

# TÜRKİYE AND THE ORGANIZATION OF TURKIC STATES: IS GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP POSSIBLE THROUGH REGIONAL COOPERATION?

March 2025 No: 55



### TÜRKIYE AND THE ORGANIZATION OF TURKIC STATES: IS GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP POSSIBLE THROUGH REGIONAL COOPERATION?

The increasingly strengthening relations between Türkiye and the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), as well as the organization's growing prominence in recent years, make it a subject worthy of academic analysis. Additionally, despite the OTS's rising recognition, its expanding policy initiatives draw further attention.

To elaborate on some of the key themes, the OTS is an organization dedicated to enhancing cooperation among Turkic-speaking countries, taking significant steps toward deepening cultural, economic, and political collaborations among its members. In this context, projects such as a common alphabet, a shared currency, and strategic partnerships have come to the forefront, with Türkiye playing a pivotal role in these initiatives. It is crucial to recognize that Türkiye's rapidly evolving and deepening engagement with the OTS in recent years has the potential to be influential not only at the regional level but also on a global scale.

The Turkic world encompasses a vast geographical expanse connected by historical, cultural, and economic ties that extend beyond the OTS member states. However, even when assessed solely within the framework of the organization, the OTS commands a significant presence in the global economy with a population of 178 million and an economic size nearing \$2 trillion. The total exports of member states amount to approximately \$558 billion, accounting for around 2% of global trade. Consequently, as economic integration and cooperative projects within the organization expand, the dependence of Turkic states on external economies could gradually diminish.

Cooperation within the OTS is not only structured within the organization's central framework but is also reinforced through bilateral and multilateral agreements among member states. These collaboration mechanisms facilitate a more organic development of the integration process while also easing the implementation of large-scale initiatives. Considering these factors, the establishment of a more stable and sustainable integration model in the long run becomes increasingly feasible. However, it is important to note that the unique national interests and sensitivities of member states may significantly influence the pace and functionality of this process.

Although the OTS was officially established in 2009, the past five years have witnessed

an accelerating trend of rapprochement and cooperation, fostering confidence among member states. Initially emerging as bilateral or trilateral collaborations, many of these initiatives have gradually expanded to encompass all OTS members, becoming an integral part of the organization's collective vision. Efforts to enhance the international recognition of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) within the OTS and initiatives to transition observer members such as Turkmenistan and Hungary into full membership present both opportunities and challenges, particularly given the reactions of certain regional and global actors.

In this context, while Türkiye can assume a leadership role in strengthening cultural

and economic ties, it must also balance regional dynamics and carefully navigate the responses of external stakeholders. Projects such as a common alphabet and a shared currency have the potential to deepen the integration of the Turkic world. However, these processes must proceed gradually, in alignment with the economic and political priorities of member states. Türkiye's leadership in these initiatives not only strengthens regional cooperation but also enhances its position as an influential global actor. Nevertheless, the success of this integration process hinges not only on state-level policies but also on societal and political-cultural alignment. In this regard, the implementation of a common alphabet appears to be a more immediate and predictable development, while steps toward a shared currency must be approached cautiously due to their implications for supranational economic mechanisms.

In summary, the question "Türkiye and the Organization of Turkic States: Is Global Partnership Possible Through Regional Cooperation?" is a crucial inquiry into the OTS's regional influence and its role in global relations. The historical, cultural, and economic ties among Turkic states raise questions about the extent to which regional cooperation can be expanded and how it might evolve into a powerful global partnership. This study will analyze the potential of the Turkic states, the challenges they face, and the future of their global collaborations. Moreover, Türkiye's integration process with the OTS is not merely a regional cooperation initiative but part of a broader geopolitical and economic vision. The strength of economic, cultural, and political ties among member states will solidify this foundation. Ultimately, Türkiye's role in this process

will be a decisive factor in shaping the future trajectory of the organization.

