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Institutionalising Pan-Turkism: Türkiye's Geostrategic Ambitions in Central Asia through the Organisation of Turkic States

مأسسة الطورانية: الطموحات الجيواستراتيجية لتركيا في آسيا الوسطى عبر منظمة الدول التركية (OTS)

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Abstract

Since the end of the Cold War, Türkiye has sought to extend its geopolitical and cultural reach beyond Anatolia, reactivating the long-dormant ideology of Pan-Turkism to forge deeper ties with the Turkic-speaking republics of Central Asia. Initially revived as a cultural and linguistic project in the 1990s, Pan-Turkism has gradually evolved into a structured framework of regional cooperation through the Organisation of Turkic States (OTS), established in 2021. This article examines how Ankara has institutionalised Pan-Turkism into an instrument of foreign policy and influence by combining cultural diplomacy, economic integration, and strategic coordination under the "Turkic World Vision 2040". It also analyses the responses of Central Asian states, balancing between cooperation and reluctance, as well as the competition of regional powers such as Russia and China. Drawing on constructivist and realist approaches, this study argues that the OTS represents Türkiye's attempt to convert cultural identity into

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Year : 2025 Volume : 35 Number : 2 ISSN : 1111-3561 EISSN : 2716-957X

geopolitical leverage. However, the aspirations of a unified Turkic bloc remain constrained by national sovereignty, diverging interests, and the persistent influence of regional and global powers.

Key words

Pan-Turkism, Türkiye, Central Asia, Organisation of Turkic States, Geopolitical Rivalry.

الملخص

منذ نهاية الحرب الباردة، سعت تركيا إلى توسيع مجال نفوذها الجيوسياسي والثقافي خارج حدود الأناضول، عبر إعادة إحياء النزعة الطورانية التي كانت قد تراجعت لعقود طويلة، وذلك بهدف تعزيز روابطها مع جمهوريات آسيا الوسطى ذات الأصول والثقافة التركية. وقد تطوّرت هذه النزعة، التي بدأت في تسعينيات القرن الماضي كمشروع لغوي وثقافي رمزي، إلى إطار مؤسسي للتعاون الإقليمي تجسّد في منظمة الدول التركية التي أُسّست رسميًا سنة 2021.

يحلّل هذا المقال الكيفية التي حوّلت بها أنقرة الطورانية إلى أداةٍ من أدوات سياستها الخارجية، مستثمرةً في الدبلوماسية الثقافية والتكامل الاقتصادي والتنسيق الاستراتيجي ضمن إطار "رؤية العالم التركي 2040". كما يتناول المقال تفاعل دول آسيا الوسطى مع هذا المشروع بين الانفتاح الحذر والتحفّظ السيادي، إلى جانب مواقف القوى الإقليمية الكبرى كروسيا والصين. وانطلاقًا من مقاربة تجمع بين البنائية والواقعية السياسية، يخلص البحث إلى أنّ منظمة الدول التركية تمثّل مسعىً تركيًا لتحويل الهوية الثقافية المشتركة إلى نفوذٍ جيوسياسي فعّال، غير أنّ هذا المسعى ما زال يواجه تحدّيات تتعلّق بتباين المصالح الوطنية، وبقاء النفوذ الروسي والصيني، وحدود الاندماج داخل الفضاء الطوراني الناشئ.

الكلمات المفتاحية

الطورانية، تركيا، آسيا الوسطى، منظمة الدول التركية، المنافسة الجيوسياسية.

Year : 2025 Volume : 35 Number : 2 ISSN : 1111-3561 EISSN : 2716-957X

Introduction

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Central Asia has re-emerged as a strategic crossroads at the intersection of Eurasian power politics. The six newly independent republics of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan[1], inherited fragile state structures and found themselves navigating between competing regional and global powers seeking influence over their political orientation, economic routes, and security alignments (Balci & Ahmet, 2001, p. 22). In this context of renewed multipolar competition, the region has become a testing ground for diverse models of regional governance, connectivity, and cultural diplomacy.

