

EURASIA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TURKEY AND MONGOLIA

Proceedings of the International Conference Jointly Organized by the Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM) and the Embassy of Mongolia in Turkey on 5 December 2018





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Introduction

EURASIA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TURKEY AND MONGOLIA

Vuslat Nur ŞAHİN

With thousands of years ties in history diplomatic relations between Turkey and Mongolia were established on June 24, 1969. The relations developed in 1990s and gained new momentum with the opening of Embassies in Ulaanbaatar and Ankara respectively in 1996 and 1997. More than one hundred bilateral agreements have been signed so far to strengthen the legal basis of their relations.

In addition to that, although Mongolia has only two neighbors, she mentioned Turkey as the “Third Neighbour” in its “Foreign Policy Concept” in 2011 along with the US, the EU, Japan, South Korea and India.

In the panel titled “Eurasia From the Perspective of Turkey and Mongolia”, which is jointly organized by the Embassy of Mongolia in Turkey and Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM) on 5 December 2018, Turkish and Mongolian panelists addressed the historical, sociological and political aspects of Turkish-Mongolian Relations and its projections to Asia.

Prof. Dr. Hüseyin Bağcı, mentioned the Turkish foreign policy perspective through Mongolia in his speech. Director of National Institute for Security Studies, Mashbat Otgonbayar framed concepts of Mongolian Foreign Policy, and the last panelist Asst. Prof. Bahadır Pehlivan Türk mentioned Mongolia’s third neighborhood policy and its implementation of especially Asia- Pacific region.



OPENING REMARKS BY AMBASSADOR (R) ALEV KILIÇ

Alev KILIÇ*

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ambassador Bold Ravdan,

Today we come together to examine and discuss Eurasian perspectives of two well connected countries of Eurasia, Turkey and Mongolia. At Eurasian Studies Center, AVİM, we are very pleased to organize this panel together with the embassy of Mongolia. I warmly welcome all the participants of the panel and express our gratitude for their participation. Although diplomatic relations between Turkey and Mongolia were established on 24 of June 1969, Turks and Mongolians in fact have a common history of thousands of years in the heartland of Asia. Mongolia is home to the oldest known Turkish monuments of Orkhon with the early Turkish inscriptions. There is no doubt that Orkhon Inscriptions are the living testimony to Turkish- Mongolian relations and lasting friendship. Soon we will celebrate the 50. Anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Turkey and Mongolia. This will be an opportune moment to take stock of the historic, friendly

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relations between our two countries. In this respect it is pertinent to examine the perspectives of the two countries regarding an evolving Eurasia which connects both. Geographically, Eurasia covers a huge landmass from the Atlantic to the Pacific. This should sound familiar to Mongolian historians. It was the Mongol empire of Cenghis Khan known to the world for building the most extensive land-empire in human history stretching from the Pacific to the Adriatic Sea.

Mongolia lies at the heartland of Asia, Turkey is situated at the heartland of the wider Eurasian landmass, in this sense Turkey is at the key intersection linking the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Middle East and Central Asia. The comparative locations of our two countries have a major significance for the Eurasian geopolitics. From our perspective there is a need to truly examine the notion of Eurasianism prevalent in certain academic studies. In this context, this notion is frequently categorised as being inherently with variance or antagonistic towards to West. Yet, this approaches does justice to the term Eurasia itself. Eurasianism does not necessarily have to be defined or developed along such lines. In fact we need to stress the notion of constructive Eurasianism. In this context, in view of AVİM, constructive Eurasianism excludes the idea of creating new rivalries on antagonisms and instead seeks to create new avenues for cooperation between the West and the East. As such, constructive Eurasianism will allow the Eurasian countries for creating an axis between the Western and Eastern parts of Eurasia. I trust that this panel with distinguished speakers both from Turkey and Mongolia will take up the unique nature of our bilateral relations, prospects of further developing Turkish- Mongolian relations while also contributing to the discussion of Eurasia perspectives. In fact, professor Bağcı whom I cherish to know personally is one of the most known academic faces of Turkey abroad. He has in depth studies and contacts both in Russia and in China. So he is a welcome contributor to this panel. This is not discriminating against our other two distinguished panelists, who are much respected and well known in their fields. I, once again, warmly welcome all our guests and wish a successful panel discussion.

Thank you very much.



OPENING REMARKS BY AMBASSADOR GÖKHAN TURAN

Gökhan TURAN*

Excellencies, students, and Ambassador Bold Ravdan.

First of all, I would like to extend a thank you to Ambassador Alev Kılıç for inviting me to this event. I am here to present some thoughts about Turkey's relations with Mongolia. This will be of course positive. First of all, I have to explain my position at the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At the Ministry, I am dealing with South Caucasus and Central Asia and we include in "Central Asia" also Mongolia, although when you look to the map Mongolia is a bit far away, it is near or at the Pacific. Because of history, we have included Mongolia in the Central Asian region and we regard Mongolia as a Central Asian country. When I looked again into files when I was coming here, I remembered that Mongolia has a "third neighbor" policy and Turkey is among these countries. We very much appreciate this approach. Since 1969, when we had established diplomatic relations with Mongolia, we have had quiet intense relations. However, our relations could be much more. We are now nearing the 50th anniversary of our relations next year, in June 2019. What we are

* Deputy Director General at Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey

planning to organize a high-level visit between our two countries. The last visit was from the Mongolian side in 2004, when the Mongolian president was in Turkey. In terms of this big event, I think we can also count this conference as one of the anniversary activities. I am sure that the activities will continue here in Ankara, in Istanbul, and maybe also in Mongolia. The Turkish ambassador in Ulan Bator is also very eager to contribute to these efforts.

Despite being geographically distant from each other, Turkey and Mongolia have deep-rooted historical and cultural ties that provide a good basis to further our relations to the benefits of both countries. In 1996, we opened our embassy in Ulan Bator, in 1970, if our files are right Ambassador, you opened an embassy here in Ankara. And around 5000 of your citizens are permanently living in Turkey. Unfortunately, the figure regarding Turkish citizens in Mongolia is not that high; around 200 Turkish citizens are living there. We have visa-free travel for 30 days, but unfortunately, as our Mongolian colleagues are very aware, we have no direct flights yet. However, Ambassador Bold Ravdan is working very hard to establish this link. Maybe the anniversary of our diplomatic relations will be a good opportunity for realizing this goal. There was recently quite a high-level visit of our then Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım to Mongolia in April 2018. And on this occasion again, political will from both was voiced to go further in our relations. The defense minister from Mongolia was about to visit Turkey, but because of some internal political developments in Mongolia, this visit was not possible to realize. However, I guess in the next quarter, we will be able to do this. And what else, since 1992, around 1500 scholarships from Turkey were granted to Mongolian students. We are planning to increase this number according to the requests and wishes from the Mongolian side. Regarding economic relations, unfortunately, this is far behind our political relations. We have only 25 million dollars' worth of yearly bilateral trade. That is of course nothing when you compare the trade volume of Turkey which is 400 billion dollars. So, there is much room to increase the level of bilateral trade between Mongolia and Turkey.

Again and again, when I look into the files, this direct flight issue is very important for us. Many things seem to be depending on this because to make a stopover in Bishkek and go further to Ulan Bator creates problems for our business people and this is voiced all the time. I would like to make just a few words about the FETÖ terrorist organization as well. Unfortunately, there are some schools related to this organization still in operation in Mongolia, but we have a constructive cooperation with our Mongolian colleagues on this issue. I think next year during the high-level visit there will be some developments in this regard as well. Maybe the high-level visits have not been taking place that often in recent years, but in regard to political consultations on the technical level, we are realizing this contact quite frequently and we have an open and sincere dialogue with our Mongolian friends. So, this is the general picture about our relations with Mongolia. We are ready to work on this basis and intend to go further.

Thank you very much.



OPENING REMARKS BY H.E. BOLD RAVDAN

Bold RAVDAN*

First of all, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all of you for participating in the first roundtable meeting between the Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM) and the National Security Institute of Mongolia as well as to Ambassador Alev Kılıç for cooperating with the Embassy and providing an opportunity to organize this meeting.

Also, I appreciate the participation of researchers led by Mr. O. Mashbat, Director of the National Security Institute, who accepted our invitation and came here to attend the meeting.

First and foremost, I'd like to highlight several features of this bilateral meeting organized by AVİM. This is almost a first time face-to-face meeting among scholars from both sides organized in recent years. Moreover, it is being held on the threshold of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between our two countries. Also, we deeply appreciate the participation of such

* Ambassador of Mongolia

well-known academicians and dignitaries as Ambassador Gökhan Turan, Ambassador Yiğit Alpogan, Prof. Dr. Hüseyin Bağcı, Prof. Dr. Merthan Dündar, Prof. Dr. Vâris Çakan, and Asst. Prof. Bahadır Pehlivan Türk.