### **1. On the History of Türkiye-OTS Relations**

The Turkic world, whose historical roots extend from the Huns to various tribal formations, and later to the Seljuk and Ottoman Empires, faced significant disruptions in its unity during the Soviet Union era. However, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the newly independent Turkic republics gained the opportunity to establish closer relations with Türkiye. Over time, these newly emerging Turkic states reconnected with one another and with other Turkic states, including Türkiye, fostering the revitalization of cultural ties and promoting regional integration.

The most significant institutional outcome of this growing cooperation is the Organization of Turkic States (OTS). The foundations of the OTS trace back to the Summits of the Heads of State of Turkic-Speaking Countries, which began in 1992. While these summits were an important starting point for the integration of the Turkic world, they did not lead to substantial advancements in intergovernmental relations.

On October 3, 2009, the Nakhchivan Agreement led to the establishment of the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States (commonly known as the Turkic Council). This agreement provided an institutional framework for the cooperation process and aimed to deepen collaboration among Turkic states. Officially recognized as the Turkic Council in 2009, this entity was established with the objective of strengthening cultural, economic, and political ties within the

Turkic world. Türkiye played a leading role in this process, becoming the first country to recognize the independence of the newly emerged Turkic republics and fostering closer relations with them.

In 2021, the council was renamed the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), marking a significant step towards becoming a recognized international organization. At the same summit, the Vision of the Turkic World-2040 was announced, outlining a strategic roadmap for cooperation among Turkic states across multiple domains. This vision not only institutionalized ties among Turkic states but also became an important component of Türkiye's foreign policy.

The founding members of the OTS are Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, with Uzbekistan officially joining as a full member in 2019. Meanwhile, Turkmenistan, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), and Hungary hold observer status, closely monitoring developments within the Turkic world.

## 2. Common Alphabet Initiatives

The Turkic world, shaped by various Turkic states spread across vast geographical areas throughout history, exhibits a rich diversity. However, this diversity has also led to linguistic, cultural, and political divergences over time. Among these, language stands as a fundamental factor that significantly influences national identity. Throughout history, the Turkic world has used multiple alphabets in different regions, which has hindered cultural and social integration. Particularly under the influence of the Soviet Union, Turkic communities were divided between

the Cyrillic and Latin alphabets, further weakening linguistic unity.

Nonetheless, the Crimean Tatar intellectual Ismail Bey Gaspiralı, who lived in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, emphasized the necessity of a common consciousness in the Turkic world with his principle: "Unity in language, thought, and work." This notion remains relevant today, as it was during the final years of the Ottoman Empire. Similarly, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's statement, "To be a Turk is to speak Turkish," highlights the critical role of language in nation-building. However, significant reforms and collaborations concerning linguistic unity only became feasible in the late 20th century. The language reform of the Republic of Türkiye was not merely a change of alphabet but an effort to modernize Turkish as a scientific and diplomatic language. Today, the adoption of a common alphabet among Turkic nations is viewed as a comparable modernization and integration initiative. A common Turkic alphabet holds great potential for fostering linguistic unity and accelerating cooperation within the Turkic world. This initiative is not limited to standardizing the written language but also represents a strategic step toward enhancing global engagement among Turkic states.

The digitalization process plays a crucial role in determining the success of the common alphabet initiative. In the context of digital diplomacy, elements such as AI-powered translation technologies, digital archives, and shared academic databases will enable the common alphabet to support not only cultural integration but also economic and diplomatic cooperation. Institutions such as the Yunus Emre Institute and the Maarif Foundation, established under Türkiye's leadership,

could play a key role in this process. Considering the increasing integration of artificial intelligence into daily life, its impact on education—both in social and exact sciences—could be significant, facilitating common educational programs across Turkic nations.

### *The 2024 Baku Summit and Strategic Steps from the Perspective of Alphabet Unification*

The Third Meeting of the Turkic World Common Alphabet Commission, held in Baku from September 9-11, 2024, marked a crucial step toward the feasibility of a common alphabet. A 34-letter alphabet was agreed upon, designed to encompass all phonetic elements of Turkic languages. This was considered the first concrete step toward linguistic unity in the Turkic world. In line with the commission's recommendations, the following strategic steps have been outlined to ensure the successful implementation of the alphabet:

#### **1. Common Alphabet Commission:**

Composed of linguists and policymakers from Turkic nations, the commission aims to establish a framework for implementing the alphabet and fostering a common understanding. One of its key objectives is to conduct studies that will facilitate practical integration.

