
Cultural Diplomacy Initiatives of Turkic Republics

Fırat PURTAŞ*

Abstract

This paper's aim is to shed light on cultural cooperation activities carried out among the Turkic republics over 25 years of independence and to analyse initiatives of cultural diplomacy which they have undertaken on a global level. The main argument put forward in this article is that the newly independent Turkic republics determined a culture-based policy for their state building. While this culture-based policy has contributed to the establishment of the nation-state and national identity on the domestic level, it has also contributed to the recognition of these republics as esteemed members of the international community. This paper is an attempt to disclose that as a regional cultural cooperation organization, TURKSOY has been a common platform which has played a key role in the revival of the national culture of the Turkic republics as well as in the promotion thereof on a global scale.

Key Words

TURKSOY, Turkic Republics, Cultural Diplomacy, UNESCO, Turkic World.

Introduction

TURKSOY, the International Organization of Turkic Culture (*Uluslararası Türk Kültürü Teşkilatı*), was founded in 1993 by the Republic of Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Referred to as the UNESCO of the Turkic World, TURKSOY is an international organization of cultural cooperation between its member countries, having been established on the basis of their common language, history and cultural values. Its main aims are to strengthen common bonds of heritage among Turkic peoples and to transmit and promote this heritage around the world. Since it is the first multilateral cooperation platform of the Turkic World, TURKSOY's name retains a symbolic value.

In 2016, TURKSOY's founding members celebrated the 25th anniversary of their independence from the former Soviet Union. Over this 25-year period, these countries have

* Prof. Dr.; Deputy Head of the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TURKSOY), Ankara, Turkey and Gazi University, Department of International Relations, Ankara, Turkey.
E-mail: purtas@gazi.edu.tr

gone through a major transformation process, overcoming many political, economic and social issues, and even in the midst of this process, have made comprehensive reforms to policies regarding their national cultures and identities. The main aim of these policy reforms was the revival of their traditions and cultural heritages, along with the restoration of their individual national and moral values. These, along with TURKSOY's establishment could be considered a result of the new cultural and foreign policies of Turkic republics after the collapse of the U.S.S.R. The dissolution of the former Soviet Union and the emergence of five new independent Turkic republics opened up a unique communication channel between Turkey and the Turkic peoples of the former USSR. The willingness of these new republics' heads of states to strengthen their mutual cooperation by promoting a deepened cultural revival, integration and awareness, and to create a platform of multilateral cooperation, laid the groundwork for the establishment of TURKSOY. At the end of 1992, immediately following the first summit of Turkic republics' leaders, TURKSOY's establishment process was launched and its founding agreement was signed on 12 July 1993.

It is claimed that Turkic republics gained independence unexpectedly and without any effort. However, there

are clear traces of Turkic peoples' deep desire and struggle for independence which they obtained in the beginning of the 20th century. In the 19th century, educational reforms carried out by the Jadidist intellectual movement planted the first seeds of nationalism among Turkic peoples. Roots of independence can also be found in the ideas expressed by representatives of two Jadidist organizations: the "All-Russian Muslim Congress" (convened three times between 1905-1907) and the "All-Russian Congress of Muslims" (convened twice in 1917).¹ It could be claimed that the philosophy of the Jadidist intellectuals played a foundational role in TURKSOY's establishment, which embraces the motto published in Ismail Gaspirali's "Tercuman" newspaper: "Unity in language, ideas and actions."

Culture-based policy has contributed to the establishment of the nation-state and national identity on the domestic level, it has also contributed to the recognition of these republics as esteemed members of the international community.

When compared to the fall of other empires, the dismantling of the Soviet Union did not cause much bloodshed. But while their toll may be less than others' throughout history, the Turkic republics paid a heavy price for their bids for independence. The "Urkun" of 1916, a revolt against Soviet forces, resulted in the massive migration and deaths of the Kyrgyz people. In the early 1930s, in Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries, "famine" was caused by an intensification of collectivization, and resulted in the deaths of millions of people. In 1937 and 1938, the Stalinist regime systematically repressed intellectuals. The effects of these traumas are still felt.

As the new Turkic republics emerged as sovereign states, social and economic issues took priority over cultural affairs, however significant efforts to restore traditional identities were made. Commemorative events were organized to pay tribute to the memories of illustrious personalities of Turkic culture and history including Abay, Manas, Magtymguly, Ali Shir Nava'i, Nizami Ganjavi, Dede Korkut and Koroghlu. The Nowruz Feast, prohibited during the Soviet regime, was officially celebrated once more, and the reputations of intellectuals accused of treachery were restored.

Having overcome the numerous pressing challenges of new independence in the 1990s, Turkic republics pressed onwards with cultural policies and initiated cultural diplomacy on a global scale in the mid-2000s. All along the past 25 years of these republics' independence, TURKSOY has been a key supporter of these nations' cultural renaissance and diplomacy.

The aim of this paper is to give insight into the achievements of Turkic republics in reviving their cultures and to draw attention to their global initiatives through TURKSOY for cultural diplomacy. Each Turkic republic has built its future upon its own unique and extremely precious cultural heritage, and under the auspices of TURKSOY, has worked towards strengthening cultural ties with the other Turkic republics and the world. Through initiatives they take on a global scale, Turkic republics introduce themselves to the world and actively support the development of alliances between nations.

As the new Turkic republics emerged as sovereign states, social and economic issues took priority over cultural affairs, however significant efforts to restore traditional identities were made.

A Conceptual Approach to the Turkic World: Unity in Diversity

Although the term “Turkic World” may at first glance be perceived as a political term, it is more appropriately considered a cultural concept. While the “Turkic World” explicitly unites the five independent Turkic republics, it extends across state boundaries to more broadly include all neighbouring and kindred communities of Turkic-speaking peoples. From the “Adriatic to the Great Wall”, Turkic peoples live across a vast territory, spanning the Balkans, the Caucasus, Central Asia, Siberia, the Mediterranean basin and beyond. Turkic language and culture serve as the common uniting force of the people living across this extensive territory, and thus are the building blocks of the “Turkic World.” As culture transcends state borders, it is impossible to draw clear lines delimiting the Turkic World.² Given its wide expanse across lands, Turkic culture is in fact characterized by a unity in its diversity of culture, with thousands of years of interaction between peoples.

