

The Role of Tourism in Turkic World in Terms of International Relations (IR): A Social Constructivist Approach¹

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Abstract

After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, some countries in Central Asia such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan gained their independence. On the process of their restoration and positioning in the international system, Turkey came forward to establish relationship with those Turkic countries, which have common Turkic identity, tradition, culture and language. The political leaders of Turkey took some initial steps to both establish a close cooperation and improve the bilateral relations in the Turkic world. Since then, Turkey has been endeavouring to improve the relations in many fields. Tourism is one of these fields. Because tourism not only promotes social interaction among the people from the Turkic World, which have many common values but also establish a closer cooperation between Turkey and Turkic republics. In this context, tourism plays a key role in the relations of the Turkic World. This study aims to reveal the role of tourism in Turkic World in terms of International Relation (IR) and discuss the importance of identity, tradition, leadership and ideas at the relations between Turkey and Turkic republics. Hence, the questions in the research will be discussed within the framework of social constructivist theory.

Key Words: *Turkic Republics, Tourism, Constructivism, Identity, Central Asia, Turkic World.*

Uluslararası İlişkiler Açısından Türk Dünyasında Turizmin Rolü: Sosyal İnşacı Bir Yaklaşım

Özet

1991'de SSCB'nin dağılmasının ardından, Orta Asya'da bulunan Kazakistan, Kırgızistan, Özbekistan, Türkmenistan ve Azerbaycan gibi birçok ülke bağımsızlığını kazanmıştır. Söz konusu bu ülkelerin kendilerini restore etmeleri ve uluslararası sistemde konumlanmaları sürecinde, Türkiye Türk kimliği, gelenek ve dil unsurlarına sahip olan bu ülkelerle ilişki kurmak için öne çıkmıştır. Bu nedenle, Türkiye ve diğer Türki cumhuriyetleri arasındaki ilişkiler birçok alanda geliştirilmeye çalışılmıştır. Turizm bu alanlardan birisidir. Zira turizm pek çok ortak değerlere sahip olan Türk Dünyasından insanların bir araya getirerek etkileşimi sağlamasının yanı sıra bu devletlerarasında işbirliğinin kurulmasına da desteklemektedir. Bu bağlamda, turizm Türk Dünyası ilişkilerinde önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı Uluslararası İlişkiler açısından Türk Dünyasında turizmin rolünü açıklamak ve Türkiye-Türki Cumhuriyetleri arasındaki ilişkilerde kimlik, gelenek, liderlik ve fikirlerin önemini tartışmaktır. Bu nedenle, araştırmadaki sorular Sosyal Konstrüktivist teori çerçevesinde ele alınacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Türki Cumhuriyetler, Turizm, Konstrüktivizm, Kimlik, Orta Asya, Türk Dünyası.*

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Introduction

After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, many of the Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan declared their independence. With the declaration of their independence, two main issues for these countries emerged: Being recognised as independent states in the international system and establishing the relations in all areas with the other countries. Although they, except from Azerbaijan, geographically are far away, Turkey naturally took place on the side of the Turkic countries² with the common culture, identity, language, religion, and tradition and became the first country which recognised them in the international arena.

After the declaration of their independence, Turkey set out to improve bilateral relations with these countries. Turkey was willing both to assure its interests and assist these countries by considering them as “brother countries”. While the Western countries were supporting Turkey for its relations with the Turkic Republics, Russia was irresponsible to those relations. From Turkish President Turgut Özal’s initial efforts to The Justice and Development Party (AKP)’s ruling period, the bilateral relations didn’t reach to the desired level. During AKP period, the relations with Turkic republics were highly improved. For instance, Turkish investors invested 2 billion US Dollars on oil, telecommunications, hospitality and banking of Kazakhstan (Kanbolat, 2012). However, the Turkic Republics have a potential to reach to a better level in many areas as they have common culture, identity, language, and religion. Tourism is one of the areas where relations among these countries have been carried out shallowly.

