gorbachev's presidency. In a burst of euphoria, promoted in part by the interest of the leaderships of the Turkic republics, and supported by the West – fearful of the possible expansion of Iranian influence – Turkey rapidly became actively involved in Central Asia. Rising nationalist feeling in Turkey also encouraged Turkish officials and the public alike to think in terms of Turkic solidarity and brotherhood. Different sets of policy objectives and ambitions towards Central Asia appeared to emerge among various ministries, political parties, agencies and lobbies.

The disappointment of the poorly prepared first Turkic Summit, convened in October 1992, resulted in lowered expectations on Ankara's part. In addition to cultivating ties with Turkey, the Central Asian leaderships were eager for economic and security reasons to remain on good terms with Moscow and were keen to develop relations with other states interested in the region, such as Iran. However, Turkey has remained a key player in post-Soviet Central Asia. Turkish businessmen and officials in Ankara have expanded their economic interests in the area. Credits have been offered to boost trade turnover and support the extensive activities of Turkish construction workers in Central Asia. In general, Turkish policy towards the Turkic republics has become motivated by both sentiment and self-interest, as shown by developments up to and immediately after the second Turkic Summit, convened in October 1994. Although the priority of the Çiller government is still to develop closer relations with Western Europe, Turkey is likely to remain a major player in Central Asia.

Former Soviet South Project

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