This cultural diversity is the most distinctive feature of the Turkic World. As the Turkic people did not settle on a single territory, they are distinct from other nations that maintain a

single homeland and identity. While a portion of the Turkic people have always remained in Turkestan, from their birth, Turks have migrated to new places across Europe, Asia and Africa, and have made them their homelands.³

The Turkic World is similar to the collective French-speaking World, the Arabic World or the Hispanic World. Just as Mexico and Bolivia are distinct nations that share the same broader culture, Turkey and Kazakhstan share more similarities than differences in terms of language, religion and culture.

Turkic culture has been existing for many centuries and during this long history, has been enriched by frequent encounters with other cultures. During the height of the Silkroad, the Turkic World saw some of its most glorious periods. Indeed, *maqams*, tales, ornaments, foods, and other elements of Turkic culture in Kashgar reached out to Anatolia, with the Silkroad acting as not only a trade route, but a cultural bridge. The power of trade, ideas and materials across state borders became apparent again at the end of the Cold War, when relations among the Turkic World and other nations were opened up, and a new glorious era for the Turkic World was ushered in.

As an institution that came to the fore in the post-Soviet period, TURKSOY has

played a key role in reviving the cultural interaction among Turkic peoples and in enriching their culture in depth and breadth. Besides the independent Turkic republics, autonomous regions of the Russian Federation have also joined in TURKSOY activities. By its inclusion of these territories, TURKSOY has contributed to the preservation and promotion of these relatively small Russian Federation communities' cultures, including those of the Gagauz, Crimean and Karachay Turks.

Turkic culture has been existing for many centuries and during this long history, has been enriched by frequent encounters with other cultures.

Turkic peoples were one of the earliest nations to avow themselves as Muslims, with Islam being widely adopted as of the mid-8th century. However not all Turks share this religion. Indeed, there have been, throughout history, Turkic peoples with religious beliefs other than Islam. For example, the Gagauz people of southern Moldova and southwestern Ukraine are Orthodox Christian; most of the Khakas of southern Siberia are Shamans; Buddhism is widespread in the Tyva Republic; and Tengriism is

the religious belief of many in the Altai Republic. Respecting the diversity of its members' religious beliefs, TURKSOY plays an inclusive and uniting role by adopting a secular philosophy in its activities.

The UNESCO of the Turkic World

TURKSOY is often referred to as the UNESCO of the Turkic World. To understand whether this is just a rhetorical statement or an accurate comparison, we should consider the fundamental principles and activities of both UNESCO and TURKSOY. UNESCO was founded in 1945 as a specialized agency of the United Nations, tasked with a mission to foster the peaceful coexistence of all peoples of the world through educational, scientific and cultural reform programs. Maintaining the idea that "since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defense of peace must be constructed", UNESCO primarily utilizes educational and cultural reforms to foster an ingrained collaboration and peace between peoples.⁴ Thus, it can be defined as an organization of cultural diplomacy on a global scale.

UNESCO member countries and bodies have developed many documents

and normative instruments for their cultural reform programs, including conventions, recommendations and declarations. One of its foundational documents is the “Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions,” signed in 2005. This convention’s objectives are to “protect and promote the diversity of cultural expression; to create the conditions for cultures to flourish and to freely interact in a mutually beneficial manner.”⁵ TURKSOY realizes this objective among Turkic-speaking peoples and between the Turkic World and other cultures.

TURKSOY is often referred to as the UNESCO of the Turkic World.

UNESCO and TURKSOY both share goals of intercultural collaboration, and TURKSOY has greatly benefitted from working closely with and learning from this renowned organization. In 1996, a cooperation protocol was signed between TURKSOY and UNESCO, through which many events to preserve and promote Turkic heritage have been organized. TURKSOY has celebrated Nevruz in UNESCO Headquarters twice in recent years. The celebration of the 20th anniversary of the foundation of TURKSOY is another example

of cooperation, which was made at the headquarters of UNESCO with a performance of the Arshyn Mal Alan Opera to commemorate its 100th anniversary. In addition to these individual cultural events, TURKSOY actively offers ongoing support for the “International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures 2013-2022”, an important UNESCO initiative which was declared upon the initiative of Kazakhstan. And in January 2015, the Director General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, paid an official visit to TURKSOY Headquarters, during which she expressed that the cooperation between their organizations has brought about fruitful results.⁶

The formation of the National Commissions and Committees for UNESCO of TURKSOY member countries is another important example of the collaboration between UNESCO and TURKSOY. This group has held meetings since 2008, the sixth of which took place on 9 July 2016 in Istanbul.⁷ Its meetings focus on:⁸

- the preservation of the cultural and natural heritage of the Turkic World
- the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage of the Turkic World
- the preservation of the documentary heritage of the Turkic World
- education and youth

UNESCO and TURKSOY both share goals of intercultural collaboration, and TURKSOY has greatly benefitted from working closely with and learning from this renowned organization.

Some of the concrete results of these meetings are the creation of a group of Turkic-speaking countries on UNESCO platforms; the presentation of joint files regarding issues such as world heritage, intangible heritage, and the declaration of commemorative years and; the organization of events within the framework of the “International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures 2013-2022” and the “Youth Education Camps on Intangible Cultural Heritage.”⁹ As a result of TURKSOY’s collaborative efforts and goals it shares with UNESCO, the above-mentioned National Commissions and Committees along with many other instances of UNESCO support TURKSOY’s informal title as the “UNESCO of the Turkic world.”

