

Perspectives

Eurasian Studies in Turkey

Ayşe Güneş-Ayata, Director, Center for the Black Sea and Central Asia, Middle East Technical University, aayata@metu.edu.tr; Hayriye Kahveci, Research Assistant, Center for the Black Sea and Central Asia, Middle East Technical University, hkahveci@metu.edu.tr; and Işık Kuşçu, Research Assistant, Center for the Black Sea and Central Asia, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey, isikkuscu@yahoo.com

The break-up of the Soviet Union initiated vast changes in academic studies in Turkey. This paper examines the changes occurring specifically in studies in the social sciences. It traces the recent development of Eurasian studies in Turkey and explains how the shift occurred from a dominant ideological approach to one based on objective scholarly study. It indicates how this shift, accompanied by an increase of students with advanced training in Central Eurasian affairs, has transformed not only academic institutions in Turkey's universities and developments in the social sciences in the country, but also state and non-state policy-research institutions. It shows how the interaction among these different types of institutions influenced their respective research agendas. All these developments have increased Turkey's profile within the international social science community. The country's cultural and historical interests have facilitated intensive interdisciplinary research activity within Turkey as well as active international scholarly cooperation with institutions in the region, and with institutions and researchers internationally.

Academic Studies

Before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the interests of Turkish specialists in Central Eurasia were more ideological than empirical. Notwithstanding this fact, significant anecdotal knowledge was accumulated, as people of Turkic origins immigrating to Turkey provided an important source of information. However, their experiences were strongly tainted by anti-communism and Russophobia. Systematic academic interest in the region remained limited, and the dominant publications were written by several ideologically-oriented groups, particularly pan-Turanian nationalists. A long tradition of pan-

Turanianism in Turkey gave great emphasis to the study of the Turkic peoples within the Soviet Union, who, it was asserted, experienced dramatic oppression, acculturation and enforced migration, and the violation of basic human rights. However, this interest was limited mainly to the disciplines of literature and history, where the relevant texts were relatively more accessible. The inaccessibility of the Soviet Union to Turkish social scientists strongly contributed to the paucity both of interest in the region and of knowledge about it among groups with other ideological orientations. At the same time, Turkey's official foreign policy of non-intervention and non-irredentism discouraged serious research.

During the first post-Soviet years, the evolution of Turkish studies on Central Eurasia, and Central Asia in particular, was strongly influenced by the climate of opinion among Western and especially American elites, and was characterized by uncertainty in the international environment. Discussions among academic and political decision-makers and opinion-leaders focused on whether Turkey could be a development model for the newly independent states, especially those in Central Asia and the Caucasus, which have longstanding historical and cultural ties with Turkey itself. It was hoped that Turkey, with its secular state and Western-style market economy, could assume such a role and so diminish residual Russian influence in the region while at the same time preventing the newly independent states from drawing close to such states as Iran. So in the early 1990s, the Western powers encouraged and promoted Turkey's search for enhanced political influence in the region. Similarly, states in Central Asia and the Caucasus favored close and cooperative relations with Turkey, which they presumed to be a gateway to the Western world. Thus all three — the West, the states in the

region and Turkey — looked forward to enhanced Turkish involvement in Central Eurasia.

The regional dynamics of Turkish foreign policy were strongly shaped by the dissolution of the Soviet Union. On the one hand, Turkey became anxious that its role in Western eyes as a “frontline” state in the Cold War might diminish. On the other hand, Turkey’s international role became enhanced, thanks to cultural and historical ties with the region, and especially the newly independent Turkic states. Researchers in Turkey enthusiastically welcomed this new atmosphere, and their new work reflected this emphasis.

The interests of Turkish scholars in the region developed in parallel with the changes in Turkish foreign policy. Cultural, historical and linguistic ties made this part of the world attractive for the Turkish academics, especially among the young, who were excited by the rapid changes in contemporary history. Moreover, researchers in Turkey easily acquired the languages spoken in the region due to their linguistic similarity to Turkish. All this facilitated rapid growth in studies of the region and their peoples by Turkish scholars. This review surveys the evolution of Turkish academic interest in Eurasian studies in general and Central Asian and Caucasian studies in particular. Two features attract special interest: first, the themes of dissertations dealing with the region that were defended in Turkish universities; and second, the development of Eurasian studies in Turkish universities, as reflected in the proliferation of courses of studies and research

centers devoted to the field.

