

Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Turkey Relations

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Abstract

At the beginning of the 1990s, collapsing of the USSR caused huge disappointment also political disorder and problems. To solve treacherous conditions and border disputes, joint actions were implemented by China and Russia. As a result, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was established. On the other side of Asia, Turkey has been trying to become a member of the European Union. Although Turkey has put extraordinary effort, European Countries have not accepted Turkey's application. As a reflection, Turkey has started to find alternatives and headed to east to vary her options. Turkey requested to apply the SCO. The membership process is ongoing. Becoming a member of SCO has challenges and opportunities for both Turkey and SCO.

Keywords: *Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Turkey, European Union*

Introduction

At the beginning of the 1990s, the collapse of a compelling state like the USSR in Asia completely changed the Eurasian political structure. In order to fill the power gap in this region, China and Russia, the two great powers of Asia, had developed their mutual relations. With the rapprochement of Russia and China, mobilization in the region had led to the establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. In order to solve the border problems, seen as one of the main reasons for its establishment, and to ensure the development of neighborly relations on safer ground, the Shanghai Five Group renamed as Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) with the participation of Uzbekistan in 2001.

With this new name, main purposes of the organization are expanding the understanding of solving border problems through mutual dialogue, to combat terrorism, radicalism, drugs and ecological problems, as well as to increase cooperation in economy, energy, tourism, transportation, scientific and cultural fields, and to contribute to the formation of a new democratic and rational political and economic order.

This study has addressed the evaluation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and its relations with Turkey. Moreover, the change of the Turkish foreign policy from West to East is mentioned. This paper is divided into five parts. The first part explains the historical background, foundation, and purposes of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Understanding the historical background and purposes of the organization are one of the key factors to evaluate today and relation of the organization with other countries, particularly with Turkey. The next part addresses the relation between the organization and Turkey. In this part, Turkey-European Union relation is also mentioned and compared to the relation with SCO. The next session explains the challenges and opportunities of the membership process and full membership for both Turkey and SCO. Finally, the last part contains the conclusion and evaluation.

The Foundation, Members, and Structure of SCO

Historical Background

How we can understand the SCO process is by understanding the historical relations between Russia and China, which are from the organization. Although there is a 4300 km boundary between Russia and China, historically the most significant problems of the two countries are mainly the problem of boundaries and ideological differences (Eren, 2017). The border problem has caused many crises between the two countries, like in March 1969, Ussurisky Bolshoy Island caused armed conflict. In particular, the development of dialogue between the two countries has made important contributions to the solution of border problems and border security provisions. Also, China needs energy after increasing production activities has become one of the main factors in building bilateral relations. Therefore, it is not wrong to say that the basis of the SCO is based on relations between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China from the Soviet Union to the present. For both countries, it is considered a reasonable way to go to regional integration to solve problems and protect public interests by ensuring security. At the first meeting in Shanghai in 1996, the solution to the border problem saw the same objectives of the organization.

Apart from border problems, one of the essential elements of the Sino-Russia relationships is the arms trade. Russia is one of the countries where China has procured high-tech and cheap weapons. Besides, China is a large market for Russian goods. Russia supplies China's surplus goods. Russia also meets 20% of China's oil needs. The desire to take a common position against the US is another factor that pushes Russia and China to cooperate. While Russia perceives NATO's enlargement as a threat to

Eastern Europe and the Black Sea basin, China is quite uncomfortable with the US's pressure and criticism in particular at its human rights point and the arms trade with Taiwan and movements in the South China Sea. These common threat perceptions of Russia and China bring them together in a strategic partnership (Eren, 2017). Historically and geographically squeezed between Russia and China, the Turkestan¹ states² (Clewell & Thompson, 1966) maintain their relations with the two states in order to maintain their existence through the balance of power. The participation of Turkestan states in the SCO is the result of these old balancing policies.

After September 11, 2001, a new period for Asia started with the US invasion of Afghanistan. In addition to the predominant position of Russia and China in Central Asia, the third factor was the US. This situation has also been a big question mark for SCI's effectiveness and future. Also, the organization has taken steps in military cooperation by showing a natural reflex.

