

# Institutional Development and Cooperation Mechanisms of the Organization of Turkic States

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The Organization of Turkic States (formerly the Turkic Council) is an important platform that takes cooperation between the countries of the Turkic World to a new level. The Organization, of which Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan are members, was established in 2009 on the basis of the Nakheivan Agreement and the Istanbul Declaration. The main purpose of the organization is to deepen cooperation between Turkic-speaking countries. To that effect, as an international organization, it brings the member states with common identity closer together with the high-level summits held by the Organization of Turkic States. Our study focuses on the role of the organization of Turkic States in its institutional, economic, and diplomatic interaction among the countries of the Turkic World. To that effect, we examine the influence of the Turkic Council on the international and regional relations of the member states. The importance of the cooperation of the countries of the Turkic World at the institutional level is another important issue that is emphasized in our study. The contributions of the Turkic Council to the interaction among the countries of the Turkic World were examined within the framework of the summits and consultation mechanism. This issue is the main problem of our study.

*Keywords:* cooperation, institutionalization, Turkic Council, summits

An important part of modern international relations research is integration studies and similar research areas. Integration efforts are in demand both at the regional and global level. In the post-Cold War period, new integration opportunities were arisen in Europe (predominantly Central and Eastern Europe), Asia (Pacific region and Central Asia), and Africa. Central and Eastern European countries of the Eastern Bloc after the Cold War preferred integration into the Western European integration system, or the European Union, where democracy and economic stability were at the forefront. Integration trends among Asian countries have strengthened, and global actors such as China and Japan have strived to create a sphere of influence in their near geography. African countries have strived to participate in various integration movements in order to maintain their independence and ensure their economic/social development. Although not all integration initiatives have been successful, economic-based initiatives, especially in the European Union and Asia-Pacific region, are important examples of success.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The European Union is a regional integration that found its foundation after the World War II. However, its success in the integration phase was achieved in the late and post-Cold War. See Single European Act (1987) and Maastricht Treaty (1992).

The dissolution of the Soviet Union created new opportunities for the Turkic-speaking countries of Central Asia and the South Caucasus. These countries, which declared their independence in 1991, dealt with serious economic and social problems and faced challenges in the process of nation-building. Turkish language and Turkish culture played an important role in the nationalization and nation-building process of these countries. The size and effectiveness of this role has decreased in terms of the place and position of the countries of the Turkic World on the regional and global platform.

The principle that makes Turkey's regional mission different from other international actors at that time constitutes an emphasis on a sense of common identity and belonging. In this perspective, starting in the 1990s, Turkey has implemented projects/initiatives supporting the countries of the region both culturally and economically.

The main factor that will determine the future of Central Asia, which is geopolitically at the center of the world, should be cultural partnership, not natural resources or strategic position. If this awareness is not acted on, it seems difficult for the region to get free of the predicament of global competition. Since the 1990s, integration initiatives among the countries of the Turkic World have been strived to be carried out without an institutional framework. Starting in the mid-2000s, with the economic and diplomatic rise of Turkey and other Turkic World countries, institutional infrastructure is based on more realistic foundations. The Turkic Council has emerged as a manifestation of the economic and diplomatic advancement. The Turkic Council, which plays an important role in the institutionalization process, also increases the hopes and opportunities for the future.

### **Historical Development**

In the development of the Organization of Turkic States, the summits, which have been convened since 1992 and bring together the Presidents of State of Turkic-Speaking States, have an important role. To that effect, the Organization of Turkic States is "founded on the common political will that arises as a result of these Summits" (Turkic Council, n.d.a). The first summit, hosted by Turkish President Turgut Özal in Ankara in 1992, discussed customs legislation, the creation of free trade zones, and the integration of newly independent countries into the world economy (Turkic Council, n.d.b). One of the main challenges faced by the Turkic States, which gained independence after the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), was the issue of adapting to the world economy and international relations, which was the agenda of the summit (Durdular, 2016, p. 1).

Ankara Declaration was signed at the end of the Ankara Summit attended by the leaders of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan (Turkic Council, n.d.b). Between 1992 and 2010, 10 summits were held among the parties. Especially the summits held in 2009-2010 were important for the formation of the Organization of Turkic States.

