

**Citation List:** Altunışık, M. (2026). Türkiye and the Organization of Turkic States: Regionalism, identity, and strategic alignment in Eurasia. In Ş. Aktürk & A. Balcı (Eds.), *Azerbaijan and Türkiye in world politics* (pp. 313-325). Turkish Academy of Sciences Publications.

---

## **CHAPTER 20**

# **TÜRKİYE AND THE ORGANIZATION OF TURKIC STATES: REGIONALISM, IDENTITY, AND STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT IN EURASIA**

**Meliha ALTUNIŞIK**

## **TÜRKİYE AND THE ORGANIZATION OF TURKIC STATES: REGIONALISM, IDENTITY, AND STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT IN EURASIA**

**Meliha ALTUNIŞIK**  
*Middle East Technical University*

### **Abstract**

This paper examines Türkiye's engagement with the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) as a key vector of its broader geopolitical and geoeconomic strategy in Eurasia. Rooted in shared linguistic, cultural and historical ties, the OTS has evolved from a consultative forum into an institutionalized framework for political, economic and security cooperation among Turkic countries. Türkiye has played a leading role in shaping this evolution. The paper argues that Türkiye's activism within the OTS reflects its strategy of leveraging cultural proximity to expand influence, strengthen regional leadership and achieve strategic autonomy in an increasingly multipolar international order. Situated within the literature on regionalism, the study conceptualizes the OTS as both a product and an instrument of identity-based regionalism. It demonstrates how the organization contributes to constructing a sense of "Turkic actorness" and fostering region-building in Eurasia. However, it also identifies significant challenges that constrain its institutional consolidation and deepening cooperation. Internal divergences among member states, concerns over sovereignty, and differing priorities continue to limit deeper integration, while external factors, including the competing influence of Russia, China, the European Union, and the United States, as well as the existence of overlapping Eurasian frameworks, curb the organization's geopolitical maneuverability. Ultimately, the paper concludes that the OTS embodies both the opportunities and constraints of regionalism in a contested geopolitical space. For Türkiye, it represents a strategic platform to translate cultural affinity into political and economic alignment, yet Ankara faces structural limits inherent in a region marked by diverse loyalties and great-power competition.

### **Keywords**

*Organization of Turkic States (OTS), Turkic Council, Regionalism in Eurasia, Türkiye's Foreign Policy, Identity-based Regionalism*

## **Introduction**

Türkiye's engagement with the Turkic Council (officially the Organization of Turkic States -OTC-since 2021) represents a strategic dimension of its regional diplomacy, rooted in shared linguistic, cultural, and historical ties among Turkic countries. Since its beginnings in 1992, the founding of the Turkic Council in 2009, and finally its renaming as the OTC, the organization has evolved from a cultural and consultative platform into a more structured mechanism for regional cooperation, encompassing political, economic, security, and connectivity initiatives. Türkiye has played a central role in shaping the OTC's institutional framework, promoting Turkic solidarity, and advancing infrastructure and trade integration projects, including the Middle Corridor initiative that aims to link Central Asia to Europe via the South Caucasus and Türkiye. Ankara's recent proactive diplomacy within the OTC reflects its broader geopolitical aspirations to enhance influence across Eurasia, counterbalance external powers, and promote a multipolar regional order. Moreover, Türkiye leverages the organization to strengthen bilateral ties with other member states, namely Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan, while also encouraging observer and dialogue partner engagement from other states with Turkic heritage.

The 2020 Second Karabakh War and the 2021 renaming of the organization signaled a more assertive phase of regional alignment, with members such as Türkiye and Azerbaijan emphasizing the strategic and cultural unity of the Turkic world. This paper aims to examine the trajectory, motivations, and implications of Türkiye's engagement with the OTC, arguing that it is a key vector of Ankara's regional foreign policy that complements its aspirations for leadership within the broader Turkic and Eurasian geopolitical landscape. It argues that the Turkic Council is also an example of Türkiye's foreign policy strategy of leveraging cultural proximity to be an actor in one of its regions. As such, the paper also situates the Turkic Council and Türkiye's relations with it within the regionalism literature. Finally, the paper explores the possibilities and limitations of the OTC as a regional organization and analyzing how these dynamics shape and constrain Türkiye's broader regional engagement strategy.

### **1. Defining a region: The emergence of a Turkic World as a Region**

Regions are not inherent or self-evident; rather, they are constructed and reconstructed through political, cultural, and economic interactions (Acharya, 2012). The Organization of Turkic States (OTS) exemplifies how shared identity, rather than strict geography, becomes the basis for regional formation. Through its development and expansion, the OTS illustrates how regionalism is a strategic project carried out by states and other political actors to articulate regional interests and identity-an exercise in what Björn Hettne and Frederik Söderbaum (2010) describe as *regionness*.