#### **2. Educational Programs:**

A phased transition is planned for integrating the common alphabet into education systems. The adoption of hybrid models and gradual implementation will ensure a smooth adaptation process. This could be one of the most crucial steps, as teaching the common alphabet to younger generations would accelerate linguistic, intellectual, and economic integration

across the Turkic world in just a few generations.

#### **3. Digital Integration:**

The technological advancements of today offer limitless possibilities in this regard. The common alphabet should be promoted through digital platforms such as websites, social media, and academic publications to accelerate the integration process.

#### **4. Economic and Cultural Cooperation:**

The common alphabet could serve as a bridge for cultural and economic projects among Turkic states. In fields such as joint media productions, cinema, and literature, alphabet unification could reinforce a common Turkic identity and facilitate its global promotion.

In conclusion, the Common Turkic Alphabet Initiative should be viewed not merely as a writing system reform but as a strategic tool shaping the identity, history, and future of Turkic communities. The common alphabet adopted at the 2024 Baku Summit is expected to accelerate cultural integration within the Turkic world while also fostering technological advancements and cooperation in various fields. It can be stated that Ismail Bey Gaspirali's principle, "Unity in language, thought, and work," has reached an era in which it can be most effectively realized, thanks to today's advanced political, cultural, and technological conditions. The adoption of a common alphabet will enhance interactions among Turkic states and strengthen their position as a unified global actor on the international stage.

### 3. Path to Financial Independence for Turkic States: Common Currency and Alternative Mechanisms

Turkic States are increasingly addressing common currency initiatives more seriously to become a stronger actor in the global financial system, rather than limiting economic cooperation to trade agreements alone. The global economy is now shaped not only by production and trade volume but also by financial infrastructure and monetary policies. Dependence on Western-centric currency and payment systems increases economic vulnerabilities, whereas regional financial integration projects make states more resilient to external shocks. In this context, common financial mechanisms developed under the umbrella of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) are critically important not only for accelerating regional trade but also for strengthening economic independence.

#### 3.1. Common Payment Systems

Common payment systems, in particular, are among the fundamental building blocks of economic integration. While the Turkic Investment Fund aims to facilitate financial flows among member countries, significant steps are being taken toward establishing payment systems that will increase trade in local currencies among Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. One of the most apparent examples of monopolization in the international financial system, the SWIFT mechanism, has once again demonstrated the necessity of alternative financial channels following Russia's exclusion from the system. Accordingly, the efforts of Turkic States to establish their own payment networks to reduce dependence on the global system have the potential to create a new balance

of power, not only economically but also geopolitically. Against increasing Chinese investments in the Middle Corridor, this system could also be highly effective in preventing excessive dependency in the coming years.

#### 3.2. Digital Ecosystem and Blockchain Solutions

Digital currencies and blockchain-based financial solutions, which are claimed to be a new financial breath, stand out as one of the most innovative steps shaping the financial future of the Turkic States. The central banks of Türkiye, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan are conducting studies on central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) to establish an independent financial infrastructure separate from the traditional financial system. Particularly, Türkiye's Digital Turkish Lira could serve as a crucial prototype in creating a regional digital payment network. Blockchain-based financial systems not only reduce transaction costs but also provide a more resilient structure against international sanctions and external pressures. In this regard, defining a common strategy for the digital economy among OTS countries will pave the way for constructing a Turkic Financial Ecosystem independent of traditional financial instruments.

#### 3.3. The Leading Role of Local Currencies

Increasing trade in local currencies, which is a primary global goal of BRICS+, also plays a critical role in reducing dependence on the US dollar and euro in trade among the Turkic States. Fluctuations in the global economic system and the difficulties in accessing the Western financial system, especially after the Russia-Ukraine war, have further highlighted the importance of regional economic mechanisms. The goal

of BRICS+ to update the existing global system presents an opportunity for the OTS to avoid isolation on the international stage. Agreements aiming to conduct trade between Türkiye and Azerbaijan in Turkish Lira and Azerbaijani Manat can be seen as one of the first steps in this transformation. Similarly, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan are also initiating efforts to promote local currency use in mutual trade. This process will not only provide economic advantages but also contribute to strengthening regional currencies in global markets.

