

# The Organization of Turkic States: Implications for the Regional Balance of Power

## Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı: Bölgesel Güç Dengesine Yönelik Sonuçlar

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### **Abstract**

*Three decades of close relations in the Turkic world have brought about several platforms of cooperation built on a common cultural basis. As the last in the series, the Organization of Turkic States bears the hallmark of a full-fledged international organization of the whole Turkic world with a strong vision for the next two decades. This study examines the dynamics of the organization, which is expected to become a significant international actor in Eurasia, owing to the increasing synergy among the Turkic States. In this regard, the study aims to analyse the implications of the emergence of the Organization of Turkic States as an international actor for the regional balance of power in Eurasia. To this end, the SWOT analysis method is used to specify the organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, which lead to general implications. The Organization of Turkic States is sure to be a power to be reckoned with among superpowers having interests in the Eurasia region in the long term.*

**Keywords:** *The Organization of Turkic States, Turkic States, Turkic World, Cooperation in the Turkic World, the Regional Balance of Power.*

### **Öz**

*Türk dünyasındaki son otuz yıla dayanan yakın ilişkiler, ortak kültür temelli birçok iş birliği platformu meydana getirmiştir. Bunların sonuncusu olarak, Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı, müteakip yirmi yıllık sürece yönelik sağlam bir vizyon ile tüm*

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*Türk dünyasının gerçek bir uluslararası örgütü olma özelliğini haizdir. Bu çalışma, Türk devletleri arasındaki artan sinerji sayesinde Avrasya'da önemli bir uluslararası aktör haline gelmesi beklenen örgütün dinamiklerini ele almaktadır. Bu itibarla, çalışma Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı'nın uluslararası bir aktör olarak ortaya çıkışının Avrasya'daki bölgesel güç dengesine yönelik sonuçlarını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaçla, SWOT analizi metodu kullanılarak, genel sonuçlar çıkarılacak şekilde örgütün güçlü yönleri, zayıf yönleri, fırsatları ve tehditleri ortaya konulmaktadır. Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı, uzun dönemde Avrasya bölgesinde çıkarları olan büyük güçler arasında göz ardı edilemez bir güç haline gelecektir.*

***Anahtar Kelimeler:** Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı, Türk Devletleri, Türk Dünyası, Türk Dünyası İş Birliği, Bölgesel Güç Dengesi.*

## **Introduction**

The emergence of the independent Turkic states in Central Asia and the Caucasus following the dissolution of the Soviet Union paved the way for solidarity and increased cooperation among the Turkic states, including Türkiye. This cooperation among the states developed over time through a set of bilateral and multilateral initiatives, mechanisms and organizations. The Turkic Council emerged as the most deep-seated platform of cooperation. The Organization of Turkic States finally succeeded on the thirtieth anniversary of the independence of the Turkic states.

The Organization of Turkic States (OTS) has laid down a shared vision for the next two decades, covering resolutions in several domains that will help achieve the organization's potential to be an international actor to be reckoned with in regional politics.

This study examines the dynamics of the OTS, which has joined the regional power equation as an international actor with a new name, organization and vision. In this regard, the study aims to provide an overall comprehensive interpretation of the following main research question: What implications does the emergence of the Organization of Turkic States as an international actor have for the regional balance of power in Eurasia?

A comprehensive literature review preceded the study. A set of resources were reviewed to compile a brief history of the organization. For a theoretical approach to the shared identity, which has given impetus to the rise of the organization and the accompanying shared vision, a review was conducted of academic works related to the international relations

theories, in particular the social constructivism theory. Furthermore, other works were reviewed to analyse and specify strong and weak aspects of the organization, potential future opportunities and threats to the organization.

Since the OTS was declared in November 2021, a remarkably low number of academic works dedicated to this name exist. No single academic work has analysed multi-domain strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the organization systemically and through a holistic approach. This study covers all related issues by putting the OTS, as a transnational organization, its member and observer states on its central axis through a holistic approach and provides a distinctive perspective to the already existing literature.

The study utilizes the SWOT Analysis method to put forward implications of the organization for the regional balance of power. The analysis method, which is originally used in the business domain, is also used in the international relations discipline to conduct analyses of states, international organizations and bilateral relations between international actors. In this study, the SWOT Analysis method puts forward the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the OTS as an international organization, which leads to general implications. Within the SWOT analysis, the study puts the Caucasus and Central Asia at the centre based on the assumption that the region is the geopolitical centre of gravity for the organization.

The first section of the study introduces a brief history of the OTS. The second section provides an insight into the pattern of shared identity and vision of the organization through the introduction of the social constructivism theory. The third section analyses the strengths and weaknesses of the organization and the opportunities and threats under sub-sections, with each involving a set of suggestions that build the overall analysis results and implications which are included in the conclusion.

### **1. The Lengthy Path to the Organization of Turkic States**

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the emergence of the independent Turkic states in Central Asia and the Caucasus gave a new dimension to the foreign policy of Türkiye. In the following period, Türkiye orchestrated the construction of new state structures in the newly

independent states.<sup>1</sup> Ankara prioritized relations with the Turkic states through an idealistic and nationalist foreign policy as the new term was characterized as the “Turkic Age” and the concept of “a Turkic world stretching between the Adriatic Sea and the Great Wall of China” was commonly articulated.

The conjuncture at the time helped Türkiye forge closer ties with the newly-independent Turkic states. Through its leverage in international organizations, Türkiye supported the Turkic states, which relied on itself to a certain degree as a role model. The Russian Federation, as the successor of the Soviet Union, was too involved in domestic issues and unable to adopt a stance against Türkiye’s engagement in what was regarded as the “Russian backyard”. Additionally, Europe and the USA built interaction with the region through Türkiye. Both of these factors prepared a suitable “political climate” for Türkiye’s leverage in the region.

Following a set of bilateral agreements, Türkiye instigated the process of summits with the Summit of the Heads of State in Ankara in 1992. In the same year, the Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency (TCDA) was initiated by Türkiye to share its development experiences and bolster cooperation with the Turkic States. The following year, all six Turkic States founded TURKSOY, the International Organization of Turkic Culture, also referred to as the UNESCO of the Turkic world.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the 1990s, Türkiye facilitated the economic integration of the Turkic states with the greater region of Eurasia.<sup>3</sup>

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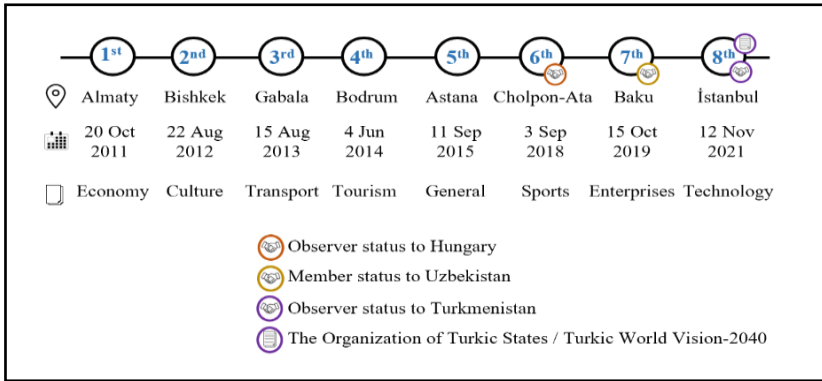
<sup>1</sup> Selçuk Köstem, “Turkish Foreign Policy Towards Turkic Countries: An Assessment of the Past and an Agenda for the Future”, Turkic Council & SAM, (ed.), *25th Anniversary of Independence of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and Turkey’s Contribution to Development and Cooperation in Turkic Region*, 2016, <https://www.turkkon.org/assets/pdf/yayinlar/ozel-yayin-azerbaycan-kazakistan-ve-kirgizistanin-bagimsizliginin-25yili-ve-turkiyenin-turk-bolgesinde-kalkinma-ve-isbirligine-katkisi-10-en.pdf> (Access Date: 08.03.2022), pp. 87-88.