The Foundation

With the collapse of the Soviets in 1991, the Eastern Bloc experienced great disappointment. Border problems experienced by the new states after the collapse and the emerging states started to create great insecurity in the region. The best examples of this are the border problems between China and Russia. In order to solve these boundary problems among them and to take mutual confidence-building measures, the countries of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan established Shanghai Five Group on April 26, 1996, and they gathered in the city of Shanghai. Because the number of countries collected was five, it started to be known as the Shanghai Five Group. The first issues that caused these five to collect are to solve the border problems and take mutual confidence-building measures. Besides, in 2001, the nature of the organization has changed drastically as a result of the participation of Uzbekistan. The aims I have mentioned before has changed as to protect regional security and peace, to combat terrorism, radical movements, drugs and ecological problems, as well as to increase cooperation in the fields of economy, energy, tourism, transportation, scientific and cultural fields and to contribute to the formation of a new democratic and rational political and economic order. The name of the organization started to be called Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Together with these new objectives, members will now be more open to each other and more closely linked to

¹ Turkestan, also spelt Turkistan (literally "Land of the Turks" in Persian), refers to an area in Central Asia between Siberia to the north and Iran, Afghanistan, and Tibet to the south, the Caspian Sea to the west and the Gobi Desert to the east.

² Turkey, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan are considered as a Turkish Republics or Turkestan states due to their history.

security issues. For this purpose, various agreements made in the meetings held with the participation of the heads of state and the organization came to institutionalization based on close cooperation.

Not long after the accession of Uzbekistan in 2001, many Asian countries are waiting for the opportunity to enter this organization. The organization has 8 member states which are China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, 4 observes states which are Afghanistan (en.people.cn, 2012), Belarus (Belarusian News National Source of New, 2015), Iran and Mongolia, 6 dialogue partners which are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Turkey and finally 4 guest attendances which are ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States), Turkmenistan and UN (United Nations). These full members, observer members, guest attendances and dialogue member countries are considered to increase the number of members as long as they are popular in Asian countries. It is necessary to say that including the observer states Shanghai Cooperation Organization represents almost half of the world's population and is extremely important and determinant for the world market (Duman, 2017).

The structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization includes the council of heads of states, the council of heads of governments, the council of foreign ministers, the council of national coordinators, the secretary-general of the SCO, the regional anti-terrorism center, permanent representatives, the meeting of the heads of ministries or institutions, individual working groups, council, interbank consortium and SCO forum structures (Çoğal, 2015). Member states' heads of state convene at least once a year in order to decide on important matters and give necessary instructions as the highest decision-making body of the organization.

In the same way, the Heads of Government meet once a year to discuss the organization's strategies and to find solutions to significant problems of cooperation in budget, economy and other fields. Moreover, it also has three different councils and agency. The first is Council of Foreign Ministers. This council meets one month before the Council of Heads of State, and it is the council which determines the agenda of this council and discusses more international problems. This council is one of the most functional organs of the organization.

The second is Council of Representatives. It is an essential body in which the representatives of the member countries cooperate to create the infrastructure of large meetings and agreements. The third is National Coordinators Council. It is the organ that has been attended by the national coordinators of the member countries of the SCO, and which has gathered at least three times a year, and in a sense directs all other

bodies. The last one is Regional Anti-Terrorism Agency. It is a permanent, anti-terrorist branch located in Tashkent, Uzbekistan (www.web.archive.org, 2008).

Purpose of Organization

I have written the purpose of establishment of the organization as a summary in the introduction, but in general, we can examine the establishment purpose of the organization under three main heading: economy, security, and culture. First, the member countries of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization emphasized the importance of economic cooperation in the establishment phase and signed a treaty in 2003 to expand the framework of economic cooperation. The membership countries paved the way for the establishment of a free trade zone during the 2003 treaty. In 2004, an agreement was signed in order to achieve 100 different initiatives in this field.