Although the Cold War has already become a part of history, the regional conflicts have been constantly occurring since then. Unfortunately, the issues of war and peace have started attracting attention yet again. Turkey played a critical role and made a huge contribution in deescalating long-lasting conflict that arose on its southern border. Although Mongolia stays out of any war and conflicts, there is a harsh trade war between China and the US going on along its southern border. To stop these conflicts is a common challenge for such countries as Mongolia and Turkey who are committed to maintaining peace. It's crucial to hold meetings regularly between academicians, researchers, and experts in order to deepen mutual understanding and get to know each other better. Therefore, I would like to invite the Turkish researchers to participate in the "Ulaanbaatar Dialogue" round table meeting that is hosted by Mongolia annually on a regular basis. Thus, taking this opportunity, I'd like to touch upon some issues concerning our bilateral relations.

Strategic issues. Turkey is Eurasian middle power with strategical geographical location bridging Europe and Asia, and at the same time, it's an important member of NATO and G20 as well as a recognizable player in the Middle east, Mediterranean Sea, and the Black sea basin. Turkey has been holding talks over its EU membership for quite many years. Mongolia is a small country located in Northeast Asia and a stronghold of democracy in Inner Asia. Moreover, Mongolia is NATO's active partner for dialogue as well as the only Asian state that became a full member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and which established a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with the EU. Therefore, we believe there is a wide opportunity for bilateral cooperation within the EU, OSCE, and NATO's framework. Mongolia perfectly understands that the burden of the fight against international terrorism is being performed by the Turkish people. Thus, the Intergovernmental Agreement on Counter-Terrorism was signed by both parties in 2010, and in accordance with this agreement, the Mongolia always stands by Turkey in its fight against international terrorism.

Political issues. In 2011, the Mongolian Parliament made an important decision to elevate the bilateral political relations and cooperation between our countries to a new level. Mongolia defined Turkey as its "third neighbour" in its foreign policy concept for the purpose of strengthening the partnership. Based on this decision, the Government of Mongolia has agreed to bring bilateral relations to the strategic partnership level, which was indicated in the joint statement released during the Turkish Prime Minister's visit to Mongolia in 2013. Currently, Turkey is the only country considered as "fraternity country" stated by Mongolia in its

official political document. Thus, Mongolian side is eager to regularly hold bilateral consultative meetings on highest political level. The name of Orkhon Valley is very close to the hearts of Mongolian and Turkish nations. In this regard, the Presidents of both countries have agreed to cooperate toward the establishment of a touristic complex in the Orhon Valley in order to promote tourism. Furthermore, the fact that the two Governments have agreed to jointly study the possibility to establish FTA can be considered significant strategic step.

Economic cooperation issues. The Intergovernmental Joint Economic and Trade Committee is held biannually. So far, it has already held eight meetings and have been making important decisions. However, the implementation of these decisions should be acknowledged to the extent that they do not reach the desired level. It's a reality that the geographical distance and absence of daily direct flights affects the development of trade and economic relations. But the key factor leading to the stalled development of bilateral trade and economic relations is the lack of information about the current development progress of both countries among the general public as well as business groups. There is huge unexploited potential for bilateral cooperation in the fields of agriculture, tourism, infrastructure, education, and science. Turkey's investment to Mongolia is just over 20 million US dollars, which is extremely frustrating. The Mongolian side is eager to cooperate and provide support in attracting Turkish investment in the field of infrastructure and mining.

Education and culture. The Turkish poets Orhan Pamuk and Nazım Hikmet are well-known among Mongolians. Their poems have been translated and published into the Mongolian language. Prof. Dr. Ahmet Temir, who specialized in Altai and Mongol studies and translated the "Secret history of Mongolia," is also deeply respected among our people. Mongolians deeply appreciate Turkish Government's, especially TİKA's support and assistance in safeguarding the Turkic historical heritages preserved in Mongolia. Moreover, Turkey's investment in the field of education in Mongolia must be mentioned as well. In the past two decades, more than two thousand young Mongolians have graduated from Turkish universities, including those who benefited from the Turkish scholarship program, and 60 percent of them work in the private sector.

Thank you again and I wish you all a successful and fruitful meeting.



A STRATEGIC OUTLOOK TO TURKEY AND MONGOLIA FROM ANKARA

Prof. Dr. Hüseyin BAĞCI*

First of all, thank you very much Mr. Ambassador Alev Kılıç, Mr. Ambassador Bold Radvan, dear friends. I am also very happy to have a colleague from Mongolia here and to enlighten us, Mashbat Otgonbayar that we need also your perspectives. We will provide our perspectives but your perspective will be more enlightening. Because in academic life, we need more dialogue and more exchange of ideas from people. And Mr. Ambassador Gökhan, please open Turkish Airlines direct flight to Mongolia as soon as possible so that we increase this human touch which is crucial. My first encounter with Mongolia was of course, the book about the Mongolians by Sabah Yayınları, we always had some knowledge about Mongolia, but it was general knowledge. However if you go deeper into the literature, then you will discover a treasury as it was indicated by you and by other former speakers. But one of my best encounters with Mongolia was, three years ago, during Valdai club meeting in Sochi, Russia. In the morning I went to the sauna and it was

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just around 7 am. I was making diet and was going into the sauna every morning. The sauna was very hot and it was more than 60 degrees where I saw two Mongolian participants of the conference. One was the former economic minister and the other one, is a professor from Mongolian State University. We were talking while we were sweating and touched upon the issues of the conference. The Minister wasn't able to speak in English so we needed translation for Turkish, Russian and English. The language was interesting and the sauna was very hot again. So we went in and out in several times and enjoyed the water. But what more important was, in academic terms, one of my former students, who is now in general council in Edinburg, Semih Lütfü Turgut was, in 1997, was number two in the Turkish embassy in Mongolia,. And The Turkish Ambassador was often not there. And he made his first diplomatic experience and he said "'Teacher, I am the one who is dealing with all these diplomatic talks because nobody is there except me and my secretary in the embassy.'" And I heard from him that the weather was sometimes -55 degrees and that it is a very interesting and beautiful country. The climate change does not affect Mongolia because the weather is getting up two degrees or less, so it does not matter if it is -60. So, it is still -58. So maybe Mongolia is one of the countries less affected by global climate change. But, at the moment, Mr. Ambassador, I was also writing to Ambassador Murat Karagöz, who is now in Jordan and a good friend of mine, you have a real friend of Mongolia in Turkish diplomacy circles as well as in academic life. He likes Mongolia very much and he was making so much public research, public propaganda for Mongolia. I think what he has done is a great thing between two countries' human relations. But what it is more important, I will say, we need, Mr. Ambassador and dear friend, more dialogue and this is what I can suggest for next year when we celebrate the fifty years of Turkish-Mongolian relations. I offer a platform at my university, with my students to have a talk. You should be there so we can make it together a very good lecture also for the university students in general and for my students. With these lectures and conferences at several universities we can increase the awareness of Mongolian and Turkish relations which I can contribute very humbly. I have not been in Mongolia yet, you think but I was actually not in Mongolia but over the Mongolia!! But only problem was that I was at 12.000 meters high, because I was on the plane on my flight from Korea and from Japan back to Istanbul. I was getting breakfast exactly around Ulan Bator. Stewardess said: now it is breakfast time in the plane and we are just over Mongolia. So I was in the skies and on the air space of Mongolia but not on the land yet which you mentioned that the people have been there, I hope one day, that will be the case.