A Sui Generis Institution of Cultural Diplomacy

Besides being deemed the UNESCO of the Turkic World, TURKSOY holds

other unique qualifications. While only independent countries can be members of UNESCO, TURKSOY has members which are not independent states, including six autonomous republics of the Russian Federation, the Autonomous Region of Gagauzia (Moldova) and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which is subjected to isolation by the international community even in the fields of culture and art. Guided by the understanding that culture has no borders, TURKSOY does not cooperate exclusively with the institutions of its member countries but rather embraces opportunities to work with educational and artistic institutions outside its member countries too. As such, it has already worked with organizations within the United States of America, Europe, Iran, China, South Korea, Morocco, and others.

Since TURKSOY is an organization of member countries that share a common language, it may also be compared to the British Council,¹⁰ an institution of cultural diplomacy of the United Kingdom, and to the International Organization of *La Francophonie* (*La Francophonie*, Alliance of French Speaking Countries),¹¹ an institution that aims for the cooperation of France, its French-speaking former colonies, and any other countries that embrace the French language and culture. However, despite its functional

similarity to the British Council or *La Francophonie*, TURKSOY is distinct from them in so far as while these organizations also aim to preserve the memory of their mother nation's colonialist achievements,¹² TURKSOY does not include this as a focus.

TURKSOY is based on the principle of equal participation and common interest of its members.

As TURKSOY's headquarters are located in Ankara, the Turkish capital, Turkey is perceived to have a dominant position within TURKSOY. One might consider TURKSOY to be a bureaucratic institution or NGO within Turkey, however, TURKSOY has no hierarchical or centralistic structure. Indeed, one of its most fundamental features is that it is based on the principle of equal participation and common interest of its members. In line with this equal footing, only a few activities within TURKSOY's history have promoted the individual culture of any one member country. This anti-favoritism policy does not apply for those Turkic-speaking communities whose language or culture is endangered, with exceptions including TURKSOY's publications of the legends of the Khakas, Sakha and Chuvash peoples, and commemorative

events for illustrious artists of the Karachay-Balkar people.

Art as a Means for Dialogue and TURKSOY's Best Practices

The Council of Europe describes intercultural dialogue as "an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups belonging to different cultures that leads to deeper understanding of the other's global perception."¹³ Language is the most fundamental instrument of dialogue amongst people. However, where a common language is unavailable, art emerges as an alternative channel of communication between societies. Indeed, art makes it possible to introduce oneself and one's culture to others, and to understand others, when other communication channels are not available. Thus, all media and subjects of art serve as instruments of peace, for the mutual understanding and rapprochement of societies.

TURKSOY is an organization that considers art to be an important means of dialogue, for its member countries and all cultures. While strengthening ties and interaction among Turkic-speaking peoples, it also aims to introduce the uniqueness and richness of Turkic culture to the rest of the world,

and has often employed art as a means. TURKSOY has carried out many art activities and events that are considered as best practice examples of cultural diplomacy and dialogue. From 1993 to 2016, TURKSOY held 19 Opera Days, 10 Photographers' Gatherings, 5 Sculptors' Gatherings, 7 Congresses of Literature Journals of the Turkic World, 3 Kashgarly Mahmut Short Story Competitions and 5 Seminars on Intangible Cultural Heritage. The Painters' Gatherings of TURKSOY have brought together more than 200 painters from different countries, and now TURKSOY enjoys a unique collection of colourful paintings, which have been exhibited in nearly 100 cities of more than 30 countries, from New York to Tehran and from Florence to Rabat. TURKSOY has thus, introduced Turkic culture to the world from another, dynamic angle.¹⁴

Where a common language is unavailable, art emerges as an alternative channel of communication between societies.

TURKSOY art events have brought together artists and scholars from across the Turkic world, and over time have become comprehensive cultural projects in their own right. These

projects have enabled TURKSOY to cooperate with respected international NGOs and academic organizations, such as the International Council of Traditional Music (ICTM), the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and the International Society for Music Education (ISME). Thanks to these activities, artists from across Turkic republics have been able to share their experiences with the world, expanding their intercultural dialogue.

Youth Projects

Since its establishment in 1993, TURKSOY has sought to enhance the exchange of repertoires, conductors and musicians among Turkic World countries and to introduce Turkic music to the world. It has emphasized the importance of participation by young artists in all its traditional events. Well-known youth projects within TURKSOY are its Youth Chamber Orchestra (established in 2010) and Youth Chamber Choir (established in 2015).

Since its establishment in 2010, the Youth Chamber Orchestra of TURKSOY has performed concerts in the United States of America and several European countries. In August 2016, it gave special performances dedicated to the 25th anniversary of Turkic republics' independence, and did

so within the framework of the ISME conference held in the U.K. and Italy. It has also recorded two albums featuring works by Turkic composers.

Like the above-mentioned orchestra, the Youth Chamber Choir of TURKSOY also gathers selected young artists from the best conservatories of Turkic republics. Gathering 32 students from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey and Turkmenistan, the Choir successfully represented Turkic republics in the European Choir Games in 2015 and won three gold medals in this competition, where more than 100 choirs and more than 5000 choir members from 37 countries were represented. Thanks to this event, young artists from Turkic countries had the opportunity to directly interact with their counterparts from all corners of the world and had the opportunity to introduce their colourful music to them at the same time.¹⁵ Recently, in 2016, the Choir took part in the Festival of Young Artists Bayreuth and participated in the Harmony International Project launched by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Germany.

