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THE UYGHUR IDENTITY AND RELATIVE PEOPLES' RELATIONSHIP

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Central Asian nations are characterized by ethnical diversity. In the different countries different nationalities live, pure nations-states cannot be apparent. The Uyghurs appear in China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan as a significant ethnicity, they have close ties with the latter, as they can be regarded as relative people with the Turkish from linguistic and cultural point of view. An own, separate state does not exist; although, in 1864 their independence was declared entitled East Turkestan, and during the 20th century their freedom was given twice, they cannot resist the Chinese occupation forces.¹ Nowadays, Uyghur alias Xinjiang is a part of the communist China as an autonomous province. Only 45% of its population is Uyghur who is desperately try to resist the Chinese violent assimilative politics. It is questionable how these Turkic people can count on the help and support of the relative peoples. Turkish' support towards the Uyghur ethnicity with similar language, culture and religion, has changed during the centuries. The same is apparent in case of Kyrgyzstan where one of the most enormous Uyghur diaspora lives. The changing world-politics affected the judgement and support of the ethnicities, too, some countries' priorities has changed, the relationships and economic interests of the great-powers has also modified, and all these things affected a lot the judgement of the Turkic people. The terror attack on 11 September in 2011 brought a complete change, due to this, the separation attempts of the Uyghurs and their movements and organization for an independent and separate state were identified as separatism and terrorism. The Uyghur people with their Muslim religion the least bit count on the support of the relative peoples, as well as their expanding Muslim put the fear into the international communities, and every attempt that tries to reach a people's or an ethnicity' independence with violent is sentenced to death by the international politics.

The Uyghurs is considered to be relative people with the Turks from both linguistic and cultural point of view. The Turks regards this national-ethnical minority group living in the north-west part of China as "brother nation" nowadays too, as they originated from the same part of Asia and their language also is in closer relationship than any other Central Asian peoples' one. Their strong lasting relationship is noticeable symbolically as well, for example

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¹ Bernát, P.: *Az ujgur kérdés és ami mögötte van*. In: *Nemzet és Biztonság*. (April 2008) p. 31

in case of the Turkish president's official flag on which sixteen stars can be seen referring to the Turkish states established during the history. One out of the stars symbolizes the Uyghur state that was established approximately in the 8th century.²

At the beginning of the 20th century considerable amount of Uyghur ethnicity groups escaped to Turkey. Since 1930s they left China on diverse occasions, and found shelters in the Ottoman State. Turkey had a receptive and sympathetic policy towards the Uyghurs, in 1952 when more thousands Uyghurs escaped to Pakistan from the communist regime, due to the Turkey government 1850 people were immigrated into Turkey. The majority of new-comers were located in Anatolia where they were provided with job and citizenship. Nowadays this attitude of the Turkish government has changed a lot. Although, the Turkish citizens unequivocally and obviously stand by the Uyghurs (or the Ottomans call them: East Turkestan people), Ankara is more and more conscious about the Chinese politics, and due to this, its attitude towards the Uyghurs had changed a lot. The Uyghur problem always was a problematic point for Turkey; nevertheless, China is these days' economic great-power, so not only the Ottoman State, but also Central-Asia and the countries next to Uyghur resist more from their support as they try to save their favourable political-economic relationship with China.³

The number of the East Turkestan people who come to Turkey illegally in order to settle down and start a new life there is essential nowadays, too. Earlier a law existed in Turkey according to which, the immigrant Uyghurs were let (because of the empathy of the Turkish people) treated as emigrants rather than immigrants. This act totally modified today. If the migrants who come to the Turkish state already have relatives in that country, they will be provided with residential status, but a guarantee is not given. The Uyghurs who escaped to Turkey has to appeal to the United Nations for the escaped status of the high-commissioner's local office, but different treatment is not given them, like either an Iraqi or a Sudanese exile. The procedure can last for long months, and in a lot of cases, they do not stay on the area of Turkey, but they are sent to another third receptive country with a temporary travelling document, such as Canada or the Netherlands.⁴