As the time went on, the Turkic Republics developed their relations with the other actors. Of these actors, Russia mostly had the impact on the Turkic Republics. That’s because “Turkish model”, which Western states supported as a measure against the spread of Iranian regime wasn’t exactly adopted by The Turkic Republics. That the former administrators of the Communist regime in those countries became the new rulers of the new republics has been effective in this regard (Kılıçbeyleroğlu, 2012, s. 50). At this point, it can be added that the peoples and the rulers of these countries have been influenced by the Russian language and culture for a long time. For this reason, it can be said that these countries have better relations with Russia on the contrary to Turkey’s efforts and expectations. Economic and military dependence on the Soviet period enabled them to maintain their position nearby Russia and consider Russia to be the most important actor in the region (Denizhan, 2010, s. 20). More specifically, the Russian language, culture, and interests became effective in their partnership with Russia. These countries remained under the rule of the Russians for a long time in the same geographical environment, shared the same culture, and also spoke Russian. On the contrary to that, during the Cold War era Turkey was far away from these countries with the shared common characteristics and almost met them for the first time. After their independence, Turkey wasn’t able to make any adequate preparations and plans due to the fact that this match was very sudden and unexpected.

This study aims to reveal the reason why the relations between Turkey and the Turkic republics in the Turkic world could not be developed as desired and in this context, its impact on tourism and the role of tourism in the Turkic World. Because tourism is a tool that allows people to get together, meet each other, observe and recognise their culture and traditions, and speak their language. In other words, the people who make up the community would visit and get the chance to recognise similarities and differences and construct the societies. Because “...people and societies construct, or constitute each other” (Onuf, 1989, s. 36). Additionally, identity, tradition, language, religion, leadership, the importance of ideas, and discourse will be discussed

² In the research, it is focused on the Turkish-speaking countries which are Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan as Turkic Republics in the Asia. However, the list of the Turkic countries in the world can be extendible.

in the relations between Turkey and Turkish-speaking countries. That's because identity, culture and norms of the intellectual and social relations after the Cold War revived, and these elements have gained importance again in the international relations (Küçük, 2009, s. 772). For this reason, the relations between Turkey and the Turkic republics and its reflections on tourism will be discussed in the framework of constructivist theory. Since the end of the 1980s, constructivist approach has been involved in the discipline of the international relations, proposed a new framework for understanding the international relations, and has been highly effective up to the contemporary debates (Ateş, 2008, s. 215). In this theory, identity and interests come to the fore. Alexandre Wendt, one of the pioneers of the theory, claims that "identities are the basis of interests" (Wendt, 1992, s. 398). Since these states come from the same root, "the Turkic identity" is expected to be one of the most important bending elements among the Turkic Republics. In this context, the research will mainly focus on the questions: Has the Turkic identity played a key role for their relations? and have these countries been able to get closer to each other over the years?

Turkish Foreign Policy Towards Turkic Republics After the Cold War and Its Impact on the Relations

After the Cold War ended and the USSR collapsed, many new states emerged. Declaring their independence, they had the issue of being recognized. That these countries had rich natural resources and a strategic importance highly motivated the regional powers to focus on them (Aydın, 2004, s. 369). Turkey also took action to establish a close relationship with those countries and brought a major change in its foreign policy. Turkey entered a competition with Russia and Iran, and wanted to be a leader and a model country in the region (Demirhan, 2010, s. 18). Thus, Turkey became the first country which recognised the Turkic republics as independent states (Aydın, 2004, s. 378). Turkey aimed to establish its own interests in these countries, which it has common culture, language, identity and religion.

Constructivist theory differs from other international theories in examining the attitudes of the actors. Because constructivism unlike other international theories considers the elements such as norms, rules, culture, identity, language, and discourse. In the constructivist theory, discourse is important as it is considered to be the reflection of beliefs and interests. Discourse as an important element of identity-interest relationship, and especially dominant political discourse in a society have the greatest importance for the analysis of international relations (Kaya, 2008, s. 106).

Turkish President Turgut Ozal's approach to these countries ushered in an important era in terms of international relations. Ozal considered the relations with these countries as a historic opportunity for being the leader of Turks in the region (Aydın, 2004, s. 370). Turkey approached to these states as "a big brother" or "a model country". Turkish leading elite's discourse was also in this way. On the other hand, on the process of the establishment of the Turkic republics, this kind of attitude was positively welcomed to gain status and respect in the world and perform the changes (Aydın, 2004, s. 370). However, within a short time, being independent states in the region and presence of the other states that can establish relationship with Turkic republics have drastically changed the look. Because "social structures exist, not in actors' head nor in material capabilities, but in practices. Social structure exists only in process" (Wendt, 1995, s. 74).