Cultural Capitals of the Turkic World

During the European integration process of 1985, an initiative to raise

awareness about the richness and diversity of European culture and to foster collaboration between the citizens of Europe was undertaken. As part of this initiative, European countries decided to declare one of their cities as their cultural capital. Later, in the 1990s, America and the Arab World also began selecting their cultural capitals. After the Summit of the Heads of States of Turkic Speaking Countries was held in Istanbul in 2010, the Turkic World followed suit and began declaring its own cultural capitals. During the summit, and upon TURKSOY's proposal, Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, was declared as the Cultural Capital of the Turkic World for 2012.¹⁶

As the representatives of their national cultures, the Cultural Capitals of the Turkic World host many events throughout the year. These events range from artistic gatherings to theatre and classical music performances, and besides showcasing their cultures, they help to promote their host cities and to increase cultural tourism there. In addition to these events, the Capitals have sought more innovative ones. For the first time in 2013, the Turkvision Song Competition, similar to the Eurovision Song Contest, was held in Eskişehir, followed by another in Kazan in 2014. Rimzil Valiyev, a Tatar journalist, described the Turkvision Song Competition as follows:

“The importance and colourfulness of the Turkvision Song Competition and its impact on the image of Tatarstan and Kazan is the same as that of the *Universiade* 2013 held in Kazan. Compared to the construction of palaces and subways which are worth billions, Turkvision is a much more efficient initiative in terms of its contribution to the image of Kazan, Tatarstan and Russia as well as to the strengthening of ties among tens of countries and peoples.”¹⁷

As the representatives of their national cultures, the Cultural Capitals of the Turkic World host many events throughout the year.

It is clear that these initiatives have played a significant role in introducing Turkic culture as a rich treasure of the global community.

Literature and Commemorative Events

The commemoration of illustrious historic personalities and their legacies within our human society is a well-known practice of UNESCO. Adopting this tradition, TURKSOY

also declares commemorative years to pay tribute to the legacies of renowned authors, artists, theater actors, playwrights, musicians and composers of the Turkic World, honoring their works and thereby introducing them to young generations.¹⁸

Within the framework of these commemorations, two major competitions have been launched in the fields of literature and theater. With TURKSOY’s support, the Eurasian Authors’ Union (*Avrasya Yazarlar Birliđi*), an NGO that has carried out activities in the field of literature for over 10 years, organized the Competition of Short Stories in 2008, dedicated to the commemoration of Kashgarly Mahmut. In 2015, the Union organized the Competition of Theater Plays, dedicated to the commemoration of Haldun Taner, on the occasion of his 100th birthday.

Congresses of literature journals of the Turkic World, regularly held since 2008, have played a key role in literature as they resulted in the submission of short stories by authors of the Turkic World one of whom is declared “Author of the Turkic World” every year by TURKSOY. Individuals awarded with this title so far have been: Ali Akbař (Turkey), İsmail Bozkurt (TRNC), Tolen Abdik (Kazakhstan) and Omar Sultanov (Kyrgyzstan).

The Preservation of Cultural Heritage

Oral history and nomadic traditions are features of the intangible cultural heritage characteristic of the Turkic World. From epic legends to simple folk tales, from lullabies to mourning songs, and from handicrafts to elaborate artisan works, Turkic peoples have a rich and diverse intangible cultural heritage. Preserving, promoting and introducing this heritage to future generations has been TURKSOY's aim in several of its projects. The first book published by TURKSOY dealt with the Manas Legend, which was later included in UNESCO's "List of Intangible Cultural Heritage." TURKSOY later published the legends of Dede Korkut, Kultegin, Ural Batır and Huban Arıĝ. Nevruz, a common tradition of Turkic peoples which tended to disappear in Anatolia, was one of the first festivals to be officially celebrated by TURKSOY after its founding. Minstrels' Gatherings and Traditional Crafts' Fairs have been still other examples of cultural preservation.

Education is one of the most important instruments for safeguarding cultural heritage. Therefore, TURKSOY attaches great importance to cooperating with universities. This aim eventually resulted in the establishment of TURKSOY Chairs,

With TURKSOY's support, the Eurasian Authors' Union (*Avrasya Yazarlar Birliđi*), an NGO that has carried out activities in the field of literature for over 10 years, organized the Competition of Short Stories in 2008, dedicated to the commemoration of Kashgarly Mahmut.

similar to UNESCO Chairs. The first TURKSOY Chair was established in 2010, at the Aknulla Bashkort State University in Ufa. Later, TURKSOY established Chairs in Kazakhstan and in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. These Chairs and their departments organize various academic activities to raise awareness about the Turkic cultural heritage and its diversity. Through this awareness, they aim at inspiring young people's appreciation for this heritage so that they have a natural desire to preserve it.

TURKSOY attaches particular importance to the cooperation among museums of its member countries. The Forum of Eurasian Museums, organized by TURKSOY, is a unique platform to enhance cooperation between these institutions. The first Forum of Eurasian Museums was held in 2013

in Bursa and the second in Kazan, the Cultural Capital of the Turkic World for 2014.¹⁹ These Forums do not only address TURKSOY members, however, and so the third forum held in 2015 was hosted by Mongolia, a non-member nation but one with a rich history in Turkic culture. The Forum of Eurasian Museums has given rise to the establishment of an organization similar to ICOM. This marks a major step taken towards the preservation, promotion and transmission of the rich cultural heritage of the great Eurasian civilizations and their unique legacy within the history of humanity.

From epic legends to simple folk tales, from lullabies to mourning songs, and from handcrafts to elaborate artisan works, Turkic peoples have a rich and diverse intangible cultural heritage.

Turkic Republics' Global Initiatives for Cultural Diplomacy

The role of cultural diplomacy can be defined in many ways. As a basic definition, cultural diplomacy, like

other types of diplomacy, is a state instrument of foreign policy. Any tool can serve multiple purposes and, cultural diplomacy has indeed done so. From one angle, it can be claimed that cultural diplomacy is an essential part of the existential struggle against hegemony, in which certain entities become more and more imposing over time and threaten the survival of smaller and more varied groups. From another angle, it can be viewed as an antithesis to the clash of civilizations, as an effort towards peace among peoples. To this end, the newly independent Turkic republics have used cultural diplomacy effectively, strengthening their own cultures and keeping peaceful coexistence in their regions.

