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CONFERENCE ON "SECURITY ALONG THE SILK ROAD" HELD IN INDIA

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Özge Nur Öğütcü, AVİM Analyst, participated in a two-day meeting titled Security Along the Silk Road organized in New Delhi, India on 15-16 December 2016. The meeting that was co-organized by Vivekananda International Foundation based in New Delhi and Washington based Near East South Asia (NESA) Center for Strategic Studies generally covered cooperation opportunities along the Silk Road, security threats, economic and the political situation of the countries in the region. NESA is the premier Department of Defense institution aiming to build relations in the NESA region and located at the National Defense University of the United States of America. Vivekananda International Foundation works in cooperation with Indias leading experts, diplomats and private sector focusing on Indias foreign policy and regional developments particularly in Asia. At the meeting that was held in New Delhi, Öğütcü delivered a speech on Turkeys Central Asia policies and recent developments in the region. Öğütcü is an active member of Centers Central Asia working group for the last two meetings.

Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road initiative revived by China was one of the issues that draw the most attention at the meeting. This initiative aims to connect eastern and the western continents via maritime and land routes. Within this context besides railway, highway and airway routes, improvements on the maritime routes are also on the agenda. For instance, the Gawdar port in Pakistan that was constructed with the support of China and the Chabahar port in Iran supported by India serve to this interest. South Korea and Japan are contributing in the development works at the Chabahar port through improving highway connections of the port. When we consider the increasing trade volume and the need to meet the demand, Turkey supports construction and improvement of both ports.

One Belt initiative predominantly covers railway and highway corridors. In this context, Middle Corridor has importance for Turkey since it goes through Turkeys territory. Turkey, which will become an important connector with the completion of Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, completed the Marmaray pillar of the project. The high-speed railway constructions expected to finish in 2017 and connect Middle Corridor with the North and South ports of Turkey. The projects that have the potential to strengthen both commercial ties and people to people relations are being funded by the investment banks. However, eventually countries find themselves in a difficult position when they are supposed to pay back the credits and loans. In the long term, reconstruction and reconsideration of the economic pillars of the One Belt initiative-like projects might be one of the topics on the agenda as one of the primary items.

Role of China and Russia in the region and a possible revival between two actors should not be overlooked. Both countries are expanding their areas of influence, even though the motivations are quite different from each other, inevitably the outcomes and the actions are overlapping.

Russia-led Eurasia Union and China-led Shanghai Cooperation Organization can be considered as the main institutions for both actors to expand their influences in Eurasia. Herewith, this situation can lead to further cooperation or conflict of interests in the long term.

Iran emerges as a significant actor within the regional projects particularly following the nuclear deal. Projects such as North-South Transport Corridors as well as Silk Road Southern Corridors underline the benefits of cooperation between Iran and other regional actors. Irans geographic location and energy resources put the country on a different level. As it was underlined at the meeting several times, Iranian port Chabahar enhances Irans role both on the regional and global level. Yet, to actualize its potential cooperation between Iran and Turkey is essential.

Besides the over mentioned topics water security in Central Asia, CASA 1000 project, possibility of an ethnic conflict in the Ferghana Valley and potential of expansion of radicalization in the Central Asia especially following the withdrawal of ISAF Mission from Afghanistan were among the issues that have been raised by the speakers and the participants.

Experts touched upon many issues and discussed their perception of challenges and the ways to tackle them. Even though increasing awareness on the need for further cooperation, some experts argue that it will be difficult to create such an environment mainly because of the political differences in the region. Yet, there is an undeniable positive progress. Hence, the key problems should be solved step by step starting from the issues with utmost importance to move forward. Such meetings provide an important platform for experts to exchange ideas and discuss regional perspectives.

In conclusion, wide range of challenges and the opportunities along the Silk Road require cooperation among the regional actors and outside powers. When we analyze developments we see that attention towards Eurasian routes has been increasing in the last years with the projects on building new energy corridors, simplification of the accession to the new energy resources and establishing connections among eastern and western markets. Many actors such as United States, European Union, Japan and Russia developed programs and adopted acts with the same purposes. One Belt initiative declared by China in 2013 increased the importance of routes going through Eurasia even more. European Countries efforts to decrease the dependence on Russian energy resources; additional increasing energy demands of developing countries such as India, South Korea and China; works to simplify customs and establish transportation corridors between Europe and Asia are the main agenda items of the Silk Road-minded projects. Moreover, besides national actors, as the manufacture facilities has been moving to Asia to decrease the cost of production, Central Asian countries have been put under the focus by the investment banks and multi-national companies as well. However, these initiatives brought along the problems that have an impact on the entire region such as solving the security problems in Afghanistan and building both technical and legal infrastructures along the Silk Road corridors. As it was discussed at the meeting the unsecure environment in Afghanistan, instability and terrorism should be main concerns of the all countries in the region. Even though Heart of Asia Istanbul Process particularly focuses on the joint efforts towards Afghanistan, more works need to be done.

Kaynak/Source: