

## ARTICLE

---

# Examining the Organization of Turkic States: A Teacher and Norm-Creator

Çağla Gül YESEVİ\*

### Abstract

*The Organization of Turkic States (OTS) is evaluated in this article by means of a social constructivist approach. Social constructivism emphasizes the roles of international organizations in norm-emergence, norm-creation and standard-setting. The new norms that international organizations initiate can shape, change and regulate the behaviors of states. As Martha Finnemore states international organizations may act as teachers. They can persuade states to adopt cooperative behavior, accept the culture of the organization and internalize the organization's values. International organizations can thus be seen as essential vehicles for the socialization of states. States may become more eager to rearrange their foreign policy decisions in response to the socially constructed norms held by international organizations. This article will examine the role of the OTS as an agent and a principal in the new regionalization process.*

### Keywords

Organization of Turkic States, social constructivism, international organizations, norm-creation, regionalization.

---

\* Associate Professor, Istanbul Kültür University, Department of International Relations, Istanbul, Türkiye. E-mail: c.yesevi@iku.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0003-3509-7060.

Received on: 07.01.2022  
Accepted on: 12.04.2022

## Introduction

The Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States (the Turkic Council) was established in 2009, and was renamed the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) during its 8<sup>th</sup> Summit held in November 2021. As an intergovernmental organization, the OTS acts as an umbrella organization for other vital organizations such as the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TURKSOY), the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic Speaking Countries (TURKPA), the Turkic Academy, the Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation and the Turkic Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Together, they deal with a broad range of topics concerning the Turkic world. Having the mentality and the awareness of being part of the Turkic world are the main concerns related to this organization. In addition, it is a platform that reminds the societies of the member states that they share the same cultural and ethnic identity. The central theme of the organization has always been cooperation, a value first conferred in the summits of the Heads of the Turkic Speaking States held between 1992–2009, and afterward in the documents of the Turkic Council after its establishment in 2009. It is important to note the longstanding institutionalization process of developing this structure, which started with the convening of summits leading to the establishment of the organization.

The renaming of the organization in November 2021 should not be considered merely a simple name change. Instead, it represents an essential step forward in the evolution of the identity of the OTS. Although it is too early to evaluate the effects of the name change, being part of an international organization will ensure cooperation and significant cohesion among member states, primarily in matters related to international conflicts.

In this article, the identity of the OTS will be evaluated by referring to the social constructivist approach. Alexander Wendt claims that state-centric international relations (IR) theories cannot explain structural changes, and instead stresses the importance of intersubjective dynamics. The identities and interests of states are not given, he argues; rather, they are constructed by social structures.<sup>1</sup> According to social constructivists, the international system functions as a social structure, complete with norms, rules and principles. The international structure,

international relations, and many terms such as anarchy, security, interest and cooperation are all constructed. In this regard, amity or enmity among states with intersubjective meaning could be created and recreated. The interests and identities of states can be reconstructed with the help of shared knowledge, understanding, interconnectivity and collective consciousness.

## History of the OTS

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan declared their independence. The region caught the attention of many regional and external states with diverse agendas, and the newly formed states struggled with many internal and external problems, as well as the nation-building process. As a result, they became part of different regional organizations, such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS); the Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova (GUAM) Organization for Democracy and Economic Development; the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU); the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). After the Turkic states gained their independence from the former Soviet Union, all of the leaders of the Turkic world articulated very emotionally that an influential and effective Turkic world could now be formed with the help of the unity of their powers. Although such statements garnered complaints and hostility toward the developing relations between Türkiye and the Turkic states of the former Soviet Union,<sup>2</sup> the newly independent states held many summits with Türkiye between 1992–2009. It is important to recognize that Türkiye and the Turkic states came together first because of cultural bonds, and later to pursue economic cooperation. The process began with the first summit of the Heads of the Turkic Speaking States held in Ankara in 1992. Subsequent meetings were held in Istanbul (1994), Bishkek (1995), Tashkent (1996), Astana (1998), Baku (2000), Istanbul (2001), Antalya (2006), Nakhchivan (2009) and Istanbul (2009).<sup>3</sup>

Finally, in 2009, the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States (the Turkic Council) was established during the Nakhchivan Summit.

The Turkic Council was itself a reflection of the prevalent political will at the meetings of the heads of states of the Turkic speaking states. The organization's main aim was to bring about extensive cooperation among the Turkic speaking states. The organization's founding members are Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Türkiye. Hungary gained observer status in 2018, Uzbekistan became an official member in October 2019 and Turkmenistan became an observer member of the OTS in 2021. This expansion further strengthened the organization, and is consistent with its aims.<sup>4</sup>

This article examines how the OTS helps shape economic and cultural cooperation among its member states. It also explains the organization's importance, aims, activities and identity since its establishment by drawing upon speeches made by the leaders of the member states, as well as documents and publications on the organization's website. The activities, initiatives, meetings and decisions of the OTS are detailed on its website and social media accounts. In addition, there are a number of articles about this organization in academic journals and proceedings books.

The OTS has contributed to norm emergence and identity formation, primarily on cultural and economic grounds. It has helped its member states internalize the concept of unity and strengthened the consciousness and spirit of their fraternal affinities. Moreover, the OTS has been cautious and rational about not posing any threat to other states, and has not considered any state as a threat. Although the OTS has concerns about the region's security issues, as seen in the Nakhchivan Agreement and "Turkic World Vision-2040", it has made only general acknowledgments and statements about these issues in order to preserve regional and universal security. In some of the publications mentioned on the website of the OTS, certain security problems of the member states are described. The organization itself and its member states are well aware that the

**The OTS has contributed to norm emergence and identity formation, primarily on cultural and economic grounds. It has helped its member states internalize the concept of unity and strengthened the consciousness and spirit of their fraternal affinities.**

Eurasian region has its own characteristics and historical background. Indeed, the member states are cautious not to cause any apprehension to other regional powers. Member states have affirmed that they will pursue peaceful means of interaction and contribute to the peace and order of the region.