Now, I can skip to my topic which is more important. I think all these speakers at the moment provided us a very good framework actually. We just began to discover Mongolia from several perspectives such as, Turkish-Mongolian

relations, Asian perspective. In this regard I will speak more from the global perspective as far as I can and I hope it will create some questions in your brain and in the Q&A period. And this topic is also important because we have to know how we do perceive Mongolia and the region “Eurasia” and how they perceive us. In this case there are two types of perceptions from our perspective when Turkey look from here, The Eurasian region is getting bigger and wider., In spite of that when you look from Mongolia we are getting smaller because Turkey is located in the west. And the sun is coming out from the east and getting down in the west. In this sense, we are the most western neighbour country of Mongolia and the Mongolians are the eastern part or in Central Asia for us. If you take the geography, to use terminology from Henry Kissinger, from Vancouver to, the Vladivostok meaning this new definition of the end of Cold War in particular, then we have 58 countries and Mongolia is the last one which joined the European Security Conference Organization with the headquarter in Vienna. During the summit, two years ago in Vienna, I was there and I saw Mongolians there. The people also were not only diplomats but were also serving their national food for the summit participants. I asked them, “how come you serve your national food?” They said, Mongolia is the last member country of OSCE now and they of course serve today all these good things from Mongolia. They provided Mongolian food which tasted very good and had an interesting mixture. But the fact is Mongolia is opening now, ladies and gentlemen. The globalization is the factor which makes Mongolia open itself to the outside, getting out from this sandwich position, strategically speaking. Mongolia is squeezed like a lemon, cheese, or orange between Russia and China. When you look to the map once again, these two neighbour countries are not small countries. There are two big countries with nuclear weapons and they are permanent members of The United Nations Security Council. And you have steppes so many million square kilometres but squeezed between the two nuclear powers. In 2015, I am also a member of Astana Club, we had the discussion about the security issues in Central Asia. The title of the conference was ‘‘Rule Eurasia’’ and the geographic definition which you made was also done there and I’ve never seen in my academic life, not a diplomatic but intellectual battle between Chinese and Russian academics from Sergey Karaganov to Professor Lee from Beijing. Because Eurasia also is the future for the 21st century from several perspectives, such as economic and social developments. When you look to the countries in this part of the world, along with China, within 20 years period, was getting 8 hundred million people from the poverty line up to the middle income class. It means that this region is getting more and more richer and having neighbour countries like China, Probably our friend will talk about also these ethnic Mongolians near the Chinese border The Chinese do not forget to invest also in this part, near Mongolia, including Mongolia. And in my view China is a country which has a great interest in Mongolia more than Russia. Then Russian economic position is not so strong like China. China, within this

One Road One Belt policy, is the one which has the money and financial strength whereas Russians have more hard power, military strength, and strong political and cultural influence. In his book *The World Order*, Henry Kissinger is describing, within historical context, definitely what happened before in the region. But for me and probably for most of you present here, it is all more depending on what is going to be in the future. How do we locate ourselves, with our economy, with our people, human capital and geographic location? As Ibn Haldun or Machiavelli used to say that "Geography is the destiny", and within this geography, it is not easy to survive, you have to be nice to both of them as Mongolia. In my point of view, in the discussion in Astana Club, once again, provided at least the framework that in the 21st century, the most important military, economic political, developments will concentrate on Eurasian area and there is no other big project like the Silk Road or One Belt One Road. And history comes again here in the discussions. The Mongolians are not aliens in this sense to Anatolia, Middle East, they have been there already in the 13th and 14th century, just after the Crusaders, they came here and they created a huge empire. Chingiz Khan was mentioned and also from Goktürk Empire to several others. We have also now rediscovered at the moment what happened, how happened, who has been involved in it and took many lessons. I think the 21st century will provide us in this framework probably a very solid friendship between the two nations and try to find out not only the differences but also common behaviour and how to act together in several international institutions which I do stress in particular. The Mongolians at the moment through this opening policies, they take more and more role in international organizations. Mongolia is more present than it was during the Cold War years. So, to my mind, if globalization is a good thing, the profit maker of it is the Mongolia among the other countries, if globalization is a bad thing, then Mongolia is also among the countries which will get the negative developments because of the environmental issues in particular. But we have to debate as Ludger Kühnhardt indicates in his book, "The Global Society and its enemies", borders, people, space and time are the topics which will be interpreted in a new fashion. We have to reinterpret all these again. What border means, what people mean, what type of people, how these people will be educated, what is their economic value, what is their perception by the other neighbouring civilizations. Mongolians created a great civilization in history. And what means the space and time? How do we interpret this? In general framework that Mongolia, again I am not an expert on Mongolia, but observing Mongolia from outside, has a great and bright future in her domestic and foreign policy developments.

Not only China and Russia have the interest to get Mongolia on their side, but also the USA is interested in Mongolia as a global power as well. How can we think that Americans are not interested in it? They are interested of course in the region. And also even in 1995, when I was in Minneapolis, the first

Mongolian agricultural expert was also in Minneapolis, learning how to get these agricultural production mechanisms of America and Americans were investing in the animal production and agricultural production. Anyone interested how, just watch the BBC Series about Mongolia, one of the best programs how Mongolia is developing in the last 25 years. Before we did not know too much about it. It was a closed one, naturally within the Cold War period, but now as the USA considers China as a "trade enemy" and Mongolia with this huge land with very rich uranium sources, I think, there are some minerals which you do not find everywhere, they are just in Mongolia. We did not use them until now and in the future, it is an asset for Mongolia also in economic terms. I would also go much more. Also the EU is interested in Mongolia, as is India. The entire Central Asian Republics too. We may not underestimate Kazakhstan's role in the region for example. At the moment, how Kazakhstan is getting quite closer to Mongolia is a very important issue. And just two weeks ago, when I was in Almaty, I made it until Tien Shang Mountains -inşallah Altay Mountains later-. When you look from Tanrı Dağları, from Tien Shang, is just steppes, you can go kilometers and kilometers and I will say for us is a time of discovering but also for those great powers and regional powers. And suddenly, this is my suggestion (please enlighten me later on), the question is how Mongolia is dealing with these countries. Mongolia seems to be doomed to make a balance of power policy between Russia and China in its foreign and security policy. But we have to know one thing as looking from Turkey, we may not underestimate the future role of Mongolia in this part of the world. It is landlocked, yes but it is getting so important and the more Mongolia is opening itself to outside, it will be influenced by technology, by science, getting more dialogue with the people but it will also bring a lot of advantages to the Mongolian people so I do consider from this perspective Mongolia as one of the stars for the 21st century. Never forget your advantage is now that you are on the geography of One Road One Belt, and you have China, you can see them as a threat or as a partner. I don't know how you do consider this. But China is the most influential country there. I was discussing with the Chinese a little bit about Mongolia. I was astonished to see what value Mongolia gets in their new strategy in Shanghai Institute for International Strategic Studies. I was five times there in four years to debate about these Eurasian developments, One Road One Belt policy, from economy to security, from agriculture to construction. Building the roads or creating new technologies in agriculture. I finish my speech with what is more important for me, from security perspective point of view, the integration of Mongolia into the international organizations is a good step that Mongolia is now not anymore afraid to get into the international organizations, different than Turkmenistan for example which is having certain concerns and choose neutrality as official policy. But you have the advantage of Russia and China as two competing countries in order to get closer relations with you. One is providing you with nuclear weapons and security, the other one provides you

Prof. Dr. Hüseyin BAĞCI

with cheap goods and good life, which is China. I don't know which one you prefer. Or you manage somehow balance two of them with a balance of power policy. How do you manage it? It is your problem!! Maybe, Mongolians have anew style to manage this. But I would like to hear from you, my dear friend, your country's view and perception. Welcome again to Turkey and I hope I will host you at my university this year.

Thank you very much for your interest.



MONGOLIAN FOREIGN POLICY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES: TURKEY AS A THIRD NEIGHBOR

Mashbat OTGONBAYAR*

This article aims to explain that Mongolia looks at Turkey with a great hope regarding Ankara's potential role to play its foreign policy towards Central Asia and Eurasia, as well as in domestic economic development with its investment and trade. For this purpose, it will first explain the framing concepts of Mongolian foreign policy, focusing on logical hierarchy between its policy towards the immediate neighbors and so-called "Third Neighbors". Absence of well-defined policy towards Central Asia and Eurasia will be described next. Based on these, third section will describe why Turkey is important for Ulaanbaatar.

1. Framing Concepts of Mongolian Foreign Policy

Mongolian Foreign Policy has a number of framing concepts and the most important of them, probably the fundamental ones are the Priority for Neighbors

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policy and the Third Neighbor policy¹. This section will explain why Ulaanbaatar gives the priority to its neighbors and how the Third Neighbor policy is defined on given geopolitical situation of Mongolia.

1.1. Balancing Powers and Fate of a Buffer Zone

Mongolia is geographically enclosed between Russia and China having no access to open seas. Its independence, therefore, has always been a matter of Russo – Chinese geopolitical game and balance. Mendee Jargalsaikhany states that:

Mongolia is a prototype buffer state. Like Finland and Poland in Europe or Kazakhstan in Central Asia, Mongolia sits between two traditional rival states, maintains an independent statehood and possesses lesser economic and military capability than its neighbors do.²

Although it is 18th biggest nation by its territory, the nation has the few populations, slightly more than 3 million and weak industrial capacity, mainly dominated by mining sector.