Among the actors seeking to consolidate a long-term presence in Central Asia, Türkiye[2] occupies a distinctive position. Historically and linguistically linked to the region's populations, Ankara has revived an old ideological current: Pan-Turkism. Türkiye reframed it as a vehicle for soft power. What began in the 1990s as a cultural and linguistic rapprochement with the Turkic-speaking republics has evolved, during the second term of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, into a multidimensional strategy aiming to transform common identity into geopolitical influence. The institutionalisation of this vision has been embodied in the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States

1- While Tajiks are not Turks but a Persian-speaking Iranian ethnic group, Tajikistan remains a strategic focus of Turkish foreign policy. Moreover, given the presence of Uzbek and Kyrgyz minorities, Dushanbe could potentially be drawn into the pan-Turkist sphere in the future.

2- The country is now officially recognised by its Turkish name Türkiye, rather than Turkey. During the summer of 2022, the Turkish government requested the international community to adopt this designation, which is now used by international organisations such as the United Nations and NATO. By giving up its anglicised name, Ankara aimed to avoid the linguistic confusion with the Thanksgiving bird. A seemingly light-hearted reason that, in fact, reflects a deliberate act of political symbolism and national affirmation.

Year : 2025 Volume : 35 Number : 2 ISSN : 1111-3561 EISSN : 2716-957X

(CCTSS) created in 2009, rebranded in 2021 as the Organisation of Turkic States (OTS) (Yaldiz, 2023, p. 65). It represents the culmination of three decades of Turkish efforts to formalise the "Turkic world" as a regional bloc.

Besides, Pan-Turkism can also be interpreted as a symbolic re-enactment of empire, reflecting the political elite's aspiration to restore Türkiye's historical prestige and revive elements of its Ottoman legacy (Kramer, 1996, p. 114). In this sense, Ankara's renewed activism in Central Asia constitutes not only a quest for regional influence but also an attempt to rekindle the flame of imperial grandeur, with the region serving as the ideological backbone of this ambition.

Yet this aspirational dimension faces structural constraints. Türkiye's Pan-Turkist resurgence unfolds within a complex environment marked by entrenched sovereignties, overlapping spheres of influence, and the enduring presence of Russia and China (Duarte, 2014, p. 113). The question therefore arises as to whether Ankara's attempt to institutionalise Pan-Turkism can effectively translate into sustainable regional leadership, or whether it will remain constrained by competing national interests and broader geopolitical dynamics.

From a theoretical standpoint, this article adopts a constructivist and realist framework. Constructivism helps explain how shared language, culture, and identity have been mobilised by Türkiye to shape new norms and narratives of regional belonging. Realism, by contrast, accounts for the strategic and material dimensions of Ankara's engagement including security cooperation, energy diplomacy, and trade corridors, which reflect a pursuit of national interest and balance of power logic (Hinnebusch, 2015). Together, these perspectives provide an analytical lens to understand how an ideology rooted in identity has been transformed into an institutional instrument of influence in post-Soviet Central Asia.

Year : 2025 Volume : 35 Number : 2 ISSN : 1111-3561 EISSN : 2716-957X

1. Historical and Ideological Roots of Pan-Turkism

The origins of Pan-Turkism can be traced back to the late Ottoman Empire, when intellectuals and reformist elites sought new ideological foundations to preserve the unity of a declining state. Emerging in the nineteenth century as both a linguistic and political movement, Pan-Turkism was initially conceived as a cultural response to the disintegration of the empire and the rise of nationalist currents among its diverse populations (Raso, 2017, p. 169). Influenced by the broader currents of Pan-Slavism and Pan-Germanism in Europe, Ottoman thinkers such as Ziya Gökalp began advocating the idea of a transnational solidarity among Turkic peoples, linked by shared language, culture, and ancestry.

During the Young Turk[3] era (1908–1918), Pan-Turkism acquired a distinctly political dimension. At a time when the Sublime Porte mourned the loss of its Balkan possessions, the Young Turks sought to compensate for these territorial defeats by projecting the Empire's ambitions eastward, towards Central Asia and the historic Turkestan[4], perceived as a land inhabited by populations of authentic Turkic descent, untainted by foreign domination.