In the 2000s, Turkic republics launched several prestigious initiatives of cultural diplomacy on a global scale. The capital of Kazakhstan, Astana, became the Center of Interfaith Dialogue in 2003. In 2008, the Baku Process for Intercultural Dialogue was launched and Baku (Azerbaijan) was declared as the center of multiculturalism. Kyrgyzstan took an innovative step in the field of traditional sports with the first Nomadic Games in 2014. And a year later, Turkmenistan declared the year, 2015, as the “Year of Permanent Neutrality and Peace.”

Baku: the Center of Multiculturalism

Because 20% of its territory is occupied by Armenia, Azerbaijan has based its foreign policy on the restoration of its territorial integrity. Azerbaijan preferentially employs soft power policies as a means to raise awareness about the invasion and occupation. The Eurovision Song Contest, Formula 1 races and European Sports Championships, all hosted by Azerbaijan, are tangible examples of its soft power policy efforts. Compared with these programs, the Baku Process for Intercultural Dialogue is a unique initiative in that it enables direct contact between Eastern and Western civilizations.

The Baku Process for Intercultural Dialogue, comprised of high-level meetings between Western and Eastern countries, was launched in 2008 during the Conference of the Ministers of Culture of the Council of Europe. The conference, entitled, “Intercultural Dialogue as the Basis of Sustainable Peace and Development in Europe and Neighbouring Regions,” brought together not only ministers of the Council of Europe, but also ministers and representatives from member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).²⁰ In 2009, Baku hosted a meeting of OIC

Cultural diplomacy is an essential part of the existential struggle against hegemony, in which certain entities become more and more imposing over time and threaten the survival of smaller and more varied groups.

ministers of culture, inviting members of the European Union as well. Hosting these Baku Process meetings has enabled Azerbaijan to claim a position as an enforcer of intercultural dialogue programs.²¹

After these initial meetings, Baku continued to host important events to further the Baku Process initiatives. In 2010, it held the Summit of Spiritual Leaders of the World and, in 2011, the Forum of Intercultural Dialogue. At the opening ceremony of this forum held in 2011, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, delivered a speech in which he underlined the importance of multiculturalism and explained the principles on which Azerbaijan’s cultural policies are based:

“All these activities and humanitarian reforms are not a coincidence. People from different cultural backgrounds have been living together as a family in Azerbaijan for centuries.

There has never been any ethnic or religious conflict nor any disagreement in Azerbaijan, as this is not something which can be tolerated. This is a tradition to which Azerbaijan is also strongly committed today as an independent country.”²²

Baku Process for Intercultural Dialogue is a unique initiative in that it enables direct contact between Eastern and Western civilizations.

Azerbaijan further contributed to global peace initiatives by hosting the 7th Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) from 25 April to 27 April 2016. In his speech, Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, the U.N. High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, stated that the Baku Process is closely tied to the U. N. Alliance of Civilizations’ initiatives and further stated that it will constitute the most important part of the Forum. Al-Nasser, who extended his gratitude to Ilham Aliyev for declaring the year 2016 as the Year of Multiculturalism in Azerbaijan, stressed that the Baku Process is a true platform for intercultural dialogue between peaceful and inclusive societies on a global scale.²³

Astana - Center for Dialogue Among Traditional Religions

The capital of Kazakhstan, Astana, declared as Cultural Capital of the Turkic World for 2012, had long before served as a key center of dialogue for world and traditional religions. In 2003, Nursultan Nazarbayev, the President of Kazakhstan, launched The Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, and this congress placed Astana as the host center for dialogue among religions and cultures in the Turkic world.²⁴ Recently, in 2012, the Congress created a Council of Religious Leaders, expanding its host city’s position as a facilitator of religious dialogue.

The Fifth Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions was held on 10-11 June 2015, and was attended by the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-Moon, along with 112 delegates from 44 countries. In the opening speech he held at this congress, the Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev stressed that standard systems of checks and balances tend not to function effectively on an international scale, and highlighted the decline of the mutual trust that had been established after World War II, the decline of tourism and mobility, and the increase of information wars waged between former allies. In the context

of these international issues, he stressed the significance of the Congress as a most important component of global “faith diplomacy” and as a platform to help end conflicts and restore mutual confidence.²⁵ In his speech, Ban Ki-Moon drew attention to the timing of the Summit and extended his gratitude to the Kazakh leader for his concrete efforts towards cooperation and mutual respect.²⁶

Kazakhstan played a pioneering role in the United Nation’s launch of the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures, which aims to preserve peace and sustainable development on a global scale. With the adoption of resolution 62/90, entitled, “Supporting Cooperation for Peace Through Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue,” on 17 December 2007 at the U.N. General Assembly, the year 2010 was declared, “Year of the Rapprochement of Cultures.” As this initiative proved successful, the 36th General Conference of UNESCO, held in November 2011, then declared the years 2013 to 2022, “International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures.” Besides proposing the declaration of this decade, Kazakhstan hosted this program’s opening ceremony²⁷ and, further showed its support by funding the program with 150 thousand dollars in 2012, 200 thousand dollars in 2013, and 100 thousand dollars in 2014.

Kazakhstan played a pioneering role in the United Nation’s launch of the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures, which aims to preserve peace and sustainable development on a global scale.