<sup>2</sup> Mehmet Yüce, “Bağımsızlıklarının 30. Yılında Türkiye-Orta Asya Türk Cumhuriyetleri İlişkileri”, *Kriter Dergi*, 6:62, 2021, pp. 22-23.

<sup>3</sup> Timur Abidov, “Türkiye ve Merkezi Asya Ülkeleri: Avrasya İşbirliği Perspektifleri”, Almagül İsina, (ed.), *Türk Diasporası Ve Türk Dünyası Vizyon 2023*, TASAM Publishing, İstanbul, 2014, pp. 448-450.

The principle of multivectorism<sup>4</sup> and discourses of Eurasianism, supporting an understanding of the relations with the East being a better alternative to the West, pervaded Türkiye's foreign policy approaches in the early 2000s<sup>5</sup> and closer ties were forged with the Turkic states. On 21 November 2008, the Istanbul Agreement signed by Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan established TURKPA (the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic Speaking Countries) to strengthen and develop inter-parliamentary cooperation.<sup>6</sup> The mechanism of cooperation among the Turkic states gained a more institutional ground when the four states signed the Nakhchivan Agreement on 03 October 2009, which established the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States, referred to as "the Turkic Council" or "Türk Keneşi". The Almaty Summit in 2011 was the first of a series of summits of the Turkic Council under the official organizational framework depicted in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: The Summits of the Turkic Council**



Source: Author.

<sup>4</sup> Toni Alaranta and Kristiina Silvan, "Turkey In Central Asia: Possibilities And Limits Of A Greater Role", FIIA Briefing Paper, 328, January 2022, [https://www.fiaa.fi/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/bp328\\_toni-alaranta-kristiina-silvan\\_turkey-in-central-asia.pdf](https://www.fiaa.fi/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/bp328_toni-alaranta-kristiina-silvan_turkey-in-central-asia.pdf), accessed 02.04.2022), p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Oktay Tanrısever, "Discourses and Politics of Eurasianism in Turkey During the 2000s", Valeria Talbot, (ed.), *Turkey: Towards a Eurasian Shift?*, Ledizioni LediPublishing, Milano, 2018, pp. 23-28.

<sup>6</sup> "History", [https://turk-pa.org/en/content/about\\_turkpa/history](https://turk-pa.org/en/content/about_turkpa/history), accessed 08.03.2022.

In the 2010-2012 timeframe, the Turkic Council founded the Turkic Academy and the Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation as affiliated partner organizations. The Turkic Council facilitated better cultural cooperation and increased trade volume among the member states. At the summit in Çolpan-Ata in 2018, Hungary was given observer status, which earned the organization more visibility in the western world.<sup>7</sup> At the summit in 2019, Uzbekistan became a member state. At the 8<sup>th</sup> Summit in 2021, observer status was granted to Turkmenistan and the organization was renamed “the Organization of Turkic States”. It was also at this summit that “the Turkic World Vision-2040” was approved by the member states.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Shared Identity and Vision

The evolution of international relations in the Turkic world in the post-Cold War era exhibits the characteristics argued by the social constructivist approach in the international relations domain. Emerging in the international relations discipline in the early 1990s, social constructivism is regarded as a grand theory by certain scholars while certain others view the concept as an approach or framework. Regardless, social constructivism argues that the identities, characteristics and interests of states are constructed by social assets. The relations of states with each other provide a norm-making process, formation of rules and construction of institutions. These relations also affect the identity and behaviour of states.<sup>9</sup> The social constructivism theory also suggests that materialistic interests are not necessarily the motivations for the emergence of international political organizations. International actors with shared norms, values and principles get together to form alliances that in return grant their members collective identities.<sup>10</sup> Alexander Wendt, who provides one of the mainstream understandings of social constructivism, argues that actors

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<sup>7</sup> Ruslan Rehimov, “Naçıvan Anlaşması 10. yılında tarihi dönemeçte.”, 03.10.2019, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/nahcivan-anlasmasi-10-yilinda-tarihi-donemecte/1600917>, accessed 12.03.2022.

<sup>8</sup> Ayşe Şimşek, “Dünyanın yükselen gücü: Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı.”, 13.01.2022, <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/dunya/dunyanin-yukselen-gucu-turk-devletleri-teskilati-644709.html>, accessed 12.03.2022.

<sup>9</sup> Çağla Gül Yesevi, “Uluslararası İlişkiler Bilim Dalında Sosyal İnşacılık Yaklaşımının İncelenmesi”, *Electronic Journal of Political Science Studies*, 12:1, 2021, pp. 53-57.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pp. 61-64.

retaining a collective identity have the potential to form stronger alliances dedicated to achieving aggregated interests.<sup>11</sup>

The European integration process has been one of the fundamental subjects of the social constructivism theory. For the social constructivists, international organizations led by the EU within the integration process in Europe materialized on the basis of shared values and norms centred around a collective European identity along with specific rational factors.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, collective identity as introduced through the social constructivism theory is the most important aspect of the political integration process in Africa and the emergence of the African Union.<sup>13</sup>

Given the social and cultural integration process leading up to the political integration under the umbrella of the OTS, the collective Turkic identity and shared cultural values are considered to be the main driving forces for the integration and a collective vision for the future laid out in the Turkic World Vision-2040 document.

With the formal vision, the OTS envisions better intra-organization consultations on regional and worldwide foreign policy issues of common interest in the political domain and enhanced cooperation with European institutions led by the Visegrád Group through contributions by Hungary as an observer state.

The OTS also advocates for enhanced cooperation on counter-terrorism, border security, migration and fight against crimes in the security domain, and the eventual free movement of capital, commodities and services as well as intra-regional investments in the economic domain. Additionally, the OTS also envisions collective initiatives to increase the economic potential in the region such as the consolidation of the Middle Corridor, the promotion of the Zengezur Corridor, the development of

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<sup>11</sup> Maja Zehfuss, *Constructivism in International Relations-The Politics of Reality*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, pp. 56-57.

<sup>12</sup> Bahar Rumelili, "Bölgeselcilik ve İnşacılık: Kazanımlar ve Vaatler", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, 12:46, 2015, pp.172-173.

<sup>13</sup> Muhammed Tandoğan, "Konstrüktivizm (Sosyal İnşacılık) Kuramı Bağlamında Afrika Birliği", *Journal of the Human and Social Sciences Researches*, 4:3, 2015, pp. 635-636.

strategic energy infrastructure projects, and projects in a wide range of other domains.<sup>14</sup>

### 3. The Organization of Turkic States: SWOT Analysis

The SWOT Analysis is a tool used for strategic management and planning in organizations. In the business domain, the strategic management process initially comprises the phases of vision, mission and objectives. These phases are followed by the SWOT analysis to help identify internal and external factors which will play determining roles in singling out strategies and plans for the future. The method is a two-pronged structure with strengths and weaknesses constituting the internal factors and opportunities and threats constituting the external ones.<sup>15</sup>

The SWOT Analysis has existed in the literature since the 1960s and has been utilized predominantly in business studies.<sup>16</sup> More recently, the method has been used in the international relations discipline to analyze states, international organizations and bilateral relations between international actors. Using the SWOT Analysis method, Blaxland identifies geostrategic factors for Australia in his article,<sup>17</sup> Weaver presents a comprehensive work on NATO as an international organization in his book<sup>18</sup> and Sergunin analyzes the US-Russia bilateral relations in his work.<sup>19</sup>

As in the strategic management process, the OTS has already laid down its mission, vision and objectives. It is a relatively new international organization with incremental geopolitical visibility. The SWOT analysis will specify the strengths and weaknesses of the organization and the potential threats and opportunities in question through a holistic approach. The analysis will cover points of consideration in the geopolitical,

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<sup>14</sup> “Turkic World Vision-2040”, <https://www.turkkon.org/assets/pdf/haberler/turkic-world-vision-2040-2396-97.pdf>, accessed 22.03.2022.