Learning from the experience of other nations, which are geographically and geopolitically situated in similar conditions, is essential for the country's survival. Tibetan case shows that small and buffer nation's independence stays on the balance of power between the major powers and the end of this balance in favor of one violently and momentarily puts an end to the very existence of the small nation. Korean case teaches that the constant struggle of the major powers is so disruptive and devastating, and the peace between the major power may even end up with the division of the pivot nation.

1.2. Tibetan Lesson – End Up of the Very Existence

For a small buffer state, keeping the balance of the two powerful neighbors is a matter of life and death and Tibetan case of rise and fall vividly showed how. Fall of Manchu Qing dynasty in 1911-1912 provided a rare opportunity for many na-

1 U.S. Secretary of State James Baker was the first, who used the term “Third Neighbor”, when he defined U.S. interest in Mongolia during his visit in 1990 although the concept itself was elaborated earlier. When Mongolia has declared its independence from Manchu Qing Dynasty in 29 December 2011 and enthroned Jebtsundamba IX as the Bogd Khan (King), His Holiness government has faced its foremost difficult problem – finding a powerful leverage of protecting Mongolian sovereignty.

Since then, success of Third Neighbor policy was always depended on international situation of the days and the ability of Mongolians to seize opportunity at the right moment.

2 Mendee Jargalsaikhany, “Mongolia’s Dilemma: A Politically Linked, Economically Isolated Small Power”, *ASAN* (website) <http://www.theasanforum.org/mongolias-dilemma-a-politically-linked-economically-isolated-small-power/>

tions and ethnicities to found its independent state. Both Mongolian and Tibetan peoples have enjoyed this opportunity founding their own nations under the similar geopolitical situation; Russia was a natural ally for Mongolians, and the same way, British India was for Tibetans. In 1914, a tripartite convention on status of Mongolia has commenced in city of Kyakhta among Mongolia, Russia and China. In the meantime, another tripartite convention with the same nature was held among Tibet, British India and China in city of Simla.

Final outcome of the two conventions were similar, as well. Treaty of Kyakhta provided that Mongolia shall be divided into “Outer Mongolia” and “Inner Mongolia,” where Outer Mongolia should be under Chinese suzerainty as an autonomous region with no power to conclude international treaty, while “Inner Mongolia” lies under full sovereignty of China.³ The same way, Tibet was also divided into “Outer Tibet” and “Inner Tibet” respectively; Outer Tibet has become a British Protectorate and Inner Tibet a Chinese province. Both treaties have consolidated the balances of the respective two powers and drawn the sharp lines between the sphere of their interests.

The balance of power between China and Great Britain was unfortunately disrupted after World War II in favor of Beijing, eventually Tibet was forcefully occupied by China. India has initially considered Tibet as its sphere of influence, which was legitimately inherited from the British Empire and a natural buffer against China. Unexpectedly, Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1951, however, “vanished (it) overnight.”⁴ Newly founded India, which was born from the non-violent movement and deal with London, was not powerful enough to balance communist China, which was born from the long-lasting and violent civil war.

Tibetan lesson teaches that the peace for Mongolia means nothing, but the keeping balance of power between Russia and China. The two neighbors, meanwhile shall be equally powerful to hold the balance in parity and Ulaanbaatar shall strengthen and support this. Hence, the Priority to Neighbors policy comes from.

1.3. Korean Lesson – A Frontline of Battlefield Across a Nation

History of Korean Peninsula also teaches Mongolia how the disruption of the balance of power may affect the destiny of a small power. Korea is a buffer zone between sea and continental powers and has frequently become the victim of competition between the two. It was Korea, who suffered most in Sino – Japan-

3 Eric Her, “The ‘Great Game’: Mongolia Between Russia and China,” *The Mongolian Journal of International Affairs*, No. 4, 1997, 65.

4 Sidhu, Wahegur Pal and Yuan, Jing-Dong, *China and India: Cooperation or Conflict* (Lynne Rienner Publisher; 2003) 12.

ese war in 1895. The same is true about Russo – Japanese war in 1904. Korean War erupted in 1950-1953 was indeed a proxy war between U.S.A and Soviet Union.

Mongolia has suffered the similar destiny of becoming a battlefield of great powers, luckily, not that devastating as Korea. In 1919, Chinese troops occupied Outer Mongolia when Russia was gravely shattered by the civil war. Later, with Soviet Russian assistance Mongolians reassured its independence from China.

Mongolia became a battlefield in the Russian civil war and the White Russians drove the Chinese from Urga⁵ in 1921. But the Whites' victory soon turned to defeat at the hands of the Bolsheviks.⁶

In mid-1960's, when Soviet troops stationed in Mongolia, it faced the same challenge to become an immediate battlefield between Russia and China if war erupted.

Like Koreans, Mongolia is a divided nation, but Ulaanbaatar deeply understands and calmly accepts this dividedness. In the north, ethnic Mongolian Buryats live in Russia while in the south, Inner Mongolians in China. Early XX century, several attempts to unite all ethnic Mongolians in one nation; sometimes quietly by the government of Mongolia⁷ and mostly by foreign political groups such as white Russian generals. Although all of them was unsuccessful and dangerous to the very existence of independent Mongolia.

1.4. Peaceful Policy for Mongolia

From viewpoint of rationalist theory, the peace for Mongolia is easily defined as existence of the balance of power between Russia and China. Article 3.1.1.4. of National Security Concept of Mongolia states:

Good neighbor friendly relations and wide-ranging cooperation with the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China shall be developed. More specifically, national interests and the history of bilateral relationships

5 Capital city of Bogd Khan Kingdom of Mongolia, currently Ulaanbaatar.

6 Her, "The 'Great Game'", 65.

7 Mongolian troops have almost liberated all Inner Mongolia in 1915 when Kyakhta Tripartite Treaty was in effect and had to withdraw its force due the conditions of the treaty. Mongolian People's Army has also liberated all Inner Mongolia from Japan in 1945 in collaboration of Soviet Red Army at the end of the WWII, but also had to withdraw it again due to agreements made among the great powers. Japanese and Russian political and military groups also attempted to use ethnic Mongolian identity as a nationalistic ideology to destabilize Russia and China in early XX century.

shall be taken into account while regional peace and stability as well as a general balance of relations with neighbors shall be sought.⁸

With this existence of an independent nation will be guaranteed for Mongolia.

2. Failed Alliance Building – Hard Balancing

Third Neighbor policy is not about building a military alliance against Russia and China and Ulaanbaatar will never ask any of its partners to stand against its neighbors.

History shows that buffer states always tries to make an alliance against their powerful neighbors and their policies were eventually failed with a simple reason – the allied great power barely interested to protect the small state in expense of its relation with other great powers. On the edge of World War II, both of Britain and France preferred peace with Germany rather fighting for Czechoslovakia, for example.

One of the motivations behind Chamberlain’s appeasement policy was the recognition that Britain could neither win a short war [with Germany] nor afford a long one⁹

and gave up Prague during the Munich Convention held in 1938. Neither of major powers stood against Berlin, but compromised Czechoslovakia for their own sake.

Building a military alliance against the immediate neighbors will surely threaten Moscow and Beijing and make them hostile about the country, bringing the very existence of the nation at the risk. Russian and Chinese scholars openly warn about it.

True, this is not a new tactic in diplomacy, but it seems that Mongolia has missed the point that its giant neighbors would never accept the involvement of the third neighbor(s) into their strategically proximate areas.¹⁰

The neighbors, therefore, carefully observe Mongolian Armed Forces’ activities in U.N. Peacekeeping operations and regular international PKO trainings held in

8 Article 3.1.1.4. “National Foreign Policy Concept”, *Legal Information System* (unified website for all legal acts), <https://www.legalinfo.mn/annex/details/3362?lawid=6340>

9 Alex Weisiger, “*Logics of War: Explanations for Limited and Unlimited Conflicts*,” (Cornell University Press; 2013) 128.

10 Wang Li, “The ‘Third Neighbor Policy’ Of Mongolia: Romantic or Realistic? – Analysis”, *EurasiaReview* (website), <https://www.eurasiareview.com/17072017-the-third-neighbor-policy-of-mongolia-romantic-or-realistic-analysis/>

the country and Ulaanbaatar also appease the neighbors making those operations as transparent as possible.

Repeating the mistake of others made a century ago is definitely neither our choice nor goal. No Third Neighbor will be likely to engage any coercive policy against either Russia nor China in sake of much smaller. Weaker and unimportant Mongolia. Taking account on the fact that Ulaanbaatar is landlocked and has no access to sea, no superpower is able to provide a reliable military assistance against its neighbor.