It took place in Nakhchivan on 2-3 October 2009 with the participation of Turkey, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan hosted by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev. Uzbekistan did not participate in the summit. Nakhchivan Agreement on the Establishment of the Turkic Council was signed by Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan at the summit (Turkic Council, n.d.b). Turkmenistan, on the other hand, has not been a party to the Nakhchivan Agreement within the framework of the official foreign policy principle of "permanent neutrality".

The establishment of the Turkic Council was officially announced at the last summit held in Istanbul on September 16, 2010, hosted by Turkish President Abdullah Gül (Turkic Council, n.d.a). Uzbekistan did not attend the summit, where Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan were represented at a high level.

The Summits, which were held after the establishment of the Turkic Council in 2010, became known as the Summits of the Turkic Council. 7 Summits were held in 2011 Almaty, 2012 Bishkek, 2013 Qabala, 2014 Bodrum, 2015 Astana, 2018 Cholpon-Ata and 2019 Baku. (Turkic Council, n.d.b)

### **Basic Considerations of the Nakhchivan Agreement**

The Nakhchivan Agreement, signed in 2009 and with a founding quality, prioritized deepening comprehensive cooperation by emphasizing the historical ties and common languages, cultures and traditions between Turkic-speaking countries (Turkic Council, 2009). With the Nakhchivan Agreement, “The Summit of Turkic-Speaking Countries has been transformed into the Turkish Council, enabling institutionalization”. The 23-clause Agreement emphasized the international scale of the Turkic Council. It was aimed to establish a co-operation mechanism among the countries, parties to the agreement (Turkic Council, 2009). The second article of the Agreement outlines the main objectives and duties of the Turkic Council:

- Strengthening mutual trust, friendship, and good neighbourly relations between the parties;
- Achieving peace at regional and international level;
- Determination of common position on foreign policy issues where common interests are at stake in international relations;
- Ensuring coordination in the international fight against international terrorism and separatism, extremist currents, human trafficking, illegal drug trafficking;
- Establishing favorable conditions for trade and investment, establishing facilitating arrangements for the circulation of customs and goods and services and capital;
- Effective regional and bilateral cooperation on political, commercial, and economic issues, military-technical, financial, and human issues;
- Ensuring economic growth, social and cultural development in terms of improving the living conditions of the peoples of the parties;
- Commitment to the norms and principles of international law and human rights;
- Increasing interaction in humanities;
- Effective evaluation of the rich cultural and historical heritage of Turkic peoples, promoting and disseminating the interaction between the press and communication tools of the parties to the masses;
- Ensuring the exchange of legal information on the basis of mutual legal assistance (Turkic Council, 2009).

Solidarity in the field of international relations and foreign policy, which is among the objectives and duties of the Nakhchivan Agreement, was of great importance. Solidarity in this area has the potential to increase the quality and functionality of cooperation among Turkic countries. From this point of view, the joint stance on international issues will bring the Turkic people closer together and accelerate the integration.

The Nakhchivan Agreement stated that the mechanism for co-operation among the parties “will be built on the basis of special solidarity arising from the union of common history, culture, identity and language” (Rehimov, 2019a). The main framework of the objectives and tasks of the Agreement was shaped around the basis in question.

### **Summits of the Organization of Turkic States**

The First Summit of the Organization of Turkic States was held in Almaty on 20-21 October 2011 with the theme of “Economic and Trade Cooperation” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, 2009). The Turkic Business Council was established at the Almaty Summit to ensure economic and trade coordination. With the participation of representatives of the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB), the Council of Foreign Economic Relations (DEIK), the National Economic Chamber of Kazakhstan (Atameken), the National Confederation of Entrepreneurs Organizations of Azerbaijan, and the Kyrgyzstan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Establishment Agreement of the Organization of Turkic States was signed and the first meeting was held (Turkic Council, n.d.c). Turkic Business Council “brings together the business communities of member states and supports cooperation efforts between the private and public sectors” (Acicbe, 2019, p. 2).

The Second Summit of the Organization of Turkic States was held on 22-23 August 2012 in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan. At the summit on the theme of “Education, Science and Cultural Cooperation”, new developments were experienced in the institutionalization process of the Organization. “On Bishkek Summit, agreements were signed with the Turkic Academy in Astana for the establishment of a Turkic Cultural and Heritage Foundation in Baku” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, 2009). The Turkic Academy was formed “at the Nakhchivan Summit when Kazakhstan’s leader Nazarbayev proposed the establishment of an international scientific center tasked with conducting research on the Turkic world” (International Turkic Academy, n.d.). “The Turkic Academy, which gained international agency status on August 27, 2014, was registered and accredited as an international organization in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan on October 28” (Gürbüz, 2018, p. 72). The International Turkic Academy aims to

investigate the history, language, literature and culture of the Turkic world from ancient times to the present day, to determine the place and contribution of Turkic states in human civilization on the basis of original sources, and to coordinate scientific research on the Turkish world. (International Turkic Academy, n.d.)