<sup>15</sup> Emel Gürel and Merba Tat, “SWOT Analysis: A Theoretical Review”, *The Journal of International Social Research*, 10:1, 2017, pp. 995-998.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 1001-1002.

<sup>17</sup> John Blaxland, “A Geostrategic SWOT Analysis for Australia”, *Australian National University The Center of Gravity Series*, 49, 2019.

<sup>18</sup> John Michael Weaver, *NATO in Contemporary Times - Purpose, Relevance, Future*, Palgrave Macmillan Publishing, Switzerland Cham, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Alexander Sergunin, “SWOT Analysis of U.S. - Russian Relations”, *Russian Analytical Digest*, 178, 2016.

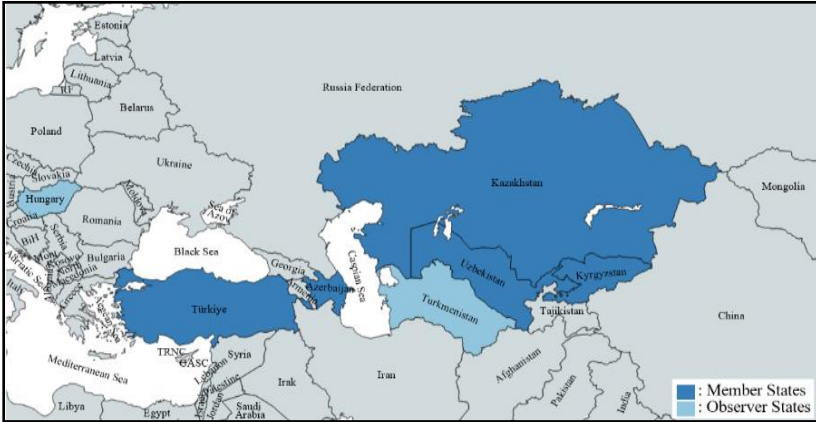


economic, energy, military, cultural and foreign policy realms. Within the SWOT analysis, the study puts the Caucasus and Central Asia at the centre based on the assumption that the region is the geopolitical centre of gravity for the organization.

### 3.1. Strengths

The OTS constitutes nearly three percent of the world's total land mass, which is roughly one-fourth of the size of Russia and half of the size of China.<sup>20</sup>

**Figure 2: The Geopolitical Layout of the Organization of Turkic States**



Source: Author

As Figure-2 displays the geopolitical layout, the organization neighbours the European Union in the west, Russia in the north, China in the east and the Middle East in the south. Türkiye earns the organization geopolitical proximity to North Africa and access to global maritime routes through the Mediterranean Sea.

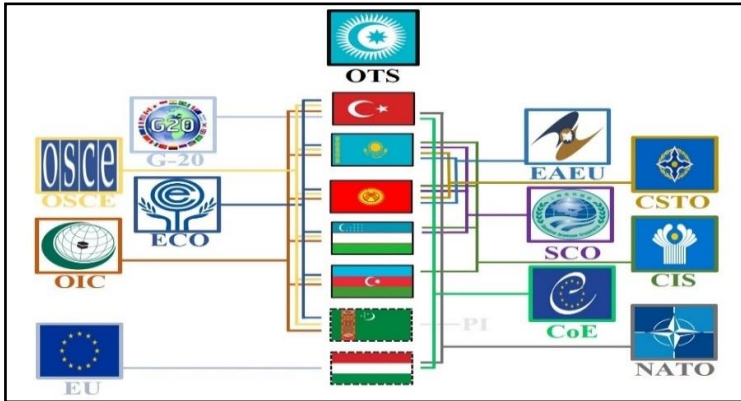
The OTS has emerged as an organization interacting with several International Organizations (IOs) on global and regional scales through

<sup>20</sup> “Largest Countries in the World (by area)”, <https://www.worldometers.info/geography/largest-countries-in-the-world/>, accessed 05.03.2022.

the memberships of its states to these organizations. Figure-3 depicts the interactions between the OTS and several other IOs.

All member states and Turkmenistan, as a permanent independent (PI) observer state, are also members of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). All member states except Türkiye are members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) while only Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are members of the Russia-centric organizations of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Both states, along with Uzbekistan, are also members of the China-centric Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).<sup>21</sup> Türkiye is a G-20 state, Hungary is a member of the European Union (EU) and both states are members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Council of Europe (CoE).

**Figure 3: The Interactions of the OTS with Other IOs**



Source: Author

<sup>21</sup> Yalçın Sarıkaya, “Türki Cumhuriyetler’den Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı’na 30 Yıllın Muhasebesi”, 20 December 2021, <https://www.tasav.org/index.php/turki-cumhuriyetler-den-turk-devletleri-teskilati-na-30-yilin-muhasebesi.html>, accessed 08.03.2022.

The OTS member states have a total population of nearly 155 million people, which is roughly 16.7% of the total population of Europe and Central Asia together and almost 2% of the world's total population.<sup>22</sup> The median age in the member states is below 30 years, suggesting the existence of particularly young populations, compared to regional and global averages.<sup>23</sup>

In 2020, the total GDP of member states amounted to nearly one trillion dollars. It constituted about 4.5% of the total GDP of Europe and Central Asia together and about 1.2 % of the world's total GDP.<sup>24</sup> When 2020 figures are taken as the baseline, Türkiye and Uzbekistan achieved economic growth above regional averages, while the other member states shrank.<sup>25</sup> The total GDP of the states is expected to rise to 1.3 trillion in 2023 with a considerably higher growth rate.<sup>26</sup>

Though the OTS is not a security organization in its essence, it should be noted that the individual military potentials of member states bring about a cumulative defence capacity. Türkiye, as the leading actor in this regard, has the second-largest army in NATO and overall military power to be reckoned with thanks to its tremendous military capacity and experience on the ground through recent armed conflicts<sup>27</sup> and its defence industry, which is gaining more of a self-sufficient identity.<sup>28</sup>

Enormous energy reserves and energy transfer routes with strategic importance constitute a significant strength on the side of the organization. Kazakhstan has the second-largest oil reserves in Eurasia and the twelfth

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<sup>22</sup> "Population, total Indicator", <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?view=chart>, accessed 05.03.2022.

<sup>23</sup> İbrahim Gökburun, "Küresel ve Bölgesel Güçler Çağında Türk Dünyası Nüfusu", *Journal of Turkish World Studies*, 21:1, 2021, p. 16.

<sup>24</sup> "GDP (current US\$) Indicator", <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD>, accessed 05.03.2022.

<sup>25</sup> "Economic growth - Country rankings", [https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/economic\\_growth/](https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/economic_growth/), accessed 14.03.2022.

<sup>26</sup> Deniz İstikbal, "Türk Dünyasında Ekonomik İşbirliği", *Kriter Dergi*, 6:62, 2021, p. 37.

<sup>27</sup> Ali Bakır, "Mapping The Rise of Turkey's Hard Power", 24 August 2021, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/turkey/mapping-the-rise-of-turkeys-hard-power/>, accessed 12.03.2022.