The OTS brings together countries such as Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Türkiye and Uzbekistan, as part of a "region" on the basis of shared linguistic, historical, and cultural ties-what might be called a "common regional identity". Turkmenistan, Hungary and recently Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) have become observer states. The OTS, thus, demonstrates that the perception and interpretation of region are what ultimately define it. This aligns closely with Acharya's constructivist view, whereby a region is not bound by geography but shaped through shared experiences, narratives, and identity construction (Acharya, 2014).

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the independence of the Turkic states, the foundations of the Organization of Turkic States were laid with the Turkic-Speaking States Summit held in Ankara in 1992 (Organization of Turkic States, 2025a). The institutionalization of cooperation among Turkic-speaking states has been a gradual and evolving process, shaped by both geopolitical dynamics and domestic political shifts within member countries. The first step came in 1996 with the establishment of a Secretariat and the preparation of a charter. This initial phase reflected a limited degree of institutionalization, as the

Secretariat's role was largely confined to preparing for summits. Indeed, summit diplomacy constituted the primary mode of engagement during this period (TekeTek, 2025).

Efforts were made to introduce further structure, including an attempt to establish a rotating presidency. However, these plans were blocked at that time by Uzbekistan, highlighting the challenges of aligning national interests within a multilateral framework (TekeTek, 2025). A notable turning point came with the 2006 Antalya Summit, which laid the groundwork for a more formalized organization (Assembly of Turkic States, 2006).

The Nakhchivan Agreement of 2009 marked a significant institutional breakthrough, formally creating the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States, also known as the Turkic Council (Nakhchivan Agreement, 2009). In 2010, a Secretariat was established to provide a permanent bureaucratic basis for cooperation. This period also saw the signing of several agreements affirming the principle of sovereign equality among members.

The organization continued to evolve and at the Istanbul Summit on November 12, 2021, the council's name was changed to "Organization of Turkic States" (OTC). In fact, the Istanbul Summit became a turning point for several reasons: the renaming of the organization, the admission of Turkmenistan as an observer member, the adoption of the 2040 Vision Document (Organization of Turkic States, 2025b), and the drafting of the 2022–2026 Strategic Roadmap, which was later adopted at the Samarkand Summit in 2022 (Organization of Turkic States, 2025c). These developments marked a new era where the organization aimed to deepen regional cooperation. The strengthening of regional cooperation reflected not only broader shifts in the political, economic, and ideational orientations of member countries but also the changing geopolitics of the region amid rising multipolarity. These transformations ultimately shaped the extent and depth of regional cooperation.

## 2. Türkiye and the OTC

Türkiye has been one of the driving actors in the establishment and the evolution of the OTC. The idea of building institutional framework among Turkic states emerged in the early 1990s, when the dissolution of the Soviet Union brought newly independent states in Central Asia and the Caucasus onto the international stage. For Ankara, this new geopolitical context presented both a historical reconnection with a region from which it had been cut off during the Cold War, and an opportunity to reposition itself in a rapidly changing global order. At a time when Türkiye's Western identity was under strain, when NATO's future was in question and Ankara's 1989 membership application was rejected by the European Community, Turkish foreign and security elites began to imagine a new regional identity grounded in cultural and historical ties. Then-President Süleyman Demirel referred to this new imagined geography when he said a Turkic world had just emerged "stretching from the Balkans to Great Wall of China" (Hale, 2000, p. 223).

Although early euphoric expectations soon gave way to the realities of limited capacity, contested influence, and Russia's return, the region remained a central element in Turkish foreign policy throughout the 1990s. Ankara's regional engagement combined economic, energy, cultural and political dimensions. Competition over Caspian hydrocarbon resources placed Türkiye, alongside Russia and Iran as key players, with Ankara advancing the Caspian–Mediterranean Oil Pipeline Project in 1994, backed by Washington. This vision culminated in the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, cementing Türkiye's role as a vital energy transit country. At the same time, Turkish companies expanded into construction, telecommunications, and textiles, while aid was delivered through newly-established Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), which delivered nearly 90% of development aid to Central Asia between 1992 and 1996 (Alaranta & Silvan, 2022). Culturally, Ankara strengthened ties through scholarship programs, cultural centers, media broadcasts, joint universities, and the creation of institutions such as the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic States (TÜRKPAA), the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TURKSOY), and the Summits of the Heads of Turkic Speaking States (Altunışık, 2024, pp. 718-19). To enhance cooperation

in religious matters, the Eurasian Islamic Council was established in 1994, headquartered in Ankara, serving as a consultative mechanism. Infrastructure projects—roads, railways, pipelines—were promoted as means of deepening connectivity (Altunışık, 2024, pp. 718–19). Thus, during the 1990s, Türkiye’s approach focused on leveraging cultural proximity, primarily religious and ethnic connections, and employing soft power to engage with the region to pursue strategic, economic and energy interests (Köstem, 2017).