The Third Summit of the Organization of Turkic States was held on 15-16 August 2013 in Qabala, Azerbaijan with the theme of “Transportation and Connectivity”. Within the scope of “cooperation in the field of transport”, the main theme of the Qabala Summit, the Transport Ministers met for the first time in Baku in July 2013 after the working group meetings at the level of experts and the meeting between the Baku-Aktau Port Administrations held in Aktau (Turkic Council, n.d.b). Within the scope of the meeting, “a protocol of cooperation was signed between the Transport Ministers of the member states. In addition, a signed Memorandum of Understanding established a sister port relationship between Baku, Aktau and Samsun Ports” (Turkic Council, n.d.b). At the summit, the projects to be carried out in the field of transport and the strengthening of the economic prosperity of the peoples of the Turkic World were discussed. Joint energy, transport and logistics projects have the potential to transform the countries of the Turkic World into the center of the international economy (Nagiyev, 2013).

The Fourth Summit on tourism cooperation was held in Bodrum on June 5, 2014. At the Bodrum Summit, the Presidents of State of the Turkic Council “pledged to work together to benefit from the common tourism potential of the Member States of the Organization of Turkic States” (Turkic Council, 2014). Concrete steps taken by the institutions responsible for tourism, such as the initiative to create the “Turkic Council—Modern Silk Road” tour package, were welcomed by the leaders of the Organization of Turkic States (Turkic Council, 2014).

The Fifth Summit of the Organization of Turkic States was held on September 11, 2015 in Astana, capital of Kazakhstan, with the theme of “Media and Information Technologies”. “Complementary agreements of the Turkic Academy and the Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation and the founding and complementary agreements of the Turkic Sports and Nomadic Cultural Center were signed at the Astana Summit” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, 2009).

The Sixth Summit of the Organization of Turkic States was held on 3 September 2018 in Cholpon Ata, hosted by Kyrgyzstan President Sooronbay Ceenbekov with the theme of “Youth and National Sports”. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, and Kazakhstan’s President Nursultan Nazarbayev attended the summit. Uzbekistan’s President Şevket Mirziyoyev and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban also attended the summit as guests of the host country (Turkic Council, n.d.d). Hungary was included in the Organization of Turkic States during the Cholpon Ata Summit with the status of an observer member. Hungary’s leader Orban, speaking at the 6th Summit of the Turkic Council, stated that “Hungarians consider themselves descendants of The Ruler of the Hun Empire Atilla and are based on Hun-Turkic origins” (Yüzbaşıoğlu, 2019).

The Seventh Summit of the Organization of Turkic States was held in Baku on October 15, 2019, hosted by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Kazakhstan’s Founding President Nursultan Nazarbayev, Kyrgyzstan President Sooronbay Ceenbekov, Uzbekistan President Şevket Mirziyoyev, and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, observer member of the Turkic Council, attended the summit. Turkmenistan participated in the summit at the level of Deputy Prime Minister. Representatives of the International Turkic Cultural Organization (TURKSOY), the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic-Speaking Countries, the Turkic Academy, and the Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation attended the Baku Summit (TÜRKSÖY, 2019). Uzbekistan participated in the Seventh Summit of the Organization of Turkic States as a full member. Uzbekistan’s President Mirziyoyev stated in his speech at the summit that “this is a historic day for them, Uzbekistan has joined the ranks of the Turkic Council as a full member” (Rehimov, 2019b). Uzbekistan’s “full membership shows that the Turkic Council, which celebrates its 10th anniversary, is confidently marching into the future” (Acicbe, 2019, p. 2).

The Extraordinary Summit of the Organization of Turkic States was held on April 10, 2020 with the theme of “Cooperation and Solidarity in the Fight Against the COVID-19 Pandemic” by video conference method. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, Kazakhstan President Kasım Jomart Tokayev, Kyrgyzstan President Sooronbay Ceenbekov, Uzbekistan President Şevket Mirziyoyev, Turkmenistan President Kurbankulu Berdimuhammedov, and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban attended the extraordinary summit. Baghdad Amreyev, Secretary General of the Organization of Turkic States, and Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director General of the World Health Organization, were also present at the video conference (TRT Avaz, 2020).