One of the crucial contributions of the OTS has been on cultural grounds with the help of affiliated organizations such as TURKSOY, the Turkic Academy and the Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation. Addressing the challenges derived from the economic conditions of the member states, many of which are remnants of the former system, the OTS could be considered a platform to alleviate these conditions and promote economic cooperation. It can help provide new instruments, policies and strong trade ties, and work to reform internal laws and regulations to strengthen further economic cooperation. For this purpose, the OTS has introduced many policies, meetings and institutions. These new regulations and instruments could further strengthen economic relations among members.

States are the main actors in the OTS. Nonetheless, it is essential to have the help of civil societies. The comprehensive aims of the organization and the fulfillment of these aims are its primary concern. The OTS's good relations with other international organizations are viewed as an asset that contributes positively to regional peace and stability. Having cooperative relations with other organizations will empower the OTS.

It is essential to recognize that the Turkic states came together for the first time in history as an international organization; the establishment of the Turkic Council in 2009 was the product of the aspirations of the Turkic world. It has long been a milestone for the Turkic world to have unity. The idea and hope of achieving it probably began centuries ago. In this context, the emergence of the OTS represents a concrete step forward for Turkic unity.

The second part of this article examines the collective identity, primary goals and strategies of the OTS and its affiliated organizations. The third part briefly defines social constructivism. The fourth part examines the aims, activities and roles of the OTS by referring to social constructivism. The final part describes the accomplishments of the OTS and makes recommendations for its continued success.

## OTS: Collective Identity, Primary Goals and Strategies

The unique identity of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States which later turned into the OTS was revealed in the Nakhchivan Agreement. The principal organs of the OTS are the Council of Heads of State, the Council of Foreign Ministers, the Council of Elders, the Senior Officials Committee and the Secretariat. The OTS is also an umbrella organization for other affiliated organizations such as TURKSOY, TURKPA, the Turkic Academy, the Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation, and the Turkic Chamber of Commerce and Industry.<sup>5</sup>

Initially, the OTS aimed to ensure far-reaching cooperation among Turkic speaking states based on shared history, language, identity and culture. Secondly, member states wanted to cooperate on political, security, economic and cultural issues.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the purposes, decisions and activities of the OTS have been comprehensive and inclusive. To date, the OTS has made only non-binding decisions. To become a member, a country must have one or more Turkic languages as an official language.<sup>7</sup> By providing a platform for cooperation, member states have become aware of their working mechanisms, leading them to collaborate in other areas. Empowering the sectoral approach has strengthened multidimensional cooperation and people-to-people collaboration.<sup>8</sup> Above all, the OTS has emphasized that they do not consider any state an enemy. Most importantly, the organization will have a voice in further cooperation among the Turkic states. Indeed, the OTS has the chance to become the single voice of the Turkic states.

Before establishing the OTS, many institutions, meetings, and summits resulted in a fragmented approach to cooperation among the Turkic states. The establishment of the OTS as an umbrella organization has remedied this fragmentation to some extent. While the headquarters of the OTS are located in Istanbul, the headquarters of the other organizations are in different member states, which has ensured equality among them, giving the impression that every member has responsibility in a unique area. Moreover, this distribution of duties has helped develop the internalization of norms in every member state and enhance the contribution of member states to the policies of the OTS.

**While the name change does not affect the essence and evolution of the organization's identity, it cannot be considered a simple name change. Rather, it represents the transformation of an implied reality into a tangible reality.**

There are different opinions related to the organization's name change. While the name change does not affect the essence and evolution of the organization's identity, it cannot be considered a simple name change. Rather, it represents the transformation of an implied reality into a tangible reality. As a result, the notions of

Turkic unity and the soul of Turkicness have been strengthened. In addition, it is clear that whether the name change has converted the discourse, aims, and uniqueness of the organization or not will be better understood and assessed in the future. It could be highlighted that the organization initiated a process to present its identity. The member states declared their fraternal affinities and shared cultural and historical similarities on every ground. The President of the Republic of Türkiye, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, considering the OTS, used the phrase "the family assembly" in the press conference during the 8<sup>th</sup> Summit of the Heads of State of the OTS in Istanbul in 2021.<sup>9</sup>

The founding Secretary-General of the Turkic Council Halil Akıncı, defined the unique identity of the OTS. He emphasized the sovereign equality principle and indicated that every nation should have a consciousness of its own identity. Turkicness could be constructed upon this awareness. Most importantly, radical nationalism has been disaffirmed in this regard. In Akıncı's words:

"The Turkic Council was founded on the principle of sovereign equality and the principle of recognition and acceptance of identities. If a Kyrgyz does not know his/her Kyrgyz identity, a Kazakh does not know his/her Kazakh identity, or an Azerbaijani does not know his/her Azerbaijani identity, then s/he will not be able to know Turkic-ness as his/her common identity. Therefore, our goal is to strengthen our common identity based on the sovereign equality principle. Surely, we do not want the development of radical nationalism, but I personally do not see any drawbacks for that kind of nationalism I alluded to earlier to develop."<sup>10</sup>

Although Turkic unity has been discussed for centuries, Turks have voluntarily come together for the first time under the umbrella of the Turkic Council, as Akinci highlights. His statement clearly articulates that the member states will not lose their national identities under this organization. Rather, they have a shared history, culture and common ancestors, and these assets will contribute to cooperation in many areas. Strengthening ties and the spirit of cooperation, the OTS has emerged as a norm-creator by establishing unity within the Turkic world.

The cooperative nature of the OTS is evident in the eleven areas of cooperation mentioned on its website. These are political cooperation, education, economy, transport, youth & sport, customs, health, tourism, diaspora, information and communication technologies (ICT), information and media. This article, to make it easier, will focus on three important areas of cooperation, namely, political, cultural and economic; the other areas will be regarded as sub-sets of these three main areas of cooperation.