² Schleifer, Y.: *Beijing urged Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan to retract his statement that China is committing "genocide" against its Muslim minority.* In: The Christian Science Monitor. (July 14, 2009) [<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2009/0714/p06s16-wome.html>]

³ Turgut P.: *Turkey No Longer a Safe Haven for Chinese Uighurs.* In: Time. (July 27, 2009) [<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1912653,00.html>]

⁴ *ibid.*

It lasted for months when the Uyghur population, who was about to leave its country, finally managed to get the passport edited by the Chinese government. According to the Chinese law two witnesses are needed to justify that the person will come back to China. If it is not happen, the government will take the witnesses to task for the person's emigration. On the contrary, under these conditions more hundreds people took risk and left their earlier country forever.

In Turkey these days the Uyghurs are judged positively, they support them and demonstrate in favour of their rights. Although, Turkey's any attempts which try to make better the Turks' situation are sentenced to death, as Ankara is not a member of the United Nations Commission Council's five constant members, and there was a veto by China and Russia on its effort. The communist Asian great-power's country considers the Uyghur problem its internal issue, and tries to fill the Uyghur separation efforts with separatist, terrorist content. Russia accuses the Uyghurs, stands by the Chinese. Among its arguments it is apparent that this problematic issue is the given country's (i.e. China) internal issue, in which external country has no right to deal with. Moscow's reaction is understandable, as it fights against a similar problem, like in case of the Chechens. It has such regions where mostly Muslim people live and it is challenging to avoid these areas' separation attempts.⁵

It is questionable how far Ankara can and how far it would like to go into the questions concerning the Uyghurs' rights. The up-and-coming countries strive to make successful political connections in the region, and first and foremost, fruitful economic relationship with each other. It is same in case of Turkey and China, too. The enhancement of the economic collaboration was supported by the visit to China of Abdullah Gül, the Turkish president, in 2009, who passed by the Uyghur capital, too. His visit was symbolic because this was the first official visit in the region. Gül, during his visit, claimed that Uyghur creates a bridge between the gaps of the two nations, and make a friendship between China and Turkey. This role will make the two countries improve and deepen their relations, and collaborations.⁶ The presidents' visit, the collaboration and the support of the Uyghurs should be seen symbolically, and there is no real underlying political gap and act behind it, because the modified world-political situation does not make it possible for Turkey to solve the Uyghur question, therefore, the Uyghurs do not wait either for real, political and judicial steps in order to amend their situation.

⁵ Schleifer, Y.: *Turkey's Uighur Problem*. In: Istanbul Calling. (July 10, 2009)
[<http://istanbulcalling.blogspot.hu/2009/07/turkeys-uighur-problem.html>]

⁶ Timur Ş.: *Local Uighurs skeptical about Gül's China visit*. In: Hürriyet Daily. (June 25, 2013)
[<http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/english/world/11968267.asp>]

The other significant country concerning the Uyghur ethnicity is Kyrgyzstan, as it can be considered the centre of the Turk diaspora. According to the official announcements the number of the Uyghurs living here is about 50,000, but according to some estimates this data is not punctual. According to some researchers, the number of the Uyghur minority also can reach the 200,000 in the Central-Asian country. Kyrgyzstan's first important minority group was the Uyghurs. After the break-up of the Soviet Union, Central Asia's countries were reborn as separate countries. At the beginning of the 1990s Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan dealt with their own internal political challenges, did not support and not avoid either the Uyghurs in their plan of creating their East Turkestan state. A lot of Uyghur political organizations were established these days, among others the East Turkestan United National Revolutionary Front. Public assemblies and conferences were organized with the authority of the Kyrgyz government; the Uyghur population were informed about the need of the East Turkestan state's establishment, and steps of the realisations. This process was being carried out until 1994. On the one hand, the Chinese-Russian relations were not organized, on the other hand, the Chinese government forced Kyrgyzstan to solve the border questions, as well as the communist country did not take these Central-Asian countries seriously, they thought that it will stay independent from China because of the weak economic achievement.⁷ Under the direction of Akayev president the Uyghurs could participate actively in their movements for independence. Some members of the Kyrgyz parliament, among them Nurmammed Kenjiyev campaigned in favour of the Uyghurs. The sympathy for the Uyghurs has changed after the establishment of the Shanghai Collaborative Organization from the 2000s years. The Shanghai contract mainly enhanced China and Russia's economic relations and political collaboration, but the Central-Asian countries such as Kyrgyzstan also was involved into the cooperation. The Uyghurs' fate was decided by the part of the contract that unequivocally recognized the west part of China, that leads to the fact that Xinjiang became part of the Asian great-power, all efforts for separation was sentenced to death, and the Central Asian countries which appeared so far as a supporter stopped supporting the Turks. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were forced to mop the Uyghur organizations acting inside the state border up. The first arrests started in 1998. After 2001 China in case of the Uyghurs, and Russia in case of the Chechens, got legitimate for mopping up the independency efforts, in the frame of international expedition which was against the mopping of the

