



## UZBEKISTAN AND THE RISE OF TURKIC UNITY: THE JOURNEY OF THE ORGANISATION OF TURKIC STATES

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**Abstract:** This article is aimed to explore the importance of The Organization of Turkic States. In addition, the article examines Uzbekistan's relations with the organization, and its geopolitical significance, the organization's position in international relations, and economic and political aspects.

**Key words:** “*Turkic Factor*”, *transit-transport potential, energy cooperation, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Hungary, Turkmenistan.*

**Introduction:** The Organization of Turkic States, initially known as the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States (Turkic Council), was established in 2009 as an intergovernmental organization. Its primary objective is to foster comprehensive cooperation among Turkic States. The founding member states—Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Türkiye—were later joined by Uzbekistan as a full member during the 7th Summit in Baku in October 2019. Hungary attained observer status at the 6th Summit in Cholpon-Ata, Kyrgyz Republic, in September 2018. In the 8th Summit held in November 2021, Turkmenistan joined, in November 2022, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and in 2023 the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) became Observer Members of the Organization.

**Organisation of Turkic States:** Constructed on four main pillars of common history, common language, common identity and common culture, the OTS does not limit itself to the confines of these commonalities. Rather, it aims to broaden the existing bilateral cooperation areas such as economy, science, education, transportation, customs, tourism and other various fields among the Member States into multilateral cooperation for the benefit of the region. To achieve these goals, **6 structures** function under the auspices of the OTS – the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TURKSOY), the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic States (TurkPA), the International Turkic Academy, the Foundation of Turkic Culture and Heritage, the Turkic Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Representation of the



Organization of Turkic States in Hungary. Such an organizational structure is aimed precisely at the effective implementation of the tasks assigned to the OTS. Furthermore, by promoting deeper relations and solidarity amongst Turkic speaking countries, it aims to serve as a new regional instrument for advancing international cooperation in Eurasian continent, particularly in Central Asia and Caucasus. Today OTS is becoming one of the main geopolitical power in the world. The population of member and observer states of the Organization of Turkic States is about 150 million people, they are located in a large and important geopolitical area of 4,200,000 square kilometers. The role of the member states of the organization in the world economy is also very important. The location, geopolitical and strategic importance of the countries that are part of the organization of Turkic states is very important, historically. These countries ruled the world order in certain periods. It has a history of great statesmanship.

OTS has undergone a three-stage transformation since its inception. The initial phase involved the Summits of Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States meetings, commencing in 1992, marking the inaugural stride towards regional integration. The Nakhchivan Agreement, signed on October 3, 2009, during the ninth meeting, paved the way for the establishment of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States (Turkic Council), which later transitioned into OTS at the Istanbul Summit on November 12, 2021. The pivotal Samarkand Summit on November 11, 2022, marked the first gathering under OTS's new structure. Currently, OTS comprises full members Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, and Uzbekistan, while Turkmenistan and Hungary serve as observer members. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus joined as an observer during the Samarkand Summit. Together, these countries, with a collective population of approximately 173 million, represent over 2% of the global population and contribute more than 3% to the world's GDP, measured by purchasing power parity.

OTS offers diverse opportunities for cooperation, aligning with the objectives outlined in Article 2 of the Nakhchivan Treaty. These objectives encompass strengthening the peace and security environment, fostering political, economic, cultural, environmental, and scientific collaboration, as well as engagement in education, transportation, and finance. TDT, guided by the Turkic World Vision 2040 Document adopted at the Istanbul Summit in 2021, aims to facilitate favorable conditions for mutual trade and investment. This involves streamlining customs and transit procedures and promoting collaboration in science, technology, education, health, culture, youth policies, sports, and tourism



Turkic countries will also become one pole. Turkey is located at the junction of Europe and Asia. In recent years, economy, population and technical development is increasing. The Caucasus region has always played an important role in world politics, connecting Europe and Central Asia. It borders with countries like Russia and Iran. The oil industry is developing. In general, Azerbaijan is also a country which has a great strategic importance.

Central Asia. Our region connects Europe and Southeast Asia which is located close to two major power centers. As the order in the world changes, the attitude and role of Asia is increasing. In terms of transport corridors, Turkic countries have the most transit areas. The direction of Central Asia, Azerbaijan, Turkey is the most important corridor. According to tenth summit declaration, member states have agreed to develop “Great Silk Road” concept.

Today, OTS covering over 173 million, is a large market, the total GDP of member states and observers is about 1.4 trillion USD. The share of the total GDP of OTS members in the world GDP is about 1.4%, and according to PPP – about 4.5 trillion USD. (3% of the world)

**Samarkand Summit:** On November 11, 2022, the Summit of the Heads of State of the Organization of Turkic States was held in Samarkand, in which Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Hungary and Turkmenistan participated. In connection with this summit, Uzbekistan took over the chairmanship of the organization from Turkey.

The Organization of Turkic States is developing as an organization in accordance with the pragmatic and dynamic principles of the 21st century. Regional organizations are increasingly replacing global international organizations. Therefore, since regional platforms are the most favorable ground for cooperation between countries, many states are trying to focus on regional structures in recent years.