However, in the long term, the idea of creating a common currency for Turkic States represents the highest stage of financial integration. Inspired by the Eurozone model of the European Union, this initiative requires fulfilling fundamental conditions such as economic stability, reducing inflation disparities, and harmonizing fiscal policies. Türkiye, as the region's largest economy with the most developed financial infrastructure, could assume a leadership role in this process. However, given the diverse economic structures of OTS countries, this process must be managed carefully and gradually. Therefore, in the short term, developing common payment systems and promoting trade in local currencies emerge as more realistic and feasible strategies.

#### **4. Economic Power Union of Turkic States: Strategic Moves and Regional Dynamics**

Economic relations between Türkiye and the Turkic States have a dynamic structure that supports regional development and lays the groundwork for strategic cooperation. These relations extend beyond historical ties and are shaped by

global power balances and regional influences. Economic cooperation and partnerships are of great significance both politically and commercially. Notably, projects such as the Middle Corridor through the Caspian, spearheaded by Türkiye and Azerbaijan, exemplify economic integration among the TDT (Organization of Turkic States) members. Initiated in 2014 but seeing concrete steps only in 2022, the project reached a significant milestone when the foreign and transport ministers of Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan convened in Baku to agree on its development. Similarly, the trilateral mechanism established between Türkiye, Uzbekistan, and Azerbaijan has facilitated coordinated steps to enhance the Middle Corridor. Uzbekistan's desire to connect with the West through the Middle Corridor and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway is among the crucial factors shaping this process.

#### **4.1. Economic Cooperation and Regional Development**

The Organization of Turkic States (TDT) is one of the most important platforms for strengthening regional cooperation. This organization serves as a key mechanism for increasing trade among member states, deepening economic integration, and achieving strategic goals in a coordinated manner. Energy-rich countries such as Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan play a significant role in the economic integration process of the Turkic world. Their energy resources contribute to regional development and enhance the competitiveness of Turkic States in the global market.

The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) is another important actor in advancing economic cooperation. By

supporting SMEs and entrepreneurs, TİKA promotes trade agreements and accelerates economic growth. Additionally, regional transportation projects such as the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA) integrate land, sea, and railway networks across the Turkic world, fostering regional trade. While the TRACECA project strengthens Türkiye's strategic position, it also enhances transportation links among Turkic States and aims to reduce economic disparities. Although these mechanisms are not yet sufficient to fully secure the commercial and social connectivity of the member states, they are expected to contribute to the development of their partnership. Furthermore, considering Russia's persistent control efforts in the region and China's ambitions to dominate through the Belt and Road Initiative, these projects could compel both powers to act cautiously in their struggle for influence. In this scenario, TDT has the potential to transform into a balancing actor within a win-win policy framework.

### 4.2. Belt and Road Initiative and Energy Strategies

China's Belt and Road Initiative presents a major opportunity for regional development and increased international trade for the Turkic States. This initiative strengthens the economic infrastructure of the Turkic world while also reinforcing commercial ties between China and these nations. By participating in this project, Turkic States advance their national development goals while positioning themselves as significant players in global trade.

The management of energy resources is also a critical factor in economic cooperation. The Turkic Republics hold an

important place in the global economic system due to their abundant energy resources. Efficient management of these resources and modernization of regional energy infrastructure will further strengthen the economic position of the Turkic world. Türkiye's energy strategies and partnerships in this field help the Turkic States become more influential players in global energy markets. The "Hot Economy – Cold Politics" strategy, which balances economic relations with political independence, offers a strategic advantage to the Turkic States.

### 4.3. Economic Challenges and Dependence on China

The economic relationships of Central Asian countries with China pose significant challenges concerning regional independence and sustainable development. Particularly, the credit dependency of countries such as Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan on China makes it difficult to establish more balanced economic relations. While these nations expand their trade volume with China, they must also take strategic steps to diversify their financial sources and establish more balanced partnerships.

