

Letter to the Editor

MONGOLIA-TURKISH RELATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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After the collapse of the Manchu Qing Dynasty, Mongolia regained its independence in 1911. As a result, Mongolia has obtained its own constitution, currency, government, armed forces and borders. Mongolian authorities made several attempts to gain recognition of the independence by other powers in the early 20th century but found no success. Although not recognized by international community, yet declared its independence, Mongolia's de facto existing was unprecedented phenomenon in international relations. At that time, the Mongolian People's Republic had only a diplomatic mission in Moscow. Until the end of the World War II, Mongolia's strategic importance attracted the attention of the surrounding powers and served as a platform for their geopolitical play. The Soviet Union, the United States, and Britain signed an agreement at Yalta February 1945 to "preserve the status quo of Mongolia." Consequently, the Soviet Union and the United States pressured the Kuomintang government to recognize Mongolia's independence. Henceforth the process of de jure recognition of Mongolia's independence in the international arena has begun. With the restoration of Mongolia's independence in 1911, relations between Mon-

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golia and Turkey were able to be established. Unfortunately, Mongolian-Turkish relations were limited until the end of the 20th century. This was due not only to geographical remoteness but also to differences in political systems and the Cold War.

Interestingly, there were common features in political history of Mongolia and Turkey. Mongolia and Turkey established republican rule almost simultaneously in the early 20th century. The proclamation of the Republic of Turkey on October 29, 1923 marked the end of the centuries-old Ottoman Empire. A year later, Mongolia abolished monarchy and proclaimed the People's Republic of Mongolia in its first constitution. In 1921, the People's Party was formed by political groups formed in Mongolia to oppose foreign aggression. In the fall of 1923, Turkish patriots opposing the foreign invasion formed a political organization called the People's Party. Until the end of World War II, Mongolia and Turkey both were dominated by one party system. However, from 1946, other political parties were allowed to openly operate in Turkey, while in Mongolia, one-party rule lasted until 1990. Another similarity is the separation of religious affairs from the state, given that religion has a significant impact on the social life of both Mongolia and Turkey, and that the majority of the population is religious. In order to modernize the country and bring it closer to Western culture, Atatürk successfully completed the transition from Arabic alphabet to Latin in 1928. The Mongolian government also decided to switch to Latin and began preparations, however failed to do so and stopped the initiative in 1941¹. In the 1930s, some Mongolian leaders were particularly interested in Turkey's reform movement, its experience of establishing secular state, and its policy of switching to the Latin alphabet.

After the Second World War, the independence of the People's Republic of Mongolia was recognized by Eastern European countries, Asian countries such as India and Indonesia, and later in the 1960s by other Western countries such as Britain and France. Mongolia is grateful that Turkey, as one of the first 50 members of the United Nations, continuously supported the People's Republic of Mongolia's accession to the United Na-

1 Ц. Багдорж “Бичиг үсгийн талаарх Монгол төрийн бодлого - 1921 оноос өнөөг хүртэл”.

tions during the 1950s. The People's Republic of Mongolia became a full member of the United Nations² with the support of nine members of the Council, including Turkey, when its application for membership was considered at the UN Security Council meeting on October 25, 1961. Hence the strengthening position of the People's Republic of Mongolia on the international arena, created favorable conditions for mutual recognition of Mongolia and Turkey, and thus in 1969 the two countries established diplomatic relations. However, due to the Cold War, bilateral relations did not go beyond mutually appointing non-resident Ambassadors.

The end of the Cold War created favorable conditions for a new phase in Mongolian-Turkish relations. The visit by H.E. Ts. Gombosuren, Foreign Minister of Mongolia to Turkey in 1992 started the expansion of our bilateral relations in different fields. The 1990s were a time when the legal basis for bringing Mongolian-Turkish relations to a new level was laid. In accordance with the new international environment, Mongolia renewed its friendship and cooperation agreement with its two neighbors in 1993-1994. Following this, a friendship and cooperation agreement was signed between Mongolia and Turkey in 1995, which shows how much importance Mongolia attaches to Turkey. Mongolia have signed friendship and cooperation agreement with 12 countries of which three are NATO members and one of it happen to be Turkey. The Turkish side has also expressed strong interest in cooperating with Mongolia from early 1990s. To date, more than 30 intergovernmental agreements have been signed on cooperation in education, culture and defense. High-level political visits between the President, the Prime Minister, and the Speaker of Parliament are being held regularly.