Among the leading figures of this movement, Enver Pasha embodied the most ambitious expression of Pan-Turkist aspirations.

3- The Young Turks were members of a political reform movement in the late Ottoman Empire, which sought to modernise and centralise the state while curbing the power of the Sultan. Organised around the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), they promoted constitutionalism and Turkish nationalism and played a decisive role in the empire's final years before its dissolution.

4- Turkestan refers to the vast historical region of Central Asia traditionally inhabited by Turkic-speaking peoples. It extends roughly from the Caspian Sea in the west to Xinjiang in the east, and from the Aral Sea to the Hindu Kush. The term has been used in various historical contexts to describe this cultural and geographic space.

Year : 2025 Volume : 35 Number : 2 ISSN : 1111-3561 EISSN : 2716-957X

Following the Ottoman defeat[5] in World War I, Enver fled the collapsing Empire and found refuge in Bolshevik-controlled Central Asia. Initially sent by Lenin to quell the Basmachi Revolt in the Fergana Valley, Enver instead turned against the Bolsheviks, assuming leadership of the insurgency in a bid to establish a Turkic state in the region (Yerasimos, 1989, p. 23).

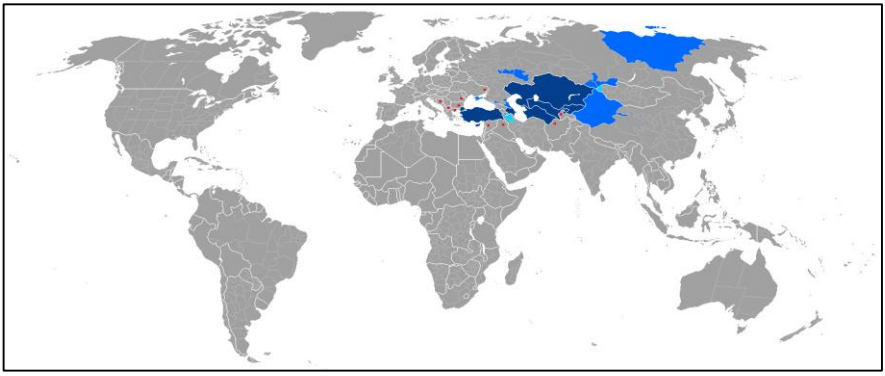
Despite brief successes, including the capture of Dushanbe, Enver Pasha was defeated and by the Red Army under Armenian commander Yakov Melkumov in 1922. Enver's remains, repatriated to Türkiye in 1996 and reburied with state honours, have since been reinterpreted as a symbol of Pan-Turkist heroism, a figure to whom

5- The Ottoman defeat in World War I marked the definitive collapse of the empire and the disintegration of its multi-ethnic territorial order. The signing of the Armistice of Mudros on 30 October 1918 between the Ottoman Empire and the Allied Powers effectively ended hostilities and authorised the latter to occupy strategic points across Anatolia and the Straits. This was followed by the Treaty of Sèvres, which formalised the dismantling of the Ottoman state: vast Arab provinces were placed under British and French mandates, while the empire's remaining European territories were partitioned, and plans were made for the creation of an independent Armenia and Kurdistan. Istanbul and the Straits were placed under international control, and Western Anatolia was occupied by Greek forces, provoking widespread resentment among Turkish nationalists. These humiliating conditions generated a profound sense of betrayal and fostered a climate of political fragmentation. It was in this context that the Young Turk elite, many of whom had gone into exile, sought to reimagine a future for the Turkish nation beyond the empire's ruins. For figures such as Enver Pasha, Pan-Turkism appeared as a means of reclaiming dignity and power through the unification of Turkic peoples in Central Asia, a region perceived as the authentic cradle of Turkic civilisation and a potential base for imperial renewal. However, the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), which replaced Sèvres, recognised the sovereignty of the Republic of Türkiye within its present borders, thereby closing the imperial chapter and institutionalising a new political paradigm centred on territorial nationalism and state sovereignty rather than transnational unity.