3. Third Neighbor Policy as Soft Balancing

If Third Neighbor policy is about alliance building, it might be only explained as a Soft Balancing strategy. It should be therefore defined as the increasing the cost of unilateral or arbitrary action of two powerful neighbors with cooperation of third powerful ones, be it a nation such as U.S.A, Germany or Japan, or international organization and institutions such as the U.N., NATO or WTO.

This has to be principle for every policy although barely observed and implemented. In some case such as first selection of Tavan Tolgoi coking coal mining development, the soft balancing of the immediate two neighbors were successfully achieved and according to the condition stated by the government of Mongolia, their companies had to form a consortium with Japanese and Korean companies. Therefore, during the bid,

In the second stage of the selection for the (Tavan Tolgoi) deposit development following consortiums and companies have included in the shortlist: the consortium consisted of U.S. Peabody Energy, Chinese Shenhua Energy, and Japanese Mitsui & Co.; the consortium consisted of Russian Railways and a Japanese corporation; the consortium led by Korean Kores group, Australian Xstrata coal, Brazilian Vale, Luxembourgian Arcelor Mittal.¹¹

Doing so, this selection could have been a demonstration of successful Third Neighbor policy. Unfortunately, the project is still stalled due to lack of political consensus among interested groups and party leaders. Good news is that no powerful neighbor has solely imposed its will and instructed what to do with whom.

As any policy, there are limitations for Third Neighbor policy or points of which

11 “Таван толгойн нүүдэл (*Moves on [Chessboard of] Tavan Tolgoi*)”, *Mongolian Economy* (website) <https://mongolianeconomy.mn/%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%BD%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B9%D0%BD-%D0%BD%D2%AF%D2%AF%D0%B4%D1%8D%D0%BB/>

the policy should be revised in whole or in case of a particular country. At least following three scenarios might theoretically be such limitations;

- Balance of power between Russia and China is erupted and get hostile towards each other. This situation eventually brings the very existence of Mongolia as a nation to the risk of nihilation. In this case, Ulaanbaatar will likely bandwagon one of the two neighbors against other and shall stop not only Third Neighbor policy, but also “balanced and equally distant” policy towards its neighbors.
- Both neighbors get hostile towards Mongolia and also brings the very existence of the nation to the risk of nihilation. In this case, Third Neighbor policy will be stopped as the Soft Balancing strategy and will likely look for Hard Balancing although it might be impractical given the geopolitical and landlocked location of its territory.
- Third Neighbor gets hostile about Russia and China, even though having a good relation with Mongolia. The situation would not directly bring the very existence of a nation to the risk of nihilation although will eventually drive one of the two above-mentioned scenarios. In this case, Ulaanbaatar might have two options; at the best, it will remain neutral about the conflicting powers, and at worst, it will bandwagon the immediate neighbors against the third one.

In light of these limitations, there is an ongoing debate whether Mongolia shall revise its Third Neighbor policy. U.S. led western sanction on Russia continues for more than five years. Washington has also declared a trade war against China. So far, there is no open military confrontation, the debate about if we should continue the Third Neighbor policy and who might it be may soon spark since President Kh. Battulga made an uncertain statement about possible revision of the Third Neighbor Policy, which fact got an attention of Russian and Chinese analysts.¹²

4. Eurasia – No Clearly Defined Policy

This section aims to illustrate that absence of Eurasian and Central Asian policy is caused by ignorance or lack of the fundamental knowledge to understand and explain current developments in the region by checking the case of the debate if Mongolia should be member of SCO. Politicians and scholars have actively participated and raised the different arguments and it was the hottest topic of the early 2018.

12 Wang Li, “The ‘Third Neighbor Policy’ Of Mongolia”, URL.

4.1. Failure Come from the Assumption “We Know Them”

Mongolia has no clearly defined Eurasian nor Central Asian policy, and it is not about today. Actually it never had one. It has one simple reason: lack of knowledge about the region, which has also a simple reason – ignorance.

But this ignorance is, however, deeply rooted in Mongolian cultural perception about the region. Mongolians think, “we know them,” we know who Central Asian people are and what their customs are. The most of institutes that work on Central Asia mainly focus on history such as Central Asian Research Center at the Institute of History and Archeology, Academy of Science and Center of Turkish Studies at the National University of Mongolia. These institutes mainly work on topics like the heritages of ancient Turkish kingdom in the territory of modern-day Mongolia. Deeper they study, the cultural proximity will get even closer and the assumption that “we know Central Asians” will be further justified.

Mongolian foreign policy priority towards Northeast Asia also played an important role in the ignorance of Eurasia. Early 1990’s, in the time that world communist system shattered down, the country was under painful transition and was looking for a source stability. In Central Asia, there were newly independent nations and their situation promised no stability. The closest ideological support came from South Korea and Japan and these nations have meanwhile provided the main support for economic restructuration from the centrally-planned to the free market. To maintain this support and attract those countries, Ulaanbaatar have actively engaged with Northeast Asia.

4.2. Debate and Competition of the Weak Arguments

In his opening speech of “Mongolian Economic Forum – 2018” on 22 May, President of Mongolia has suddenly made an uncertain statement on Mongolian role in the SCO. He said:

Within this year [Mongolia] shall bring its relation with SCO to an advanced level with more active participation and collaboration. This will provide us a convenient condition for further development of relations with eight SCO member nations along with paving the road for successful connecting to the regional infrastructure, about which we have debated long, but did nothing.¹³

13 “President of Mongolia Kh. Battulga Made the Opening Speech for Mongolian Economic Forum (Монгол Улсын Ерөнхийлөгч Х.Баттулга Монголын эдийн засгийн форумын Үндсэн чуулганыг нээж үг хэллээ)” *President.mn* (Official Website of President of Mongolia Kh.Battulga), <https://president.mn/3813/>

Media has momentarily sparked a debate what the president really meant with “an advanced level with more active participation and collaboration,” asking if it possibly meant a Mongolian membership in SCO.

Both sides' views and articles on the media, no matter if they supported or opposed, were begin with brief introduction what SCO is, how it was founded, how many members it has, who the members were, when Mongolia has become an observer, how many observers are, which countries are willing to be member and why. For example, Dr. Ch.Sumiya's article titled “Time to Make Decision on the Issues of Mongolian Membership in SCO Has Come”, published on *iToim* online newspaper has even a graphic that shown each member countries basic information and has gently expressed his generally positive attitude towards Mongolia's full membership in SCO.¹⁴ Batbayar Bat-Erdene, a former politician and a famous columnist has also written an article with excessive description of similar information to Dr. Ch.Sumiya mentioned. His final conclusion was, however, against the membership.¹⁵ The fact that having an excessive information or a long introduction about what SCO is in the most articles in the same debate shows the arguing parties wanted to inform the reader first. That shows how Mongolian general public was ignorant about not only SCO, but also Central Asia in general.

Opposers of SCO membership had the typical arguments; their arguments were relatively strong a few years ago, but has lost its effect this time since the situation was changed. Some rejected the membership in the organization saying that it was an alliance of authoritarian rulers, from which the country should avoid to sustain Mongolian democracy.

The most of SCO members have authoritarian governments and every country in this community is under life-long rule of a single person, except for Kyrgystsan, where color revolution has regularly erupted. Thus, [mongolian] researchers have concluded that SCO membership is not convenient for our democratic principles. SCO has declared to fight against terrorism and separatism. Mongolia has no separatim since its a unitary nation and there is nothing we have to point out that is the terrorist threat

14 Ch. Sumiya, “Монгол Улс ШХАБ-д гишүүнээр элсэх асуудалд шийдэл гаргах цаг болсон (Time to Make Decision on Issues of Mongolian Membership in SCO Has Come)”, *iToim.mn* (online news agency), <http://itoim.mn/article/7OutU/11925>

Болат Нурғалиев тухайн үеийн өдөр тутмын сонинд ярилцлага өгөх үеэрээ “Монгол Улс ШХАБ-д элсвэл АНУ-тай түншилж болохгүй гэсэн үг биш”[12] хэмээн хэлж байв.

15 Bat-Erdene Batbayar, “ШХАБ ба Монгол (SCO and Mongolia)” *Өдрийн сонин (Daily News)* (webpage of a daily newspaper) <https://dnn.mn/%D1%88%D1%85%D0%B0%D0%B1-%D0%B1%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%BB/>

for us. [Mongolian] observers have therefore reckoned that SCO political and military agenda is not actual problem of Mongolia.¹⁶

This was an obvious selective argument since India, the biggest democracy in the world population-wise, was a member now. Besides, the liberal democracy itself has been challenged throughout the world and the issue if the country was authoritarian had lesser importance today.