Yet, Türkiye’s activism was checked by structural constraints. Its limited economic resources and domestic challenges curbed its influence, while Russia viewed Turkish initiatives, especially the Turkic Summits and pipeline projects, with suspicion, often portraying them as Pan-Turkist encroachments. The resulting competition narrowed Türkiye’s strategic room for maneuver (Aydın, 2003). By the late 1990s, the “Turkic world” had become just one of Türkiye’s multiple regional identities, reflecting its status as a Cusp State located at the intersection of several regions but never fully embedded in any single one (Altunışık, 2023).

In such a context, Türkiye increasingly sought legitimacy and belonging through institutionalized regionalism. Regional multilateralism has long been a feature of its foreign policy, and in this case Ankara’s sustained engagement contributed to the gradual institutionalization of Turkic cooperation. This trajectory culminated in the transformation of the Turkic Summits into OTS. In the 2020s, Ankara has doubled down on its engagement with this region again (Altunışık, 2024). The OTS has become a key platform for projecting Türkiye’s political, strategic, economic and cultural ties with the region. The OTS’ crucial November 2021 Istanbul Summit underscored Türkiye’s central role in shaping the Organization’s vision. The organization, which is headquartered in İstanbul, has since emerged as a vital institution for Türkiye to emphasize cultural proximity and further deepen its ties with the region (Kahveci & Kuşçu Bonnenfant, 2023).

Taken together, Türkiye’s engagement with the OTS illustrates its broader strategy as a Cusp State: seeking to blur and expand regional boundaries, using institutionalized regionalism to reconcile multiple identities, and leveraging cultural proximity as soft power (Altunışık, 2023). Yet, both in the 1990s and today, Ankara’s aspirations have faced significant external and domestic constraints, from Russia’s dominance and regional conflicts in the post-Soviet space to great-power rivalries and delicate balancing act of the current era.

### **3. OTC Regionalism at the nexus of domestic and global politics**

Regionalism, as a political project, emerges at the intersection of domestic and systemic dynamics. In the case of the OTS, domestic politics have been decisive in shaping both the scope and depth of regional cooperation. In the 2020s domestic elites throughout the region has been promoting Turkic regionalism based on perceived national interest, economic benefit, and political security. Türkiye’s pivot toward Eurasia illustrates this trend. The so-called “Eurasian shift” in Ankara’s orientation has provided the ideological justification (Tüysüzöğlü, 2023). Consequently, Türkiye’s engagement with Central Asia and the South Caucasus has expanded beyond cultural diplomacy, trade and energy cooperation to encompass arms sales and strategic partnerships. The Second Karabakh War in 2020 crystallized this reorientation, as Ankara’s support for Baku elevated Türkiye’s role in the South Caucasus and reinforced its critical place within the OTS. Since the Second Karabakh War, Azerbaijan also has redefined its regional role as a bridge between Türkiye and Central Asia. In the 2020s the member states of the OTC, especially Türkiye and Azerbaijan, began to present a vision of turning OTC into a regional integration project. The President of Azerbaijan İlham Aliyev in his opening speech of the National Assembly in February 2024 stated that “our family is the Turkic world” and “our policy is to solidify the Organization of Turkic States” (Aliyev, 2024).

Similarly, domestic political will in Central Asian republics has also influenced their engagement with the OTS. In Kazakhstan, a notable shift occurred in 2019 when founding president Nursultan Nazarbayev was succeeded by Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. Tokayev introduced his reform agenda under the banner of “New Kazakhstan” (*Jana Qazaqstan*), reaffirming a pragmatic multi-vector foreign policy, aimed not only at Great Powers, but also at strengthening ties with regional partners (Vanderhill, et. al., 2020). In this framework, Tokayev has repeatedly emphasized Kazakhstan’s commitment to deepening cooperation within the OTC

(See, for instance, Omirgazy, 2025). An earlier leadership transition in Uzbekistan proved even more consequential. The rise of Shavkat Mirziyoyev marked a decisive turn toward greater regional engagement. Under his leadership, Uzbekistan, which had long kept its distance, joined the OTS in 2019. This move signaled both broader reorientation in Uzbek foreign policy and better relations with Türkiye, which had encouraged Uzbekistan's accession during Mirziyoyev's visit to Ankara in October 2017 (Hashimova, 2019). Turkmenistan, by contrast, has maintained its inward-looking stance and refrained from becoming a full member. However, it was also a significant development that Turkmenistan did join the Organization as an observer at the 2021 Istanbul Summit, where the Organization was also renamed.

Systemically, the shifting dynamics of global politics, especially increasing multipolarity and the waning dominance of Western-led multilateralism, create space for regional initiatives like the OTS. The rise of regional powers and the relative decline of globalization's integrative force make regional organizations more attractive as instruments of influence and security. Thus, as a project of regionalism, the OTS shows how states, driven by both domestic imperatives and systemic opportunities, can construct a region and deepen cooperation through deliberate political action.