Year : 2025 Volume : 35 Number : 2 ISSN : 1111-3561 EISSN : 2716-957X

contemporary Turkish leaders, including President Erdoğan, often refer during visits to Central Asia.

Figure 1: Distribution of countries and major autonomous subdivisions where a Turkic language is predominantly spoken



Source : *Fichier:Map-TurkicLanguages.png* - *https://fr.wikipedia.org*

Countries with an official Turkic language	Autonomous subdivisions with a Turkic language
- Azerbaijan (Azeri)	- People's Republic of China
- Cyprus (Turkish)	- Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (Uyghur)
- Kazakhstan (Kazakh)	- Aksai Kazakh Autonomous County (Kazakh)
- Kyrgyzstan (Kyrgyz)	- Russian Federation
- Türkiye (Turkish)	- Altai Republic (Altay)
- Turkmenistan (Turkmen)	- Dagestan Republic (Azeri, Nogay and Kumyk)
- Uzbekistan (Uzbek)	- Tatarstan (Tatar)
	- Republic of Sakha (Yakut)

Year : 2025 Volume : 35 Number : 2 ISSN : 1111-3561 EISSN : 2716-957X

However, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent foundation of the Republic of Türkiye in 1923 under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk led to a profound ideological rupture. Atatürk's republican vision was built upon the principles of territorial sovereignty, secular nationalism, and Western-oriented modernisation, seeking to replace imperial pluralism with a unitary nation-state (Devrim, 2022, pp. 67-68). This new paradigm deliberately rejected supra-national identities and pan-ideological movements such as Pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism, both of which were viewed as remnants of the imperial past.

Despite its exclusion from the official doctrine, Pan-Turkism endured in limited intellectual and nationalist circles, notably within segments of the military and conservative intelligentsia (Balci, 2005, p. 300). During the Cold War, these currents were occasionally reactivated in opposition to Soviet influence, serving as a latent reservoir of ideological continuity. Nonetheless, when the Cold War ended and the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991, these dormant ideas found new geopolitical relevance.

2. Post-Soviet Euphoria and the Limits of Turkish Influence

Several months before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Türkiye had already reactivated its contacts with the capitals of Central Asia. Nevertheless, Ankara's first initiatives in the region were marked by caution (Kramer, 1996, p. 112). During visits to Moscow and the emerging Turkic republics, Turkish President Turgut Özal reassured both Soviet and Western audiences that Türkiye had no intention of imposing itself in Central Asia, where the winds of independence were already blowing.

This prudence, however, was quickly replaced by enthusiasm once independence was achieved. Türkiye became the first state to recognise the sovereignty of the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, and a veritable diplomatic ballet followed. In 1992, all Central Asian heads of state visited Ankara, inaugurating a series of summits

Year : 2025 Volume : 35 Number : 2 ISSN : 1111-3561 EISSN : 2716-957X

and exchanges (Balci, 2005, p. 305). Under President Süleyman Demirel, Türkiye's ambitions expanded significantly. With the encouragement of the United States and Western Europe, anxious to prevent the spread of Iranian influence, Ankara sought to present itself as a model for post-Soviet transition, a synthesis of secularism, democracy, and market economy. The Turkish approach aimed to help the newly independent states break away from the centralised Soviet model (Kramer, 1996, p. 114). Economic assistance was primarily channelled through Eximbank loans and the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), established to facilitate the transition of the newly independent Turkic republics from centrally planned to market-oriented economies (Alimukhamedov, 2021, p. 3). These instruments supported reforms in accounting, privatisation, and public administration, while encouraging Turkish investment across the region. Through its development programmes, TİKA sought to transfer managerial know-how and promote institutional modernisation, thereby positioning Türkiye as both a model and a mentor for post-Soviet transformation in Central Asia.