In 2005, the establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Interbank was accepted, and it announced that priority would be given to increase cooperation in the energy field. Interbank Board made its first meeting in 2006 in Beijing. After the establishment of Interbank, On 30 November 2006, at the SCO conference held in Almaty, the Russian Foreign Minister stated that the SCO should plan to establish an Energy Club. Needs for establishing Energy Club to be replicated in the November 2007 SCO summit but did not receive much attention from other members.

Second, it has function in regards to security cooperation. Among the most crucial establishment objectives of the organization, border security, and terrorism issues, the organization does not compromise in the framework of mutual trust between its member states. Terrorism has been considered as the main enemy of the member states, and the anti-terrorism discourse has become the primary goal of security.

Especially in the area of regional security, SCO members regularly discuss issues such as international security conjuncture and exchange views. The Regional Anti-Terrorist Agency established at the summit on June 16-17, 2004. Comprehensive talks in 2003, 2005 and 2007 have attracted a great deal of attention in the international public opinion – the full range of these exercises perceived as a message to the international public. In October 2007, the Treaty on Collective Security concluded a treaty on security, smuggling, and drug trafficking.

Third, it relates to cultural cooperation. SCO aims to increase economic, military and diplomatic relations, as well as to increase cooperation in trade and culture. As it stated in the discourse of establishment, the SCO family is also vital for cultural cooperation like other aims. In 2002, the summit of Ministers of Culture held in Beijing,

and a joint declaration was signed. At the 2005 Astana summit, a SCO Art Festival and an exhibition organized.

Turkey and SCO

Located at the crossroads of Asia and Europe, for more than a century Turkey directed its political and economic development to the West. Turkey has been trying to become a member of the European Union since 1959. EU-Turkey relations have stagnated in recent years. Moreover, some officials from the European Union have made statements against Turkey, has created dissatisfaction for both the Turkish government and society. On the other hand, uncertainty regarding the future of this relationship constitutes question marks for Turkey. All these reasons have made Turkey's quest for alternative organizations or collaborations essential. Today the EU is Turkey's most important economic and political partner. More than 60% of Turkey's exports and imports operate with EU countries.

However, this did not prevent alternative searches from the Turkish government. SCO has been one of the most prominent among these choices with recent developments. Turkey had not established close relations with the region until 1991. The reason for this is that Turkey had west oriented foreign policy at that time, as well as the attitude of the Russian government should not be forgotten. It is not a matter of judging the past. It will not go beyond repeating the past, preferring to stay away from this organization, which will be an important organization in the world scene. If we look at the periods after 1991, the Turkish Republics, which gained their independence, started to establish mutual relations both in the political sense and in the context of economic and cultural cooperation.

Turkey has even created a separate state agency called TIKA (Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency) to carry these relationships. The 8th president of Turkey, Turgut Özal, mentioned during his speech at the Turkish Grand National Assembly that the end of the Cold War and collapse of the Soviet Union gave several opportunities to Turkey. With these opportunities, Turkey could become a regional power and a leader in this area. Also, Özal stated that after 400 hundred years, Turkey should not miss this opportunity. (Mahmut Yardımcıoğlu).

As a result of long years of negotiations, Turkey has failed to achieve the desired position from the EU. In 2005, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said to Russian President Vladimir Putin during his visit to Russia that Turkey wanted to enter to the SCO. Russian side expressed a positive approach as a result of joint consultations

with the President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev. However, China did not accept Turkey's application request. In the meantime, Iran applied to the SCO during the same period and accepted as observer status. This fact was remarkable for Turkey.

Turkey made its application for membership again in 2011, but this time it is mentioned by member countries that application demand will discuss in 2012. Foreign Ministers Meeting of the member states held in Beijing on May 11, 2012, before the 12th-period leaders' summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on June 6-7, 2012. The SCO Foreign Minister's meeting described in the last Declaration that Turkey is a dialogue partner, Afghanistan as a "guest observer" (Deniz, 2013). Referring to this statement, it can be said that Turkey's request to become a full member of this organization depends on developmental relations at the economic and strategic level with China. Due to Turkey's geopolitical interests in Central Asia and the history, culture, religion and ethnics of relations between people in Central Asia, there is no doubt that the status of dialogue partners will not be enough for Turkey because in this area there are a number of relatively, friendly communities and brothers The Republic of Turkey and countries exist. The volume of trade between Turkey and the Turkish Republics has increased rapidly since 1992. Given the wealth of natural resources, we can say that the potential for cooperation in the economic and political fields will increase.