The distribution of dissertations concerning Central Eurasia across scholarly fields of study is an especially useful indicator of shifts in the sociology of knowledge. Dissertation topics represent the interests of the newest scholars and therefore also have predictive value for the future evolution of scientific work. Also, the topics are chosen under the supervision of recognized authorities in the field and so reflect their evaluation of which topics will be most relevant in the sociology of knowledge of the near-term future. Using data from the search engine of the Turkish Board of Higher Education, one can profile the remarkable change taking place in Turkish academia. Table 1 depicts the growth of subject areas in which dissertations concerning Central Eurasia were defended in Turkish universities. Over the past decade and a half an increase both in the variety of topics and in the numbers of dissertations is clear from Table 1. There are four main periods from 1987 through 2001.

At the end of the Soviet period, 1987-1991, history was the only discipline in which dissertations concerning Central Eurasia were defended. During a second phase, 1992-1994, some dissertations were defended on historical and literary topics, but in the main these years mark a transition in the disciplines concerned with the region. Economics, foreign policy, and international politics began to be represented. Among the particular topics addressed were the possibilities for economic cooperation between Turkey and the newly independent states, and the question of Turkey as a development model

Table 1. Dissertation Topics in Eurasian Studies at Turkish Universities, 1987-2000

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
History	1	1	1	1		1				1			1	1
Relations with Turkey						2	1	4	2	4	1	3	5	2
Culture						1		1			1	3	1	
Transition							3		5	3	1	2	4	5
Language & Literature							1	2	1			1		
Religion									1		1		1	1
Education									1				1	
Public Administration									1					1
Anthropology									1					1
Gender										1	1			
Identity								1		1	2		6	1
Energy											1	1	2	5
Demography											1	1		
TOTAL	1	1	1	1	0	4	5	8	12	10	9	11	21	17

for the newly independent states. Such topics were very much in line with Turkish foreign policy.

Ankara's enthusiasm for the renaissance of Turkic states of Central Eurasia found expression in 1992 through the creation of the Turkish International Cooperation Agency (TICA) as a branch of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. TICA was explicitly conceived and designed as an instrument for channeling aid and investment to Turkic states. It sponsored frequent visits by specialists between Turkey and the newly independent states, and Turkey made promises to support many projects. The relative prosperity of Turkey's national economy during the first half of the 1990s also made it possible to grant a significant level of export-import credits. Turkey investigated the possibilities for assisting the newly independent states' transition to a market economy and TICA created some programs for this purpose. One of the biggest projects was in the sphere of education, where a newly created program was capable of receiving 10,000 students from the region into Turkey over the course of five years.

All these developments increased Central Eurasian studies in Turkish universities. Throughout the first half of the 1990s, Turkish interest in post-Soviet Central Asia and the Caucasus was characterized mainly by exploration of the possibilities for Turkey's new role in the international system in general and the regional subsystem of international relations in particular, as well as by the kinds of cooperative relations that could be established with other Turkic countries and peoples. This emphasis changed as a result of recognizing the limits of the role that Turkey could play.

The data in Table 1 also reflect this change of emphasis. Thus, a third period from 1995 through 1998 shows decreased attention to the traditional areas of history and language/literature but also to such general descriptive topics as "the possibilities of economic cooperation between Turkey and the region" or "Turkey as a development model." From 1995 onwards dissertation topics ranged from literature to economics, politics to taxation, banking systems to education systems. Dissertations addressed specific questions concerning the problems of economic transition to a market economy and prospects for political transition to a democratic state characterized by the rule of law, in addition to such specific features as public administration. These were years of blossoming

academic interest in the region. Not only a diversification in dissertation topics among various disciplines characterized the years after 1995; there was also an increasing level of country-specific research, due in part to the need for such specialized knowledge in the service of Turkey's enhanced economic and technical cooperation with countries in the region. Finally, during a fourth period, from 1999 onwards, there is a qualitatively and quantitatively still greater proliferation in both the number and diversity of topics.

In the 1990s, Central Eurasian studies saw not just the development of new fields of knowledge in Turkey but also a new stage in the development of social science research in the country at large. Until very recently, area studies in Turkey were limited to research on the Middle East, mainly because of the Ottoman heritage. These works naturally stressed the traditional disciplines of history and language/literature. However, the proliferation of Central Eurasian studies into Turkish scholarly life in general and the social sciences in particular has led to a markedly increased emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches to regional studies. Likewise, the field of international relations is developing as an autonomous interdisciplinary field, no longer limited to theoretical discussions of dominant political science paradigms such as realism and its critiques. The failure of political scientists to predict the dissolution of the Soviet Union raised the importance of area studies and of alternative theoretical approaches.