Multiculturalism is a key component of Kazakhstan’s cultural policies. Indeed, 130 nations, religions and cultures peacefully coexist in the country. Within the framework of “Kazakhstan 2050,” an initiative launched by Nazarbayev in 2014, the Ministry of Culture of Kazakhstan approved the Concept of Cultural Policies of Kazakhstan. This concept aims to make Kazakhstan the Center of Eurasian Culture by 2030 and the Center of World Culture by 2050.²⁸

Kyrgyzstan: Home of World Nomadic Cultures

As descendants of the Manas people, the Kyrgyz people have a very rich oral tradition. The Kyrgyz government attaches particular importance to nomadic and intangible cultural heritage as essential components of the national culture of Kyrgyzstan. One of the modern revival efforts of their nomadic roots are the Kyrgyz,

“World Nomadic Games,” held for the first time in the summer of 2014. These games, comprised of traditional Kyrgyz sports’ competitions, lasted for one week and saw more than 400 competitors from 19 countries. At the opening ceremony, the President of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan, Almazbek Atambayev, stated that Kyrgyzstan builds its future on the heritage left behind by its ancestors and emphasized the feat the Games have achieved in bringing together all the people of the country, a first in the history of Kyrgyzstan.²⁹

The idea to organize these Games arose during the Second Summit of the Turkic Council, held in Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic, in 2012. The Declaration issued at the end of the summit stated that this initiative has been welcomed as a sign of respect towards the preservation and revival of the common history, traditions, language and culture of Turkic peoples.³⁰

The World Nomadic Games, which emphasize ethnic sports and culture, play an additional important role in preserving cultural diversity and preventing cultures from deterioration through globalization. As a tribute to nomadic traditions, lifestyles and cultures, and as the trademark of Kyrgyzstan, the World Nomadic Games promoted the national beauty and tourism potential of Kyrgyzstan.

Increased tourism will undoubtedly spark more direct, one-to-one contact and dialogue between individuals from within and abroad, furthering Kyrgyzstan’s contribution to the rapprochement of cultures.

In a list of 10 countries, the United Nations World Travel Organization (UNWTO) ranked Kyrgyzstan as the number one country which will experience a boom in tourism in future decades.³¹ If this prediction comes true, this increased tourism will undoubtedly spark more direct, one-to-one contact and dialogue between individuals from within and abroad, furthering Kyrgyzstan’s contribution to the rapprochement of cultures.³²

Magtymguly Pyragy and Cultural Initiatives of Turkmenistan

As a philosopher and poet who lived in the 18th century, Magtymguly Pyragy is a key personality of Turkmen national culture. Indeed, his character and poems are essential components of the Turkmen people’s mentality and lifestyle.³³ 18 May, the birthday of the great poet, is an official holiday in

Turkmenistan. Magtymguly Pyragy is a cornerstone of the Turkmen cultural heritage; his works have been translated into many languages. His legacy extends beyond his literary works; busts and statues of him are common, as are parks named after him, even outside Turkmenistan, for example in Turkey and Russia.³⁴

For 2014, the 290th anniversary of Pyragy's birth, TURKSOY dedicated the year to his commemoration as a great poet and philosopher of Turkmenistan. To honor his legacy, many events were carried out in Turkey, Turkmenistan, and several other countries. The most impressive of these was an international conference hosted by the President of the Republic of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguli Berdimuhammedov, entitled, "Magtymguly Pyragy and Universal Cultural Values," which took place on 15 May 2014 in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan. UNESCO Director General, Irina Bokova, TURKSOY Secretary General, Dusen Kaseinov, and many other high-level guests attended the conference. Mrs. Bokova said, "Today, at a time of global change, when all societies are undergoing transformation, I believe these humanist values have never been so vital, and this is the importance of the legacy of Magtymguly Pyragy."³⁵

A state programme, primarily focused on international activities, and aiming

at the development of cultural affairs over the years 2012 through 2016 was approved in Turkmenistan. In 2012, cultural events were organized by China, Germany, Korea, Ukraine, Belarus, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of their mutual diplomatic relations.³⁶ In the years following 2012, Cultural Days of Turkmenistan were organized in Turkey, Mongolia, Croatia, Armenia and the United Arab Emirates among others.³⁷

A state programme, primarily focused on international activities, and aiming at the development of cultural affairs over the years 2012 through 2016 was approved in Turkmenistan.

In 1995, Turkmenistan obtained the status of permanent neutrality in a U. N. General Assembly vote. In accordance with this new status, Turkmenistan declared the year 2015 as the "Year of Neutrality and Peace" in Turkmenistan. In 2015, the city of Merv, Turkmenistan, was declared the Cultural Capital of the Turkic World. Many events organized throughout 2015 contributed to Turkmenistan's international cultural enrichment and promotion. Colourful opening

and closing ceremonies, conferences and exhibitions, and the 32nd Term Meeting of the Permanent Council of TURKSOY, have been the most prominent events held in the country within this framework. On 12 December 2015 an international conference on “International Cooperation for Peace, Security and Development” was held in Ashgabat. In the speech he delivered at this conference, the Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, said that Turkey fully supports all international initiatives of Turkmenistan, “which are particularly important for the entire humanity.”³⁸

The ASIADA Games, which will be held in Ashgabat in 2017 with the participation of thousands of athletes from all countries of Asia, will be another significant step toward enhancing the “Open Door” policy of Turkmenistan.

Conclusion

The founder of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, declared that, “the republic is built upon culture.”³⁹ He sought to follow the reforms for linguistic and cultural issues that had been set in the early years of the Republic.⁴⁰ Leaders of newly independent Turkic republics have adopted a similar culture-based approach in revitalizing and developing

their nations. The importance of traditional and spiritual heritages, trivialized under the Soviet regime, was restored and the renewed sense of common national cultures bolstered the republics’ new identities as sovereign nations. The establishment of TURKSOY in 1993, immediately following independence, bears testimony to the solidarity and wish to work together towards a common future.

The importance of traditional and spiritual heritages, trivialized under the Soviet regime, was restored and the renewed sense of common national cultures bolstered the republics’ new identities as sovereign nations.

During the 25 years since their independence, Turkic republics have accomplished many significant achievements in overcoming their individual struggles for sovereignty, strengthening their common cultural ties, and promoting themselves globally. As the “UNESCO of the Turkic World,” TURKSOY has adopted UNESCO’s universal principles on a regional level, focusing on preserving and enriching the cultural diversity of Turkic peoples, contributing to their

mutual rapprochement, and increasing the prosperity and welfare of the world through the sharing of cultural wealth. It has supported its member countries and neighbouring communities by organizing many cultural and artistic events and by collaborating with and helping to found other organizations. TURKSOY acts as a cross-border organization, serving as a cultural bridge between peoples living on a vast territory across Eurasia. With an efficient use of cultural diplomacy, Turkic republics have successfully enforced policies to sustain peaceful coexistence, and TURKSOY has contributed immeasurably to the restoration, preservation, integration, and promotion of Turkic peoples' culture.

