

POST-SOVIET TURKIC STATES' SEEKING FOR COOPERATION

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Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, five independent Turkic States were established. These countries, lacking in political, economic, and military aspects, aimed to form new alliances within the scope of regionalization and cooperation. Border conflicts and water sharing issues among the states in Central Asia, as well as instability factors, have directed these countries to form alliances with actors outside the region. The newly independent Turkic Republics of Central Asia have tried to adapt to the new order by maintaining their relationships with other former Soviet Union countries, including Russia, and by establishing relations with the United States (US) and European Union (EU) countries.¹ However, these actors have not supported the development of policies that would help solve the problems of the Central Asian Turkic states. Within this context, the existing power asymmetry in alliances with states outside the region has led to a deepening of conflicts and instability, which in turn has increased external influence over the region.²

Türkiye, not remaining indifferent to the newly formed international system, has developed cooperation policies in many areas towards these countries, with which it shares linguistic, historical, and cultural commonalities. Aiming to support the new republics in achieving full independence and in pursuing independent policies in economic and commercial areas, Türkiye organized the “Summit of Turkic Speaking Countries” on October 30, 1992.

From 1992 until the establishment of the Turkic Council in 2009, Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan held ten summit meetings, referred to as the “Summit Process,” aimed at strengthening bilateral and multilateral relations among the Presidents of these states. In these meetings, the parties agreed on principles such as mutual respect for sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs, and discussed cooperation in various sectors including customs, free trade, telecommunications, transportation, natural resources, and energy. To effectively coordinate this process, several institutional structures were established, such as the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) and the

Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic Speaking Countries (TURKPA).³

These institutions have served as a bridge for cooperation in culture, health, and education among the Turkic States. On October 3, 2009, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Türkiye signed the “Nakhchivan Agreement” for the establishment of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking Countries, and the agreement officially entered into force on November 17, 2010. Accordingly, the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking Countries has become a supreme institution adopting the standards of international law.

¹ Erhan Büyükakıncı, “Sovyet Sonrası Orta Asya’da Türkiye’nin Dış Politika Açılımları: Özbekistan ve Türkmenistan ile İlişkiler”, Türk Dış Politikasının Analizi, Ed. Faruk Sönmezoğlu, (İst: DER Yay.2004): 792-799

² Tayyar Arı, “Orta Asya ve Kafkasya Rekabetten İş Birliğine”, (Bursa: MKM Yay., 2010), s.14

³ Ömer Faruk Kocatepe, “Türk Cumhuriyetleri’nin Bölgesel Güvenlik Bağlamında Uluslararası Örgütlerle İş Birliği”, **Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları** 130, no. 257, (April 2022):421

In 2019, with the inclusion of Uzbekistan, the number of members of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking Countries increased to five, with Hungary and Turkmenistan obtaining observer status.⁴ In 2021, at the Summit celebrating the 30th anniversary of the independence of the Turkic States, the organization's name was changed to the "Organization of Turkic States (OTS)."

From Central Asia to Nagorno-Karabakh: The Journey of Cooperation and Victory in the Turkic World

The Turkic Republics, in their attempt to establish regional cooperation, were unsuccessful in resolving disputes until they united under the umbrella of the Turkic Council (Organization of Turkic States).⁵ Expectations of economic integration and energy supply, political and economic reforms, and the victory in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020 have accelerated regional cooperation in Central Asia.⁶

To solve the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute, the Minsk Group was established under the leadership of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) with the United States (US), France, and Russia as co-chairs. However, positive results have been scarce from the activities of the OSCE, except for a few matters.⁷ The OSCE, after 30 years of attempting to resolve the conflict, remained ineffective, and organizations such as the Collective

Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) led by Russia and China, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), have not taken any steps in this regard. Consequently, due to the conflicting interests of the superpowers in the region, it has been observed that they have been ineffective in solving the security problems of the Turkic World.⁸

The silence surrounding the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue was broken through the "Turkic Council Joint Media Platform," established under the leadership of Türkiye. The massacres and ballistic missile attacks targeting civilians by the Armenian Army were not highlighted by the international media, displaying a double-standard approach.⁹ During the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, Türkiye played a significant role in bringing Azerbaijan's situation to the international stage, thereby increasing foreign media interest in the region and making Azerbaijan's voice heard in the global public opinion. Throughout this process, the Turkic States demonstrated solidarity through social media and other communication channels, acting in unison. This unity formed a front against the misleading information spread by Armenia and its allies, defeating Armenia's disinformation strategy.¹⁰

