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EDITOR'S NOTE

MUHITTIN ATAMAN

This issue of *Insight Turkey* comes with a different format and brings to its readers two different topics that require special attention when we consider the latest regional and global affairs. The planned topic was Central Asia; however, the early presidential and parliamentary elections in Turkey led us to cover a second topic in the issue. First, the current issue focuses on a forgotten but very important region of Central Asia. The second section of the journal comprises commentaries and articles on the latest elections in Turkey, how to understand them and what could be the future of the presidential system.

Central Asia is one of the most geostrategic and penetrated regions in the world. The founding father of geopolitics, the British geographer Sir Halford John Mackinder, considers Central Asia as a part of the “heartland.” The control of Central Asia, a region stretching from the Caspian Sea in the west to China in the east, is a precondition of the world hegemony. Throughout the 20th century, the Central Asian countries were under the rule of the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the republics of Central Asia re-emerged as independent actors of international politics. Later, they were declared as “near abroad” by Russia; that is, they were kept close to Russia through several multilateral platforms.

Nowadays, Central Asian countries, namely Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, face many challenges such as underdevelopment, poor governance and corruption, mutual mistrust between neighbors, fear of radicalism, and threats from neighboring global powers. The governments of the regional countries must work together in order to be able to overcome these challenges. They need to increase intra-regional trade and to de-secure their relations with other countries.

Central Asian countries are squeezed between two heavyweight powers, Russia and China. With the revitalization of the historical Silk Road by China, many

observers began to discuss the increasing importance and role of the Central Asian countries. Central Asia will be the main ground for intra-East regional and global competition. The mostly Turkic and Muslim countries can play the role of game changers at least, between the two global actors.

Turkey, a country which shares the same language, history and culture with the Central Asian countries, is also one of the effective actors in the region. After an unprepared and unsuccessful attempt to forge links, in the wake of their independence in the 1990s, Turkey has improved its relations with the Turkic states and now has multi-dimensional relations (economic, cultural, political, and security) with these countries.

The transformation of the Turkish political system into a presidential one, after the April 16, 2017 referendum, was finalized with the June 24, 2018 elections, when Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was elected as the first Turkish president in the context of the new presidential system. Naturally, many questions have risen in terms of the transformation of the new system and its impact on Turkey's foreign policy. This issue of *Insight Turkey* aims to discuss this political transformation.

Turkey has been governed by a multi-party parliamentary system for decades. The country has experienced several chaotic periods due to political instabilities, mainly as a result of coalition or weak governments. Since Turkey could not end the bureaucratic (especially military and judiciary) tutelage, it could not consolidate its democracy under the parliamentary system. Therefore, many politicians such as Necmettin Erbakan and Süleyman Demirel asked for the transformation of the system into a presidential one. At a time when the whole world has been experiencing a transformation, Turkey has also decided to consolidate its political authority; and therefore, it has decided to transform its political system into a unified and strong executive power in order to be able to struggle against emerging threats. Ultimately, as a regional power and global actor, Turkey now has a strong political leadership, who plays an effective role in international politics.

In this issue, we bring four manuscripts which analyze in detail the June 2018 elections and the new presidential system in Turkey. On the verge of the reorganization process in Turkey, Zahid Sobacı, Özer Köseoğlu, and Nebi Miş in their article provide a legal and institutional analysis of how the public policy process and the roles and responsibilities of policy actors have changed with the new system.

Understanding the actual elections of June 24 is also very important. In the light of this, the detailed election analyses of Ali Çarkoğlu and Kerem Yıldırım provide an exemplary source. Furthermore, Hüseyin Alptekin's article deals

specifically with the patterns of Kurdish votes in 24 eastern Turkish cities and contends that intra-Kurdish and intra-regional differences have prevailed in the June 24 elections. The last piece on the elections is the commentary written by Ali Yaşar Sarıbay which addresses the factors that led to the new system in Turkey through historical and sociological processes.

Six other manuscripts bring a general perspective on the regional and global affairs in Central Asia. Experts in this area analyze the Russian-Chinese competition in the region, the responses of the Central Asian states and Turkey's comeback in Central Asia.

Morena Skalamera, focusing on the rivalry between global and regional powers in Central Asia, i.e. Russia, China, the U.S., Turkey, etc., intends to explain the Central Asian governments' failure to capitalize on these developments. Mariya Omelicheva and Ruoxi Du, on the other hand, shed light on why Russia has abstained from a possible conflict with China when it comes to the Central Asian energy and transportation networks by arguing that Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy has played a crucial role in this regard.

This issue places a special emphasis on Kazakhstan, considering that it is one of the most important regional states. In the light of this, the articles of Azhar Serikkaliyeva *et al.* and Aidar Kurmashev *et al.* focus on the China-Kazakhstan strategic partnership and Kazakhstan's example of fighting terrorism respectively.

Lastly, as the title of this issue suggests, Turkey is redirecting its attention to Central Asia as a part of its recent foreign policy strategies. In this regards, Bayram Balcı and Thomas Liles provide a brief analysis of Turkey's relations with Central Asian states in the political, economic, and cultural areas. Furthermore, Eşref Yalınkılıçlı focuses especially on Turkey's relationship and cooperation with Uzbekistan, which in the new era seems indispensable for the sake of the former's interests and influences in the region.

Three off-topic manuscripts conclude this issue of *Insight Turkey*. As Trump directs the U.S. towards isolation and continues Obama's policy of retrenchment in the Middle East, other actors such as the UK will attempt to fill the void. Within this context, Gareth Stansfield, Doug Stokes, and Saul Kelly in their article analyze the UK's return to the region and its implication for the balance of power in the region.

Vladimir Bobrovnikov brings attention to the making of the intolerant discourse on Islam in Soviet and Imperial Russia and the attempts to integrate applied Oriental studies into the general debates on Orientalism. Written by Emrah Kekilli, the last commentary focuses on the ongoing Libya crisis and its

forthcoming elections. Placing the main fault upon UAE's intervention, Kekilli contends that the crisis in Libya reflects the regional interests.

With one more year coming to an end, we are pleased to present to our readers another insightful issue which aims to bring attention to the largely ignored region of Central Asia. Furthermore, the latest transformations in Turkey deserve to be analyzed thoroughly and presented to those readers interested in Turkey's politics. With the trust that you will find this issue illuminating and interesting, we look forward to meeting you in the next year's issues. ■

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per year

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growth rate forecast in OECD

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current prices
2017

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