The Turkic States must carefully balance their trade relations with China to minimize debt burdens. In this regard, regional cooperation projects and partnerships play a crucial role in mitigating the risks associated with dependency. For the Turkic World, utilizing a potential Sino-Russian conflict in the coming years to its advantage could become an unavoidable necessity to counter dependency and assimilation policies. Given these circumstances, strengthening regional cooperation and increasing the share of the TDT in the global system emerge as one of



the most pressing requirements for the next decade, particularly for the Central Asian Turkic Republics.

#### **4.4. Economic Cooperation: Sustainable Development and Global Competitive Advantage**

Türkiye's "Hot Economy - Cold Politics" strategy lays the groundwork for Turkish States to become significant players in global trade by leveraging their geopolitical advantages. This strategy also serves as a crucial catalyst in strengthening the interactions between Turkish States in foreign policy and economic domains, thereby facilitating the achievement of regional development goals.

Energy cooperation has been a critical component of these relationships. The energy collaboration among Turkish States enhances regional energy security and increases the influence of the Turkic world in global energy markets. Türkiye's energy projects and partnerships contribute to the region's role as a key energy transit hub. Energy collaborations among Turkish States not only support regional economic development but also create a competitive advantage in global energy markets.

#### **5. Education and Cultural Integration: Constructing a Common Identity**

Educational cooperation among Turkish States plays a vital role in fostering awareness based on shared historical and cultural heritage, as well as in strengthening cultural and academic interactions. Türkiye's investments in education constitute a fundamental aspect of its soft power. Higher education institutions, particularly through scholarships and educational opportunities

offered to students from the Turkic world, have made Türkiye an attractive educational center. These programs facilitate the dissemination of the Turkish language while simultaneously promoting Turkish culture.

Additionally, Turkish universities support research on Turkology and Turkish culture, contributing to the strengthening of scientific cooperation within the Turkic world. Initiatives such as Türkiye Scholarships, Kyrgyzstan-Türkiye Manas University, and educational programs supported by the Turkic Council, along with student exchange programs, cultural festivals, and academic projects, enhance the closeness among the peoples of the Turkic world and help build a common identity. Expanding such collaborations not only reinforces linguistic unity but also encourages intellectual engagement with the shared historical and cultural past of the Turkic peoples.

Moreover, exchanges in engineering and sciences facilitate knowledge, technical, and technological transfer, fostering mutual growth. Ensuring sustainability in education will ultimately establish a stronger and more enduring bond between Türkiye and the Turkic world in the long run.

#### **6. Media and Digital Diplomacy: Cultural Interaction and Information Flow**

Media plays a fundamental role in diplomatic and cultural integration among Turkish States. Furthermore, it is a powerful tool of soft power. The Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT), through its various multilingual channels, not only covers Türkiye's domestic politics but also disseminates cultural and

economic developments related to the Turkic world to a broad audience. Channels such as TRT Avaz and TRT Türk play a crucial role in strengthening the common cultural ties within the Turkic world. Moreover, the global popularity of Turkish television series and films enhances Türkiye's cultural appeal.

TRT and other Turkish media organizations contribute to the formation of a shared agenda within the Turkic world, facilitating cultural interaction and fostering stronger ties among Turkic peoples. With the digitalization of media, Türkiye-led digital platforms and digital libraries enable the sharing of academic resources, historical documents, and cultural heritage elements, accelerating information exchange and deepening mutual understanding within the Turkic world. The broadcasting of documentaries, series, and films that reflect the shared history on the national channels of member states of the Organization of Turkic States could significantly accelerate cultural integration.

In this context, digital diplomacy serves as an essential tool for enhancing Türkiye's regional influence. Digital publications and content not only strengthen cultural ties among Turkish States but also send a message of unity in foreign policy, providing a strategic advantage.

### **7. Security and Military Cooperation: Regional Power Balances and Collective Defense**

Organizations such as the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) play a significant role in shaping military and security policies. These Türkiye-led structures contribute to regional security through joint military exercises, defense industry collaborations, and the development of security strategies.