Since 1999 the Joint Intergovernmental Committee on Trade and Economic Cooperation has been a permanent and important mechanism for the development of bilateral relations between Mongolia and Turkey. Today bilateral trade turnover has not exceeded \$ 40-50 million a year (Mongolia's annual exports are only \$ 3-5 million), and trade is extremely limited. Therefore, increasing trade is an important issue in bilateral relations. The Joint Committee meeting in 2018 set a goal to increase bilat-

2 Р.Болд “Монголын тусгаар тогтнол ба АНУ” УБ 2008 т .269.

eral trade turnover to \$ 300 million. In recent years, Mongolian small and medium-sized businesses have achieved some progress in the field of business by importing small enterprises and technologies from Turkey and opening franchises of well-known brands in Turkey, such as Karachi, Cotton De Facto ... A joint Mongolian-Turkish Chamber of Commerce was established in 2020, and the two sides have agreed to explore opportunities for cooperation in the leather sector in the first place. Although there is a favorable legal environment for investment in Mongolia, Turkey has invested only about \$ 22 million into the Mongolian service sector. The Mongolian side had high hopes for the Turkish investment, but so far no significant progress has been made. Therefore, it is our duty to inform Turkish investors about the conditions of Mongolian investment and to fill in the gaps.

The Mongolian side is eager to acquire technology in the agricultural sector from Turkey, for instance in the leather industry, and in importing small-scale machinery and equipment for milk and dairy processing. There is also an opportunity to build a joint meat and leather processing³ plant in the Mongolian free economic zone to produce goods for nearby giant markets, such as China and Russia. In 2018 the governments of Mongolia and Turkey generally have come to an agreement to conclude a free trade agreement. It would definitely come as a surprise to others to agree to a FTA with extremely limited trade. However, we are grateful that the Turkish side understood and supported the Mongolian proposal. On the other hand, it is a far-reaching goal. Mongolia is more interested in cooperating in this sector, as small and medium-sized enterprises account for more than 60 percent of Turkey's exports. Every year, 10,000 Mongolian tourists come to Turkey for long and short periods. However, the number of Turkish tourists visiting Mongolia does not exceed 2,000 a year, which is a very small number. The Istanbul-Ulaanbaatar flight is launched in January 2020, increasing the number of historical and cultural tourists from Turkey to Mongolia. One way to increase trade between the two geographically distant countries is to open air freight routes.

3 Энэхүү боломжийг ашиглахад Монгол, Туркийн хооронд байгуулсан чөлөөт бүсийн хамтын ажиллагааны санамж бичиг хоёр талын бизнес эрхлэгчдэд дөхөм үзүүлнэ гэдэгт найдаж байна.

The Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA) has been functioning in Mongolia since 1994. Mongolian people appreciate that the agency has been implementing a number of projects in the fields of education, health and agriculture in rural area and thus making a valuable contribution to local development. The so-called Orkhon-Yenisei inscription, found in Mongolia and Siberia in the 19th century, was discovered in the Orkhon Valley and translated into Mongolian by the famous Mongolian scholar B. Rinchen in the 1930s⁴. Another well-known Mongolian archaeologist, N.Ser-Odjav, studied more than 400 archeological sites belonging to the Turkic period in Mongolia and proven that the cradle of the Turkic Empire was in present-day Mongolia⁵. It is important that scientists from both countries work together to further enrich and validate this finding. Without the development of Mongol studies in Turkey and without increasing the number of Mongolian-speaking Turkish scholars, it would be one-sided to study Turkic studies alone. It is a great achievement that Istanbul and Katip Celebi universities have invited Mongolian teachers to teach the language to the Turkish students.

In principle the two sides agreed on a high level to jointly establish a tourist complex in the Orkhon Valley. The ancient capital of Mongolia, Kharkhorin, is located in the Orkhon Valley. The joint implementation of a project to renovate the city's airport is needed to boost tourism. TIKA is building a museum based on Bilge Khan in the Orkhon Valley and a statue of the sage Tonyukuk near Ulaanbaatar, which are important projects to attract tourists.