The Secretary-General of the Turkic Council, Baghdad Amreyev, has unequivocally declared support for Azerbaijan's right to reclaim its occupied

⁴ Oğuzhan Manioğlu, "Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı", Uluslararası Politika Akademisi, 2021, <https://politikaakademisi.org/2021/11/18/turk-devletleri-teskilati/>, (Online: 7 March 2024).

⁵ Ali Gök, Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı ve Dağlık Karabağ Zaferinin Yarattığı Fırsatlar, **Güvenlik Stratejileri Dergisi**, TDT Özel Sayısı, s. 122.

⁶ Gök. op.cit., p. 124.

⁷ Gök. op.cit., p.127.

⁸ Sarı. op.cit., p.31

⁹ "Türk Konseyi Medya Forumu'nda Yaptığı Konuşma", (Online: 20 Mart 2024) <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/konusmalar/353/131067/turk-konseyi-medya-forumu-nda-yaptigi-konusma>

¹⁰ Gökhan Gökçe, "Türk Dünyasında İletişim İş Birliği: Gerçekliği Savunmak ve Dezenformasyonu Önlemek", **Kriter Dergi** 6, no.62 (November 2021)

territories.¹¹ Following Armenia's ceasefire violation, on September 28, 2020, the Council highlighted Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and sovereignty, insisting on an urgent resolution to the problem and demanding Armenia's immediate and unconditional withdrawal from Azerbaijani territories it occupied. In this context, the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, which international organizations dominated by superpowers hesitated to resolve and remained silent on for 30 years, has found a solution with the significant participation of the Turkic Council.¹²

Amreyev stated that *"Azerbaijan's rightful victory would bring new momentum to the strong relations within the Turkic Council and lead to the advancement of integration processes and unity in the Turkic World,"* emphasizing Turkish unity. Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev said, *"The Turkic Council is the international organization that has supported Azerbaijan's just cause most strongly,"*¹³ highlighting the successful cooperation policy of the Turkic Council, which had not yet been named the Organization of Turkic States. Furthermore, the Turkic Council's steps towards resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh issue symbolized the unity and solidarity of the Turkic World.

The city of Shusha in Nagorno-Karabakh, liberated after the 44-day Patriotic War, has been declared the Turkish Culture

Capital for the year 2023 by the TÜRKSOY organization.¹⁴ TÜRKSOY's decision aims to highlight Shusha's historical and cultural significance, contributing to the post-war reconstruction and normalization processes. Selecting the city as the Turkish culture capital intends to introduce this heritage on the international stage, demonstrating that Shusha is a significant cultural and historical center not only for Azerbaijan but for the entire Turkic world as well. This decision is aimed at creating a positive impact on promoting regional peace and stability and represents a step towards reinforcing the cultural unity of the Turkic world.

Following the victory in Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan has advanced its relations with Central Asian countries and resolved the long-standing issue of oil and natural gas fields in the Caspian Sea with Turkmenistan. At the informal summit of the Turkic Council on March 31, 2021, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev highlighted the historic Azerbaijani territory of the Zangezur Corridor, stating its unifying role for the Turkic World. The implementation of the approximately forty-kilometer-long Zangezur Corridor is expected to serve as a line of peace and development for the Turkic states, aiming to rapidly increase the trade volume of the Turkic World and strengthen its logistical and political ties.¹⁵

¹¹ "Türk Konseyinden Azerbaycan'a destek", (Online: 16 March 2024). <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/azerbaycan-cephe-hatti/turk-konseyinden-azerbaycana-destek/2012924>

¹² Sarı, op.cit., p.32

¹³ "Cumhurbaşkanı İlham Aliyev: Türk Konseyi, Azerbaycan'ın haklı davasını en güçlü şekilde desteklemiş olan uluslararası teşkilattir." (Online: 11 March 2024) <https://turkicstates.org/tr/haberler/cumhurbaskani-ilham-aliyev-turk-konseyi-azerbaycanin-hakli-davasini-en-guclu-sekilde-desteklemis-olan-uluslararasi-teskilattir-2154>