However, Ankara's ambitions quickly met structural and political limits. Overconfidence, excessive promises, and limited resources undermined Türkiye's credibility. As such, Turkish leaders pledged large-scale assistance from economic aid and the training of new civilian and military elites to support integration into the international system but lacked the capacity to deliver on such commitments (Balci & Ahmet, 2001, p. 16). Furthermore, Central Asian leaders, eager to preserve their newly gained independence, rejected any perception of tutelage, unwilling, as one diplomat put it, "to pass from the hands of one empire to another" (Kurmanbekova, 2020). Despite the euphoria of the first Turkic Summit held in Ankara in 1992, during which President Demirel proclaimed that "the twenty-first century will be the century of the Turks" and proposed projects such as a common market, a joint investment bank, and a pipeline linking Central Asia to global

Year : 2025 Volume : 35 Number : 2 ISSN : 1111-3561 EISSN : 2716-957X

markets via Türkiye; key figures such as Uzbek President Islam Karimov and Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov firmly opposed any supranational integration.

By the mid-1990s, the great dream of Turkic unity had already begun to fade. Azerbaijan's return to Moscow's[6] orbit after the fall of President Abulfaz Elchibey, a fervent Pan-Turkist, dealt a severe blow to Ankara's aspirations. Subsequent summits in Bishkek (1995), Tashkent (1996), and Astana (1998) failed to produce meaningful progress. President Karimov expressed open scepticism, criticising what he viewed as excessively politicised meetings, and reminded his counterparts that Turkic solidarity was historically fragile (Robins, 1998). Moreover, linguistic divergences further exposed the limits of this nascent bloc. Russian remained, ironically, the working language at Turkic speaking summits, as it was the only one shared by all leaders except Turkish President Demirel. The Baku Summit of 2000, marked by the absence of the Turkmen and Uzbek presidents confirmed the failure of early Turkic integration.

3. Recalibrating Ambitions: Türkiye's Cultural Turn in Central Asia

Following the diplomatic setbacks of the early 1990s, President Süleyman Demirel soon opted for a more pragmatic strategy in Central Asia. He realised that, more than political alignment or energy cooperation, it was the cultural and educational dimensions that could most effectively sustain long-term rapprochement among the Turkic-speaking states. This reorientation quickly materialised through the establishment of the International Organisation of Turkic Culture (TÜRKSOY) in 1992, often described as the UNESCO of the Turkic

6- This rapprochement was notably formalised through Azerbaijan's ratification of its membership in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), a structure serving as one of Moscow's principal instruments of influence in the post-Soviet space.

Year : 2025 Volume : 35 Number : 2 ISSN : 1111-3561 EISSN : 2716-957X

world (Dogac, 2017, p. 2). Indeed, TÜRKSOY aimed to strengthen linguistic and cultural ties among Turkic peoples, preserve their shared heritage, and promote it internationally. Its explicitly apolitical character encouraged participation from all Turkic republics and even some Turkic-speaking regions within the Russian Federation, which were granted an observer status.

However, the technical and linguistic challenges of cultural integration soon became apparent. One of Ankara's early ambitions was to create a common Turkic language that could eventually serve as a unifying instrument among the Turkic-speaking states, an idea that proved utopian. As Bayram Balci (2005) observes, intercomprehension is possible only within certain Turkic linguistic subgroups:

"A Turk from Istanbul can make himself understood in Baku or Ashgabat, though with greater difficulty in Turkmenistan than in Azerbaijan; but if he travels to Almaty or Bishkek, he will need an interpreter."

Therefore, Türkiye also encouraged its partners to replace the Cyrillic alphabet with the Latin script, hoping to facilitate linguistic convergence. In this context, TÜRKSOY and the Turkish Language Association (Türk Dil Kurumu) spearheaded the development of a Pan-Turkic alphabet of 34 Latin letters (Ercilasun, 1997). Yet the results were mixed. While Azerbaijan and the Crimean Tatars adopted versions consistent with the proposed alphabet, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan designed their own Latin-based systems, while Kazakhstan[7] and Kyrgyzstan retained the Cyrillic script.

7- In 2017, President Nursultan Nazarbayev announced the transition of the Kazakh language from the Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet, a reform intended to modernise the national linguistic system and symbolically reinforce Kazakhstan's cultural alignment with the Turkic world. The transition process is scheduled to be completed by 2025.