The most successful cooperation in the past has been in the field of education. The first Mongolian student to study on a Turkish government scholarship set foot in Turkey in the year of 1993. To date, more than 1,200 Mongolian students have graduated from Turkish universities under this scholarship. This is a major investment from Turkey in Mongolia's education sector. At the same time, more than 1,100 young people from Mongolia have been educated in Turkey at their own expense and more than 60 percent of these graduates are successful in the private sector.

4 Н.Сэр-Оджав “Эртний Түрэгүүд” (VI-VIII зуун) УБ 1970 т.5.

5 Н.Сэр-Оджав “Эртний Түрэгүүд” (VI-VIII зуун) УБ 1970 т.87-89.

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Mongolia and Turkey, only in 2018-2020, 6 scientific conferences on historical and modern relations between Mongolia and Turkey were held at the universities in Istanbul, Bahçeşehir, Katip Çelebi, Hacettepe ... and made an important contribution to strengthening mutual understanding. In particular, the Turkish Academy of Sciences pays great attention to cooperation with Mongolia, and the Academy's 2018 award was presented to a Mongolian citizen, a Turkish researcher L.Bold. The award was an appreciation of the scientific relationship between the two countries. It should be noted that in July 2020, the Turkish Academy of Sciences organized an online discussion among Turkish researchers in support of the Genghis Khan Museum in Mongolia in order to promote Genghis Khan studies. The experience of Atatürk's policy of switching to the Latin alphabet in 1928 in order to lay the groundwork for reform in his country will also be of interest to Mongolia.

Ahmet Timur, a Turkish Mongol scholar, first translated the historical book "The Secret History of Mongols" into Turkish, which was published in 1948. Since then, the work has been translated into Turkish several times by some Turkish scholars. In recent years, collections of poems by Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet and Elif Şafak, as well as several books by Orhan Pamuk, have been translated into Mongolian and appreciated by the readers. Galsan's book was translated. In perspective, the mutual launching of the Mongolian and Turkish cultural centers is necessary to share information about the modern development of the two countries and to deepen mutual understanding between the peoples.

The National Security Concept of Mongolia, approved by the Mongolian Parliament in 2010, states that bilateral and multilateral relations and cooperation in the political, economic, cultural and humanitarian spheres will be fostered with developed democracies within the framework of the "third neighbor" policy⁶. Therefore, in the Mongolia's foreign policy concept, approved by the Mongolian parliament in 2011, it was stated that we aim to expand partnership and cooperation with the United States from afar, Japan, India and South Korea in Asia, and with the EU and

6 Монгол Улсын үндэсний аюулгүй байдлын үзэл баримтлал УБ хот 2010 он.

Turkey in the West as part of a “third neighbor” policy⁷. Thus, the recognizing of Turkey as a “highly developed democracy” and selecting as one of its “third neighbors” indicates that the Mongolian side continues to attach great importance to bilateral relations. The Mongolian leadership wants our Turkish partners to accept and respond to this. Mongolia established strategic partnership with its “third neighbors”, the United States, India and Japan, and in talks with South Korea. Turkey is the only “third neighbor” with whom we have not established a strategic partnership yet. Mongolia and Turkey have agreed in 2013 to upgrade the level of bilateral relations to a strategic partnership, and just recently the relevant talks begun. If the three characteristics, such as free market economy, good governance with separated religion from state affairs and unique democracy are firmly maintained, the interest of other countries to follow Turkey’s model of development will not diminish. Mongolia’s foreign policy is based on the principles of peace, openness, independence and multipillar approach. We want Turkey to be one of those pillars. Therefore, I hope that Turkish international relations and security researchers and scholars will study in depth the nature of Mongolia’s “third neighbor” policy and the reason why the Mongolian side attaches importance and calls Turkey as a “third neighbor.” In this regard, it should be noted with delight that the Turkish Center for Eurasian Studies is organizing a discussion among Turkish researchers on Mongolian foreign policy⁸.

Turkey is located at the intersection of Europe, the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Geopolitically, strategically and economically, there is almost no other country in the world with such a favorable geographic location. According to Mackender’s classical definition, Asia Minor is a part of Eurasia⁹, and therefore Turkey is a country that can play an influential role in the Eurasian space in addition to Russia and China.