¹⁴ "Özbekistan'da "Şuşa Günleri" açıldı." (Online: 16 March 2024) <https://azertag.az/xeber/ozbekistanda-quot-susa-gunleri-quot-nin-achilisi-olub-2568896>

¹⁵ "Karabağ Zaferi'nin Azerbaycan'ın Türk Devletleri ile İlişisine Etkileri", (Online: 12 March 2024). <https://www.21yyte.org/tr/merkezler/bolgesel-arastirma-merkezleri/guney-kafkasya-iran-pakistan-arastirmalari-merkezi/karabag-zaferi-nin-azerbaycan-in-turk-devletleri-ile-i-liskisine-etkileri>

Economic Cooperation Policies of the Turkic States

On September 2, 2018, the 6th Summit of the Heads of State of the Turkic Council was held in the city of Cholpon-Ata, Kyrgyzstan. President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan announced at this Summit the initiation of a structural reform process aimed at optimizing and enhancing the efficiency of the activities of Turkic cooperation organizations.¹⁶ Accordingly, the Summit has been considered one of the most significant events of the year by Kazakh media due to its strategic importance for strengthening Turkic integration and establishing good neighborly relations in Eurasia. Following the Summit, Kazakh analysts have assessed that relations among the Turkic-speaking states of Central Asia have significantly improved, with many of the longstanding issues in Uzbekistan's relations with Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan being resolved over the past twelve years.¹⁷

President Erdoğan of Türkiye made critically important remarks at the Summit, highlighting that despite Central Asia's large population, skilled workforce, and broad investment opportunities, it has not achieved the expected economic success. He opposed methods such as pressure and

sanctions in resolving international conflicts, emphasizing the importance of diplomacy and multilateralism. In this context, it has been stated that cooperation among the Turkic states will contribute to achieving justice in the international system.¹⁸ At the Summit held on September 2, 2018, it was expressed that new strategies are needed to overcome trade restrictions and dollar dependency. On July 31, 2019, the Turkish Chamber of Commerce and Industry (TCCI) was established in Istanbul, and within this context, four working meetings were organized to create the Turkic Investment Fund to promote trade among the member countries of the Turkic Council. The "Turkic Investment Fund Establishment Agreement" was officially signed on March 16, 2023.¹⁹ The completion of internal procedures as soon as possible is awaited for the Fund to become fully operational.²⁰

The establishment of the Turkic Investment Fund has become an important strategic tool for countries like Kazakhstan in dealing with the economic and political difficulties arising from Russia's military aggression towards Ukraine. Russia's actions have not only threatened regional security but also disrupted the economic stability by hindering the export of Kazakh oil to the European Union.²¹ Kazakhstan, unable to export oil to Europe for a month, has

¹⁶ "Kazakistan Dışişleri Bakanı ve CCTS Genel Sekreteri Türk İşbirliği Teşkilatları reformunu görüştü" (Online: 17 March 2024) https://en.inform.kz/news/kazakh-fm-and-cts-secretary-general-discuss-turkic-cooperation-organizations-reform_a3507224/

¹⁷ "Türk Dili Konuşan Ülkeler Başkanları Altıncı Zirvesi eşsiz bir iş birliği fırsatı sunuyor", (Online: 14 March 2024), <https://astanatimes.com/2018/09/sixth-summit-of-heads-of-turkic-speaking-states-offers-unique-opportunity-for-cooperation>

¹⁸ "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan, Türk Konseyi 6. Devlet Başkanları Zirvesi'ne katıldı." (Online: 16 March 2024) <https://www.enerjipetrolmedya.com/2018/09/cumhurbaşkanı-erdogan-turk-konseyi-6-devlet-baskanlari-zirvesine-katildi/>

¹⁹ Türk Yatırım Fonu Kuruluş Anlaşması'nın Onaylanmasının Uygun Bulunduğuna Dair Kanun, T.C. Resmî Gazete, 32366, 1 November 2023. <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2023/11/20231111-1.htm>