<sup>28</sup> Ali Bakır, "Mapping The Rise of Turkey's Hard Power, Part 2: Domestic Industry", 26 August 2021, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/uncategorized/mapping-the-rise-of-turkeys-hard-power-part-2-domestic-industry/>, accessed 12.03.2022.

largest globally. The country is a major natural gas producer with reserves having a lifespan of over forty years. The country has the largest coal reserves in Central Asia with a nearly 250-year lifespan and the second-largest uranium reserves in the world. Currently, Kazakhstan is the leading uranium producer globally and has enormous renewable energy potential.<sup>29</sup> Azerbaijan has rich oil and natural gas reserves and exports its sources through major pipelines, making a name for itself in the Caspian energy equation.<sup>30</sup> Uzbekistan has a significant amount of natural resources with high-quality infrastructure. The country is the seventh-largest uranium supplier in the world.<sup>31</sup> Turkmenistan has the fourth-largest natural gas reserves globally.<sup>32</sup>

Though not a major energy producer, Türkiye hosts pipelines to transfer the Caspian basin's oil and natural gas resources to the West. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline moves oil from the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>33</sup> The Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) is envisioned to carry the Caspian natural gas to Europe through Türkiye. Following the first phase in 2018, the second phase is planned to be completed in 2026.<sup>34</sup> Following longstanding disputes, the five littoral states agreed on the status of the Caspian Sea along with their sovereignty rights in 2018, which will eventually make possible the completion of the Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline between Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan, which is planned to be connected to TANAP.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Aziza Syzdykova, "Kazakistan'ın Yenilenebilir Enerji Potansiyeli", *Ekonomi, İşletme ve Maliye Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 2:1, 2020, pp. 81-83.

<sup>30</sup> Burak Çalışkan, "Hazar Denizi Raporu: Enerji Havzasında Mücadele", 13 August 2020, [https://insamer.com/tr/hazar-denizi-raporu-enerji-havzasinda-mucadele\\_3156.html](https://insamer.com/tr/hazar-denizi-raporu-enerji-havzasinda-mucadele_3156.html), accessed 12.03.2022.

<sup>31</sup> Maria A. Blackwood, "Central Asia: Background and U.S. Relations", 24 September 2021, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R46924.pdf> (Access Date: 12.03.2022), p. 34.

<sup>32</sup> Çalışkan, "Hazar Denizi Raporu".

<sup>33</sup> Alen Lapan, "Caspian oil flow through Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline reaches 3.5B barrels at end of 2020", 06 January 2021, <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/energy/caspian-oil-flow-through-baku-tbilisi-ceyhan-pipeline-reaches-35b-barrels-at-end-of-2020>, accessed 12.03.2022.

<sup>34</sup> Konur Alp Koçak, "Hazar Denizinin Statüsüne Dair Anlaşma ve Olası Yansımaları", 25 August 2018, [https://www.tasav.org/media/k2/attachments/TASAV-DPA\\_Analiz\\_16\\_Kocak\\_HazarDenizininStats\\_25.08.2018..pdf](https://www.tasav.org/media/k2/attachments/TASAV-DPA_Analiz_16_Kocak_HazarDenizininStats_25.08.2018..pdf) (Access Date: 14.03.2022), pp. 11-12.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, pp. 5-8.

In addition to considerable potential in geopolitical, economic, military and energy domains, a deep-seated inter-nation cultural bond is embedded in the Turkic states. The organization is, in fact, a part of what is commonly referred to as the Turkic World, covering the geographical area from the coasts of the Adriatic Sea to the vicinity of the Great Wall of China as well as some adjacent areas, which is home to seven independent Turkic states, around twenty autonomous or self-governing Turkic states or provinces and Turkic minorities living under the sovereignty of several other countries. All independent Turkic States except for the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus are member and observer states in the organization.<sup>36</sup> The states within the organization also share cultural and linguistic similarities. The organization has subordinate affiliated organizations dedicated to bolstering cultural interaction and improving cultural solidarity among the states, including TURKSOY, the Turkic Academy and the Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation.<sup>37</sup>

The ideal of unity in the language is key to bringing together the Turkic states on the grounds of a common culture. After gaining independence from the Soviet Union, the Turkic states changed from the Cyrillic alphabet to the Latin alphabet. Azerbaijan pioneered this effort and Turkmenistan followed suit in the late 1990s. Uzbekistan switched to the Latin alphabet after 2019 and Kazakhstan plans to complete the transition between 2023 and 2031. Kyrgyzstan currently does not envision taking any concrete steps toward shifting to the Latin alphabet.<sup>38</sup>

To be a potential state power in the information domain, Türkiye restructured state media to appeal to different languages and regions including the Turkic world. Additionally, the Turkic states endeavoured unity of efforts through joint platforms including the Turkic Speaking Countries Media Forum in 2010. A recent example was the Türkiye-

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<sup>36</sup> Mehmet Seyfettin Erol, "Avrasya'nın Değişen Jeopolitiğinde Türk Dünyası ve Türkiye: Nasıl Bir Gelecek?", Burak Hamza Eryiğit, (ed.), *Yerelden Küresele: Türkiye - Türk Dünyası İlişkilerinin Diünü, Bugünü ve Yarını*, Tesam Kitapları, İstanbul, 2018, pp. 329-330.

<sup>37</sup> "Related/Affiliated Organizations", <https://www.turkkon.org/en/iliskili-kurumlar>, accessed 11.03.2022.

<sup>38</sup> Ömer Faruk Karaman, "Ortak Kültür ve Değerler Bağlamında Türk Dünyası Entegrasyonu", *Kriter Dergi*, 6:62, 2021, pp. 44-45.

Azerbaijan joint media platform that countered the information activities of Armenia and its allies during the Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2020.<sup>39</sup>

### 3.2. *Weaknesses*

Even after the dissolution of the USSR, the Central Asian and Caucasian Turkic states continued to be exposed to Russian influence due to considerably high percentages of Russian populations in their territories.<sup>40</sup> In particular, Kazakhstan has been vulnerable to Russian influence due to its ethnically Russian minorities. They constitute one-fourth of the population and mainly live in the north of the country. Albeit with less Russian populations, other Turkic countries have also been exposed to the domestic influence of Russian diasporas to varying degrees.<sup>41</sup>

Being the successor states of the then USSR, Russian Federation and the Turkic states share a common institutional legacy facilitating political, military and economic ties. The Russian language is common to varying degrees in the Turkic states and has official status in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. A positive public opinion toward Russia as a superpower is still pervasive in Turkic countries.

Russia is home to nearly ten million labour migrants from Central Asian countries. The Turkic states are especially economically reliant on remittances from Russia. Russia is the primary partner for imports and exports for the Turkic states, which makes these states vulnerable to external shocks. Since 2014, trade relations of the Turkic States with Russia have been a source of frustration due to Russia's antagonistic actions, especially towards Ukraine. Sanctions by the western world also have indirect effects on the Turkic States as the primary trade partners with Russia.<sup>42</sup> Just like the Turkic states in Central Asia, Türkiye and Azerbaijan also have large-scale economic and trade relations with Russia.

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<sup>39</sup> Gökhan Gökçe, "Türk Dünyasında İletişim İş Birliği: Gerçekliği Savunmak ve Dezenformasyonu Önlemek", *Kriter Dergi*, 6:62, 2021, p. 39.

<sup>40</sup> Füsun Kara, *Rusya'nın Orta Asya'ya (Türkistan) Yönelik Politikalarının Dönemlere Göre Değişimi*, İKSAD Publishing, Elazığ, 2021, pp. 213-218.

<sup>41</sup> Burak Çalışkan, "Orta Asya Raporu: Dönüşüm Sürecinde Türk Cumhuriyetleri", 29 October 2018, [https://insamer.com/tr/orta-asya-raporu-donusum-surecinde-turk-cumhuriyetleri\\_1743.html](https://insamer.com/tr/orta-asya-raporu-donusum-surecinde-turk-cumhuriyetleri_1743.html) (Access Date: 20.03.2022)

<sup>42</sup> Blackwood, "Central Asia", pp. 52-53.