Others argued that SCO was an anti-western alliance, a fact Ulaanbaatar should take an account for keeping our good relation with the West. Mr. G. Temuulen, member of Parliament of Mongolia said:

Membership in SCO would be inconsistent with Mongolian foreign policy. SCO is political and military organization designed to stand against NATO¹⁷

Not mentioning the fact that the most of SCO members, excluding India and China, but including Russia were NATO Partnership for Peace members. His statement, indeed, was irresponsible and showed his incompetence in the issue.

The SCO membership supports have never defeated those arguments; instead, they have simply raised equally weak arguments, mainly about Russian and Chinese role in SCO. During SCO summit held in Tashkent in 2016, trilateral summit of Russia – Mongolia – China has also taken place, where PRC president Xi Jinping made a statement that SCO is a productive platform for this trilateral cooperation. Xi's speech was, Batbayar writes, about the construction of economic corridor through Mongolia and it was plausible sign that the immediate neighbors and SCO will never downgrade Mongolia for not being a SCO member.¹⁸ But this statement has become a reason why the media began to interpret the President Kh. Battulga's speech with the SCO membership.

Probably with this reason, the SCO membership supporters were also basically talking about the appeasement of the two neighbors, but not SCO itself. If the powerful neighbors insist Ulaanbaatar for the membership then it should become a member to avoid possible misunderstandings with them. Professor D. Ulambayar says;

16 Mungundalai, Dashbalariin, "Significance of SCO Membership and Disadvantages (ШХАБ-д элсэхийн ач холбогдол ба ашиггүй талууд) *Өдрийн сонин (Daily News)* (webpage of a daily newspaper) <https://dnn.mn/%D1%88%D1%85%D0%B0%D0%B1-%D0%B4-%D1%8D%D0%BB%D1%81%D1%8D%D1%85%D0%B8%D0%B9%D0%BD-%D0%B0%D1%87-%D1%85%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%B1%D0%BE%D0%B3%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BB-%D0%B1%D0%B0-%D0%B0%D1%88%D0%B8%D0%B3%D0%B3%D2%AF%D0%B9-%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BB%D1%83%D1%83%D0%B4/>

17 Mr. G.Temuulen's interview in "Who Said What: Pro's and Contra's on SCO Membership (Хэн юу хэлэв: Монгол Улс ШХАБ-д элсэх нь зөв ба буруу)", *NewsMedia.mn* (media website), <http://newsmedia.mn/19660>

18 Batbayar, "SCO and Mongolia", URL.

Keeping neutrality while becoming the strategic partnership with the two neighbors is inconsistent. Especially, we have Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with our southern neighbor [China]. Non membership in SCO, therefore, makes no sense. We shall become a member.¹⁹

Besides, they assumed that SCO members are economically growing faster and should join the organization to boost the economy. Mr. D. Sumiyabazar, member of Parliament, said “we observe how they develop and we remain poor while they richer.”²⁰

4.3. Some Serious Debate

The main serious debate was about if SCO membership will provide the suitable economic opportunities for Mongolia. Proposers argued that the membership will send a positive message to the neighbors and eventually provide a fruitful soil for economic cooperation.

... Mongolia should realistically assess the geopolitical environment today. We are landlocked. We are enclosed by the two of world greatest powers. And we shall find a development solution from here. [Derived from this situation] the preemptive condition for our development is the keeping and developing the good cooperation [with Russia and China] in all ways; political, economic, trade and cultural

says Ambassador L. Gerelchuluun, former Minister of Foreign Affairs²¹. Member of Parliament Ch. Ulaan said:

...I think, there is no problem with the membership. It may even provide us better advantages for an active economic integration. But my view is only economic, not political.²²

Appeasing the two neighbors, in their mind, will open their market and encourage their investment.

19 D.Ulambayar’s interview in “Who Said What: Pro’s and Contra’s on SCO Membership (Хэн юу хэлэв: Монгол Улс ШХАБ-д элсэх нь зөв ба буруу)”, *NewsMedia.mn* (media website), <http://newsmedia.mn/19660>

20 Mr. D.Sumiyabazar’s interview in “Who Said What: Pro’s and Contra’s on SCO Membership (Хэн юу хэлэв: Монгол Улс ШХАБ-д элсэх нь зөв ба буруу)”, *NewsMedia.mn* (media website), <http://newsmedia.mn/19660>

21 Amb. L. Gerelchuluun’s interview, *ibid*.

22 Mr. Ch.Ulaan’s interview in “Who Said What: Pro’s and Contra’s on SCO Membership (Хэн юу хэлэв: Монгол Улс ШХАБ-д элсэх нь зөв ба буруу)”, *NewsMedia.mn* (media website), <http://newsmedia.mn/19660>

Opposing arguments defied the expectations of the supporters and were based on current SCO situation of economic cooperation. Batbayar wrote:

Nothing worth to mention was observed in SCO economic cooperation the last decade. Yet, there is no joint SCO economic project. All economic projects are bilateral, at the best trilateral. But those projects go undisputedly well of course.²³

With the same spirit, Professor D. Bayarkhuu argued that:

As a researcher, I see no advantage in Mongolian membership in SCO. Because, there is no cooperation in SCO, in which Mongolia might find its interest. Especially, in terms of economy, trade, investment and business, Mongolia cannot find any cooperation that would help the country to get out from the poverty we have today²⁴.

In addition to that “[SCO] keeps talking about economic cooperation, there are lots of projects remained on papers,” and he concluded “We, therefore, better remain as an observer”.²⁵

The debate on SCO membership has revealed at least two interesting points. First, both sides wanted to inform the readers before they raised the arguments. It shows that general public of Mongolia has little understanding what the SCO is. Second, the SCO membership supporters’ arguments were mainly concerned with Ulaanbaatar’s relation with Moscow and Beijing and nearly ignores what SCO is and what role SCO plays in the region. Third, the opposers’ argument was based on the hard-economic data and information of the western media.

In general, Mongolia’s Central Asian policy is yet to be defined clearly. Its main reason is ignorance, which indeed deeply rooted with perception that come from the historical and cultural similarities. There is no profound study made on current situation of Central Asia and Eurasia. Developing research and educational works on contemporary Central Asian and Eurasian studies, therefore, is one of the immediate subject of the Mongol – Turkish relation. In this regard, Mongol – Turkish relation may play a role in re-opening contemporary Central Asia and Eurasia to Mongolia with means for strengthening and investing the regional studies and enabling the research communities’ capacity of shaping and advancing policy options towards the region.

23 Batbayar, “SCO and Mongolia”,

24 D.Bayarkhuu’s interview in “Who Says What”.

25 Bayarkhuu Dashdorj, “Where SCO Goes and Who Directs It So,” *baabar.mn* (website for well-known columnists) <http://baabar.mn/article/shkhab-khaashaa-yawj-khen-khaash-ni-chigluulne-we>

5. Turkey – Third Neighbor

Ulaanbaatar looks at Turkey as its Third Neighbor in its policy toward Eurasia and highly value Ankara's potential as Strategic Partner.

5.1. Definition and Requirements, Where Turkey Fits Well

Turkey is officially and righteously defined as one of Third Neighbors. According to National Foreign Policy Concept:

14.2. Developing partnership and cooperation with the United States of America, Japan, the European Union, the Republic of India, the Republic of Korea, the Republic of Turkey and other nations and alliances of the West and the East in frame of "Third Neighbor" policy.²⁶

This phrase has openly declared the interest of Mongolia to develop closer and strategic relation with Turkey.

Turkish side may interest in what the Third Neighbor is and how it was defined, then. National Security Concept of Mongolia adopted in 2010 states:

3.1.1.5. Bilateral and multilateral partnership and cooperation shall be developed with highly-developed, democratic nations in political, economic, cultural and humanitarian fields in frame of "Third Neighbor" policy.²⁷

The phrase clearly defines what the Third Neighbor's requirements are.

Turkey obviously meets those requirements of "highly-developed, democratic nation". Ankara is a member of industrialized G-20 nations; which fact clearly shows how "highly developed" is. Besides, this is one of the advanced democracies in Asia although the West has critical about it from the liberal point of view.

The definition of Third Neighbor given by the National Security Concept is heavily criticized by rationalists saying it was too ideological and argues that Mongolian Third Neighbor should be a nation powerful enough to change the power of balance in the region. Even by this definition, Turkey still is well qualified to be the Third Neighbor, as a nation that plays an important role in

26 "National Security Concept", URL.