Although Turkey considered the Turkish republics as "brothers" and felt himself as a "big brother" and a "model country", the other party determined themselves as independent states with equal status with Turkey, and desired to be recognized in this way. (Aydın, 2004, s. 283) Onuf believes (Onuf, 1989, s. 37) that "the world is what we take." That is related to how the mutual perception of the truth is. From this point, it is important to define how the actors are to each other or perceive the truth. Whenever Turkey realised that seeing itself as the Turkic

republics' big brother returned little and the relations would not be designed as intended, it became a disappointment for Turkey (Aydın, 2004, s. 372). However, Turkey tried to establish close relations with the Turkic republics that have common language, religion, identity, culture and interests, but could not achieve desired level of cooperation.

Turkey believed that it could establish its own interests with those countries based on a common heritage. This idea is compatible with the constructivists'. They claim that the mainstream of the interests is intellectual elements and identities (Küçük, 2009, s. 344). Identity affects the behaviours of states in international relations and helps them determine their positions. However, while a state is positioning the others, the others must be taken into account. By adopting collective identities, states can act collectively and build institutions in which they can act collectively (Kaya, 2008, s. 104) Thus, recognizing the other peoples' sovereignty, it can also preserve its own sovereignty and mutual interests.

Although the Turkic republics separated from Russia and came out as independent states, they firmly developed their relations with Russians. That the administrative elite of the Turkic republics used to work for Russia and speak their own language, Russian, and they believed that their needs could be met better by the Russians must have driven them to determine their position on the Russian side. Also, the existence of Russian minorities in all the Turkic republics across the region must have led them to act in harmony with the Russian Policy in their Foreign Policy (Denizhan, 2010, s. 20). The impact of Russia on the new republics itself was felt soon and a closer relationship with Turkey hasn't been achieved as desired. In this context, it is important how the actors see each other. Turkey felt that the Turkic republics should be closer to Turkey than any other actors. However, they wanted to be closer to Russia than Turkey. The survey conducted in Kazakhstan reveals that the perception of Turkey and Turkish in Kazakhstan is, somehow, still problematic (Mominkulov, 2013).

Turkey's relations with the Turkic republics couldn't be established at the desired level in the beginning. However, Turkey realized that it couldn't replace Russia as a "big brother" and decided to revise its own Foreign Policy towards the countries in the region. Also, over the last years Turkey has tried to improve relations with both the Turkic republics and Russia, and thus, its Foreign policy towards the Turkic republics have been evolving to more realistic one. However, After the 2000s, Turkey's relations with the Central Asia intensified again (Denizhan, 2010, s. 22) As a result of this, bilateral relations have been improved visibly. Additionally, Ahmet Davutoğlu, Turkish Foreign Minister, made a speech about the relations between Turkey and Kazakhstan in 2010. He said, "Turkey and Kazakhstan mutually leads the way in the promotion and improvement of mechanisms for cooperation among the Turkic republics and Kazakhstan's leadership about this matter" (www.mfa.gov.tr, 2010). It can be understood from his discourse that Kazakhstan is evaluated on the equal ground with Turkey. This rhetoric also suggests putting Kazakhstan in an important place in the Turkic World. During the AKP era, Turkey wishes to develop mutual relations with the Turkic republics on the basis of language and culture, see it as a historical necessity of the development of mutual relations, and indicate that relations are based on brotherhood, common language, beliefs, and race (Efegil, 2014). it can be concluded from the first Kazakhstan visit of Davutoğlu as a Prime Minister of Turkey that Turkey desires to improve the relations with the Turkish republics and both parties have common interest (www.aljazeera.com.tr).

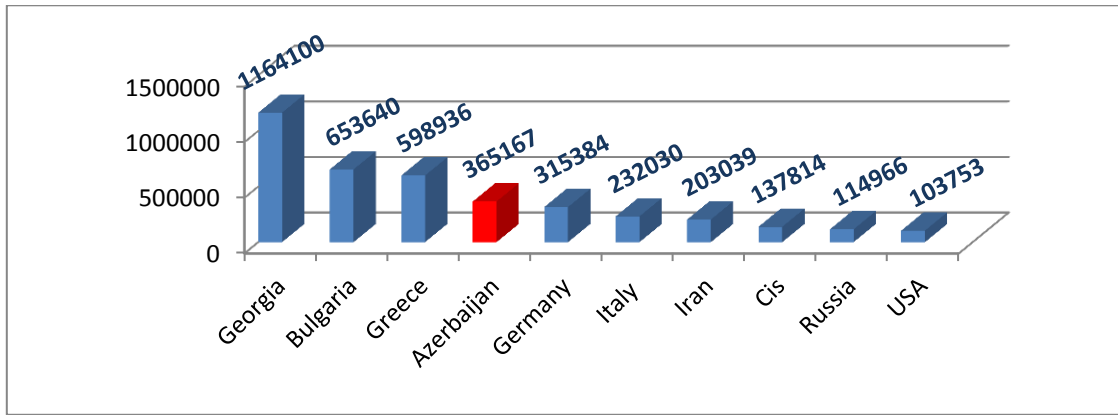
Tourism As A Way of Constructing Identity