Year : 2025 Volume : 35 Number : 2 ISSN : 1111-3561 EISSN : 2716-957X

Recognising these limits, Ankara gradually redirected its focus toward cultural education and symbolic representation. One significant initiative was the integration of Central Asian cultures into Turkish school curricula. As such, Turkish textbooks were revised so that, alongside the national symbols of Atatürk and the flag, they now featured a map of the Turkic world, stretching "from the Adriatic to the Great Wall of China" (Avatkov & Sbitneva, 2022). This pedagogical shift aimed to familiarise Turkish students with a broader Turkic identity and to embed the notion of a shared civilisational space in the national imagination.

In parallel, public institutions and private foundations in Türkiye increasingly sponsored cultural and scientific exchanges with the Turkic republics of Central Asia. Works of Central Asian literature were translated and disseminated in Türkiye as expressions of a shared Turkic heritage, helping to cultivate a subtle yet enduring sense of belonging that transcended political fragmentation. Education also became a key instrument of this cultural diplomacy. Türkiye established joint universities, the most emblematic being the Turkish–Kazakh Ahmet Yesevi University, named after the 12th-century Sufi mystic regarded as a founding figure of Turkic literature and spirituality (Privratsky, 2001, p. 23). Located in the historic city of Turkistan, birthplace of the Yeseviyya brotherhood, the university embodies Ankara's effort to anchor contemporary cooperation in a common cultural and spiritual memory deeply resonant among Anatolians, Kazakhs, Uzbeks and Turkmens alike.

In this way, Pan-Turkism entered a new phase, no longer a project of territorial unification or political leadership, but a cultural and linguistic strategy of influence, laying the groundwork for the institutional developments that would follow in the late 2000s. Nevertheless, these efforts were not sufficient to convince the former Soviet republics to embrace the Pan-Turkist vision. Most Central Asian states remained within Russia's strategic orbit, maintaining strong

Year : 2025 Volume : 35 Number : 2 ISSN : 1111-3561 EISSN : 2716-957X

political, economic, and security ties with Moscow. Relations between Türkiye and Uzbekistan continued to deteriorate, while other republics grew increasingly wary of Ankara's Pan-Turkist ambitions (Aras, 1997). This was particularly the case of Turkmenistan, whose leader Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow favoured a policy of permanent neutrality. Only Azerbaijan actively aligned itself with Türkiye's, but this cooperation remained strictly bilateral, limiting the possibility of a broader regional integration.

Disheartened by these successive setbacks, the momentum of Pan-Turkism gradually faded in the early 2000s, giving way to a new political orientation, a period marked by pro-European aspirations and Türkiye's intensified efforts to deepen its relationship with the European Union (Balci & Ahmet, 2001, p. 16). Indeed, Türkiye's application to join the European Union, formally accepted in 1999, dominated its diplomatic agenda, with accession negotiations planned to begin in 2005. Under President Ahmet Necdet Sezer, Ankara shifted its attention from Central Asian capitals to Paris, Berlin and Brussels, signalling a clear reorientation of priorities. Apart from Azerbaijan, relations with the other Turkic republics stagnated. No Turkic summit was convened between 2001 and 2006, despite the initial ambition to make them annual events. By the mid-2000s, Pan-Turkism appeared politically exhausted.

Yet, paradoxically, it was during this period of apparent decline that Pan-Turkism achieved its most enduring institutional milestone. In 2009, under the initiative of Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev, the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States (CCTSS) was established by the Nakhchivan Agreement (Gafarlı, 2020). This development reflected Kazakhstan's growing desire for strategic autonomy, as Nazarbayev sought to balance relations among Moscow, Ankara and the West. Besides, the global financial crisis of 2008 accelerated a wider trend of emancipation within Central Asia. In a context marked by shifting power dynamics, Pan-Turkism re-emerged

Year : 2025 Volume : 35 Number : 2 ISSN : 1111-3561 EISSN : 2716-957X

not as an instrument of Turkish expansion but as a collective framework for cooperation among Turkic republics (Shumilov, 2022). This evolution transformed Pan-Turkism from a political ideology into a pragmatic mechanism of multilateral solidarity, paving the way for the eventual creation of the Organisation of Turkic States (OTS) in 2021.