At the Last Summit held in Istanbul on November 12, 2021, the organization established as the Turkic Council was renamed the Organization of Turkic States. At this summit, Turkmenistan became an observer member of the Organization. “Turkic World 2040 Vision Document” was adopted at the summit under the theme of “Green Technologies and Smart Cities in the Digital Age”. The main topic of the summit was the developments in Kazakhstan. Members of the organization expressed their full support for Kazakhstan and underlined the importance of stability in this country (Yüzbaşıoğlu & Yılmaz, n.d.).

### **Institutional Structure and Objectives**

Various institutional structures have been established within the Organization of Turkic States. The Parliamentary Assembly is an assembly that brings together the assemblies of all member states.<sup>2</sup> The secretariat of the Parliamentary Assembly is located in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan. Cultural activities are carried out through TÜRKSOY in Ankara.<sup>3</sup> Kazakhstan's capital Astana is home to the Turkic Academy (Tüymebayev, 2012). The bodies of the Organization of Turkic States are as follows:

- Council of Presidents of State,
- Council of Foreign Ministers,
- Council of Whitebeards,
- Senior Officers Committee,
- Secretariat.

The main decision-making body of the Organization of Turkic States is the Council of Presidents of State, which is chaired by the country (in alphabetical order) that assumes the Chairmanship-in-office. The activities of the organization are coordinated and supported by the Secretariat based in İstanbul.<sup>4</sup>

The main objectives and duties of the Organization of Turkic States set out in Article 2 of the Nakhcivan Agreement are listed as follows:

- Strengthening mutual trust among the parties;
- Maintaining peace inside and outside the region;
- Adopting common positions on foreign policy issues;
- Coordinating actions to combat international terrorism, separatism, extremism, and cross-border crime;
- Development of effective regional and bilateral co-operation in all areas related to common goals;
- Creating favorable conditions for trade and investment;
- Aiming for comprehensive and balanced economic growth, social and cultural development;
- Discussion of ensuring the rule of law, good governance, and protection of human rights;
- Expanding interaction in the fields of science, technology, education, and culture;
- Promoting interaction with mass media and more intensive communication;
- Exchange of information on legal issues and promotion of judicial co-operation.<sup>5</sup>

### **Result**

The end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union have resulted in radical changes in the international system. After the Cold War, world became more globalized and the spread of a number of common values accelerated considerably. The dissolution of the Soviet Union allowed the emergence of new independent states and development of their own culture and identity.

Turkic-speaking countries, which gained independence in 1991, faced serious economic and political challenges in the early periods. Political instability and socio-economic crises have negatively affected the cultural development and nationalization processes of these countries. Turkey was the first country to recognize

<sup>2</sup> For the official website of the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic Speaking Countries, see [www.turk-pa.org](http://www.turk-pa.org) (Accessed on 24.01.2022).

<sup>3</sup> For the official website of the International Organization of Turkic Culture—TÜRKSOY, see [www.turksoy.org.tr](http://www.turksoy.org.tr) (Accessed on 24.01.2022).

<sup>4</sup> Bodies of the Turkic Council see <http://www.turkkon.org/icerik.php?no=25> (Accessed on 24.01.2022).

<sup>5</sup> For more information see <http://www.turkkon.org/icerik.php?no=26> (Accessed on 24.01.2014).

the independence of these countries and supported the descendant countries through political, economic, and cultural activities. Especially in the field of institutionalization, the support given has played an important role in the nationalization processes of these countries.

By the 2000s, Turkey's growing economic and international strength, as well as the economic development of other Turkic World countries, brought new opportunities.<sup>6</sup> Institutionalization, which is the most fundamental deficiency in the bilateral relations of the countries of the Turkic World, has gained new momentum with this period. To that effect, the Organization of Turkic States is an example of successful institutionalization. The greater solidarity and cooperation of member states in international and regional terms is one of the main factors that will strengthen their independence and prestige. It seems possible that the Organization of Turkic States will play an important institutional role in this process.

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<sup>6</sup> Natural resources, especially oil and gas, have played a decisive role in the development of the Turkic Republics of Central Asia (other than Kyrgyzstan). The main share of the national income of these countries belongs to the energy sector.

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