Russia and China are the overall primary economic partners for the Central Asian Turkic States, which have relatively less economic and trade relations with Türkiye. The Turkic states account for only 3.02% and 1.29% of Türkiye's total exports and imports respectively. The figures are well below the real potential of trade between Türkiye and these states.<sup>43</sup>

Partly due to a common legacy, Russia has remained the primary partner in security with the Turkic states in Central Asia and the Caucasus since the dissolution of the USSR. Russia is known to have provided more than half of the total arms exported to the region since 2015. A considerably high number of military leaders in the Turkic states have studied at the Russian military academies, which are still regarded as prestigious destinations of education for officers in the Turkic states. As CSTO members, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan host large-scale Russian military installations and are entitled to purchase Russian military equipment at reduced costs. Uzbekistan also has firm ties with Russia in terms of security cooperation and is entitled to procure Russian military equipment at reduced costs.<sup>44</sup> Lastly, Azerbaijan is expected to increase defence and security cooperation with Russia through a mutual agreement signed in February 2022.<sup>45</sup>

Though the OTS is not a defence and security alliance, the alignment of member states with defence alliances in opposite directions constitutes an institutional weakness through a holistic approach. Türkiye and Hungary are members of NATO, which regard Russia as a primary threat to the rules-based international order. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, on the other hand, are members of CSTO led by Russia. Having left CSTO in 2012, Uzbekistan still enjoys security cooperation with Russia. The Turkic states were also involved in the NATO Partnership for Peace Programme in 1994, due in large part to US influence in NATO.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> İstikbal, "Türk Dünyasında Ekonomik İşbirliği", p. 37.

<sup>44</sup> Blackwood, "Central Asia", pp. 54-55.

<sup>45</sup> Ruslan Rehimov, "Rusya ve Azerbaycan arasında 'Müttefiklik Faaliyetleri Hakkında Beyanname' imzalandı.", 22 February 2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/rusya-ve-azerbaycan-arasinda-muttefiklik-faaliyetleri-hakkinda-beyanname-imzalandi/2510597>, accessed 19.03.2022.

<sup>46</sup> Zhuldyz Kanapiyanova, "The US and Russian Policy Toward Central Asia in the Framework of the Geopolitical Theory", *Eurasian Research Journal*, 2:2, 2020, p. 59.

Border disputes among the Central Asian states constitute a fundamental weakness for the OTS. Following the dissolution of the USSR, the Central Asian region became full of unclear borders. Though no grave issue arose in the first decade after the independence, incidents of unrest towards the end of the 1990s urged the countries to start negotiations for clear delineation and demarcation.<sup>47</sup> The negotiations followed a checkered pattern during the following two decades, with several border clashes taking place along the border between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and that between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, mainly involving the enclaves close to these borders. Border clashes have been centred around the Fergana Valley, which covers the territories of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan at a juncture where dual borders among the trio cross one another. Inside and in the vicinity of the valley, the trio has their enclaves inside one another's territory separated from their homelands. In Kyrgyzstan, there are four enclaves belonging to Uzbekistan and two others belonging to Tajikistan, while a Kyrgyz village and a separate enclave belonging to Tajikistan remain inside the Uzbek territories.<sup>48</sup> All these border disputes among the OTS member states as well as with Tajikistan constitute a significant weakness, as they are sources of instability and can easily be exploited by adversaries.

The internal vulnerability to China's increasing soft power in Central Asian Turkic states is also another point of contention in the form of weakness. China has several economic initiatives in the region, much to the chagrin of several factions in these states. Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are members of the SCO, a China-led intergovernmental organization focusing on security and economic cooperation in Eurasia. Turkmenistan has also participated at SCO summits but as a guest. China has also constructed a forum of multilateral engagements with the Central Asian countries through the C+C5 initiative. China accounts for more than one-tenth of all arms transfers to the region.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Altynbek Joldoshov, "Kimlik ve Sınır: Orta Asya'da Sınır Sorunları", *Journal of Turkish World Studies*, 19:2, 2019, pp. 309-311.

<sup>48</sup> Bahtiyar Abdülkerimov, "Orta Asya ülkelerinin Sovyetler'den miras sınır sorunu", 30 April 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/orta-asya-ulkelerinin-sovyetlerden-miras-sinir-sorunu/2225665> accessed 19.03.2022.

<sup>49</sup> Blackwood, "Central Asia", pp. 56-57.



### 3.3. *Opportunities*

The developing transportation routes in Central Asia offer better opportunities for trade and economic development. In particular, Uzbekistan is endeavouring to become a transportation hub for the region, as part of its position in the Road and Belt Initiative. The Turkmenbashi-Navoi railway line, currently under construction, is planned to connect the Fergana-Osh-Kashgar line in the east to the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway over the Caspian Sea in the west. On the other hand, Uzbekistan also plans the construction of a north-south railway line that can stretch to the Oman Sea over Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>50</sup>

For Europe, the transfer of hydrocarbon resources from Central Asia and the Caucasus to the region through Türkiye, as an alternative to Russia, is vital for energy security. To this end, the connectivity through the Caspian Sea is of great importance. It is essential that Azerbaijan further develop energy cooperation with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to ensure that these countries participate in the energy cooperation mechanisms established between Türkiye and Azerbaijan.<sup>51</sup>

The longstanding negotiations on the legal status of the Caspian Sea saw progress when the five littoral states agreed on a text that largely determined the legal status of the Caspian in 2018. The agreement turned a new page in regional cooperation on trade and lines of transportation. The Caspian Transit Middle Corridor (East-West) line connects Anatolia to Chinese territories through the Caspian Sea. The Middle Corridor has serious economic advantages when compared to the Northern Corridor and sea lines. With the active use of the Middle Corridor, both Central Asian countries and Türkiye will have very promising new economic opportunities.<sup>52</sup> The new legal status of the Caspian also urged Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan to reach an agreement on cooperation for the discovery

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<sup>50</sup> Fırat Purtaş, “Yeni Özbekistan ve Türk Dünyası”, *Kriter Dergi*, 6:62, 2021, p. 32.

<sup>51</sup> Oktay F. Tanrısever, “Türkiye’nin Türk Cumhuriyetleri ile İlişkilerinde Enerji Boyutu”, *Kriter Dergi*, 6:62, 2021, p. 35.

<sup>52</sup> Burak Çalışkan, “Hazar Denizinde Yeni Statü ve Beklentiler”, 08 July 2020, [https://insamer.com/tr/hazar-denizinde-yeni-statü-ve-beklentiler\\_3066.html](https://insamer.com/tr/hazar-denizinde-yeni-statü-ve-beklentiler_3066.html), accessed 28.03.2022.

and processing of oil.<sup>53</sup> This agreement also highlights tremendous opportunities for the region.

