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# CAN HUNGARY AND TRNC BECOME MEMBERS OF THE ORGANIZATION OF TURKIC STATES?

The Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States (Turkic Council/Turkic Council), which was founded in 1992 with the Summit of Turkic Speaking States and became an organization in 2009 upon the proposal of Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev, was restructured and renamed the Organization of Turkic States during the 8th Meeting of the Council of Heads of State in Istanbul in 2021. The

change from the Turkic Council to the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) was considered by the international press as a step towards being more inclusive. In order to understand this name change, it is important to understand what is intended by the concept of organization. This name change expresses the desire to unite the member states around common goals with equal status, rather than to achieve

uniformity by melting them into a melting pot. Since 2020, statements from high-level officials of the OTS member states also show that the OTS aims to expand. Many states with direct and indirect links to Turkish culture are seen as potential members of the Organization of Turkic States and are expected by the organization to join "naturally" in the future.

The founding members of the Organization of Turkic States are Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Türkiye. In 2019, Uzbekistan became a full member of the CIS. Observer members of the organization are currently Hungary, Turkmenistan and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). At the 9th OTS Summit, Turkmenistan's full membership was on the agenda, but the acceptance of full membership could not be realized as the concern of whether it does not comply with the Permanent Neutrality Statute was one of the issues discussed by the members. Afterwards, Turkmenistan expressed the hope that their full membership would be accepted in the future. At this point, it is important to clarify what observer membership means. Observer status is a privilege granted by some organizations to nonmembers to give them the right to participate in the activities of the organization. In other words, observer members are not full members, but potential candidates, and observer countries are generally expected to become full members in the future. In the light of this information, the full membership status of Hungary and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which are observer members of the OTS, will be evaluated and a general framework will be tried to be drawn on the subject.

When Hungary's association with the Turkish states is evaluated, it is seen that this can be traced back to the Ottoman Empire in the late 19th century and is based on the idea of Turanism. Of course, this dynamic changed in 1945 when Hungary joined the Soviet bloc and was suspended for many years. In 2004, Hungary became an EU member as part of the largest expansion in the history of the European Union (EU). Since 2010, Hungary has been considered by the European Union to be in democratic decline due to the conservative policies of Viktor Orbán and his right-wing Fidesz Party. According to a report by the European Parliament, Hungary is considered to be in a regime of electoral autocracy due to deficiencies in the functioning of constitutional processes and the electoral system, lack of full independence of the judiciary, increasing corruption, failure to guarantee freedom of speech, and violations and discrimination of fundamental human rights. Despite various warnings from Brussels, Budapest's unchanging policies and political stance have started to strain relations between the EU and Hungary and this tension has continued to escalate with neither side backing down. Hungary's current situation triggered the idea of "Eastern Opening" and Hungary and the Turkic World, which had already been winking at each other for some time, started to improve their relations. In 2018, the Hungarian Prime Minister was invited as a guest to the 6th Summit of the Turkic Council and Hungary was officially offered a membership. Hungary, which was looking for new cooperation after its problems with the EU, welcomed this offer and became an observer member in 2019. Especially during the Covid-19 Pandemic, Hungary and the Turkic World have developed their relations and the Turkic States have started to be called "true friends" by Hungary.

Today, there are 19 areas of cooperation defined by the OTS, mainly political, economic and energy cooperation, and Hungary is active in many of these areas.

For Hungary, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are countries with an important role in the world economy due to their natural resources. Türkiye, on the other hand, is a state that Hungary feels closer to due to its geographical location and deep ties with the West. As an indicator of their close relations, Türkiye supports Hungary's membership in international organizations such as NATO, OECD and the World Trade Organization, while Hungary fully supports Türkiye's EU membership process. From this point of view, Hungary's full membership to the OTS seems likely. However, Hungary's full membership is not as simple as it seems and involves different dynamics.

Another important point in Hungary's tensions with the EU is the possibility of sanctions being imposed on Hungary. It is not known how Hungary will deal with this. The opening of the TRNC representative office in Budapest in 2014 and the admission of the TRNC as an observer to the OTS in 2022 have caused serious criticism in the EU, especially on behalf of Hungary. It was claimed that Hungary took steps that contradicted EU values. From this perspective, it may be possible that the EU has some concerns about the OTS. Recently, the European Parliament (EP) decided that Hungary is not a country appropriate to take over the Presidency of the European Union (EU) for 6 months on July 1, 2024. The decision was justified by the democratic regression in Hungary caused by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his government. It highlighted violations of the rule of law and limitations on fundamental rights. In response, Hungary

declared the resolution null and void. In addition, the EP's decision that Hungary is "no longer a democratic country" and the European Commission's call for the suspension of approximately 7.5 billion euros of EU funding to Hungary on the grounds of violations of the rule of law have further increased the long-standing tension between the EU and Hungary. In the light of all these developments, Hungary is seen as a gateway to the West by the OTS members and its membership to the Organization is supported. However, the decisive factor is whether Hungary can afford to further damage its already strained relations with the EU.

Hungary, which currently has a good relationship with the OTS states and there is no pressure for more, is not in a hurry for full membership and seems more likely to take cautious steps for its own interests and foreign relations. For Hungary, although OTS membership is part of its vision for the future, applying for full membership is not on its agenda in the near term. At this point, unless there is a serious development to the contrary, it can be said that Hungary will wait for a period when it will be much more critical for it to be a member of the OTS.

As far as the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is concerned, the process of full membership to the OTS follows a quite different dynamic than Hungary. Founded in 1983, the TRNC is recognized as a de facto state by states other than Türkiye. The TRNC has been subjected to various international embargoes since its establishment. Türkiye is the biggest supporter of the TRNC in this process. Although Türkiye has called for the official recognition of TRNC many times to other states, especially the OTS member states, no official step has been taken by any state

yet. At this point, the TRNC becoming an observer member in 2022 with the 9th OTS Summit can be considered as a step to increase the visibility of the TRNC rather than a full membership target.

The fact that the TRNC became an observer member of the OTS drew reactions in the international arena, especially harsh statements from the EU. Türkiye, on the other hand, sees the acceptance of the TRNC as an observer member of the OTS as part of the peace process. In the official statement by the TRNC, it was stated that the TRNC has gained a status in an international organization for the first time under its constitutional name, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, and that this is a big step in international recognition. However, this process, which is a big step for the TRNC, is unlikely to result in membership in the near future due to various reservations of other member states apart from Türkiye.

As it can be understood, the membership of Hungary and the TRNC to the Organization follows different patterns. Indeed, while Hungary's membership is supported by the OTS members, Hungary is behaving cautiously due to its own interests. While the TRNC, on the other hand, welcomes the membership of the OTS, the member states of the Organization other than Türkiye have various concerns on this issue, especially due to their international agreements and cooperation. Recognition of the TRNC by states in the international arena and efforts to make the TRNC a member of various organizations are policies of Türkiye and the TRNC. However, there are serious obstacles to the recognition of the TRNC and it is expected that it will take time to resolve all of these problems. Overcoming these obstacles will pave the way for the

TRNC's membership in the OTS, but it does not seem possible to say that this will happen in the near term.

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