Two other disciplines benefiting significantly from the growth of Central Eurasian studies in Turkey are sociology and anthropology. Anthropology in Turkey had always been particularly weak because Turkish social scientists had neither resources nor professional incentives for studying other societies. But the new situation offered opportunities for young scholars. Possibilities opened up both for the Turkish government and for Turkish academics through the joint creation of universities in countries other than Turkey, such as Ahmed Yasevi Türk Kazak University in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan Türkiye Manas University in Kyrgyzstan. Some young scholars, supported by university resources and scholarships, traveled and lived in the area, learning the languages, living with the people, and applying anthropological methods in their work there. Similarly in sociology and political science, comparative studies proliferated and the study of other societies became an accepted part of the

curriculum in many of the more selective Turkish universities, which was not the case even a decade and a half ago.

Up to that time, the social sciences in Turkey, in contrast to many other countries such as the United Kingdom and France, did not include the tradition of studying other societies. Living in another country to study its society, economy and politics, learning its language, and developing a scientific perspective were uncommon. Many of the students who in the 1990s went to Central Eurasian countries to study these societies were not only pioneers in the opening-up of this field of inquiry but also, without exaggeration, makers of intellectual history within their own disciplines. Needless to say, these developments also had the very significant result of giving Turkish social scientists an opportunity to develop more comparative perspectives on domestic Turkish affairs and issue areas of Turkish policy and society. For a country such as Turkey, lying at the intersection of so many regional subsystems in international politics, that comparative approach is especially important for overcoming parochial views and achieving broader generalization and relevance.

Research Centers

The establishment of university-based research centers with a scholarly interest in Eurasia (including Russia) has contributed to the quality and quantity of academic work. From the mid-1990s onward, area research centers and institutes were established in Turkey; at present, there are ten such research centers active in Turkish universities.

As Table 2 illustrates, many of the research centers emphasize the study of the Turkic world, especially the history of the Turkic peoples as well as their languages and literatures. Indeed, many of the courses offered are in the departments of history and of Turkish language and literature. Altogether, Turkish universities offer a total of 332 courses in Eurasian studies. Among these, 109 are in history, 175 in Turkic languages and literature, 34 in political science and international relations, and 14 in the only degree program dedicated to Eurasian studies, which is at Middle East Technical University (METU). It is noteworthy that of the 48 courses in disciplines other than history and language/literature, 21 are offered by METU. Language and literature courses emphasize the

teaching of various Turkic languages, such as Chaghatay, Göktürk, Oghuz, Azeri, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, Kazakh, etc. The Department of Turkish Language and Literature at Hacettepe University offers the most courses, with 21 on different Turkic dialects or languages and comparative linguistics. Kafkas University ranks first in courses offered in the history of Central Asia, the Caucasus and Russia.

An interdisciplinary emphasis is to be found only at recently established research centers such as the Center for the Black Sea and Central Asia (KORA, or Karadeniz ve Orta Asya Ülkeleri Araştırma Merkezi) at METU. KORA's MA Program in Eurasian studies remains the only graduate program in Turkey that emphasizes the Eurasian region and uses a multidisciplinary approach. KORA's mission includes developing relations with scientific and economic organizations in Central Eurasia as well as outside it, coordinating and motivating technical cooperation with countries in the region, establishing and administering faculty and student exchange between METU and Central Eurasian academic institutions, and facilitating fieldwork and international cooperation in both scholarly and practical spheres.

Policy Research

Government development agencies and private think-tanks have also carried out research on Central Eurasia over the past decade. As noted above, the Turkish International Cooperation Administration (TICA, formerly the Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency) deserves special attention. Mention will also be made of a representative foreign ministry policy-planning organ, the Strategic Research Center, and of one of the more notable recently established private think-tanks, the Eurasian Strategic Research Center (ASAM).