The consolidation of the "One Nation, Two States" principle between Türkiye and Azerbaijan following the victory in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict serves as a concrete example of security cooperation among Turkish States. Such security and military collaborations not only ensure regional stability but also enable the Turkic world to have a stronger voice in global security matters.

Collaborations in military education, logistics support mechanisms, and defense industry projects enhance the resilience of Turkish States against potential threats. The growing strategic significance of these partnerships strengthens the security framework of the Turkic world in alignment with global security structures.

### ***What Do Current Energy Initiatives Offer to the Parties?***

Energy projects constitute a critical domain that strengthens economic and political cooperation between Türkiye and the members of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS). Projects such as TANAP, TurkStream, and the Trans-Caspian Natural Gas Pipeline aim to secure energy supply and support regional development. TANAP facilitates the transportation of Azerbaijani gas to Europe through Türkiye, enhancing energy diversification, while TurkStream provides a direct gas flow from Russia to Türkiye and Europe, balancing regional energy dependencies.

Azerbaijan's natural gas exports via TANAP to the European market, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan's efforts to diversify their energy resources, and Uzbekistan's initiatives to modernize its energy infrastructure exemplify the tangible cooperation in this domain. The Trans-Caspian Natural Gas Pipeline aims to

transport Turkmen gas to Europe via Azerbaijan and Türkiye, accelerating Central Asia's integration into global energy markets. Meanwhile, the Zangezur Corridor not only strengthens land connections but also integrates energy and logistics networks, offering the potential to increase transit revenues. Türkiye and Azerbaijan blame Armenia for obstructing progress on the Zangezur Corridor, which was a strategic outcome of the Second Karabakh War. Although the corridor is expected to become fully operational soon, Türkiye and Azerbaijan remain committed to achieving this in the most peaceful manner possible. Once completed, the corridor will establish an uninterrupted Turkic network between the Republic of Türkiye, the Central Asian Turkic republics, and Turkic federal states, further highlighting the practical significance of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's Nakhchivan policy.

Türkiye's active role in these projects not only generates economic benefits but also strengthens energy supply security and fosters a more integrated economic and strategic structure within the Turkic world.

## **8. Türkiye's Regional and Global Position Impact**

Türkiye's relations with the Turkic world provide multidimensional gains in its foreign policy. The Turkic Council (TDT) strengthens Türkiye's regional influence, while the Turkic World - 2040 Vision offers an institutional framework for long-term cooperation. By developing projects in energy, transportation, defense, and cultural sectors, Türkiye deepens its integration with the Turkic world, and these collaborations also enhance its international standing.

### **8.1. Regional Leadership and Strategic Influence**

As one of the most powerful actors economically and politically within the TDT, Türkiye reinforces its regional leadership position. The TDT, being the only organization in which Russia and China are not members, allows Türkiye to establish an independent power center in Eurasia. Projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) Railway and the Middle Corridor initiatives transform Türkiye into a crucial logistics hub between Europe and Asia, making it a key player in trade routes. Cultural diplomacy activities through institutions such as TİKA, the Yunus Emre Institute, and the Maarif Foundation enhance Türkiye's soft power and expand its influence in the Turkic world.

### **8.2. Global Strategic Balance and Strengthening International Position**

By developing its relations with the Turkic world, Türkiye conducts a more independent and multifaceted foreign policy in global power balances. These collaborations increase Türkiye's influence in Eurasia, allowing it to strengthen its position in relations with the West. Thanks to joint projects and international platform cooperation with the Turkic world, Türkiye becomes a more active player in global organizations like the United Nations, G20, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Strengthening Türkiye's multidimensional collaborations and achieving deeper integration in energy, trade, and security will create lasting gains in its foreign policy.

### 9. Cultural Diplomacy and Soft Power Strategies

#### 9.1. The Role of Soft Power in Türkiye's Foreign Policy

Soft power refers to a country's ability to influence others through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion. Türkiye aims to effectively use soft power strategies in cultural, educational, media, and diplomatic fields to gain respect and influence both in the Turkic world and globally. Türkiye's soft power, integrated with its economic strength, is a key tool in building trust-based relationships with other countries, as well as in enhancing regional stability and cooperation.