¹⁹ 10. Zirve Bildirisi, (Online: 20 March 2024) https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel_belgeler/10-zirve-bildirisi-2023-21-tr.pdf

²⁰ "Tokayev, Türk Yatırım Fonu'nun kurulmasına onay verdi", (Online: 20 March 2024), <https://m.kun.uz/news/2023/03/28/toqayev-turkiy-investitsiya-fondi-tashkil-etilishini-maulladi>

²¹ "Tokayev, Türk Yatırım Fonu'nun kurulmasına onay verdi", (Online: 20 March 2024),

incurred losses of over 300 million dollars.²² This situation has limited Kazakhstan's economic and political maneuvering space while simultaneously increasing the need to develop alternative trade routes and energy export strategies. In this context, the Turkic Investment Fund offers a platform that will provide alternative financing sources and promote economic diversity for regional countries, especially Kazakhstan, against the economic impacts of Russia's military intervention. Moreover, through this fund, the promotion of closer economic cooperation and integration among the regional countries is analyzed to strengthen regional economic ties and reduce dependency on external sources.

Within the scope of the "Belt and Road Initiative", a maritime and railway transportation network extending from Türkiye to the Caucasus, then across the Caspian Sea to Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and ultimately to China, is planned. This initiative aims to implement a strategic trade and cooperation route that will connect Asia, Europe, and Africa. The Organization of Turkic States and the Turkic Investment Fund are expected to play an effective role in financing and implementing this large-scale project.²³

Conclusion

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the five emerging Turkic States aimed to address the political and economic challenges they faced by forming new alliances both regionally and internationally. Türkiye, sharing cultural

and historical ties with these countries, has increased cooperation to support their efforts towards independence and development. The establishment of the Turkic Council and subsequently the Organization of Turkic States have been significant steps in institutionalizing this cooperation. These developments have strengthened relations among the Turkic States, deepened cooperation in cultural, health, and educational sectors, and supported regional development.

These countries, united under the Organization of Turkic States, achieved a tangible success in regional cooperation with the victory in Nagorno-Karabakh. This success has marked the beginning of a new era in both regional peace and stability and in the cultural and economic integration of the Turkic world. The victory in Nagorno-Karabakh, led by Azerbaijan and supported by the Organization of Turkic States, has demonstrated the strength of Turkic unity and solidarity. This process has also paved the way for further economic and cultural cooperation among the Turkic states, and with the introduction of the Zangezur Corridor, it has been emphasized that a period of strengthened logistical and political ties in the Turkic world has been entered. These developments play a critical role in positioning the Turkic Republics as significant actors on both regional and global levels.

Despite their strategic geopolitical location and rich energy resources, the Turkic States face challenges in fully leveraging their economic potential, contending with issues such as trade restrictions and dollar

<https://m.kun.uz/news/2023/03/28/toqayev-turkiy-investitsiya-fondi-tashkil-etilishini-maqulladi>

²² Sanat Kushkumbayev ve Aliya Musabekova, New Kazakhstan and the Future of the Organization of Turkic States: Key Areas of Cooperation, *Journal of International Affairs* 27, no.1. 2022, p. 78

²³ Hakkı Karataş . "Türk Dünyasında Ekonomik İttifakın Yeni Aracı Olarak Türk Yatırım Fonu", (Online: 20 March 2024) <https://businessdiplomacy.net/tr/turk-dunyasinda-ekonomik-ittifakin-yeni-araci-olarak-turk-yatirim-fonu/>

dependency. In particular, Turkmenistan, known for its rich natural gas reserves in the Caspian Sea, and Kazakhstan, a major oil producer, encounter limitations in bringing their resources to the international market. Following the economic downturn caused by the Russia – Ukraine Crisis, the Turkic States have implemented policies to promote economic cooperation and integration to solve these problems. Steps such as the establishment of the Turkish Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the creation of the Turkic Investment Fund within the Turkic Council have been taken. The Turkic Investment Fund aims to encourage trade and investments among the regional countries, reduce dependency on external sources, and strengthen economic ties. The existence of this fund has the potential to strengthen regional economic relations as an alternative financing source, mitigate risks arising from currency fluctuations, and thus enhance economic stability. It is believed that collaborations among the Turkic States will accelerate regional development, enhancing the global competitiveness of member countries.

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