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CENTER for DIPLOMATIC AFFAIRS and POLITICAL STUDIES

MAY 2024 | No: 28

# RUSSIA – UKRAINE CRISIS AND THE REGIONAL ROLE OF THE ORGANIZATION OF TURKIC STATES MEMBERS

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to the emergence of a unipolar order on the international stage. Although Russia lost its sovereignty over the former Soviet territories, it has developed various strategies to maintain its influence in the region. These strategies include reorganizing political and economic relations, continuing cultural and ideological interactions, maintaining military presence, and strengthening relationships with regional allies. Additionally, Russia has attempted to

expand its influence in the region by leveraging historical, demographic, cultural, economic, and ideological ties with the countries of the former Soviet geography. In this context, Russia has shown a tendency to use elements of smart power. Influential diplomacy has been conducted through the provision of economic aid, the organization of cultural activities, and education programs. These activities have influenced the post-independence policies of the former Soviet

territories and played a decisive role in regional balance.

Russia's oppressive and manipulative policies toward the countries of the former Soviet geography led to the crises in Georgia in 2008 and Crimea in 2014. Moscow's military operations launched in February 2022 in response to the Kiev administration's request for NATO membership have also impacted the Turkic republics of Central Asia, which are considered as part of Russia's 'near abroad.' Despite supporting Ukraine's territorial integrity, these Turkic States of Central Asia have avoided direct confrontation with Russia. The dismissal of the foreign ministers who supported Ukraine's territorial integrity in both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan is an example of this.

This study aims to explain the impact of the Russia – Ukraine crisis on regional stability and security in Central Asia. The regional and global economic impacts of the conflict will be evaluated in terms of energy resources, trade relations, and economic connections.

In the final section, findings will be assessed, and the regional role of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) and its members in the Russia – Ukraine war will be analyzed.

### Impact of the Russia-Ukraine War on Regional Stability and Security in Central Asia

The trade routes of Central Asian countries passing through Russia mean that sanctions against Russia also affect the countries of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS). For instance, a significant portion of Kazakhstan's oil exports are conducted through Russian ports, raising concerns that sanctions against Russia could also impact Kazakhstan.

In early 2022, increases in energy prices in Kazakhstan led to street protests, which resulted in President Tokayev requesting assistance from the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). These events illustrate not only the internal political and economic instability in Kazakhstan but also the interaction of regional powers. The increasing Russian population in Kazakhstan is thought to affect the country's internal balance and ethnic structure, as Russia could potentially use its population in Kazakhstan as a tool for intervention. This situation holds strategic importance for Kazakhstan's national security and sovereignty. In this context, Kazakhstan's efforts to balance its relations with Russia are critically important for regional stability and security.<sup>1</sup>

Kazakhstan's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Aybek Smadiyarov has emphasized non-intervention in the Russia-Ukraine war, aligning with international law and the principles of the United Nations, stressing the importance of states' territorial integrity, sovereign equality, and peaceful coexistence.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bahar Özsoy. "Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı ve Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı Ülkeleri", *Türk Dünyası İncelemeleri Dergisi* 22, sy. 2 (Aralık 2022)

<sup>2</sup> "Kazakistan: KGAÖ'nün Rusya ile Ukrayna arasındaki savaşa katılması gündemde değil" <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/dunya/kazakista>

Kyrgyzstan's President Sadyr Japarov has called on the US and other countries not to interfere in internal affairs and to objectively assess the processes occurring in the country, showing a stance alongside Russia. Consequently, the US has imposed sanctions on Kyrgyzstan.<sup>3</sup>

Turkey, a member of the OTS, has displayed a different approach to the Russia-Ukraine war. Based on the Montreux Convention, Turkey's decision to close the Black Sea to warships stands out as a significant step in this conflict, indicating Turkey's role in reducing regional tensions and maintaining a neutral stance. Despite international sanctions, Turkey's continued relations with both Russia and Ukraine and active diplomacy efforts show its desire and efforts to resolve the conflict peacefully.

During the 9th Summit of the Organization of Turkic States held on November 11, 2022, President Erdoğan highlighted that the countries are passing through a sensitive period full of opportunities and risks. He emphasized the importance of strengthening cooperation, solidarity, and harmony in all areas during this period.

### **Economic Impacts of the War in Central Asia**

Some analysts have linked the economic successes of Central Asian countries to the developments following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The relocation of money and businesses by Russian and Belarusian citizens to Central Asia to avoid Western sanctions has increased consumption in the region.