4. Pan-Turkism in the Age of Renaissance: The Organisation of Turkic States

The Summit of Turkic States held in Samarkand in November 2022 surprised many observers by the coherence of the Turkic bloc in a turbulent geopolitical environment marked by the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. This renewed dynamism can be explained by a series of converging developments.

Türkiye's failure to join the European Union and the subsequent slowdown in its European orientation encouraged Ankara to reconsider its traditional spheres of influence. The election of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in 2014 consolidated this shift (Devrim, 2022, p. 69). Once a Europhile as prime minister, Erdoğan redefined Türkiye's external posture as president, turning toward the Turkic world as both a natural cultural sphere and a promising arena for diplomatic and economic expansion. Unlike the 1990s, Türkiye now possessed the means to support its ambitions. Its growing economic weight and expanding defence industry gave Ankara new credibility. At the same time, the multi-vector foreign policies of Central Asian states, opened new possibilities for partnership and diversification.

A key moment came in 2021, when Türkiye transformed the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States (CCTSS) into the Organisation of Turkic States (OTS)[8] during the Istanbul Summit. The

8- The accession of Uzbekistan as a full member of the Organisation of Turkic States (OTS) in 2019 marked a turning point in the institutional consolidation

Year : 2025 Volume : 35 Number : 2 ISSN : 1111-3561 EISSN : 2716-957X

OTS was formalised through the adoption of the "Turkic World Vision 2040", a strategic blueprint that set ambitious objectives for cooperation (Yaldiz, 2023, pp. 68-69). Conceived as a long-term roadmap for regional integration, the Turkic World Vision 2040 establishes a solid political and operational foundation for cooperation structured around four main pillars: (i) political and security coordination, (ii) economic and sectoral integration, (iii) people-to-people and cultural interaction, and (iv) collaboration with external partners. These broad axes are further detailed through eighteen specific areas of action, reflecting the ambition to transform the OTS from a symbolic forum into a structured intergovernmental organisation capable of articulating a shared Turkic agenda.

of the Turkic bloc. Under the long rule of President Islam Karimov, Tashkent maintained a cautious distance from Ankara, wary of Turkish influence and suspicious of Pan-Turkist rhetoric. The arrival of Shavkat Mirziyoyev brought a recalibration of Uzbek foreign policy, making full membership in the OTS a symbolically and politically significant gesture. Equally notable was Turkmenistan's decision to join the OTS as an observer state in 2021, a major development for a country that has consistently upheld a doctrine of permanent neutrality. Historically reluctant to align itself with any regional bloc, Ashgabat's limited engagement with the OTS. Perhaps most intriguing, however, is the observer membership of Hungary under Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. Though neither Turkic-speaking nor Muslim, Hungary's participation reflects Orbán's broader strategy of Eurasian reorientation, seeking to diversify Budapest's partnerships beyond the European Union and cultivate ties with Turkic nations under the banner of shared Turanian heritage, a reference to a nineteenth-century Hungarian nationalist myth positing ethnic and cultural kinship between Hungarians and Central Asian Turkic peoples. For Orbán, joining the OTS serves both symbolic and pragmatic purposes: asserting Hungary's distinct identity within Europe while enhancing economic and geopolitical linkages with Ankara and Central Asia.

Year : 2025 Volume : 35 Number : 2 ISSN : 1111-3561 EISSN : 2716-957X

Indeed, beyond the cultural sphere exemplified by the Common Alphabet Commission (Artigues, 2025), the OTS aims to deepen economic integration, notably through the creation of a Turkic Investment Fund and the development of the Trans-Caspian East-West-Middle Corridor, intended to compete China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In doing so, Ankara seeks to reduce regional dependence on Beijing's networks. Besides, in the energy field, Türkiye aspires to become a regional gas hub, linking Central Asian producers to European markets through Azerbaijan and the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline.

On the military front, Ankara's influence has been bolstered by the export of Bayraktar TB2 drones, used by Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh and by Kyrgyzstan during its border clashes with Tajikistan. Politically, the so-called Zangezur Corridor, connecting Türkiye to Azerbaijan via Nakhchivan, has given geographical expression to the concept of a "Turkic corridor" across Eurasia (Tanchum, 2021). For Ankara, this represents both a logistical opportunity and a symbolic link to the broader Turkic world.