TICA is not the only Turkish governmental institution pertinent to Central Eurasia, but it is the only one directly covering the region. In the first years following its creation as the Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency, within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, its projects concerned the basic needs of the newly independent states, including the purchase of various types of equipment. Since 1999, it has carried out its program of action as a separate state ministry rather than as a branch under the foreign ministry; in 2001, its name

Table 2. Courses, Research Centers and Institutes for Eurasian Studies in Turkey

University	Research Center	History	Language & Literature	Pol. Science & IR	Sociology	Other
Afyon Kocatepe U.	(A)	3				
Anadolu U.		3	10			
Ankara U.		9	6			
Balıkesir U.			3			
Boğaziçi U.		2		2		
Celal Bayar U.			9			
Cumhuriyet U.			6			
Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart U.			6			
Çukurova U.			5			
Dicle U.		3				
Dumlupınar U.			1			
Ege U.	(B),(C)	3		1		
Erciyes U.	(D)	6	7			
Fırat.		6				
Galatasaray U.				5		
Gazi U.	(E)	6	13	2		
Gaziantep U.		3	6			
Gaziosmanpaşa U.			1			
Gebze Yüksek Teknoloji Enstitüsü				1		
Hacettepe U.		3	21	3		2 Folklore
Harran U.	(F)		13			
Inonu U.		3	1			
Istanbul U.	(G)					
Kafkas U.	(H)	13	10			
Kahramanmaraş Sutcu Imam U.			6			
Karadeniz Teknik U.	(I)	2		1		
Kocaeli University			2			
Marmara U.	(J)			1		
Mersin U.			5			
Muğla U.		1	2			
Ondokuz Mayıs U.		2				
Middle East Technical U.	(K),(L)	5		5	2	14 Eurasian Studies
Pamukkale U.		10	9			
Sakarya U.			13	1		
Suleyman Demirel U.		4	4			
Trakya U.		8	6			
Uludag U.		1	4			
Atılım U.				1		
Beykent U.				2		
Istanbul Culture U.			4			
Baskent U.			4			
Bilkent U.	(M)				2	
Doğuş U.					2	
Fatih U.			6		2	

NOTE: Universities having research centers are indicated with the capital letter in parentheses, which indexes the name of the center given on the facing page. The five right-hand columns give the number of courses taught in different fields at the given university.

Table 2 — Notes. Courses, Research Centers and Institutes for Eurasian Studies in Turkey

- (A) Research Center on the Turkic World
- (B) Institute on the Turkic World
- (C) Graduate Programs on Turkic Languages, Literature, History and Folklore
- (D) Center for Applied Research on the Turkic World
- (E) Center for Applied Economic and Social Research on the Black Sea Region, the Turkic Republics, and the Balkans
- (F) Research Center on the Turkic World and on Strategy
- (G) Turkic Research Center
- (H) Research Center for the Caucasus and Central Asia
- (I) Research Center for the Black Sea, Caucasus and Central Asian States
- (J) Turkic Research Center
- (K) Center for the Black Sea and Central Asia (KORA)
- (L) MA Program in Eurasian Studies
- (M) Center for Russian Studies

was changed to the Turkish International Cooperation Administration. Its mission is mainly defined as promoting economic, commercial, technical, social, cultural and educational cooperation with developing countries in general, with priority to be given to those where Turkic languages are spoken, in regions close to Turkey.

Developing in parallel with trends in Turkish foreign policy, TICA's activities by the mid-1990s acquired a more specific and practical basis. In particular, TICA has contributed to the development of democracy and free market economies in Central Eurasia and has opened new horizons in Turkish foreign policy. Its main mission evolved to focus on technical assistance and development projects seeking to improve and empower the institutional and administrative structures in the countries concerned. This included training of personnel in the banking and insurance sectors, the developing of structures of administration to encourage economic competition, assisting in the drafting legal codes, and enhancing the competence of local administrative bodies. TICA also provided technical assistance for the development of the agricultural sector, small and medium enterprises, transportation and infrastructure, as well as tourism and services. Since the mid-1990s, TICA has provided support to scholars and to academic research in the framework of its cultural and educational projects, including its "Supporting the Research of Turkish Scholars Project" conducted in association with KORA, which enables scholars to do field research.

A study of the activities of Turkish public institutions from 1992 through 2001 revealed that of

the aid given, 25% was in the form of social aid, 58% in the form of technical aid, and 17% in the form of financial aid. Economic cooperation accounted for 9.3% of all cooperation, trade cooperation 7.6%, technical cooperation 15.0%, social cooperation 12.4%, cultural cooperation 52.4%, and education cooperation 3.3%. Table 3 indicates the number of projects undertaken by Turkish governmental institutions as a whole during that decade. The year 1995 marks a significant increase in these practical cooperation activities, just as it marks a new phase in the quantity and quality of academic work, as indexed by dissertation topics.