One of the most effective areas for using soft power strategies is diplomacy. Türkiye strengthens its international relations not only through economic and military means but also via cultural and humanitarian ties. In this context, Türkiye's humanitarian aid activities are highly appreciated in the Turkic world and other regions. Managing humanitarian aid effectively has reinforced the soft power elements of Turkish foreign policy. This strategy not only strengthens Türkiye's international image but also increases global trust in Türkiye.

Ultimately, Türkiye aims to become a strong actor on the global stage by effectively using soft power strategies in its relations with the Turkic world. Cultural diplomacy, education, and media activities will continue to be essential components. For these strategies to be successfully implemented, Türkiye must coordinate its use of soft power tools, considering regional sensitivities.

#### 9.2. What Opportunities and Risks Does Türkiye Face by Taking a Leadership Role in These Initiatives?

Türkiye's role as a leader among Turkic states presents both significant opportunities and strategic risks. This leadership has the potential to influence regional and global balances and can profoundly shape Türkiye's foreign policy, economic relations, and security strategies. However, alongside these opportunities, there are challenges and risks. To maximize these opportunities, Türkiye must carefully consider regional dynamics and adopt a strategic approach.

##### **1. Economic and Strategic Cooperation Opportunities:**

Türkiye has significant opportunities to promote regional economic integration. Its role in projects such as the New Silk Roads facilitates regional trade acceleration. Financial structures like the Turkic States Investment Fund can support development in infrastructure, energy, and technology. Additionally, free trade agreements and simplified customs procedures would be crucial steps in boosting Türkiye's economic power.

##### **2. Security and Defense Cooperation:**

Türkiye's military collaborations can strengthen regional security. Military exercises with Azerbaijan, for example, have the potential to influence power dynamics in the Caucasus. The Turkish Armed Forces' military training for other Turkic states could contribute to the region's growing military capacity. However, increased military capacity in the region could provoke political conflicts with global powers. Still, cooperation against common security threats, particularly in counterterrorism and cybersecurity, could further solidify Türkiye's role.

### **3. Regional Power Rivalries and External Interventions:**

Türkiye's growing influence in the region may draw reactions from regional powers such as Russia, China, and Iran. This could lead to tensions in Türkiye's foreign policy and constrain its maneuvering space. Russia's military bases and China's economic projects in the region could limit Türkiye's strategic options. The interests of the United States and the European Union in the region also present risks to Türkiye's maneuverability. In this regard, Türkiye's ongoing multilateral diplomacy remains crucial.

### **4. Regional Sensitivities and Internal Conflicts:**

Political, economic, and cultural differences between Turkic states may complicate Türkiye's leadership role. These differences can sometimes create resistance to Türkiye's initiatives in the region. Additionally, border disputes and ethnic conflicts within the region can make Türkiye's mediatory role more challenging. Such tensions may generate negative reactions to Türkiye's policies.

## **10. Conclusion**

The relationship between the Turkic Council (TDT) and Türkiye has evolved beyond a mere nostalgic reflection of historical ties to a partnership model shaped by the future's geoeconomic and geopolitical realities. The 2024 Baku Summit highlighted the growing importance of a common alphabet in constructing common action mechanisms with determination, ensuring that this transformation is not confined to diplomatic rhetoric. This multidimensional cooperation model, spanning from economics and security to cultural

integration and digital diplomacy, has the potential to redefine the position of the Turkic world in the global order.

The success of economic integration in this process depends on the capacity of Turkic states to increase trade among themselves and reduce external dependencies. Strategies such as the development of common financial systems, new payment mechanisms, and trade through national currencies under Türkiye's leadership could enhance economic independence against external factors like the dollar and euro. However, it should not be forgotten that this process is not merely a technical matter; for financial integration to succeed, economic structures between the countries must be harmonized, and a common regulatory infrastructure must be established. Türkiye, as a country familiar with both Western and Eurasian financial systems, could play a bridging role. Similarly, energy projects and infrastructure investments not only provide economic gains but also present significant opportunities for strategic independence. Managing energy corridors extending from the Caspian Region to Europe could enable the Turkic States to become more active players in the global energy game. Additionally, Türkiye's experience with projects like TANAP could boost its confidence in creating a regional energy strategy. However, balancing the interests of major actors like Russia and China in this field is a factor that requires careful attention.