With the aim of political cooperation, the OTS has convened regular meetings of the member states' Foreign Ministers, the Senior Officials Committee, the Junior Diplomats Training Program, Foreign Policy Research Centers, and the International Election Observer Missions.<sup>11</sup> As an affiliated organization of the OTS, TURKPA has contributed to political cooperation among member states. Established in 2008, it aims to ensure parliamentary cooperation in the Turkic world.<sup>12</sup> TURKPA's main principles are independence, sovereignty, territorial and state boundaries, integrity, legal equity and mutual respect grounded on the principle of non-interference in others' internal affairs.<sup>13</sup> In addition, TURKPA has election observation missions.<sup>14</sup>

Security cooperation under the OTS has a consultative nature. It has no structure, and the OTS shows no inclination to take any concrete actions on military issues involving the member states. Rather, the OTS has pointed out the importance of the peaceful settlement of disputes. In January 2022, the OTS emphasized the importance of peace and stability in Kazakhstan, and the member states expressed their strong solidarity with Kazakhstan.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the OTS expressed its deep concerns about the conflicts on the Kyrgyz-Tajik state border in January 2022 and called for an immediate cessation of the armed clashes and a peaceful settlement of disputes.<sup>16</sup>



The OTS considers education, diplomacy, youth, transport and tourism as distinct areas of cooperation. The Turkic University Union has initiated the Orkhun Exchange Program, the Sports Games, and the Student Council.<sup>17</sup> 160 students and academicians have already benefited from the Orkhun Exchange Program.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, 138 diplomats participated in the Junior Diplomats Training Program and more than 1,500 young people have participated in the OTS International Youth Camps.

The Turkic Academy is another affiliated organization of the OTS, founded in 2012. This organization explores Turkic people's language, literature, culture and history. The main aim of the Turkic Academy is to base findings on indigenous sources of the Turkic world.<sup>19</sup>

TURKSOY, which defines itself as the UNESCO of the Turkic world, was established in 1993. It aims to provide a platform for artists and scholars of the Turkic world for cooperation in culture. TURKSOY introduced Nowruz, otherwise known as the Persian New Year, as one of the common traditions of the Turkic world. In addition, it explores the common culture, history, language, literature and art of Turkic people.<sup>20</sup> The Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation, founded in 2015, aims to preserve and conduct research on the Turkic culture and heritage objectives.<sup>21</sup> The Turkic Business Council was established in 2011. It works to deepen the cooperation in the Turkic business world by organizing business forums. The Turkic Chamber of Commerce and Industry Turkic Chamber of Commerce and Industry (TCCI) was officially established in 2019 and is composed of the member and observer states' chambers of commerce and industry and business communities.<sup>22</sup>

The member states of the OTS have been demanding to cooperate in trade, energy, transport, customs, tourism and ICT. There are many meetings on all of these issues. Concerning cultural and economic aspirations, the Modern Silk Road Joint Tour Project is one of the initiatives of the OTS. The dates and price of the tour have not been announced yet. The project's primary purpose is to show tourists the traditional Silk Road's unique cultural, spiritual, historical and gastronomic life. Therefore, the modern Silk Road Joint Tour Package aims to increase the number of tourists visiting the Turkic states.<sup>23</sup> It

is important to note that the UN considered the OTS as a significant example of a regional organization utilizing South-South cooperation. South-South cooperation refers to a situation in which two or more developing countries implement individual or shared national capacity involving triangular cooperation with other Southern actors, multilateral organizations, and/or Northern partners. The UN noted that the OTS has used South-South cooperation to intensify cooperation among Turkic states, and between Turkic states and other states. The OTS has taken an active role in increasing consciousness about South-South and triangular cooperation among its member states and with other countries. In this regard, the OTS has focused intensively on economy, tourism, transport, education and youth. It prioritizes efforts to create employment, prevent violent extremism and empower youth.<sup>24</sup>

In these endeavors, the OTS works together with institutions, academia and its member states' private sectors. In addition, it has good relations with other international organizations. The UN regards the OTS as a success in regard to its tourism vocational training program, customs training program and junior diplomats training program.

**The OTS has taken an active role in increasing consciousness about South-South and triangular cooperation among its member states and with other countries. In this regard, the OTS has focused intensively on economy, tourism, transport, education and youth.**

No discussion of the OTS's identity, goals and achievements would be complete without mention of the organization's efforts to combat the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. After holding the first international summit on COVID-19, the OTS decided to set up a Health Coordination Committee and Health Scientific Group.<sup>25</sup> As a result, the OTS member states moved quickly and responded collectively to the COVID-19 pandemic. They shared hospital facilities and exchanged clinical expertise with each other.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the OTS began to help other regions and states after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, delivering vaccines to Burkina Faso and Togo.<sup>27</sup>

## The Social Constructivist Approach

This article employs a social constructivist approach to examine the contribution of the OTS to the emergence of collective identity and norm creation. The social constructivist approach, which attaches importance to ideas, norms, rules, interests, identity, shared knowledge and culture, was introduced to the paradigm of IR at the end of the 1980s.<sup>28</sup> Social constructivism sees the international structure as a social structure that involves norms, rules and law. Like any other social structure, it can be defined through social relationships, shared meanings, principles, beliefs, knowledge, practices and material elements. Social constructivism gives primary importance to ideational and intellectual factors, and its proponents claim a shared meaning behind material factors based on collective identities, common principles and accepted norms, considering the dynamic relationship between ideas and material forces.<sup>29</sup>

In the past, social constructivists assert, constructs such as “the Cold War”, “Soviet Socialist Republics”, “Soviet Central Asia” and “the Socialist World” were social structures of intersubjectively shared knowledge. During the post-Cold War era, shared knowledge and meanings began to change. The OTS has made a concrete contribution to the construction of “Turkicness”, “the Turkic world” and “Turkic cooperation”. Indeed, with its unique structure and affiliated organizations, the OTS has contributed significantly to constructing the international system and international relations.