Table 3. Number of Turkish Government Projects in Eurasia, 1992-2001

Year	Number of Activities
1992	126
1993	172
1994	256
1995	404
1996	380
1997	348
1998	422
1999	389
2000	498
2001	439
Total	3443

Note: Data from Yılmaz (2002)

The traumatic economic crisis experienced in Turkey during the second half of the 1990s, which occurred independently of the developments under discussion, created problems in the country's cooperation with the Central Eurasian states even as its accomplishments and successes became manifest, including the accumulation of knowledge and

expertise over time. Yet, aside from economic issues, problems in cooperation also arose for other reasons. It is necessary to acknowledge that there was a lack of coordination among the Turkish governmental institutions concerned with these cooperative projects. Thus, different institutions often undertook similar activities, repeating one another's mistakes and failing to achieve the desired results. Also, some of the projects proposed for the region were simply not feasible, due in part but not solely to Turkey's relative lack of experience in extending and administering technical assistance. (This problem has diminished over time through the training efforts of such institutions as the Japan International Cooperation Agency and Canadian International Development Agency.) Finally, it is clear that changes in the government in power at a given time can directly affect the successful implementation of a project.

Table 4 summarizes the areas in which TICA has executed projects in the region. For example, TICA offered substantial resources to projects in the areas of culture and history. A broad Turkology program involved assisting in the creation and development of Turkology departments in universities in Central Asia, facilitating the travel of Turkish scholars to lecture there, and identifying and administering restoration projects of historical significance. More recently, TICA's core mission

has focused on training and consultation activities within economic and administrative projects. Here, the administrative and institutional experiences of the Turkish Republic provided an excellent basis for training personnel in different sectors such as banking, insurance, promoting free-market competition, and so forth.

Given the above-mentioned intellectual climate in Turkey prior to the break-up of the Soviet Union, including a basic lack of trained personnel, it will not be a surprise that neither government structures nor civil society had research centers devoted to analytical study of questions of international relations. It is worth mentioning two such research centers that have appeared on the scene since then.

First, the Center for Strategic Research (SAM) was established within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1995 to conduct research in international affairs and regional studies. It acts as a consultative body of the foreign ministry, with the aim of providing objective analyses of foreign policy issues for those in the policy-making structures. SAM benefits from participation by academics and scholars from prominent Turkish universities. It upholds its mission also by organizing seminars, conferences and panels for discussion and debate. Proceedings of some of these sessions are published

Table 4. Activities of the Turkish International Cooperation Agency in Eurasia

Project Areas	Azerbaijan	Georgia	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Moldova	Mongolia	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Ukraine	Regional programs
Accounting, banking, insurance										X
Agriculture and drinking water	X				X		X		X	X
Customs and tourism				X	X		X	X	X	X
Energy								X		
Handicrafts			X	X					X	
Historical renovation and library/cultural foundations		X	X	X	X	X				
Housing and occupational safety and health				X		X	X			X
Internet and print media	X									X
Land privatization and small and medium enterprises				X			X			X
Meskhethian Turks	X	X								
Transport				X		X				

Note: Data come from TICA (2002)

in open-source (i.e., not classified or secret) periodicals.

Second, the private think-tank Eurasian Strategic Research Center (ASAM) was established in 1999, with the mission of carrying out systematic and scientific, interdisciplinary and policy-relevant research on the region. ASAM has a number of regional research divisions including departments on Russia and Ukraine, on the Caucasus, on the Balkans, and on Turkistan (Central Asia and western China). ASAM likewise organizes conferences and publishes books and periodicals in its field of competence.

Conclusion

On at least three counts, the emergence of Central Eurasian studies as a field in Turkish social science has had a positive effect on both Turkey and the region. First, throughout the last decade, academic cooperation between the Central Eurasian countries and Turkey has increased. Relations have developed more systematically, in a value-neutral manner detached from the emotional distortion that often characterized works in the field in the past. On a

practical level, this has led relations between Turkey and the newly independent Turkic states to develop with more clearly defined goals. Second, Turkey's influence in the region compared to what it was during the Soviet era has risen dramatically, mainly thanks to student exchanges and Turkish entrepreneurs active in the region. Third, the proliferation of Eurasian studies in Turkey has driven the creation of a previously nonexistent technical bureaucracy dedicated to extending technical aid and cooperation with other countries.

In conclusion, it is fair to say that Turkey has made appreciable contributions to the development of scholarly studies about Central Eurasia. It has developed a fast-growing academic community characterized by a variety of research interests. This academic community is especially important in the international context because of its cultural, linguistic, and geographical propinquity to the region. Turkey itself is a natural bridge between scholars in the region and in the West, and this fact will both broaden and deepen future scholarship on Central Eurasian studies in the country and internationally.