Thus, the Turkic World Vision 2040 epitomises the transformation of the OTS from a symbolic consultative platform into a structured intergovernmental organisation with genuine ambitions for multidimensional integration. Yet, this assertiveness also fuels apprehension among neighbouring states, some perceiving modern Pan-Turkism as an ambitious geopolitical project rather than a purely fraternal initiative.

Indeed, divergences persist within the OTS. Several members have expressed caution regarding Türkiye's leadership role. The 2022 Samarkand Summit revealed such tensions when Ankara proposed granting observer status to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), an entity recognised only by Türkiye (Yaldiz, 2023, p. 77). The initiative was met with reservations from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, both of which reaffirmed their commitment to the principle of

Year : 2025 Volume : 35 Number : 2 ISSN : 1111-3561 EISSN : 2716-957X

territorial integrity. Turkmenistan, meanwhile, continues to hold observer status within the OTS, maintaining its longstanding policy of neutrality.

Besides, the choice of Samarkand as the venue for the 2022 summit was symbolically significant. The same city had, within the same year, hosted two other major international gatherings: the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit and the EU–Central Asia Connectivity Conference, reflecting the strategic competition of influence currently at play in the region (McGlinchey & Dzhuraev, 2022). This coincidence vividly illustrates the multi-vector diplomacy of Central Asian states, which seek to balance relations among competing powers such as Russia, China, the European Union and Türkiye, while safeguarding their autonomy.

Ultimately, the Organisation of Turkic States stands as both the culmination and redefinition of Pan-Turkism, transforming it from a nostalgic ideal into a flexible, interest-driven framework for cooperation. Whether it evolves into a genuine geopolitical bloc or remains a platform of symbolic solidarity will depend on Ankara's ability to balance leadership with equality, ambition with partnership, and ideology with pragmatism.

Conclusion

It is undeniable that Türkiye maintains enduring irredentist and cultural affinities with Azerbaijan and the Central Asian republics, rooted in shared Turkic origins; linguistic, historical, and religious, all of which are encapsulated in the broad and often nostalgic concept of Pan-Turkism. Yet, the modern form promoted by Ankara is far less about fraternal solidarity than about strategic adaptation. Contemporary Pan-Turkism has become a vector of Realpolitik, reflecting Türkiye's pragmatic use of identity to consolidate its regional influence.

Year : 2025 Volume : 35 Number : 2 ISSN : 1111-3561 EISSN : 2716-957X

The war in Ukraine and the consequent reconfiguration of Russia's regional posture have created a strategic vacuum in Central Asia, one that Türkiye, China, and India are all striving to fill. In this emerging competition between Ankara and Beijing, every instrument of influence is being mobilised, including what might be described as ideological engineering, whereby Türkiye employs the discourse of Pan-Turkism to legitimise its growing involvement in the region.

For the Central Asian states, this rivalry provides a valuable opportunity to enhance their strategic autonomy. They are skilfully leveraging the competing courtships of Türkiye, China, the European Union, and a still-watchful Russia, whose doctrine of the "near abroad" continues to view any external penetration into Central Asia as undesirable. While Moscow has traditionally regarded Pan-Turkism with suspicion, its relationship with Ankara has remained paradoxically cordial, united by a shared rejection of Atlanticism. Some analysts even suggest the possibility of a tactical accommodation between Russia and Türkiye in the region; a pragmatic understanding aimed at preserving influence amid Western disengagement.

Ultimately, the future of Pan-Turkism and the Organisation of Turkic States will depend on the evolving balance of power in Eurasia. Should Russia's position further erode and China's assertiveness continue to rise, Ankara may find new space to assert its ambitions. Yet its success will rely less on historical nostalgia than on its ability to translate cultural fraternity into a cooperative, equitable, and sustainable regional order.

Year : 2025 Volume : 35 Number : 2 ISSN : 1111-3561 EISSN : 2716-957X

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