Social constructivism states that international organizations are important and influential actors of international politics with their own agendas and aims. They could gain the power to implement norms and values that even overreach the member states’ preferences.<sup>30</sup> Norms are defined as accepted values that determine the standards of appropriate behavior for agents (actors) with a given identity. Martha Finnemore points out that international organizations promote international norms. Norms can be considered rules when they are recognized and approved by actors. Over time, norms evolve into principled beliefs.<sup>31</sup> The OTS has contributed to the development of both norms and beliefs—such as having common ancestors, sharing Turkic ethnicity, having a shared history, common culture, collective Turkic identity and

support for economic development, etc. The identities of the Turkic states of the former Soviet Union were different in the past, when factors of culture, ethnicity and religion were downplayed in favor of a dominant political state ideology.

Moreover, the OTS will help member states reexamine their interests and identity. The member states' collective identity is based on common Turkic culture, history, language and Turkicness. This self-understanding will affect the foreign policy decision-making processes of the member states.

The OTS, in influencing the reexamination of member states' interests and identities, has contributed to the socialization process. However, it is essential to note that member states have also affected the evolution of the OTS. As a result, the OTS and its member states influence and constitute each other.<sup>32</sup> The OTS has contributed to the capacity building of its member states and intensified cooperation among them. It has initiated vocational projects and training in different areas, including a program to train young diplomats. The OTS organized the Social Media Training Program and initiated a training program for diaspora institutions. Furthermore, the Secretariat implemented various economic, transport, customs, tourism, media, diaspora and health projects. These activities have contributed to experience-sharing and knowledge-sharing among member states.<sup>33</sup> As a result, the OTS has become an efficient vehicle for achieving the socialization process.

Acting as a norm entrepreneur, the OTS has offered a solid moral content so that the Turkic states can work together, cooperate further and mutually benefit from this cooperation.<sup>34</sup> This ethical dimension includes commitment to sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-intervention principles. Furthermore, the OTS has pledged to promote common Turkic identity as the source of cultural richness and looks for ways to bring the peoples of the member states closer to each other.<sup>35</sup>

**Acting as a norm entrepreneur, the OTS has offered a solid moral content so that the Turkic states can work together, cooperate further and mutually benefit from this cooperation.**

The Turkic states initially convened many summits and conferences; eventually, this initiative turned into an organization. During this development, it is clear that the level of interest of the member states changed: in the beginning, some of the states were not even eager to cooperate; today, they have learned the benefits of their cooperation.<sup>36</sup>

The social constructivist approach claims that shared knowledge, which is an outcome of the global interaction of ideas, determines the international structure. In this regard, idea and norm shifts ensure the system's transformation. Norms are shared assessments and have a variety of strengths.<sup>37</sup> Thus, some norms can be regarded as more potent than the others if we measure the level of the agreement among member states. It is apparent under the domain of the OTS, that some norms are much more praised than others.

Norm influence has three levels; the first level is norm emergence, the second is broad norm acceptance (norm cascade), and the third is internalization. Norm entrepreneurs lead and support the process of norm emergence. As a norm entrepreneur, the OTS induces states (norm leaders) to accept new norms. Norm leaders (some member states) take necessary steps to socialize other member states to become norm followers. Lastly, norm internalization occurs. The OTS, presenting a platform for comprehensive cooperation and gradually developing expertise on many issues, has been gaining the power to change the behaviors of its member states. Its expertise has been enhanced with the help of working groups, institutions and related organizations. Moreover, it has set up various programs to train diplomats, bureaucrats and youth, who will in turn help with the promotion of new norms.<sup>38</sup>

Social constructivists emphasize that international organizations can act as principals rather than agents in the international arena. They have had an active role in the promotion of the new norm. As Finnemore states, international organizations may act as teachers. They can persuade states to adopt cooperative behavior, and can be effective on states to accept the culture of the organization. Moreover, states begin to internalize the values of organizations to which they belong. In this sense, international organizations can be seen as essential vehicles for the socialization of states. States may become more eager to rearrange their foreign policy decisions in response to the socially constructed norms

of international organizations.<sup>39</sup> Norms initiated by the OTS influence the policies of the member states. The OTS has been socializing the member states to accept the benefits of multilateral cooperation within the Turkic world, believing in the motto “together we are stronger”. As a means of engaging in norm entrepreneurship and norm creation, the Junior Diplomats Training Program aims to raise consciousness about the Turkic people’s shared history, culture and language, and will make an essential contribution to the training of future diplomats.

International organizations are considered conglomerations of rules, norms and decision-making mechanisms that determine the member states’ behaviors and actions.<sup>40</sup> Social constructivism explains that joining an international organization has less to do with material interests than with shared norms, values and principles. The OTS has instructed its member states on its norms, values and principles. Moreover, internalizing the organization’s shared beliefs, the OTS staff present and recommend the shared values and shared knowledge of the OTS. The member states, in this regard, have been passing through a collective learning process. In short, the OTS has been constructing the cognitive evolution of the Turkic world.

## Evaluation of the OTS

This article highlights some fundamental topics and related subtopics to evaluate the OTS with reference to social constructivism. Initially, the OTS, as a cooperative platform, began creating norms, especially those having to do with the unity of the Turkic world. Indeed, the most powerful characteristic of the OTS is cultural cooperation based on shared language, culture and history. Fraternal affinities have eased the development of multilateral cooperation among member states.<sup>41</sup> In this regard, the OTS has successfully established norms and values among its members in the cultural arena. Moreover, the OTS has been willing to disseminate its norms and rules.<sup>42</sup> It has been gradually institution-building and gaining the power to convince its member states of the benefits of cooperation. The fundamental norm created by the OTS is that the Turkic states have a common history, language and culture and they could work together, they are stronger together.<sup>43</sup> In this context,

as Wendt notes, states under the effect of Lockean culture are inclining to help each other.<sup>44</sup>

Second, in the realm of political cooperation, the OTS has created a collective identity on many grounds, and interactions among member states have enhanced collaboration on political issues. This understanding is expected to grow considerably stronger in the future. The collective identity cultivated by the OTS could help in unifying the national interests of the member states in mutually beneficial ways.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, the member states have already begun to speak as one voice, as witnessed in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). The OTS members' voting cohesiveness has been rising in the UNGA, which could be seen as a sign of the convergence of the member states' foreign policy preferences.<sup>46</sup> This indicates that the OTS has been successful in establishing mutual trust among member states, and in constructing similar behaviors to determine common foreign policies. The OTS has made declarations on behalf of its members and has implemented common policies on various foreign policy issues, for instance on the Cyprus issue and Afghanistan.