27 "National Security Concept", URL.

Eurasian politics, especially in Central Asia. Ankara has already become a regional power and further claims to become a global power.²⁸

5.2. Koreans Set Example for Turkey

Turkey truly enjoys a great sympathy from Mongolians as much as South Koreans. South Korean role that plays in Mongolian political, economic and social life may present a good example for Turkey as Mongolia expected long and wishes cordially. Seoul is 6th foreign trade partner²⁹ and total FDI from South Korea amounts US\$ 452 million both in retail trade and Small and Medium Entrepreneurship, in which US\$ 15 million was made by March, 2018, MongolBank statistics shows.³⁰ Today, two countries agreed and negotiate the bilateral FTA. In fact, Seoul's small and medium investment constitutes parity with Chinese overflowing presence.

Mongol – Turkish relation has unfortunately yet to use its full potentials. Ankara is yet to become one of the biggest trade partners. Its economic presence it far low; total FDI amounts US\$ 15 million, of which only US\$ 84.000 was made by March, 2018, MongolBank statistics shows.³¹

Turkey however enjoys a great potential of playing an important role in Mongolian life and there is a revealing case about it. Until 2012, when Turkish Airline offered an alternative route from Mongolia to Europe and the U.S.A., Incheon Airport was almost only hub to those destinations. Korean Air was the main carrier and all have flied via Seoul.” For us, Mongolians,” E. Gantumur, a journalist writes, “only main viable route to the world has become this [Korean Air] company, except for others like Aeroflot and Air China”.³² There were routes via Moscow and Beijing, but it was not used intensive as Incheon.

28 Ochirjav Ochir, (Former Ambassador to Turkey) in discussion with author, The Downtown Tower, Ulaanbaatar, September 26, 2018.

29 “Гадаад худалдаа – 2017 (*Foreign Trade – 2017*)” (National Statistics Office of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar; 2017) 9, table 1. Available at http://1212.mn/BookLibraryDownload.ashx?url=Foreign_trade_2017.pdf&ln=Mn

30 “*Inflow of Foreign Direct Investment to Mongolia by Economic Sectors (Монгол Улсад орсон ГХШО-ын орох урсгал, Эдийн засгийн үйл ажиллагааны салбараар)*” (dataset on Microsoft Excel file) (Ulaanbaatar: MongolBank, 2019). Available at https://www.mongolbank.mn/documents/statistic/externalsector/pozits_report/shuud2010-2018Q3.xlsx

31 “*Foreign Direct Investment to Mongolia (Монгол Улсад Гадаад Улсаас Оруулсан Шууд Хөрөнгө Оруулалт)*” (dataset on Microsoft Excel Sheet) (Ulaanbaatar: MongolBank, 2018). Available at https://www.mongolbank.mn/documents/statistic/externalsector/pozits_report/shuud2010-2018A.xlsx

32 E. Guntumur, “Regency of Korean Air Company and Corrupted Trechury of Mongolian Politicians (Кореейн Эйр компанийн хаанчлал ба Монголын улстөрчдийн увайгүй байдал)”, *mongolcom.mn* <http://mongolcom.mn/read/28300>

Korean Air Antitrust Complaint come up in Seoul in early 2018, one of the allegations was a monopoly in Ulaanbaatar – Incheon route.

Korean Air is being criticized for taking the expensive airline charge for the 19 years on the Ulaanbaatar route from Incheon to Mongolia, which has secured the exclusive rights to travel from the government in the past. According to Incheon International Airport's exclusive route, Korean Air is receiving Ulaanbaatar air fare for 3 times more than the similar distance and flight time between Incheon and Hong Kong.³³

This issue was just recently resolved by bilateral ministerial meetings in January 2019 and agreed to increase the number of flights and the aircompanies in this route.³⁴

Victims of this monopoly was not only Mongolians, but also Mongol – Turkish relation. Since 2012, Korean Air passenger flow from Ulaanbaatar was dropped by about 20 percent³⁵ even though Turkish Air flights were strictly limited with 500 passengers per week.³⁶ Implementing the Mongol – Korean ministerial level agreement will soon open the door for Turkish Airline to increase number of flights and seats, offering an alternative route from Ulaanbaatar to Europe and America.

If Mongolia makes FTA with Korea, Turkish Airline position in Mongolian air travel market may eventually decrease. The issue was discussed as early as 2016 and goes under careful studies from both sides.³⁷ If it successfully concluded, it would be the second treaty of such kind after the Mongol – Japanese Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) adopted in February 11, 2015. Although just two years have passed since the Mongol – Japanese EPA was established, trade volume has increased by 70% and overall outcome is positive as Professor N. Batnasan has concluded.³⁸ Once Ulaanbaatar has a positive reflection about this EPA, the same is anticipated from Mongol – Korean one. This will surely affect other actor's position in Mongolian economy, including Turkish.

33 Kim Yang Hyuk, "Korean Air monopolizing Mongolia-Incheon route; 'Expensive tickets' for 19 years" *Economic Daily Digital Times*, http://eng.dt.co.kr/contentss.html?article_no=20180516110129001674

34 Kh. Batsaikhan, "MIAT – Korean Air Monopoly Ends and Flight Tickets Soon be Cheaper МИАТ, "Корейн эйр"-ийн монополиялол дуусч, нислэг хямдрах боломж бүрдлээ", *eagle.mn*, <http://eagle.mn/r/54953>

35 (A Former Politician, Pro Turkish Airline lobbyist) in discussion with the author in his office in The Downtown Tower, Ulaanbaatar; November 27, 2018.

36 Rinchendulam. R., "Монгол, Туркийн хооронд шууд нисвэл эерэг өөрчлөлтүүд гарна (*Direct Flight Between Mongolia and Turkey Would Bring Positive Outcomes*)" (Interview with H.E. Ahmet Yazal, Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to Mongolia) *Өдрийн сонин* (Daily News) <https://news.mn/r/512473/>

37 B.Batchimeg, "Trade turnover between Mongolia and the Republic of Korea reaches USD200 million", *montsame*, <https://montsame.mn/en/read/136614>

38 N.Batnasan, "Mongol – Japan EPA; Pre-requisites, Implementation and Steps Should Be Taken (Монгол Японы ЭЗТХ: байгуулах шаардлага ба хэрэгжүүлэх алхамууд)", (paper presented at Ulaanbaatar Analytics Debate on Mongol – Japan EPA, The Downtown Tower Conference Hall, Ulaanbaatar, January 18, 2019)

Although Mongolian relation with both nations, Turkey and South Korea, are in the same level of Comprehensive Partnership³⁹, Seoul is much eager. Ulaanbaatar hopes that Ankara has the same potential as Seoul and two nations, Mongolia and Turkey, shall foster the cooperation to accomplish the task that President Mehmet Erdogan has stated “strive and upgrade the relations to the level of strategic partnership”.⁴⁰

Conclusion

In brief, Ulaanbaatar looks at Turkey as its Third Neighbor in its policy toward Eurasia and highly value Ankara’s potential as Strategic Partner. For this context, following points should be restated.

1. Having good relation with Ulaanbaatar will challenge neither Moscow nor Beijing since Third Neighbor policy is not about hard balancing, but soft one. Third Neighbor policy of Mongolia never requires its partners to withstand against Russia and China.

Besides, Third Neighbor policy has clearly defined the limitations or points where Ulaanbaatar should revise its cooperation with its partners due to its national security concerns derived from the geostrategic location.

2. Mongolian policy towards Eurasia is yet to be defined. It is because of a deeply rooted ignorance based on historical stereotype and cultural similarity. Political and academic debate if Ulaanbaatar should join SCO in summer 2018 has revealed the importance of the further and deeper studies of Eurasia and Central Asia to formulate reliable national policy towards the regions. Turkish academics and think-tanks have a great potential for helping Mongolian researchers, who work elaborate, formulate and recommend such policies for the decision makers.
3. Turkey has a great potential in Mongolian economy yet to become reality. Ulaanbaatar looks at Ankara would play the same role in Mongolian economy as South Koreans play. If Seoul’s investment in some extent balances Chinese overflowing presence in Mongolian small and medium entrepreneurship, Turkey surely has no lesser potential in this regard. Indeed, Ulaanbaatar would like to see Ankara from the West, Seoul from the East together balanced economic presence of Russia and China.

39 Mongolia strives to develop its relation with its Third Neighbor to the level of Strategic Partnership. Today, its relation with Japan (in 2010) and India (in 2011) were declared as Strategic Partnership, while with the U.S.A. Expanded Comprehensive Partnership (in 2019). Mongolian relations with South Korea (in 2011) and Turkey were equally declared as Comprehensive Partnership.