The relocation of Russian companies to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, facilitated by geographical and cultural proximity, has significantly contributed to the economies of these regions. Moreover, companies and investors coming from Russia have created new business opportunities in Central Asian markets, leading to the growth of local businesses and the opening of new job sectors. Central Asian countries aim to enhance trade and investment flows by promoting deeper economic integration within the Eurasian Economic Union framework, strengthening economic ties with Russia while also opening new doors for regional cooperation and development.

These developments not only accelerate economic growth in Central Asia but also enhance social and cultural integration, enabling the region to play a more visible and effective role in the global economy.

The Russia-Ukraine war has introduced various challenges to the energy sector in Central Asia, potentially leaving deep and long-term effects on the regional economies. With the onset of the war, the security and stability of energy transit routes have faced significant challenges. Particularly, energy transfers from Russia to Europe through Russian territory are under threat due to international sanctions, directly affecting the energy exports of Central Asian countries and causing fluctuations in their revenues.

These fluctuations in the energy markets have also significantly impacted global energy prices. While price increases may provide some economic benefits in the short term, they could accelerate the

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<sup>3</sup> "Kazakistan ve Kırgızistan, Rus işgaline nasıl bakıyor?"

<https://www.qha.com.tr/haber-arsivi/kazakistan-ve-kirgizistan-rus-isgaline-nasil-bakiyor-438402>

search for alternative energy sources by purchasing countries in the long term, posing a serious risk of market loss for Central Asia's energy sector.

Furthermore, uncertainties in the energy sector adversely affect the overall structure of regional economies. Fluctuations in energy revenues constrain public spending and strategic investments, creating pressure on economic growth and development.

In summary, the disruptions in the energy sector due to the Russia-Ukraine war contain both opportunities and risks for Central Asia. Price fluctuations and Europe's efforts to reduce energy purchases from Russia have created opportunities for Central Asian countries to explore new markets. For instance, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan have strengthened their positions as alternative gas suppliers to Europe, enhancing their economies by increasing energy exports.

Another opportunity is the global uncertainties in the energy markets, prompting Central Asian countries to invest in renewable energy sources. Investments in renewable sources like solar and wind energy have diversified energy production, enhancing energy security. In this context, the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) has developed various joint policies in the green energy sector.

During the 8th OTS Summit held in Istanbul, member states emphasized the need to further strengthen efficient cooperation on all key issues of mutual interest, including green and renewable energy and the environment, highlighting the importance of renewable energy sources.

At the 3rd Meeting of the OTS Ministers Responsible for Energy held in Budapest, Hungary, on March 30, 2023, the increasing importance of energy on the global agenda was noted. The Turkic States expressed commitments to further develop energy cooperation among them, emphasizing the importance of the 2023-2027 Energy Cooperation Program.

As a disadvantage, the trend of European countries diversifying their energy imports and transitioning to renewable sources could cause Central Asia to lose its traditional market role.

Control struggles over energy routes and resources, along with disputes over energy transit routes caused by the Russia-Ukraine war, could lead to regional and global disputes. In this context, OTS member states need to pursue a policy of balance.

### Conclusion

The opportunities and risks created by the Russia-Ukraine war on Central Asia's energy sector play a critical role in shaping the future strategies of the regional countries. The rise in energy prices and the impact of international sanctions have provided Central Asia with the opportunity to strengthen its position as an alternative energy supplier to Europe. Particularly, countries like Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan can turn this situation to their advantage to support their economic growth.

Furthermore, uncertainties in the energy markets are directing Central Asian countries towards investments in renewable energy, thereby diversifying energy production and ensuring long-term sustainability. This process promotes regional cooperation and development,

enabling Central Asia to take a more active role in the global economy. However, alongside these opportunities, fluctuations in the energy markets due to Russia's involvement also increase the risk of Central Asia losing its traditional energy export markets. Europe's efforts to diversify energy sources and transition to renewable resources could pose new challenges for the region's energy sector. Additionally, struggles for control over energy routes and political tensions could threaten regional security and disrupt stability.

In conclusion, the disruptions in Central Asia's energy sector should be evaluated not only from an economic perspective but also from strategic and political viewpoints. The regional countries must adopt a balanced policy in this new reality, capitalizing on opportunities while also trying to minimize risks. During this period, strengthening cooperation, solidarity, and harmony becomes even more crucial for the region to cope with the challenges it faces.

### Kaynakça

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