On the other hand after the discourse, such as China's reluctance to see Turkey in the organization, gave the 2017 security presidency from the Shanghai energy club which is one of the SCO to have made a great collaboration. The fact is that this mission was first given to a country that is not a member of the SCO. That was a very good prestige for Turkey. This situation could also interpret as a signal for the desire of the development of mutual relations by both sides.

The Challenges of Membership Process and Full Membership Benefits

First, we have to look at the challenges of entering the organization. As I mentioned earlier more than half a century, Turkey has been trying to join the EU. Appearing in Turkey's western front and become a NATO member make China and Russia worried because Russia and China historically have had political and security problems with Western states. Recently, Turkey's versatile foreign policy to a certain extent can resolve such concerns, however, to have different political values and different positions on regional issues (for example, developments in the Middle East) makes it questionable to cooperate with China and Russia in a more advanced. From time to time Turkey's potential membership is criticized that if Turkey becomes a

member of the organization the US will increase the impact of the in the organization. So the fact is that Turkey is interpreted as moving along with the United States (Ekrem, 2017).

Besides these adverse developments, becoming chair the Energy Club of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2017, becoming the first non-SCO country to hold its term presidency, shadowed the adverse situations I said before. If Turkey can be a member of this organization will benefit. (1) Turkey will officially become the preferred political partner states for Russia and China. (2) Through cooperation with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Ankara³ will have the legitimate opportunity to operate relations directly on the post-USSR territories. (3) Thanks to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Turkey will not only observe from outside the whole process in a large area. It will also provide to Turkey the opportunity to become an active player who can create an increasing impact on the creation of a future regional security system. (4) Turkey can bargain more effectively with Western countries while it has good relations with Eastern countries. (5) Turkey will have the opportunity to participate in the realization of large-scale energy projects planned by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Asia. Also, if the European economy enters a downsizing process, Turkey will have the opportunity to obtain a big sales market for domestic products (Üstün, 2017). Turkey should give importance to this organization in order to avoid the frustration of possible disintegration of the EU. Also, there is no doubt that Turkey is going to make a considerable contribution to the organization.

Conclusion

Founded in 1996, the organization was renamed as Shanghai Cooperation Association after the participation of Uzbekistan in 2001. In the beginning, the five countries set out to achieve regional security after that had changed their nature in a short time. It has also strengthened its institutionalization as a new international organization, including economic, political, military and cultural cooperation. We can give an example of the meetings of Heads of State, Heads of Government and other councils, where they regularly do this consolidation every year.

Turkey first applied in 2005 to this organization. Although Russia and Kazakhstan had a positive approach to Turkey's application, China rejected. In 2011, during his visit to Russia Turkey's Prime Minister Erdoğan repeated their willingness to

³ Capital city of Turkey

apply SCO. In 2012 Turkey became an observer country, and membership process has started.

Turkey's willingness to participate in a newly established organization will have advantages and disadvantages. Consequences are unavoidable. It is a fact that Turkey is trying to join the European Union although the European Union has not kept its promises several times. However, after 50 years turning back to the EU may put Turkey in a difficult situation because there is no guarantee that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization would accept Turkey as a full member. Indeed, Turkey is pending on various pretexts by the European Union for 50 years.

Turkey should be directed to the organization slowly but surely. Although the brotherhood Turkish Republics and Islamic countries in Asia want to Turkey, establishing close and trustful relations between Turkey and these countries will disturb third-party countries. Turkey's position very clear in this case; should increase economic, military, political, social and cultural cooperation with brotherhood countries. In the same way, Turkey has to have the same sensible approach to other Asian countries demands. Turkey should gradually reduce their relations with the West, but should never turn their back entirely. Turkey must not forget the importance of geopolitics and the geostrategic position between Asia and the West and make it the cornerstone of its foreign policy.

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