40 B.Amarsaikhan, “Mehmet Erdogan: Mongolia and Turkey should strive for strategic partnership”, *montsame*, <https://montsame.mn/en/read/127389>



MONGOLIA'S THIRD NEIGHBORHOOD POLICY AND CHANGING WORLD ORDER

Asst. Prof. Bahadır PEHLİVANTÜRK*

Thank you very much Mr. Ambassador. I think we have met with Prof. Mashbat Otgonbayar some years ago, probably in SAM (Strategic Research Center of Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs). I have to say that at the time SAM was a really small place. It has become a bigger institution with some level of influence at least in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

If I am not wrong, I remember having listened to Professor Otgonbayar on conundrums and limitations of Mongolian foreign policy and its foreign affairs. Two things remained in my mind: One was that Mongolia has a very simple geopolitical environment; it has only two neighbors, giant neighbors; Russia and China. It sounds so different from Turkey's geopolitics, which has so many land and sea neighbors in a transregional area, complicating its foreign policy quite a lot. Mongolia's geopolitical situation on the other hand seems rather simple. While saying 'simple', this is certainly not something that makes its foreign policy easier. As a matter of fact, it might be the contrary. One can say that its geography provides limited choices to Mongolia. Listening to Professor Otgonbayar's speech on

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Mongolian foreign policy, I had a feeling that Mongolia was not very happy about these limited choices and it wished to have wider opportunities with the rest of the world. Some prefer to call these two great power neighbors, Russia and China, as two emergent great powers. Some also see these countries as revisionist countries. So, I think it is a very interesting and also an awkward situation for Mongolia to be situated between Russia and China, two revisionist great powers.

On the other hand, maybe it is also lucky that these two great powers today have some level of a harmonious relationship through their corporation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). This has not always been the case in the history. Therefore, the problem I feel is that Mongolia's foreign policy in the future depends on the future of Russia-China bilateral relations. What if Russia and China again become damagingly competing countries again? In many senses of the word, they are competitors even today. But a more conflictual competition between these countries can complicate Mongolia's foreign policy which I dared to say simple (but not easy) just now.

Mongolia, as I understand it, tries to create wider options for itself. In this sense, the Third Neighbor Policy sounds like a very smart and useful concept. First of all, it does not change or deny the geography of Mongolia; it is still a landlocked country with two neighbors. But today technological advancements are making geography less of a hindrance for connecting to the wider world. We are not living in 19th century world, so Mongolia has lot of options I think, in terms of receiving investment, establishing strong diplomatic relations, and building up soft power. Today there is also a general tendency that resolutions of problems are not through achieved conflict or war, and there is more room for conflict resolution through diplomacy and economic means. I see the Third Neighbor Policy as a manifestation of soft power. It does make sense that Mongolia would need extra opportunities besides its two neighbors to expand its options and engage with the wider world in a peaceful manner. I have to say that I feel honored that Turkey has become part of this small list of countries and also major international organizations such as EU, ASEAN and NATO. I believe that Turkey should build on its role as one of Mongolia's third neighbors, as a standalone country and as a member of NATO.

This is related to the second thing that I remember from our previous meeting with Professor Otgonbayar; that Mongolia was also trying to present itself as an Asian, an East Asian country, rather than a Central Asian country. I remember that at the time, my perception on Mongolia was that it was more of a Central Asian country rather than an East Asian country. This is reflected in academic approaches to Mongolia. In my search, I was not able to find any text book that includes Mongolia as an Eastern Asian country, so that I could present Mongolia's place in East Asia to my graduate students. I think Mongolia has to do more, maybe promote itself more, to be perceived as such. It seems that it is still easier to place Mongolia in Central Asia.

The term of Asia-Pacific is also becoming a bit of a passage. There is this new term now; Indo Pacific, which I believe is a more correct reflection of the region. Some see it as an effort to make China a little less visible, and this might be true. On the other hand, it also reflects the fact that East Asia and the most-talked phenomenon of the rise of Asia is not a China-centric phenomenon. It includes all Asia, including Southeast Asia and South Asia as well. We in Turkey for instance, tend to miss the huge Southeast Asian region, 650 million people, to a large extent. One can hardly find a meeting, conference, news, publications or discussions on the region. There is scant academic work on it in Turkey. Same goes for South Asia as well. One should not forget that India's population will be bigger than China very soon.

On a positive note, I have to say that there are signs of recently increasing interest in Turkey towards Asia that goes beyond China. Of course, there has always been some public interest towards Japan and Korea, mostly in cultural aspects such as TV dramas and anime. But there is also a growing interest (at least in some government agencies) towards Southeast Asia. Turkey has become a Sectoral Dialogue Partner of ASEAN last year. I think Mongolia has also applied but has not been accepted yet. It seems that ASEAN was rather quick in picking Turkey as a sectoral dialogue partner, which I find rather interesting and shows the rising visibility of Turkey in extra-regions.

The ASEAN's expectation from the sectoral dialogue partners is quite a lot in terms of funding developmental projects and investment, which are supposed to be done in all ASEAN countries and not only in the Muslim or specific ones. Turkey has pledged to do that, and the Turkish government has promised to realize many specified projects in the region. Unfortunately, I do not have knowledge about how much of these are being realized because it is quite new. I also do not know what is expected from Mongolia for such a partnership, but I understand that Mongolia has a strong interest in ASEAN as a third neighbor, and I am sure Mongolia will be a Sectoral Dialogue Partner at one point as well.

India and ASEAN are important, and they should be included in calculations for the future. Today, most of the analysis and predictions for the future imagine a showdown between two powers, USA and China. Most of the popular talk is on whether China can be the next hegemon or not. However, if one takes the Indo-Pacific as the framework concept, one would see that the future might be way more complicated. If you allow me, I will attempt to make an analogy, even though I am not as apt in using colorful analogies as Professor Bağcı is. I'll risk it anyway. Let's imagine two cowboys, one Chinese one American (ok, it is a little bit weird) facing each other, eyeing each other. This is the way the future is imagined in popular discussion on the future of world order. I believe that it is not going to be like that. India is also developing fast. Southeast Asia is also coming very strongly, an important economic grouping that have been very successful in centralizing

themselves in Asian politics (called ASEAN centrality). One should also not underestimate Japan. It might be the third biggest economy in the world, but I believe it is the second most important economy in the world if one takes account of its scale of global investments, its financial power, and also its technological leadership. It will continue to be very influential sometime to come. There also other potential leaders in other parts of the world, yielding different levels of increasing influence on various world issues. So, I believe the future will look more like Amitav Acharya's concept of a multiplex world order, in which there are many different powers with different levels of capabilities and sets of skills, competing with each other on different issues. Following up on the cowboy analogy, I would like to remind you the ending of the well-known spaghetti Western movie, *The Good the Bad and the Ugly*, in which there were three cowboys in a showdown. The future world will probably have many cowboys with different types of (metaphorical) guns, different skills, capacities, and interests, eying different sets of competitors for different issues. The main street will probably not be dominated by only one or two players.

It is hard to guess what challenges such a complicated world order would pose for Turkey and Mongolia. But establishing good and friendly bonds between these two distant countries that includes substance (such as trade and investment relations as well as organic bonds) should be beneficial for them in increasing their ability to navigate through difficult times.

Today, looking at Turkey-Mongolia relations, I saw that there has been an increase of interest paralleling Turkey's interest in rest of the world and Mongolia's efforts to overcome its geography. In 2011, Turkey became the third neighbor for Mongolia. In 2004, after a long time, Mongolian President visited Turkey, and then after a long time in 2013, Erdoğan as Prime Minister visited Mongolia. In 2015, during Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu's visit to Mongolia there was the Joint Economic Committee discussions. There is a considerable level of fluctuation in Turkish- Mongolian trade relations, which range between 23 million and 48 million USD, which can be explained by the small volume. It seems the goal is to increase the volume to 300 million USD. TİKA has granted 88 million Dollars of ODA to Mongolia until now, which I believe is quite substantial. So obviously there is an interest towards Mongolia from Turkey, coming out of Turkish leaders' wish to make Turkey a global country, and also out of the perception of Mongolia by Turkey as a brother country (if not a Turkic) in Central Asia, sharing some historical roots and relativity with Turkey.

Finishing my speech, I would like to suggest that Turkey and Mongolia should deepen and substantiate their relations, which is a necessity in an evolving complex world. Mongolia should continue to promote itself in Turkey, both as an East Asian country and also as a Central Asian country. Thank you very much for listening.



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