Third, relatedly, Onuf and Kratochwill are interested in “speech acts theory”, which explores language’s social meaning. Through speech acts such as statements and declarations, and even in terms of “who speaks”, in this case the OTS, language constructs social structure by shaping intersubjective meaning.<sup>47</sup> According to some theorists in this field, the whole world is socially constructed through language.<sup>48</sup> The OTS has engaged in defining certain international events and some international terms, a speech act that functions to both position it in a place of authority and establish the meanings of these events and terms. In addition, its tendency to use cooperative language continues to construct its own identity as a collaborative structure and as a wielder of soft power. The OTS has been creating norms and values through all these activities.

Fourth, the OTS has been helping member states develop common communication strategies, and is functioning as a platform to promote good relations among the strategic research centers of the member states.<sup>49</sup> The OTS members recently opted to consult and coordinate regarding the conflict in Afghanistan. They also collectively emphasized

the need to reach a just, lasting, sustainable and mutually acceptable settlement of the Cyprus issue based on the realities on the island. Moreover, the member states expressed their solidarity with the Turkish Cypriot people in their aspirations to secure their equal, inherent rights. In addition, they recognized Türkiye's request to invite the Turkish Cypriots to participate in the relevant activities of the OTS.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, they supported Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and during the 44-Days Patriotic War. The OTS expressed strong solidarity with Kazakhstan during the uprisings there in December 2021. The OTS examined the Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan border conflict, requested immediate cessation of the armed clashes and offered a proposal for peaceful settlement.<sup>51</sup>

While interested in security cooperation, the OTS is not a military organization. In its process of pursuing an integrationist spirit within the Turkic world, it has made cautious declarations on security issues, as witnessed during the Kazakhstan uprisings and the Kyrgyz-Tajik border issues. Moreover, taking into account the values and norms of the organization, the OTS has received requests from different circles that it should take an influential role in regional military conflicts. However, regardless of their validity, such requests are not in conformity with the aims and activities of the OTS.

In terms of its aims and activities, the OTS has proven itself an effective and successful international organization. Moreover, as mentioned in "Turkic World Vision-2040", as a regional organization, the OTS has gradually become institutionalized, and this process has been carried out with a realistic vision. "Turkic World Vision-2040" clarifies that the existing cooperation will be beneficial to ensure that each member state's principal goal is to increase their people's cultural, economic and political conditions.<sup>52</sup>

**In terms of its aims and activities, the OTS has proven itself an effective and successful international organization. Moreover, as mentioned in "Turkic World Vision-2040", as a regional organization, the OTS has gradually become institutionalized, and this process has been carried out with a realistic vision.**



Fifth, the member states of the OTS have begun to internalize economic cooperation on various grounds as a shared understanding, as witnessed in their rational decisions. The OTS has aimed to strengthen the economic structures of its member states; it has helped to increase trade relations among member states and has enhanced socializations in the region. As agents of the international system, individuals are the main research area of social constructivism. The OTS offers an efficient platform for private companies.

Moreover, the sectoral approach of the organization will enhance people-to-people connections. The OTS continues to foster cooperation in transport, customs, ICT, energy and tourism. It ensures “economic cooperation among the Turkic world” as a norm. In this regard, while the Turkic Chamber of Commerce and Industry (TCCI) implements joint projects and training programs, the Turkic Investment and Development Fund will provide funds to the member states. All these efforts will enhance the economic relations of the people of the Turkic world.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, norm acceptors will collaborate in other areas. The organs and affiliated organizations will attract people to collaborate in the economic arena. The OTS will help share information and technical experience among member states. It will continue to have an informative and instructive effect on states, which will learn and adopt the new norms initiated by the OTS.<sup>54</sup>

Considering these issues, the OTS has been acting as a teacher; it is a norm creator and a norm entrepreneur in terms of cultural, economic and political cooperation. The rules, norms and principles initiated by the OTS have been changing and shaping the behaviors of the member states.<sup>55</sup> Secretary-General of the OTS Baghdad Amreyev emphasized that if the member states had the opportunity to gather more often under the roof of the OTS, they would be able to understand each other better. As a result, they could have a common position in foreign policy. The OTS has been contributing to the socialization process of the member states on having common behavior and taking similar foreign policy decisions. Moreover, Amreyev stated that the OTS held a pioneering international meeting on Afghanistan on September 27, 2021 upon the call of Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu. At this meeting, the member states signed a joint declaration, and Amreyev asserted that they were more powerful when they acted together.<sup>56</sup>

Türkiye and Kazakhstan initially acted as norm leaders, and have been eager to draw attention to the fraternal affinities of the Turkic world; this knowledge about Turkicness became the shared knowledge of the OTS. In this regard, this knowledge was constructed as an international norm along with the establishment and gradual institutionalization of the OTS. The evolution of the organization's name from the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States to the Organization of Turkic States is an expression of this progress.