Astana, the center of interreligious dialogue, Baku, the center of multiculturalism, Turkmenistan, the active advocate of permanent neutrality, and Kyrgyzstan, the center of traditional sports' competitions, each represent their individual and mutual commitment to preserving their Turkic culture. Over the last

quarter of a century, Turkic republics have faced many global and regional challenges. Despite these challenges, Turkic republics' success in internal and external policies helped strengthen their stability and have brought about significant economic growth and increased social welfare. Above all, these policies have played a key role in contributing to the prestige of Turkic republics in the eyes of the international community. Given the success of Turkic republics and TURKSOY, the adoption of the same approaches of cultural diplomacy by other regional powers would be advisable to work toward peace and stability in Eurasia.

With an efficient use of cultural diplomacy, Turkic republics have successfully enforced policies to sustain peaceful coexistence, and TURKSOY has contributed immeasurably to the restoration, preservation, integration, and promotion of Turkic peoples' culture.

Endnotes

- 1 Shireen T. Hunter, *Islam in Russia*, New York, CSIS, 2004, pp.17-21.
- 2 Michael Vlahos, "Culture and Foreign Policy", *Foreign Policy*, No. 82 (Spring 1991), p. 59.
- 3 Umay Türkeş-Günay, "Türk Kültürünün Değerlendirmesi ile ilgili bir Öneri ve Kültür Değiştirme Alanında Önemli Bir Örnek: Kutad gu Bilig", *Türkler Ansiklopedisi*, C.III, Ankara, Yeni Türkiye Yayınları, 2002, pp. 811-820.
- 4 The statutes of UNESCO signed on 16 November 1945 state that sustainable peace cannot be reached if it is only based on political and economic regulations of governments, and that durable peace can only be achieved thanks to intellectual and moral solidarity of humanity. Thus the Constitution of UNESCO stresses that it was established in order to contribute to peace and security through educational, scientific and cultural cooperation among societies : "UNESCO Constitution", http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=15244&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html (last visited 14 January 2017).
- 5 "Basic texts of the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions", Edition, Paris: UNESCO, 2013, p. 5. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002253/225383E.pdf> (last visited 14 January 2017).
- 6 "UNESCO Director General Irina Bokova Visited Turksoy Headquarters", http://www.turksoy.org/en/news/2015/01/06/unesco_director_general_irina_bokova_visited_turksoy_headquarters (last visited 14 January 2017).
- 7 "6. TÜRKSOY Üyesi Ülkeler UNESCO Milli Komisyonları ve Komiteleri Toplantısı İstanbul'da" <http://unesco.org.tr/dokumanlar/duyurular/turksoy6.pdf> (last visited 14 January 2017). Meetings of UNESCO National Commissions of TURKSOY member countries have been held in Ankara, Kazan, Eskisehir, Astana, Baku and Istanbul so far.
- 8 Murat Yılmaz (ed.), *Türk Dünyası Kültürel Mirası Envanter Çalışması*, Ankara, Ahmet Yesevi Üniversitesi, 2015, p.6.
- 9 The fifth meeting of UNESCO National Commissions and Committees of TURKSOY member countries took place in 2015 in Baku, Azerbaijan. For results of the meeting see http://unesco.org.tr/dokumanlar/duyurular/turksoy_bt.pdf (last visited 24 January 2017).
- 10 Since 1934, the British Council has been carrying out cooperation activities among the United Kingdom and peoples of other countries and linking millions of people to each other in more than 100 countries. According to Martin Davidson, the Chief Executive of the British Council, the British Council carries out activities to promote the values of the United Kingdom and make its culture more appealing by contributing to its prosperity, security and stronger bilateral and multilateral relations. Davidson further notes that a key priority of the British Council is to strengthen the confidence and

- belief in the United Kingdom through mutual confidence and trust among the United Kingdom and peoples of other countries worldwide. In other words, the strategy of the British Council is focused on the fundamental values of the United Kingdom such as the English language, the education system, art and culture of the United Kingdom. See, *Corporate Plan 2014-2016*, British Council, 80 Years of Cultural Relation, pp.2-3, at <https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/corporate-plan-2014-16.pdf> (last visited 10 February 2017).
- 11 The *La Francophonie* organization is based on humanist values and the French language. It was established in 1970 and is currently comprised of 80 member states, 23 of which are member states with an observer status. Based on the principle of respect towards cultural and linguistic diversity, it aims at the popularization of the French language. With its Headquarters based in Paris, the *La Francophonie* organization has representations in Addis Ababa, where the Headquarters of the African Union are located, Brussels, where the Headquarters of the European Union are located, and Geneva and New York where the Headquarters of the United Nations are located. Besides these representations, *La Francophonie* also has regional offices. See, <http://www.francophonie.org/Welcome-to-the-International.html> (last visited 28 January 2017).
 - 12 The establishment of the International *La Francophonie Organization* started with the signature of the founding agreement of the Agency of Cultural and Technical Cooperation by 21 states under the auspices of the Presidents of four ancient French colonies (Senegal, Niger, Morocco and Cambodia) on 20 March 1970; Cemil Doğaç İpek, “Türk Dünyası İçin Alternatif Bir Model: Frankofoni”, 2023, (September 2014), p. 13.
 - 13 Council of Europe, http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/concept_EN.asp#P12_1420 (last visited 5 January 2017).
 - 14 Fırat Purtaş, “TÜRKSOY”, in Turgut Demirtepe ve Murat Yılmaz (eds.), *Türk Cumhuriyetleri ve Toplulukları Yıllığı-2013*, Hoca Ahmet Yesevi Uluslararası Türk-Kazak Üniversitesi, Ankara, 2015, p. 594.
 - 15 “TURKSOY International Youth Chamber Choir”, *TURKSOY Journal*, No. 47 (Winter 2015), p. 24.
 - 16 Türk Dili Konuşan Ülkeler Devlet Başkanları 10. Zirve Toplantısının Bildirisi, Madde 17, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/bildiri.tr.mfa> (last visited 15 January 2017); Final Declaration of the 10th Summit of the Heads of State of Turkic Speaking Countries, Article 17, İstanbul, September 16th, 2010, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/declaration-of-10th-summit-of-the-heads-of-the-turkic-speaking-states-_istanbul_-16-september-2010_.en.mfa (last visited 15 January 2017).
 - 17 Rimzil Valeev, “Sennost Turkvizyon-2014 Mı Poymöm Tolko togda, kagda vse uçastniki razyedutsya po domam (We will get aware the value of Turkvizyon-2014 when all participants had already back to their home)”, at <http://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/119188/> (last visited 23 January 2017).