Regional security dynamics will also be a critical test in strengthening the geopolitical power of the Turkic States. Türkiye's progress in the defense industry, including drones and indigenous defense technologies, creates an attractive area for

cooperation among member countries. However, for defense cooperation to be sustainable, it must not be limited to technology transfer but should also include the development of common security concepts and military doctrines. In this regard, a model similar to NATO's collective defense concept could be suitable for the TDT. If a common security pact can be established among member states, it will not only enhance military deterrence but also make member states more resilient to external interventions. However, the way such an arrangement would be perceived by actors like Russia and China and the potential countermeasures could make it more of a medium- to long-term goal rather than an immediate one.

The cultural integration process should also be seen as a supportive element to economic and strategic cooperation. Initiatives for a common alphabet and educational projects can strengthen communication and identity-building among Turkic States. However, the key point here is that such initiatives must be integrated into state policies to ensure their continuity. The establishment of joint universities, research centers, and exchange programs in the field of education can accelerate this process. Furthermore, digital diplomacy and media integration are becoming increasingly important. Ensuring effective visibility in the global public eye can be achieved not only through diplomatic channels but also with a strong media and digital communication network. The creation of a common media platform addressing the Turkic world will not only strengthen the flow of information but also strengthen ties with the Turkish diaspora outside the region.

In the coming years, Türkiye's relations with the TDT could evolve within different scenarios. The regional integration model, due to the necessity of harmonizing the economies of member states, may be challenging, but in the long run, it could lead to the creation of an institutionalized union. Alternatively, the TDT could adopt a model of deepening cooperation in specific areas rather than becoming a fully integrated entity. Gradual integration in areas like energy, defense, trade, and cultural diplomacy could be a more realistic scenario. Besides, member states could develop a flexible cooperation model, engaging in joint projects intermittently while maintaining their independent foreign policies. However, it should be noted that the sustainability of this model depends on the strength of the shared vision. Despite the common ethnic origin of the member states, each sovereign nation has its own sensitivities and interests. Especially considering Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Azerbaijan, global actors such as China, Russia, and regional actors like Iran could influence the foreign policies of member states.

From Türkiye's perspective, this integration process holds significant opportunities, but it also presents some noticeable risks. Economic integration could open new markets for Türkiye and strengthen the Turkish lira's position at the regional level. However, this process will also require redefining Türkiye's relationships with global actors. The necessity of balancing policies between China, Russia, and the West could pose a challenge for Türkiye. Particularly, the future of the increasingly positive relations between Türkiye and Europe should be closely monitored, given the current global context. With a U.S. following an "America First" policy, a Russia that Europe may not trust for some time,

and a China surpassing even the U.S. in the race, it is foreseeable that the EU and the TDT will have to overcome internal relations and superficial cooperation to become a large-scale transit balancing factor. For China, the “Belt and Road” initiative, for the U.S., efforts to avoid losing Europe, and for Russia, the region’s energy dependence on itself, will all contribute to a multipolar order, making this vision sustainable. To ensure that the economic, strategic, and cultural initiatives support each other, these efforts need to be harmonized.

Türkiye’s leadership role should not only be guiding but also transformative. Joint projects could not only strengthen regional solidarity but also help the Turkic world emerge as an ascending power center in the global order. However, the success of this process will depend on the determination to implement the vision and adapt to changing global dynamics.



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**Ali Furkan TOKGÖZ** started his studies at Istanbul University in the Department of Political Science and International Relations (English) in 2021 and in the Department of Law in 2022. He is currently continuing his undergraduate studies in the same departments at Istanbul University. Tokgöz is currently participating in the internship program at DİPAM. His research areas include Central Asia-Turkic World, the Caucasus regions, and International Law.