## Concluding Remarks

The OTS is a regional organization that aims to ensure political, cultural and economic cooperation among its member states. Although it has pledged to cooperate to achieve regional and international peace, stability and prosperity, it is neither a security organization nor a military alliance. Indeed, it has emphasized and praised regional and universal peace and stability, the supremacy of international law, the significance of multilateral cooperation and the peaceful settlement of disputes.<sup>57</sup> The OTS successfully creates its identity and pursues meaningful activities to ensure cooperation within the Turkic world. It also takes action in instructive and informative roles to create knowledge, shape the behaviors of member states and support the emergence and internalization of new norms within the Turkic world.

Social constructivism focuses on the role of international organizations as norm-creators and norm-entrepreneurs. In this regard, the OTS, acting as an instructor, has had a specific influence on its member states' foreign policies. Although the member states have had different international commitments and agendas, they have begun to act similarly as a group and cooperate in different international organizations such as UNESCO and the UNGA.<sup>58</sup> In this sense, the OTS, acting as a teacher, has successfully provided a platform for developing mutual interest and trust based on its members' fraternal affinities.

Social constructivists consider individuals as agents. Onuf emphasizes that like all social realities, international relations were constructed by individuals.<sup>59</sup> Hence, compared to the past, the OTS has been offering joint development projects and helping the peoples of member states

get closer by engaging in shared activities. In terms of the organization's recent achievements, the liberalization of transport between Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan is a concrete example. In addition, the member states have been sharing knowledge for the training of nuclear engineers, developing nuclear infrastructure and uranium mining. Moreover, the OTS has focused on vocational training, which will disseminate information, experience and knowledge.<sup>60</sup> Elites could help with the process of circulating and promoting the values and norms of the OTS. Also, it is significant to state that opening the Zangezur corridor will be essential for further economic and cultural integration among member states.

The OTS has been highly successful in ensuring cultural affinities among member states. There are notable affiliated organizations of the OTS, and they have had a significant impact on closer interaction among the citizens of member states. Exchange programs are the most effective tools to enhance people-people interaction. The existing exchange programs for high schools and universities should be extended, and

**The OTS has been highly successful in ensuring cultural affinities among member states. There are notable affiliated organizations of the OTS, and they have had a significant impact on closer interaction among the citizens of member states.**

many more students, teachers and academics should have a chance to benefit from them. Similarly, OTS youth programs could be supported financially by civil society organizations and private companies. In addition, empowering the diaspora communities of the Turkic world, which is one of the aims of the organization, will be an important achievement of the OTS.

One of the strengths of the OTS is its transparent character. All of the related speeches, decisions, aims and activities are shared on the organization's website in the languages of the member states and in English. This transparency has contributed to interaction among the peoples of the member states, and to the socialization process whereby its shared values, principles, norms, and knowledge are internalized. In addition, the transparent character of the OTS will prevent any

perception that it poses a threat to the external world. While emotional public demands could push the organization to take action or give speeches on every regional conflict, a major strength of the OTS has been its way of handling international events cautiously, carefully, rationally and with a long-term perspective. Therefore, the cautious speech culture of the OTS will remain an important asset and feature of its organizational culture.

Examining the roles of the member states in different affiliated organizations, one can say that the OTS is an egalitarian organization in which responsibilities are shared among the different member states. Its meetings and summits have been held in different cities of the member states; the Secretariat of the OTS is in Istanbul, the Turkic Academy is in Astana, and the Secretariat of the Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation is in Baku.

The OTS would benefit from declaring its aims more clearly. It has received many criticisms from different circles of the public related to its role in cooperation among the Turkic states. The expectations from the organization to its members have been increasing incrementally. However, high and unrealistic expectations may affect the organization negatively. In particular, ultranationalist and extremist demands could damage the institutionalization process of the organization and the cooperation among member states. Moreover, other states could perceive such high demands and expectations as threatening under current international conditions. Thus, the OTS must present its aims, activities and results more explicitly on different platforms, especially regarding security concerns.

First, the OTS could benefit more fully from academics, civil society activists and the media to correctly describe and disseminate its aims and activities. Collaboration with universities and civil society organizations would help strengthen the organization in many respects. Second, the purposes, activities and agendas of the OTS and its affiliated organizations are enormously wide-reaching. “Turkic World Vision–2040” was prepared in detail and with great care; nonetheless, it has generated questions as to how all these aims will be accomplished. Moreover, every summit of the OTS has concentrated on different topics, and subsequently, working groups have begun to handle the decisions

taken. These circumstances could complicate the workload management of the OTS. In addition, the monitoring and measurement of its many achievements risks being complicated, unclear and indefinite. In other words, the organization's comprehensive aims could cause difficulties in attaining precise and concrete results. Shortfalls in staffing, difficulties in financing the activities and challenges involved in the adaptation to digitalization are likely problems that the OTS must anticipate.

To solve these problems, Secretary-General Amreyev announced at the 2021 Istanbul Summit that the OTS would generate five-year strategic plans. The OTS has already prepared the 2022–2026 Strategy Document, an operational document containing concrete steps to be taken within the paradigm of “Turkic World Vision–2040”. It is important to note that even if the organization does not limit its agenda, some of the aims and topics will be prioritized within these five-years plans.<sup>61</sup> Concentrating on fewer aims within a given period will ease the organization's workload and yield concrete results. Furthermore, to share responsibility and lessen the organization's workload, it is advisable to cooperate with civil society organizations and universities of the Turkic world. In particular, support from academics and civil society activists will contribute to realizing people-to-people collaboration.

Last but not least, the organization has been exceedingly successful to date in realizing its aims and activities. Moreover, the OTS has acted as a successful teacher and norm-creator. In many respects, it is a norm entrepreneur: importantly, it has initiated an economic and political cooperation culture. The commonalities in language, culture and the history of the communities of the member states have become shared knowledge. As a result, Turkicness has become a collective identity, and the values of collaborative culture and collective action have been internalized.