7 Монгол Улсын гадаад бодлогын үзэл баримтлал УБ хот 2011 он.

8 “Asya-Avrupa Zirvesi Oncesi Mogolistan`daki Guncel Durum, Mogolistan`in Bolgesel Potansiyeli ve Turk-Mogol Iliskileri” No: 19, Ankara, April 2016. “Eurasia from the Perspective of Turkey and Mongolia” AVIM Conference Book 23, May 2019: Ankara.

9 Sir Halfrod J.Mackinder “Democratic Ideals and Reality” NDU Press Washington,DC 1941,p.106.

Because Turkey is not an outsider in Eurasia. After the Cold War, some Turkic-speaking Central Asian countries and Turkey pursued a policy of economic and cultural rapprochement. As a result, the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States was established in 2009. Turkey's support for the preservation of the national languages, cultures, and customs of the peoples of Central Asia and the Caucasus in some Turkic-speaking countries has no malicious intent, but an anticipated approach that seeks to re-establish decades long ties and "brotherhood". This is not, as some say, an attempt to revive the "Ottoman Empire." This is merely a sign that Turkey's foreign policy is becoming more active and multilateral globally and regionally. The ancestors of the Turkic people migrated from the Orkhon Valley and thus had historical ties with the Mongols. The courtesy of the Turks, who cherish this historical ties, is conducive to mutual understanding between the Mongolian and Turkish peoples. Rashid al-Din called the nomadic peoples of Asia, the Turkic-speaking and the Mongolian-speaking, two nations, and wrote that if the Turks and the Mongols worked together, they could form a strong group. Therefore, I personally believe that it is not impossible to join the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States as an observer.

Mongolia and Turkey have a friendly tradition of supporting each other in the framework of international organizations and multilateral cooperation. Turkey has actively supported Mongolia's accession to the OSCE in Europe and its partnership with NATO. Bilateral cooperation within the United Nations continues to be successful.

Here are some of the steps we have to take to further deepen Mongolian-Turkish relations. Mongolia attaches great significance to establishing a strategic partnership with Turkey, an important player in Eurasia, an influential member of the G20 and NATO. It is also important to strengthen Mongolia's national security. On the other hand, I hope that our Turkish partners are paying attention to the fact that Turkey is the only Muslim country that treats Mongolia as a "third neighbor". Strategic partnerships are the highest form of trust. The Mongolian side hopes that the establishment of this partnership will raise the level of bilateral relations to a new level.

The Mongolian side is deeply interested in intensifying economic and trade cooperation through the immediate establishment of a strategic partnership. It is in the interests of both parties to use Mongolian free zones to export Mongolian and Turkish joint ventures to the two major markets surrounding Mongolia. Therefore, the Mongolian side is ready to invite Turkish investors to Mongolia and provide them with all favorable working conditions.

Mongolia is deeply interested in Turkey's experience in pursuing an active energy policy in Eurasia. The governments of Mongolia and Russia are cooperating to implement a project to build a natural gas pipeline connecting Russia and China through Mongolia. In this regard, the Mongolian side would like to share its experience in implementing the TANAP project, a 1,200-kilometer-long pipeline carrying Azerbaijani natural gas to the European market through Turkey. Mongolia and Turkey are among the countries with significant renewable energy resources. Therefore, the Mongolian side is interested in cooperating in the renewable energy sector and introducing Turkish technology.

Like Turkey's goal of using the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway as part of the Silk Railway, the Mongolian side is interested in participating in the One Road, One Zone project and having access to a railway to Central Asia. In 2019, a convoy of freight trains from China reached Europe via Turkey for the first time using the line. The railway line between Turkey and Mongolia is theoretically through Siberia. Therefore, if the bilateral trade turnover increases, it cannot be ruled out that the time will come for the transportation of goods between the two countries by rail.

In fact, only TIKA, Turkish Airlines, and the Mongolian Alumni Association are the only bridges connecting Mongolia and Turkey. Mongolian-Turkish relations should not be limited to the preservation of historical monuments of the Turkic period in Mongolia and the education of Mongolian students on Turkish scholarships. Significant resources that are not used for political, trade, economic, investment and cultural cooperation between Mongolia and Turkey need to be put into circulation. I think that in order to do that, both sides need to have the same spirit and initiative.