- 18 Commemoration years of TURKSOY: 2010- Zeki Velidi Togan, 2011-Abdullah Tukay, 2012-Mirza Fatali Ahundzade, 2013-Mukan Tulebayev, 2014-Toktogul Satylganov and Magtymguly Pyragy, 2015-Haldun Taner and Simion Kadyshyev, 2016-Yusuf Khass Hajib.
- 19 Liliya Sattarova (ed.), *The Cultural Heritage and Museums of the Turkic World*, Proceedings Book, Bursa, Bursa Kültür A.Ş. Publications, 2015.
- 20 Baku Declaration for the Promotion of Intercultural Dialogue- Final Declaration”, https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/culture/Baku/Baku_Declaration_en.pdf (last visited 15 February 2017).
- 21 Vugar Bektaş, “Baku Process”, <http://regionplus.az/en/articles/view/4269> (last visited 15 February 2017).
- 22 “Speech by the President of Azerbaijan Mr. Ilham Aliyev”, Baku International Humanitarian Forum, at <http://bakuforum.az/speech-by-president-of-azerbaijan-mr-ilham-aliyev-3/?fid=2254#speaker> (last visited 12 February 2017).
- 23 UNAOC High Representative’s Remarks on the Baku Process, 2016, <http://baku.unaoc.org/unaoc-high-representatives-remarks-on-the-baku-process/> (last visited 12 February 2017).
- 24 Arystanbek Mukhamediuly, “Congress of Religious Leaders is Result of Kazakh Leader’s Initiative”, *The Astana Times*, 10 June 2015.
- 25 Speech of Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, at the opening ceremony of the V Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, at <http://www.religions-congress.org/content/view/404/69/lang,english/> (last visited 2 February 2017).
- 26 Secretary-General’s remarks to Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions: “Promoting Dialogue for Peace and Prosperity in Turbulent Times”, <http://www.un.org/sg/statements/index.asp?nid=8717> (last visited 22 February 2017).
- 27 The opening ceremony of the “International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures” was held within the framework of an international forum in Astana on 23 August 2012. The ceremony took place in the presence of high-level guests from more than 20 countries including UNESCO Director General Irina Bokova, the High Representative of the United Nations for the Alliance of Civilizations Nassir Abdulaziz Al Nasser and Nobel Prize holders.
- 28 *Konsepsiya Kulturnoi Politiki v Respublike Kazabstana*, Astana, MKK, 2014, p.14.
- 29 Alisher Khamidov, Kyrgyzstan Hosts First “World Nomad Games,” But Can They Unite the Nation?, at <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/69986> (last visited 12 February 2017).
- 30 Türk Konseyi İkinci Zirvesi Bildirisi, Bişkek, http://turkkon.org/Assets/dokuman/Biskek_Bildirisi_Turkce_imzali_20140418_102501.pdf (last visited 12 February 2017).

- 31 “Kyrgyzstan leads the UN Ranking Among Countries Awaiting Tourism Boom”, *Kabar*, <http://kabar.kg/eng/society/full/15753> (last visited 12 February 2017).
- 32 Cholpon Orozobekova, “Daniyar Mukashev on the World Nomad Games”, *The Diplomat*, 16 May 2016.
- 33 Annagurban Aşırov Mahtumkulu, Çev. Abdurrahman Güzel vd., Ankara, TÜRKSOY Yayınları, 2014, p. 7.
- 34 The Turkmenistan Park located in Ankara features a statue of Magtymguly Pyragy. This statue was inaugurated by the Presidents of the Republics of Turkey and Turkmenistan together on 28 February 2012.
- 35 Address by Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO on the occasion of the Opening Ceremony of the International Conference, “Magtymguly Pyragy and Universal Human Cultural Values”, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002277/227768e.pdf> (last visited 28 January 2017).
- 36 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, <http://www.mfa.gov.tm/en/turkmenistan/culture> (last visited 15 September 2016).
- 37 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/?rub=6> (last visited 15 September 2016).
- 38 Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/37261/uluslararası-toplum-ve-kuruluşların-en-fazla-sorumluluk-üstlenmesi-gereken-bir-surecten-geciyoruz.html> (last visited 28 January 2017); Turkmenistan, <http://turkmenistan.gov.tm/?id=10093> (15 October 2016).
- 39 Afet İnan, “Gazi M. Kemal Atatürk, *Kültür Dünyası*, No. 28-29 (September-October 1956), p.5. Afet İnan recounts notes she took during Atatürk’s speeches on the meaning and importance of culture: “Culture is a process/movement which shows the entire historical evolution of a nation. Nations living today work to prove and maintain their existence. However, their basis will not be sound unless it is rooted in a culture of their own... The basis of the Republic of Turkey is culture...”
- 40 Atatürk bequeathed part of his property to the Institution of Turkish History and the Institution of Turkish Language, of which he was the founder; this bears testimony to the importance he attached to history and culture.