## Endnotes

- 1 Alexander Wendt, "Collective Identity Formation and International State," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 88, No. 2 (1994), pp. 385–394.
- 2 Pelin Musabay Baki, "Avrasya'da Bölgesel İşbirliği Sürecinden İşbirliği Mekanizmasına: Türk Konseyi," *Bilge Strateji*, Vol. 6, No. 11 (2014), pp. 139–140.
- 3 "Special Issue: Azerbaijani Leadership," *Journal of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Azerbaijan*, No. 56, 2020, p. 3.
- 4 For further information, see the official website of the Organization of Turkic States: <https://www.turkkon.org/en/>.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 "Nakhchivan Agreement on the Establishment of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States," *Organization of Turkic States*, October 3, 2009, [https://www.turkkon.org/assets/pdf/temel\\_belgeler/nakhchivan-agreement-on-the-establishment-of-the-cooperation-council-of-turkic-speaking-states-1-en.pdf](https://www.turkkon.org/assets/pdf/temel_belgeler/nakhchivan-agreement-on-the-establishment-of-the-cooperation-council-of-turkic-speaking-states-1-en.pdf)
- 7 Süleyman Sırrı Terzioğlu, "Uluslararası Hukuk Açısından Türk Dili Konuşan Ülkeler İşbirliği Konseyi," *Uluslararası Hukuk ve Politika*, Vol. 9, No. 36 (2013), p. 55.
- 8 Ömer Kocaman, "Adjusting to the New Normal' of Post-COVID-19: The Role of Organization of Turkic States in Multilateral Cooperation," *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (2021), pp. 189-200.
- 9 "Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı Nedir?," *Youtube*, November 15, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-1cKsGysZs>.
- 10 "Turkic Council and Cooperation in Eurasia in the Light of Developments Across the Region," *Center for Eurasian Studies*, No. 14, February 24, 2015, pp. 27–30, <https://www.turkkon.org/assets/pdf/yayinlar/turk-konseyi-ve-bolge-deki-gelistmeler-isiginda-avrasyada-isbirligi-rapor-1-en.pdf>.
- 11 "Political Cooperation," *Organization of Turkic States*, [https://www.turkkon.org/en/isbirligi-alanlari/political-cooperation\\_1](https://www.turkkon.org/en/isbirligi-alanlari/political-cooperation_1).
- 12 "History," *TURKPA*, [https://turk-pa.org/en/content/about\\_turkpa/history](https://turk-pa.org/en/content/about_turkpa/history).
- 13 "Activities," *TURKPA*, [https://turk-pa.org/en/content/about\\_turkpa/activities](https://turk-pa.org/en/content/about_turkpa/activities).
- 14 "About Mission," *TURKPA*, <https://turk-pa.org/en/content/events/aboutmission>.
- 15 "Statement of the Organization of Turkic States on the Events Taking Place in Kazakhstan," *Organization of Turkic States*, January 6, 2022, [https://www.turkkon.org/en/haberler/statement-of-the-organization-of-turkic-states-on-the-events-taking-place-in-kazakhstan\\_2430](https://www.turkkon.org/en/haberler/statement-of-the-organization-of-turkic-states-on-the-events-taking-place-in-kazakhstan_2430).
- 16 "Statement by the Secretary General of the Organization of Turkic States on the Situation at the Kyrgyz-Tajik State Border," *Organization of Turkic States*, January 28, 2022, [www.turkkon.org/en/haberler/statement-by-the-secretary-general-of-the-organization-of-turkic-states-on-the-situation-at-the-kyrgyz-tajik-state-border\\_2444](https://www.turkkon.org/en/haberler/statement-by-the-secretary-general-of-the-organization-of-turkic-states-on-the-situation-at-the-kyrgyz-tajik-state-border_2444).
- 17 "Turkic University Union," *Organization of Turkic States*, November 7, 2021, [https://www.turkkon.org/en/isbirligi-alanlari/education\\_4/turkic-university-union\\_14](https://www.turkkon.org/en/isbirligi-alanlari/education_4/turkic-university-union_14).
- 18 "Orkhun Exchange Program," *Organization of Turkic States*, January 28, 2021, [https://www.turkkon.org/en/isbirligi-alanlari/education\\_4/orkhun-exchange-program\\_15](https://www.turkkon.org/en/isbirligi-alanlari/education_4/orkhun-exchange-program_15).
- 19 "Turkic Academy," *Organization of Turkic States*, [https://www.turkkon.org/en/iliskili-kurumlar/turkic-academy\\_1](https://www.turkkon.org/en/iliskili-kurumlar/turkic-academy_1).
- 20 "About," *TURKSOY*, <https://www.turksoy.org/en/turksoy/about>.
- 21 "Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation," *Organization of Turkic States*, [https://www.turkkon.org/en/iliskili-kurumlar/turkic-culture-and-heritage-foundation\\_5](https://www.turkkon.org/en/iliskili-kurumlar/turkic-culture-and-heritage-foundation_5).
- 22 "Turkic Chamber of Commerce and Industry," *Organization of Turkic States*, [https://www.turkkon.org/en/isbirligi-alanlari/economic-cooperation\\_2/turkic-chamber-of-commerce-and-industry\\_40](https://www.turkkon.org/en/isbirligi-alanlari/economic-cooperation_2/turkic-chamber-of-commerce-and-industry_40);