Bilateral relations between Turkey and the Turkic republics have been on increase and it can be extracted that there has also been a gradual increase in the tourism sector (Figure 2). Although all the Central Asian countries including the Turkic republics have important commercial and tourism potential (Karaağaçlı, 2012, s. 175), the rate of visitors from the Turkic republics in the

total number of Turkey is very low. It indicates that tourism is not developed enough between Turkey and the Turkic Republics.

Tourism is not only the economic income for the Turkic republics but also a tool to bridge their social ties. Therefore, it can be considered as one of the most important areas where social interaction could be achieved by bringing the people together. Social constructivists claim that the structures that constitute the social world are not of the material elements, but to a large extend, it is of the joint opinion and additionally, the identity and the interests of social actors are not given, but they emerge in the social interaction and identities and interests are constructed by the social structures (Küçük, 2009, s. 772). The flow of the people may be promoted through the tourism activities directed by these countries, and a common culture, identity, and language may be implemented. This may give an opportunity for the people from the Turkic World to learn more about their common culture and history. Thus, while creating a collective identity among the countries through the tourism, their interests are also protected. In other words, the interaction and mutual interests are protected among the countries of the Turkic World through tourism. A survey conducted in Kazakhstan corroborates it. Over the half of the participants in the survey indicate that tourism is Turkey's main economic advantage and bright field from their perspectives (Mominkulov, 2013).

Figure 1. Top 10 Countries Turkish Citizens Prefer to Visit (2013)



Source: TÜRSAB R&D Department

In 2013, among the top ten countries that Turkish citizens prefer to visit only Azerbaijan takes place (Figure 1). The other Turkic republics except from Azerbaijan aren't in the list of the top ten. However, TÜRSAB (Association of Turkish Travel Agencies) points out that the Turkish citizens mainly prefer Azerbaijan for the business trip. According to TÜRSAB, Azerbaijan is ninth of ten for the category of cultural, entertainment and sportive activities. It means that the Turkish citizens prefer Azerbaijan for business trips rather than cultural, entertainment or sportive activities. Additionally, from 2008 to 2012 the number of tourists coming to Turkey from Azerbaijan and Central Asia was doubled as compared to the tourists going to those places from Turkey (Türk, 2015, s. 99).