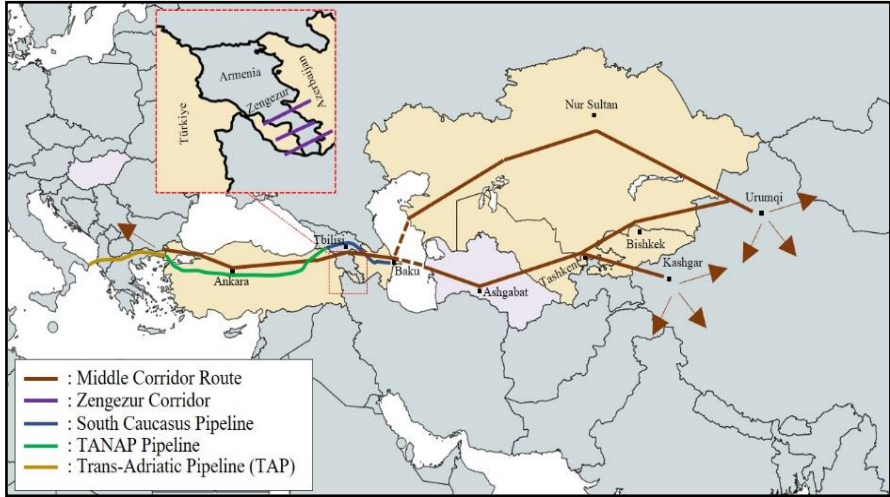
Another significant opportunity for the Turkic world is the potential geographical connectivity through what is referred to as the Zengezur corridor. The Tripartite Declaration on 10 November 2020, which ended the 44-day Nagorno-Karabakh war resulting in the liberation of Azerbaijani lands from Armenian occupation, also opened up new opportunities for global and regional cooperation. The “3+3” (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia + Türkiye, Russia, Iran) model proposed by Türkiye and Azerbaijan, covering the South Caucasus and its neighbours, aims to transform the region into a hub of cooperation, prosperity and stability. The Zengezur corridor, involving transportation routes both for Azerbaijan and for Armenia, provides an opportunity for both countries to increase mutual cooperation, strengthen the security environment and create common areas of economic prosperity. The revival of the Zengezur corridor through bilateral and multilateral economic agreements will grant Azerbaijan a shorter route to the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic and diminish its dependency on Iran. The corridor will provide direct transportation between Europe and the easternmost part of Turkistan through Istanbul and the Caspian Sea. From a wider economic perspective, the corridor could also mean a new link between Beijing and London.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ruslan Rehimov and Gökhan Varan, “Azerbaycan ve Türkmenistan Hazar’daki ‘Dostluk’ Petrol Yatağının Ortak İşletilmesi Konusunda Anlaşığı”, 21 January 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/azerbaycan-ve-turkmenistan-hazardaki-dostluk-petrol-yataginin-ortak-isletilmesi-konusunda-anlasti/2118146>, accessed 29.03.2022.

<sup>54</sup> Araz Aslanlı, “Zengezur Koridoru: Zaferin Taçlanması”, *Kriter Dergi*, 6:62, 2021, pp. 47-49.

**Figure 4: Strategic Corridors and Energy Transfer Routes (East to West)**



Source: Author

The OTS can be enhanced as an international platform that can earn international recognition for the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), which is sure to earn the organization a strong reputation thanks to its distinctive geopolitical position and potential for tourism. As was the case during the Nagorno-Karabakh war when there was a rise in national sentiments in the Turkic communities, the OTS member states should consider adopting a coordinated stance regarding the status of TRNC<sup>55</sup> and granting it observer status, which may pave the way to full membership and recognition by the other member states in the long term despite deep-seated hurdles.

The OTS states should also consider increasing cooperation with several other international organizations. An excellent example of this would be potential cooperation with the Arctic Council, which also offers cooperation with non-Arctic countries and international organizations.

<sup>55</sup> Emrah Kaya, “The Renewed Face of the Turkish World: Organization of Turkish States”, 15 November 2021, <https://www.ankasam.org/the-renewed-face-of-the-turkish-world-organization-of-turkish-states/?lang=en>, accessed 04.03.2022.

Due to the increasing importance of the region globally, the OTS should consider seeking observer status in the council to bolster cooperation, increase the level of collective expertise in trade and transportation and increase its global visibility.<sup>56</sup> The OTS policymakers of the organization should also consider building internal mechanisms for mutual cooperation with other international organizations, in order of priority.

### ***3.4. Threats***

Sources of regional instability in Central Asia constitute immediate threats to the Turkic states and long-term threats to the OTS. In this regard, the security situation in Afghanistan is a real concern for the Central Asian Turkic states. Decades of war and political turmoil had already inflicted huge spill-over effects in Central Asia by the time of the Taliban takeover in August 2021, which brought further deterioration of the humanitarian situation. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, which share borders with Afghanistan, are likely to suffer the most from illegal human trafficking, drug trafficking and extremist terrorism. As landlocked countries, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan need Afghanistan to overcome their connectivity challenges. Along with Tajikistan, these two countries developed energy and transportation linkages with Afghanistan to have access to the wider South Asian markets. In 2020, Uzbekistan signed a roadmap with Pakistan and Afghanistan for a rail line construction project linking Tashkent to Peshawar and Kabul. In January 2021, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan initiated projects to construct fibre-optic lines, power transmission lines and a railway link in order to bolster cooperation. The Ashgabat Administration wants to resume the previously-suspended TAPI project envisioning the flow of natural gas through a pipeline stretching on the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India line. Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Pakistan and Afghanistan are stakeholders of the CASA-1000 initiative that will enable electricity transmission from Central to South Asia. Though the Taliban regime is known to have voiced a willingness to cooperate

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<sup>56</sup> Luke Coffey, "Is there space for the Organization of Turkic States at the Arctic Council?", 07 December 2021, <https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/is-there-space-for-the-organization-of-turkic-states-at-the-arctic-council-52404>, accessed 27.03.2022.

with regional powers, the political and security situation in the country is precarious and poses threats to the future of the projects in the region.<sup>57</sup>

The Central Asia and Caucasus policies of global superpowers and the negative ramifications of the rivalry among them constitute long-term threats to the organization.

Central Asia and the Caucasus have never been a major foreign policy priority for the USA and it seems unlikely to be the case in the near term.<sup>58</sup> However, the USA is primarily engaged with the Central Asian countries through the C5+1 diplomatic platform and is expected to facilitate around 90 billion dollars worth of investment in the 2019-2025 timeframe.<sup>59</sup> Following the overall failure and withdrawal from Afghanistan, the US policymakers are more determined to counter China economically in Asia. The US advocates for the establishment of alternative infrastructure for economic activity that can overcome China's Belt and Road Initiative in cooperation with the European Union.<sup>60</sup> The US policymakers view Türkiye's continuous engagement with the Turkic states in Central Asia as a factor that supports their strategic interests since Türkiye helps these states consolidate their integration into the global economy and resist Chinese and Russian domination.<sup>61</sup>

The European Union also endeavours to be a key political and economic player in Central Asia through diplomatic platforms and

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<sup>57</sup> Athar Zafar, "Swift Changes in Afghanistan and Central Asia's Response", 17 September 2021, [https://icwa.in/show\\_content.php?lang=1&level=3&ls\\_id=6355&lid=4364](https://icwa.in/show_content.php?lang=1&level=3&ls_id=6355&lid=4364), accessed 18.03.2022.

<sup>58</sup> George Krol and Nargis Kassenova, "How Will U.S. Policy Toward Central Asia Look Under the Biden Administration?", 16 March 2021, <https://daviscenter.fas.harvard.edu/insights/how-will-us-policy-toward-central-asia-look-under-biden-administration>, accessed 20.03.2022.

<sup>59</sup> "United States Strategy for Central Asia 2019-2025: Advancing Sovereignty and Economic Prosperity (Overview)", <https://www.state.gov/united-states-strategy-for-central-asia-2019-2025-advancing-sovereignty-and-economic-prosperity/>, accessed 18.03.2022.

<sup>60</sup> Stephen Blank, "After Afghanistan: What is the Future of U.S. Policy in Central Asia?", 06 October 2021, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13686-after-afghanistan-what-is-the-future-of-us-policy-in-central-asia.html>, accessed .03.2022.