⁷ Tarimi, N. T.: *Akayev's fall brings hope to Uighurs*. In: Asia Times. (March 31, 2005)
[http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/GC31Ag01.html]

terrorism. The release and separation of the Soviet Central Asian countries gave a hope for the Uyghurs; they waited for help in their independency attempts and help in order to modify their judicial situation.⁸ Nonetheless, the political affiliation of the region resulted in unfavourable conditions.

The Uyghurs fights for the independence and separation are identified in a lot of cases as separatism and terrorism. In fact, numerous assassinations and explosion were related to Uyghur separatist organizations (e.g. East Turkestan Muslim Movement, that is in connection with Al-Kaida, too, and in a lot of times bloody fights happened between the Chinese government and the Uyghur fighters; although, not every Uyghur organization is regarded as a terrorist one. After the events of 11th September China tends to entitle every Uyghur organization as a terrorist, on the contrary, for the USA only one organization is a terrorist. The Turk people are Muslim, and try to maintain and expand their religion, unlike the Central-Asian neighbours where it is not important to be more and more eager Muslim. The majority of the Uyghur women wear headscarf, men in their mid-ages a beard is typical. Nonetheless, the Chinese government tries to hinder the Uyghurs from practising their habits. At school the students do not wear headscarves, and the governing employees cannot see the mosques, the habitual daily pray has to be done in secret. The Uyghur separatists mainly made good relationships with the Central Asian Muslim radicals, because there is a significant Uyghur diaspora (approximately 400,000 person), the headquarters of the separatists worked publicly in the 1990s in Almaty (Kazakhstan) and in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan).⁹ Nevertheless, such formations also were appeared that wanted rights without violence for the Uyghur people, non-violent demonstration and protestations were announced; the Uyghur emigrant government can be consider like the above-mentioned characteristics, whose centre is in the USA and Germany, and its leader is Erkin Alptekin.

The chance of the Uyghur ethnicity for the establishment of an independent and separate state is almost an impossible enterprise. On the one hand, the international political situation do not make their independence possible, as China is a significant participant from the world-economy's point of view, so the countries surrounding Xinjiang would not confront with the Asian power. On the other hand, Turkey that is in close relationship with them, cannot solve the problem of Turk people's fate. Partly, because of the regional economic relationship, and on the other part, because of the EU join which had been on the agenda for a long time.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Rotar I: *The Growing Problem Of Uighur Separatism*. In: China Brief. (Volume 4 Issue 8.) The Jamestown Foundation. [[http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=3644#.UcmWnJxBPp4](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=3644#.UcmWnJxBPp4)]

Turkey tries to save the characteristic features of the Ottoman State and culture, however at the same time it also opens towards the European culture and politics, as the EU joining plan resulted in significant changes in the country. In the light of this, it cannot take part in solving such an ethnicity's problem which is identified with terrorism and separatism throughout the world. It becomes more obvious that Uyghurs stayed alone and without supporting countries their situation not likely to be solved and the establishment of their separate state does not likely to happen either.

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