Figure 2. Distribution of Nationalities Arriving in Turkey

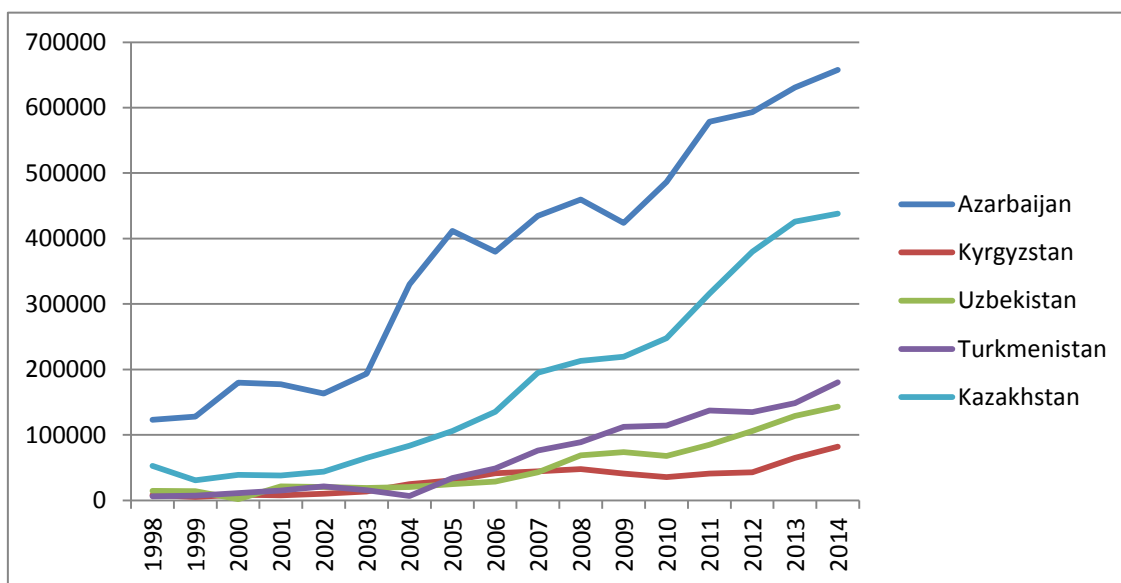


Table 1. Distribution of Nationalities Arriving in Turkey

| | Azarbaijan | Kyrgyzstan | Uzbekistan | Turkmenistan | Kazakhstan |
|-------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|------------|
| 1998 | 123.430 | 8.147 | 14.417 | 6.217 | 52.870 |
| 1999 | 128.028 | 5.451 | 14.244 | 7.376 | 30.793 |
| 2000 | 179.788 | 8.751 | 2.111 | 10.979 | 38.920 |
| 2001 | 177.612 | 7.890 | 21.364 | 14.999 | 37.885 |
| 2002 | 163.133 | 10.379 | 20.392 | 21.317 | 43.793 |
| 2003 | 193.410 | 13.796 | 19.083 | 15.785 | 65.092 |
| 2004 | 330.042 | 24.717 | 20.674 | 6.620 | 83.404 |
| 2005 | 411.652 | 31.023 | 24.689 | 34.282 | 106.196 |
| 2006 | 380.133 | 41.455 | 28.607 | 48.857 | 135.637 |
| 2007 | 434.577 | 44.638 | 43.082 | 76.334 | 195.219 |
| 2008 | 459.593 | 47.730 | 69.127 | 88.915 | 213.072 |
| 2009 | 424.155 | 40.882 | 73.910 | 112.358 | 219.445 |
| 2010 | 486.381 | 35.665 | 68.124 | 114.390 | 247.784 |
| 2011 | 578.658 | 41.197 | 85.011 | 137.476 | 315.907 |
| 2012 | 593.238 | 42.886 | 105.976 | 135.168 | 380.046 |
| 2013 | 630.754 | 64.905 | 129.292 | 148.709 | 425.773 |
| 2014 | 657.684 | 81.941 | 143.354 | 180.395 | 437.971 |

Source: Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Turkish Republic

Distribution table of Nationalities Arriving in Turkey indicates (Figure 2 and Table 1) that in the 2000s there was a gradual increase in numbers of tourists from Turkic republics arriving in Turkey. Of the Turkic Republics, Azerbaijan is in the first place in the distribution of nationalities from the Turkic World arriving in Turkey. Additionally, Table 1 indicates that the tourists from Kazakhstan coming to Turkey are much more than those from Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan or Kyrgyzstan.

The obtained statistics also show (Table 1) that Turkey's tourism is better with Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan in comparison to all Turkic republics in Central Asia. For the latter country, thanks to Kazakhstan's active, integrative and constructive foreign policy towards Turkey, its position

and role in Turkish foreign policy has been increasing (Kanbolat, 2011, s. 55), The survey conducted in Almaty, Kazakhstan clearly reveals that Turkey can be a “development model” for Kazakhstan in tourism and hotel management (Mominkulov, 2013). Because 61,6 % of the Kazakh people who participated in the survey said that Turkey could be a “development model” in the field of tourism and hotel management (Mominkulov, 2013).

Table 2. The Number of Visitors From Turkic Republics and All Nationalities Arriving in Turkey