<sup>61</sup> James Hoobler, "Turkey's Relations with the Caucasus and Central Asia: Unrealized Ambitions", RAND, *Turkey's Nationalist Course: Implications for the U.S.-Turkish Strategic Partnership and the U.S. Army*, RAND Publishing, Santa Monica, 2020, p. 149.

investment projects. The EU has signed Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Negotiations for an agreement with Uzbekistan are underway and an alternative interim trade agreement with Turkmenistan is in force.<sup>62</sup>

Russia views all kinds of alliances in Central Asia with suspicion and China approaches any initiative that is likely to rise Turkic sentiments with scepticism.<sup>63</sup> The two countries are the primary external actors in regional politics and economy. Although no formal or official Sino-Russian front exists, the two superpowers aim to exert their spheres of influence on parallel paths. China, as the biggest energy consumer in the world, relies on the Central Asian states to meet its energy needs and fully achieve gains in the Belt and Road Initiative. In a similar fashion, Russia views the region as its backyard.<sup>64</sup> The adverse effects of rivalry between either state and the western world constitute threats to the Turkic states in the region. The foreign policies of rival states affect the opinions of opposing domestic factions, thereby undermining the unity of public support in the Turkic states.

The threat perception of Türkiye's engagement with the Caucasus and Central Asia through bilateral and multilateral initiatives and eventually through the OTS is of great concern for Russia and China. Though Türkiye is not a superpower, the recent assertive foreign policy moves have turned the country into a regional power to be reckoned with. In this regard, Russia and China perceive the OTS as a threat within different contexts.

The Azerbaijani victory over the Armenian forces in the Second Karabakh War in 2020 led to a surge in Türkiye's popularity in Azerbaijan and throughout the Turkic world. Russian policymakers believe that the "Great Turan", the great ideal of the unity of the Turkic world, is gaining ground across the South Caucasus, Central Asia and ethnically diverse

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<sup>62</sup> "Fact Sheets on the European Union", <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/178/central-asia> accessed 21.03.2022.

<sup>63</sup> Murat Aslan, "Türk Konseyi: Fırsatlar ve Algılar", SETA Perspektif, 321, November 2021, <https://setav.org/assets/uploads/2021/11/P321.pdf>, accessed 04.03.2022, pp. 3-4.

<sup>64</sup> Vusal Hasanzadeh, "Türkiye, Rusya ve Çin'in Orta Asya Politikaları", 27 October 2021, <https://21yhte.org/tr/merkezler/islevsel-arastirma-merkezleri/politik-sosyal-kulturel-arastirmalar-merkezi/turkiye-rusya-ve-cin-in-orta-asya-politikalari>, accessed 06.03.2022.

regions in Russia. There is also an increasing uneasiness over Türkiye's growing influence. In the context of the former Turkic Council, the OTS and bilateral agreements, Türkiye enjoys increasing popularity among the Muslim Turkic world with increasing pro-Turkish sentiments and a growing scale of Turkish lobby. Russian policymakers are concerned that the Turkish soft power in the region is replacing the Soviet legacy and that it can have secessionist spill-over effects on the Turkic autonomous states under the sovereignty of Russia.<sup>65</sup>

Just like Russia, China also views the OTS as a threat. Chinese policymakers fear that the organization will give rise to pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism and that Türkiye will pursue a more aggressive foreign policy towards China through the organization. They also posit that the organization will have an adverse effect on the stability of Central Asia since the Turkic states in the region have multi-ethnic demographic structures and the surging popularity of Turkic ethnicity may have consequences for the minorities.<sup>66</sup>

The Uyghur issue has raised political tensions between China and Türkiye several times. The two countries have had a checkered pattern of relations. Türkiye has been critical of China's repression and genocide of the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. In October 2021, along with forty-two other countries, Türkiye exhorted the Chinese government to respect the rights of the Uyghur community in Xinjiang and apply the rule of law. China was enraged when Türkiye supported such an international call for the first time. Following this, in November, the OTS was inaugurated as the successor of the Turkic Council in a way that sparked Turkic sentiments across the Turkic world. Soon afterwards, the official statements by Turkish officials against China's repression of the Uyghurs aggravated the situation from the Chinese perspective. In retaliation, Chinese officials released statements accusing Türkiye of so-called human rights abuses against the Kurdish population. This was a clear sign of

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<sup>65</sup> Sergey Sukhankin, "The Great Turan: Russia's Concerns about Turkey's Growing Reputation in Caucasus and Central Asia", 20 May 2021, <https://politicstoday.org/the-great-turan-russia-turkey-caucasus-central-asia/>, accessed 21.03.2022.

<sup>66</sup> "Regional Countries Have Reasons to Guard against the Organization of Turkic States", <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202111/1239128.shtml>, accessed 22.03.2022.

Chinese intentions to bring Türkiye's contentious issues to the international agenda on such occasions.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, as a retaliation to the inauguration of the OTS, Chinese President Xi Jinping convened a summit in January 2022 with the leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan to bolster economic relations mainly in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative and to increase cultural cooperation.<sup>68</sup> Though China may have good relations with the Turkic states, the public opinion in the Turkic states is highly negative viewing Chinese intentions in the region as highly suspect.<sup>69</sup>

Iran is also concerned about the OTS and the growing role of Türkiye in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Iran's north-western provinces are home to nearly three times more Azerbaijanis than the total number living in Azerbaijan. Potential Turkic sentiments are feared to have the potential to incite a secessionist agenda within the Turkic populations in the country. Iran is also concerned with keeping the interests of other states in check.<sup>70</sup>

Unlike how it may be perceived, Türkiye does not follow an imperialist "Turan" policy toward Central Asia. Türkiye pursues its relations with the Turkic states under its "Turkism" policy which is equivalent to the "Eurasianism" policy with no ethnic-centric agenda.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Nurettin Akçay, "Amid Tensions With Turkey, China Is Putting the Kurdish Issue in Play", 04 December 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/12/amid-tensions-with-turkey-china-is-putting-the-kurdish-issue-in-play/>, accessed 22.03.2022.

<sup>68</sup> Emrah Kaya, "İlişkilerin 30. Yılında Çin-Orta Asya İlişkileri", 19 February 2022, <https://www.ankasam.org/iliskilerin-30-yilinda-cin-orta-asya-iliskileri/>, accessed 07.03.2022.

<sup>69</sup> Susan A. Thornton, "China in Central Asia: Is China Winning The 'New Great Game'?", June 2020, [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/FP\\_20200615\\_china\\_central\\_asia\\_thornton.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/FP_20200615_china_central_asia_thornton.pdf), accessed 04.03.2022.

<sup>70</sup> Shaheer Ismael Al Shaheer, "Organization Of Turkic States: Old Turkish Ideas With Modern Templates", *Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology*, 19:1, 2022, pp. 409-410.

<sup>71</sup> Necati Demircan, "Turks in the Changing World Order: The Organization of Turkic States", 04 April 2022, <https://www.thedefencehorizon.org/post/turks-in-the-changing-world-order-the-organization-of-turkic-states>, accessed 08.04.2022.



### 3.5. Overview

The OTS, a relatively new international organization, has significant strengths as its member states in different regions provide distinctive individual strengths in the organization in geopolitical, economic, energy, defence, and security domains. The greater power of the organization is the intrinsic cultural bond that motivates the members for greater unity. Withal, the growing importance of the trade and energy routes on which the members of the organization sit, the potential involvement of TRNC in the organization and further potential cooperation of the organization with other regional international organizations constitute great opportunities for the OTS.