**Uzbekistan and OTS:** The economic effect of cooperation within the framework of OTS can be clearly seen in the example of Uzbekistan. In 2021, Uzbekistan conducted trade operations with OTS countries in the amount of **9.3 billion US dollars**. Their share in Uzbekistan's foreign trade amounted to more than **22%**. In general, in comparison with 2016, the volume of mutual trade between Uzbekistan and the countries of OTS in the last year increased by almost **3 times**. Within the framework of the first direction, the ideas of creating an Investment Fund and a Development Bank within the framework of OTS are also promising. Such projects will allow countries to coordinate their efforts and manage investments more



effectively. In this direction, it is important to note the expansion of investment projects. In particular, the implementation of mutually beneficial investment activities is in demand by the member countries of the organization, including Uzbekistan. In 2017-2021, the member countries of the OTS invested 2.5 billion US dollars of foreign direct investment in the economy of Uzbekistan (10% of the total volume of foreign investment during this period). Of these, more than 1 billion US dollars, or 41%, was invested in 2021. Since 2017, the growth of investments from the OTS countries to Uzbekistan is about 30%. Hence, OTS presents additional opportunities for the Tashkent administration to foster collaboration with its partners. Notably, the economic impact of cooperation among OTS member states is evident in Uzbekistan's case. In 2021, Uzbekistan engaged in a trade amounting to \$9.3 billion with OTS member countries, constituting 22% of its foreign trade. A comparison with 2016 data reveals that Uzbekistan has tripled its trade with OTS nations. Uzbekistan exports a range of products, including textiles, electrical and automobile materials, horticultural and ferrous metal products, to OTS markets. Conversely, the country imports metal products, aluminum, building materials, petroleum products, and grains from these nations. It is noteworthy that President Shavkat Mirziyoyev of Uzbekistan places significance on economic cooperation among member states. He advocates for the formulation of an economic cooperation strategy among Central Asian countries, aiming to eliminate trade barriers, expand e-commerce, and increase trade volume. Additionally, Mr. Mirziyoyev has proposed the establishment of a "Commercial Cooperation Research Center" among Turkic states to explore potential and develop constructive suggestions in this regard. For Uzbekistan, the most important priority at OTS point is to increase economic relations and thus bilateral trade volume. Indeed, Tashkent's strategy aligns with the Turkic World 2040 Vision, as OTS envisions a thriving region. Notably, the establishment of a "Joint Investment Fund" within OTS at the Samarkand Summit holds significant importance. Such initiatives facilitate coordinated efforts among countries, enhancing the effectiveness of investments. It's worth highlighting that, between 2017 and 2021, OTS member states directed approximately \$2.5 billion in investments to Uzbekistan. This constitutes 10% of the country's total foreign investment during that period. Another important issue for Tashkent administration is digital transformation. Because nowadays, digitalization has become the highest development priority of almost every state.

**Geopolitical aspects of OTS:** Close cooperation within the framework of the OTS will enable the countries of the Central Asian region to have alternative



platforms, partial balancing of the influence of Russia and China with the help of Turkey.

This assumption is supported by the fact that in recent years the rapid growth of Turkey's economic and investment presence in the region has contributed to Ankara's significant strengthening of its position and entry into the top five leading trading partners. In addition, Turkish companies are active players in the market, especially in Uzbekistan. In 2022, Turkey overtook China in terms of the number of companies in the country

Territorial and transit-transport potential. The OTS countries geographically represent a vast region from Europe (Turkey, Hungary), the Caucasus (Azerbaijan), the Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan) to the borders of the PRC, the countries of South and South-West Asia and cover an area of 4.242.362 sq. km in total. These parameters indicate the possibility of connecting via transport routes two large continents – Asia and Europe – along the shortest route. The blocking of transport arteries passing through the territories of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, against the backdrop of the European-Russian crisis, necessitated considering the OTS as a “key factor” in establishing alternative transport and communication routes passing through Central Asia and the Caucasus with access to the Middle East and Europe.

Energy cooperation. Turkey intends to develop cooperation within the framework of the OTS in the field of energy in order to diversify energy resources and ensure energy security. Today, when world powers are fighting for possession of the world's resources and its strategic reserves, the unification of energy-rich states is of strategic importance for global development. The OTS states have energy resources, developed industry, have large reserves of various types of raw materials, non-ferrous metals, etc. (in terms of natural gas reserves, Turkmenistan ranks 4th in the world, Azerbaijan 17th, Kazakhstan 19th, Uzbekistan 22nd, in terms of oil reserves, Kazakhstan ranks 11th, Azerbaijan – 20th).

National and Cultural Identity. The Turkic countries have an interest in turning the OTS into a “Turkic factor” capable of influencing international relations. Active interaction within the framework of the Organization will make it possible to use the financial, economic, investment, scientific, technical and technological potential of Turkey, which will balance the financial pressure of other investors on the participating countries, and will also help to diversify foreign policy partners.





**Conclusion:** Today, the economies of the OTS countries are facing serious risks, including economic ones, which are directly related to tougher anti-Russian sanctions and the financial and economic isolation of Russia, which already creates a large number of economic, financial and social problems for the countries of Central Asia. The protracted “special military operation” in Ukraine and, apparently, the long isolation of Russia leads to its financial and economic weakening in the post-Soviet space, creating a power vacuum that China will try to fill, which also has serious risks for Central Asia. Meanwhile, one of the foundations of Central Asia’s security should be the preservation of the geopolitical balance of power in the region. The strengthening of Ankara’s role in the region as a larger and more developed member of the Organization worries Beijing and Moscow to a certain extent for several reasons: firstly, they consider the Central Asian region a zone of their special interests and do not accept the emergence of a different competitive regional structure; secondly, in the context of the unification of the Turkic peoples living in the vast expanse of Eurasia, the promotion of a Turkic identity will challenge the national interests of China and Russia; thirdly, economic integration within the OTS is of concern to Beijing and Moscow, who view it as a threat to the OBOR and the EAEU, which hinders the achievement of their stated goals – the full integration of the Central Asian countries into their projects. Meanwhile, the development of OTS is not aimed at opposing the interests of other international organizations, but at creating a healthy competitive atmosphere.

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