

POLITICS AND DIPLOMACY TALKS

POLİTİKA & DİPLOMASİ SÖYLEŞİLERİ



- Post Soviet Central Asia
in a New Eurasia Discourse
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Cinema Hall



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Post-Soviet Central Asia in a New Eurasia Discourse

Lecture at Gediz University, Izmir, 4 November, 2013

Abstract

Being a sparsely populated region due to many natural obstacles (mountains, steppes, deserts, etc.), ancient Central Asia was very much a no-man's land through which travelers and migrating populations passed. Inroads into the region were made from all directions at different times and for different purposes. New waves of human hordes for future settlement came mainly from the east. Trade caravans traveled mostly back and forth in the east-west direction with temporary stops along the Silk Routes. Relations with the north and the south developed out of trade too but turned into foreign hegemonies in the Central Asian region, either politically or culturally, as regards both religion and ethno-linguistic proportions. Iranian languages and religions were early cultural features in western Central Asia. Buddhism and Indo-Aryan linguistic culture spread from the Indian subcontinent. Arab conquerors brought Islamic culture to the region, at the same time as Turko-Mongolian populations in the eastern parts of Central Asia started moving westward. Russians from the north, finally, seized control of the region enforcing new features of civilization.

As newly-independent states in 1991, the ex-Soviet Central Asian republics were to move from one (socialist) modernity to another, with great impact on people's personal lives and worldviews. Muslim culture was a stronghold not really suppressed under Soviet rule and is for the time being regaining importance as the major religious foundation in the region, counterbalancing the Soviet legacy of atheism embedded in expired communist ideology. The former Soviet prestige language, Russian, is challenged by new language behavior involving alternative idioms as well as new concepts and new styles of expression. At the same time, the young ex-Soviet Central Asian states need to prove – for the first time in their history – that they are able to act as truly sovereign polities with a foreign policy of their own both in relation to their near-abroad and at the wider international level. One aspect that will need closer study in the future is, for example, the fact that all of the ex-Soviet Central Asian states are today participating either as full members (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) or as guest (Turkmenistan) in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which is gaining importance not only in its primary field of security but also as regards economic strategies and energy production.

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