**Table 1: SWOT Analysis for the Organization of Turkic States**

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Distinctive geopolitical position with access to global maritime routes.</li><li>▪ Individual alignments of member states with distinctive international organizations.</li><li>▪ Dynamic young population profiles.</li><li>▪ Huge collective economic potential and flourishing economies with Türkiye and Uzbekistan taking the lead.</li><li>▪ Individual defence capabilities of member states in a non-security organization with Türkiye taking the lead.</li><li>▪ Enormous energy potential mainly in the Turkic States in Central Asia and the east-to-west strategic energy transfer routes.</li><li>▪ Deep-seated inter-nation cultural bond embedded in the member states with linguistic similarities and collective aspiration of cooperation in the information domain.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Exposure of the Turkic states to Russian influence through the Russian minorities and the legacy of the Russian language.</li><li>▪ Heavy economic reliance on Russia and vulnerability to global economic shocks in this regard.</li><li>▪ Considerably low level of trade relations between Türkiye and Central Asia and unused potential in this regard.</li><li>▪ Security and defence relations with Russia and the alignment of member states with security alliances of opposing directions.</li><li>▪ Long-lasting border disputes among the Central Asian states and the vulnerability to exploitation.</li><li>▪ Internal exposure of Central Asian Turkic states to Chinese soft power and economic leverage.</li></ul>

**Opportunities**

- The developing transportation routes in Central Asia offering better opportunities for trade and other economic activities.
- Greater connectivity through the Caspian Sea for the transfer of hydrocarbon resources from Central Asia to Europe through Türkiye.
- Termination of the disputes over the legal status of the Caspian Sea and bilateral cooperation between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan to process oil reserves of the Caspian.
- The increasing importance of the Middle Corridor in connecting trade hubs in Asia to Europe.
- The revival of the Zengezur corridor for greater land connectivity in the Turkic world.
- Potential OTS observer status to TRNC and its potential recognition by the member states in the long term despite challenges.
- Potential OTS cooperation with international organizations like the Arctic Council.

**Threats**

- The protracted spill-over effects of the regional instabilities led by the situation in Afghanistan that may undermine the regional development projects.
- The long-term negative effects of the power competition among superpowers.
- The US and the EU's aspirations of countering Chinese economic projects in the region.
- The threat perception against the OTS by Russia in view of the potential secessionist sentiments among the Turkic minorities on its territories and the emergence of an international actor exclusive of itself in what it considers its "backyard".
- The threat perception against the OTS by China in view of the potential encouragement to the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang region.
- The threat perception by both Russia and China against Türkiye's growing role in the Caucasus and Central Asia.
- The threat perception against the OTS by Iran in view of the potential secessionist sentiments among the Turkic minorities on its territories.

On the other hand, internal exposure of the Central Asian Turkic states to Russian and growing Chinese influence and intra-state political disputes, including the border issues, are points of contention for the organization. Externally, the spill-over effects of the regional instabilities and the perception of the OTS and Türkiye's growing involvement in Central Asia as a threat by Russia, China and Iran, and the accompanying stances of these states constitute long-term threats to the organization.

## Conclusion

The Organization of Turkic States is the last in a series of organizations that embody the synergy among the Turkic states and the ideal of “a Turkic world stretching between the Adriatic Sea and the Great Wall of China”.

Shared identity is considered by the social constructivism theory as the catalyst for the integration process of deep-seated international organizations. This has been the case for the shared Turkic identity as the driving force for the integration process in the Turkic world. As the culmination of efforts of unity and cooperation in the Turkic world, the organization bears distinctive assets in the geopolitical, economic, energy, defence and cultural domains, which are much coveted by various global and regional powers.

Türkiye’s assertive foreign policy in recent years has been the driving force for the emergence of the organization and its leading role is the key to the overall success of the organization. A two-direction gain realization exists in the context of Türkiye’s position in the organization. As a middle power in international politics, Türkiye provides the organization with connectivity to the west and access to global trade and energy routes through enhanced cooperation as well as a greater reputation in the western world. Concurrently, the organization grants Türkiye a greater role in Central Asia as its geopolitical centre of gravity. The organization is regarded as a smart alternative to Türkiye’s long-lasting aspirations of integration with the western world.

Through increased and enhanced interaction with Central Asia within the organization, Türkiye is likely to be involved in the power competition in the region along with Russia and China on the main axis, and with the USA and other actors on the periphery. The US policymakers view Türkiye’s growing role in the region with abstention since Chinese and Russian influences in the region are sure to be contained by that of Türkiye. However, Chinese and Russian policymakers perceive the OTS and Türkiye’s growing role as a significant threat. Both states consider Türkiye and the organization to have expansionist agenda through the “Turan” and “Turkism” ideals, which they think may arouse secessionist sentiments within the Turkic minorities in their territories. The OTS has intrinsic

multi-domain strengths and opportunities for greater gains and success in international politics. However, any assertive policy through the use of these strengths and opportunities is bound to cause retaliation in some way by Russia and China possibly by attacking the weaknesses of the OTS, which constitutes a significant threat to the organization.

## Özet

Son otuz yılda Türki Cumhuriyetler ile Türkiye arasındaki ortak kültürel bağlara dayalı yakın iş birliği ilişkileri, çeşitli iş birliği platformları meydana getirmiştir. Bu platformların en köklüsü, 2009 yılında temelleri atılan Türk Konseyi iken; 2021 yılında, Türki Cumhuriyetlerin bağımsızlıklarının otuzuncu yıl dönümünde Türk Konseyi, Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı adı altında yeni bir görünüme kavuşmuştur. Hâlihazırda Azerbaycan, Kazakistan, Kırgızistan, Özbekistan ve Türkiye'nin üye; Türkmenistan ve Macaristan'ın gözlemci ülke olduğu Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı, uluslararası ilişkilerde sosyal inşacılık teorisinin ön plana çıkardığı ortak kimlik temelli bir uluslararası örgüt olarak 2040'lı yıllara yönelik sağlam bir vizyona sahiptir.

Bu çalışma, Türk devletleri arasındaki köklü ilişkiler sayesinde Avrasya'da önemli bir uluslararası aktör haline gelmesi beklenen Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı'nın dinamiklerini ele almakta, bu birlikteliğin uluslararası bir aktör olarak ortaya çıkışının Avrasya'daki bölgesel güç dengesine yönelik sonuçlarını incelemektedir. Çalışmada, asıl olarak işletme bilim dallarında kullanılan, ancak uluslararası ilişkilerde de devletler, uluslararası örgütler ve uluslararası aktörlerin birbirleriyle ilişkilerini inceleyen akademik çalışmalarda kullanılan SWOT analizi metodu kullanılarak, genel sonuçlar çıkarılacak şekilde örgütün güçlü yönleri, zayıf yönleri, fırsatları ve tehditleri ortaya konulmaktadır.

Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı ülkeleri, birlikteliğe jeopolitik, ekonomi, savunma, enerji ve kültür alanlarında önemli güçler kazandırmakta ve teşkilat, bünyesinde önemli bir kolektif güç potansiyeli barındırmaktadır. Bununla birlikte, özellikle Orta Asya Türki Cumhuriyetleri'nin Rusya ve Çin'in nüfuzuna içten maruz oluşu, bu devletler arasındaki sınır sorunları başta olmak üzere ihtilafli konular ve Orta Asya bölgesi ile Türkiye

arasındaki henüz canlandırılmamış ekonomik potansiyel teşkilat açısından kolektif bir zayıflık teşkil etmektedir.

Doğu-Batı istikametinde canlanmakta olan stratejik ticaret ve enerji güzergâhları, KKTC'nin bağımsız bir devlet olarak teşkilata muhtemel katılımı ve küresel iş birliği imkânlarının geliştirilmesi teşkilat açısından önemli fırsatlardır. Bununla birlikte, Çin ve Rusya'nın ve ikincil olarak İran'ın teşkilatı ve Türkiye'nin Kafkasya ve Orta Asya'daki artan angajmanını tehdit olarak görmesi ve buna karşı bir tutum sergilemesi, teşkilat açısından uzun dönemli bir tehdit teşkil etmektedir.

Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı, uzun dönemde Avrasya bölgesinde çıkarları olan büyük güçler arasında göz ardı edilemez bir güç haline gelecek ve bölgedeki güç dengesinin başat aktörlerinden birisi olacaktır.

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*As the author, I, hereby, declare that there is no conflict of interest with any institution, organization or person related to the article.*

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