- Kocaman, "Adjusting to the New Normal' of Post-COVID-19," p. 200.
- 23 "Modern Silk Road Tour Package," *Organization of Turkic States*, January 28, 2021, [https://www.turkkon.org/en/isbirligi-alanlari/tourism\\_6/modern-silk-road-joint-tour-package\\_13](https://www.turkkon.org/en/isbirligi-alanlari/tourism_6/modern-silk-road-joint-tour-package_13).
- 24 *The Cooperation Council of Turkic States (The Turkic Council): How a Regional Organization Uses South-South Cooperation to Promote Regional and Global Development*, New York: United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation, 2017.
- 25 "Health Cooperation," *Organization of Turkic States*, [https://www.turkkon.org/en/isbirligi-alanlari/health-cooperation\\_12](https://www.turkkon.org/en/isbirligi-alanlari/health-cooperation_12).
- 26 Kocaman, "Adjusting to the New Normal' of Post-COVID-19," p. 193.
- 27 "Organization of Turkic States Delivered Covid-19 Vaccines to African Counties," *Organization of Turkic States*, December 7, 2021, [https://www.turkkon.org/en/haberler/organization-of-turkic-states-delivered-covid-19-vaccines-to-african-countries\\_2412](https://www.turkkon.org/en/haberler/organization-of-turkic-states-delivered-covid-19-vaccines-to-african-countries_2412).
- 28 Hazal Mengi-Dinçer et al, "Evaluating the International Renewable Energy Agency through the Lens of Social Constructivism," *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews*, No. 152 (2021), p. 4.
- 29 Alexander Wendt, "Constructing International Politics," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (1995), pp.71–81.
- 30 Michael Barnett & Martha Finnemore, "The Politics, Power and Pathologies of the International Relations," *International Organization*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (1999), pp. 699–700.
- 31 Paul. R. Viotti & Mark V. Kauppi, *International Relations Theory*, New York: Pearson, 2012, pp. 277–291.
- 32 Çağla Gül Yesevi, "Uluslararası İlişkiler Bilim Dalında Sosyal İnşacılık Yaklaşımının İncelenmesi," *Elektronik Siyaset Bilimi Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2021), pp. 57–58.
- 33 Kocaman, "Adjusting to the New Normal' of Post-COVID-19," pp. 194–207.
- 34 Çağla Gül Yesevi & Burcu Yavuz Tifrikgil, "Sosyal İnşacılık Açısından IRENA'nın Değerlendirilmesi ve Türkiye'nin Yenilenebilir Enerji Politikası," *Kocaeli Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, No. 33 (2017), p. 116. Also see Seçkin Köstem, "When Can Idea Entrepreneurs Influence Foreign Policy: Explaining the Rise of the 'Turkic World' in Turkish Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (2017), pp. 722-740.
- 35 "Turkic World Vision-2040," *Organization of Turkic States*, <https://www.turkkon.org/assets/pdf/haberler/turkic-world-vision-2040-2396-97.pdf>, p. 3.
- 36 "Turkic Council and Cooperation in Eurasia."
- 37 Martha Finnemore & Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," *International Organization*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (1998), pp. 892–894.
- 38 Ibid, pp. 895–899.
- 39 Martha Finnemore, "International Organizations as Teachers of Norms: The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization and Science Policy," *International Organization*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (1993), pp. 565–597.
- 40 Martha Finnemore & Stephen J. Toope, "Alternatives to Legalization: Richer View of Law and Politics," *International Organization*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (2001), pp. 744–746.
- 41 "Turkic World Vision-2040," pp 1–2.
- 42 Barnett & Finnemore, "The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations," pp. 699–732.
- 43 Kocaman, "Adjusting to the New Normal' of Post-COVID-19," p. 213.
- 44 Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Relations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 279–285.
- 45 Martha Finnemore & Kathryn Sikkink, "Alternatives to 'Legalization': Richer Views of Law and Politics," *International Organization*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (2001), pp. 743–758.
- 46 Muhittin Kaplan et. al., "One Nation, Many Voices? External Cohesion of the Turkic Council States in the United Nations General Assembly, 1993–2011", *Bilig*, No. 74 (2015), pp. 125–150.

- 47 Yesevi, "Uluslararası İlişkiler Bilim Dalında Sosyal İnşacılık Yaklaşımının İncelenmesi," p. 58.
- 48 Nicholas G. Onuf, *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989, pp. 1–30.
- 49 Muharrem Ekşi, "Türkiye'nin Türk Dünyasına Yönelik Kamu Diplomasisi: Yeni Araç ve Mekanizmalar," *Türk Dünyası İncelemeleri Dergisi*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (2017), p. 14.
- 50 "Declaration of the Eighth Summit of the Organization of Turkic States, Istanbul, Türkiye," *Organization of Turkic States*, <https://www.turkkon.org/assets/pdf/haberler/declaration-of-8th-summit-2395-148.pdf>.
- 51 "Statement by the Secretary General of the Organization of Turkic States."
- 52 "Turkic World Vision-2040."
- 53 Kocaman, "Adjusting to the New Normal' of Post-COVID-19," p. 200.
- 54 Finnemore, "International Organizations as Teachers of Norms," pp. 566–568.
- 55 Martha Finnemore, "Constructing Norms of Humanitarian Intervention," in R.K. Betts (ed.), *Conflict after Cold War*, New York: Longman/Pearson, 2004, pp. 319-325.
- 56 "Türk Konseyi Genel Sekreteri Baghdad Amreyev: 'Yeni Nesil Ortak Türklük Değerlerine Bağlı,'" *Kriter Dergi*, November 1, 2021, <https://kriterdergi.com/soylesi/turk-konseyi-genel-sekreteri-bagdad-amreyev-yeni-nesil-ortak-turkluk-degerlerine-bagli>.
- 57 "Turkic World Vision-2040."
- 58 See Dr. Yakup Ömeroğlu's address to the Institute of Strategic Thinking at "Dil ve Kültür Temelinde Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı," *Youtube*, January 22, 2022, [https://youtu.be/aMsJpp\\_tDAw](https://youtu.be/aMsJpp_tDAw).
- 59 Onuf, *World of Our Making*, pp. 1–30.
- 60 Kocaman, "Adjusting to the New Normal' of Post-COVID-19," pp. 193–202.
- 61 "Speech of the Secretary General of the Organization of Turkic States, Baghdad Amreyev at the 8<sup>th</sup> Summit of the Leaders," *Organization of Turkic States*, November 12, 2021, <https://www.turkkon.org/assets/pdf/haberler/speech-of-the-secretary-general-of-the-organization-of-turkic-states-baghdad-amreyev-at-the-8th-summit-of-the-leaders-2398-121.pdf>.