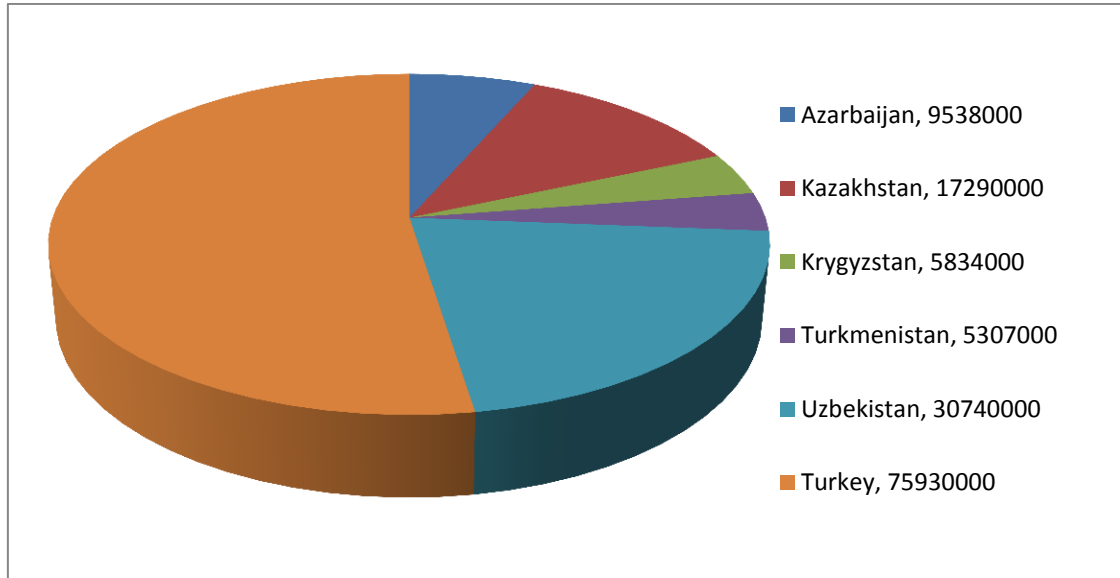
| Years | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 |
|------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Rate % | 3,0 | 3,3 | 3,5 | 7,2 | 4,0 |
| Turkic Republics | 952.334 | 1.158.249 | 1.257.294 | 2.729.433 | 1.501.345 |
| Total Arrivals | 31.364.000 | 34.654.000 | 35.698.000 | 37.795.000 | 36.837.900 |

Source: Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Turkish Republic & WorldBank Database

From 2010 to 2015, the number of visitors from Turkic Republics increased sharply when compared with the previous years. This indicates that the citizens of the Turkic republics prefer to visit Turkey much more than the previous years.

Although there is a greater rise in the number of the tourists from Turkic republics, the number of exchanging tourists is highly low when compared with the total number of all nationalities arriving in Turkey (Table 2). As for 2014, while the total number of the all nationalities arriving in Turkey is 36 837 900, the total number of the tourists from Turkic republics arriving in Turkey is 1 501 345. It is only 4. 0 % of the total tourists arriving in Turkey. For another calculation, nearly 2.88% of these Turkic countries’ population visited Turkey in 2014 (Figure 3). The Turkic republics had the population of 63.932.000 in 2014 according to Worldbank database. Only 1.500.345 of the total population visited Turkey in 2014.

Figure 3. Population of the Turkic Republics (2014)



Source: Worldbank Database

Conclusion

The decisive motivation in the approach to the Turkic republics in Turkish foreign policy can be said to have “collective identity”. On the assumption that identities are based on interests, it considerably affects who we are and what we desire. Actors and structures mutually form each other constantly. Rules, language, institutions and policies are used as a tool in the construction of actor and society. Social constructivists believe that shared ideas create identities and interests of the actors. In this sense, the concept of identity has a key role in actors’ relations. There is a need for a social process for a change. The ideal of Turkic world once guided by Turkey as a “big brother” has been inverted to the purpose of “highest integration in relations between equals” (Zorlu, 2015). In the positive process of bilateral relations with Turkic republics as equals, collective identity or Turkic identity can be strengthened. However, political elite should pay attention to the political jargon they use. Turkish decision-makers should refrain themselves from giving statements that could be misjudged. The rhetoric of the Turkic states must be almost the same. The rhetorics that will create a sense of superiority among them shouldn’t be used, the relations should be maintained at the equal status and all equals should ensure their interests mutually.

Tourism can be seen as one of the cornerstones of Turkey in its relations with Turkic World. Statistics of Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Turkey, the TUIK (Turkish Statistical Institute) and the Worldbank reveal that there has been a gradual increase in the field of tourism since 1998. However, there was an unsteady increase in the number of visitors from Turkic republics arriving to Türkiye from 1998 to 2003. (Unfortunately the data/statistics on the numbers of visitors from the Turkic republics arriving in Turkey before 1998 couldn’t be accessed through the Ministry of Culture and Tourism Of Turkish Republic and also, it couldn’t be accessed to the stated data/statistics before 1996 through the TUIK website). Especially since 2003 there have been larger and steady increases in the numbers of visitors from Turkic republics arriving in Turkey. It is a considerable amount of increase. However, it is not sufficient when compared with the total numbers of visitors from all the other countries arriving in Turkey. Facilitation arrangements and legal structures between Turkey and Turkic republics in the field of tourism can be anticipated to increase the number of visitors and consequently these visitors will be expected to bring about a change in their ideas during their visits. Thus, the ideas of the people in the population may change and enable to be more effective for mutual understanding about the common cultural heritage. These changes will be useful in the creation of a “collective identity” and establish the mutual interests.

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