The foreign policy shifts of regional states cannot be understood in isolation but must be situated within the broader transformations of the regional and global order. Three dynamics stand out in this regard. First, the Taliban's return to power and subsequent withdrawal of the US and NATO from Afghanistan fundamentally altered the geostrategic environment. These developments in a neighboring region accelerated the reconfiguration of regional alignments and deepened security cooperation among regional states. Second, Russia's traditional role as the dominant external actor in the region has been weakened since its invasion of Ukraine. As it became evident that the war in Ukraine would last far longer than anticipated, Russia's presence and influence in Central Asia and the South Caucasus declined (Primiano & O'Neill, 2025), which allowed regional states to diversify their foreign relations. Third, overall, the region has increasingly become an arena of multipolar competition, which created a limited regional autonomy.

Among the external actors, China has consolidated its presence most effectively, driven by economic and energy interests as well as domestic security concerns related to neighboring Xinjiang province. As a result, since the beginning of the 2000s, Beijing has developed comprehensive strategic partnerships with all the regional countries, proposed a region-wide cooperation mechanism, C+C5 (Peng, 2023), and expanded trade from 1.7 billion USD in 2000 to nearly 40 billion USD in 2019 (Sim and Aminjonov, 2022, p. 1).

On the other hand, Russia, despite the erosion of its dominance, remains a key actor in the region (Laruelle, 2022). Its geographic proximity, deep historical ties, and entrenched economic and energy interdependencies ensure that it continues to play a significant role in the region. Trade with several Central Asian states has in fact grown, and countries such as Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan still rely heavily on Russian transit routes for their oil and gas exports (Umarov, 2022).

Meanwhile, Western actors are recalibrating their engagement with the region. The US has revived its interest in the region largely to contain Russia and counter China's growing influence (Rudenshiold, 2025). The EU, particularly after the Ukraine war and the energy crisis, has sought closer ties through initiatives such as its 2019 Central Asia Strategy, the 2022 EU-Central Asia Summit in Astana, and the Connectivity Conference in Samarkand (European Union External Action, 2022). Like China, the EU emphasizes connectivity, including digital and energy links.

Finally, other middle powers are also reasserting themselves. Iran has prioritized Central Asia and South Caucasus both to end its isolation and to benefit from transit trade, positioning itself as a balancing actor (Shariffi & Koseoglu, 2022). India also has been developing transport projects under the North-South Transport Corridor to expand economic and energy cooperation with the region (Uljevic, 2024).

In sum, the reconfiguration of the regional order—marked by the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, the erosion of Russia's dominance after the war in Ukraine, China's expanding influence, and growing

competition among major and middle powers-has compelled regional states to recalibrate their foreign policies. While external powers remain central, the limits of reliance on any single actor have become increasingly evident. It is precisely in this context that the OTS has emerged as a strategic alternative, enabling its members to hedge against external dependency, diversify partnerships, and articulate a more autonomous regional agenda. As a result, far from being a purely cultural or symbolic framework, the OTS started to gain traction as an instrument through which its members seek to navigate great power rivalries, assert agency, and strengthen intra-regional cooperation. The deepening relevance of the OTS thus reflects not only shared identity but also the systemic pressures that make regionalism an attractive, and at times necessary, strategy for its members.

#### **4. Successes and Limitations of the OTC**

Hettne and Söderbaum's (2010) concept of *regionness*, that is the capacity of a region to define and project its identity and interests, offers a useful lens to evaluate the trajectory of the Organization of Turkic States. Over the past decade, the OTS has made significant progress in moving from symbolic declarations of shared cultural heritage toward more institutionalized and tangible forms of cooperation, signaling its evolution into a coherent regional actor.

One major success has been the strengthening of institutional capacity. From its origins as a loose forum for dialogue, the OTS has gradually developed the structures and mechanisms necessary to coordinate policies and initiatives among member states. This institutional deepening reflects a shift from aspirational rhetoric toward practical governance.

The establishment of the OTC has also been useful in increasing trade relations among its member states. For example, a comparative study of members' foreign trade based on pre- and post-foundation trade data demonstrated the effectiveness of the OTC in enhancing trade cooperation among its members (Çetinkaya & Demirel, 2023). The investment in connectivity projects is very important to further facilitate trade between member states. In fact, another key area of progress of the OTC lies in connectivity projects, which enhance physical and economic linkages across the Turkic world. Initiatives in transport, energy, and digital infrastructure not only aim to facilitate trade but also create interdependence among member states, strengthening the foundation of regional cooperation. The decision to establish the "Alliance of Logistics Centers and Cargo Carriers," under the auspices of the OTS Transport Connectivity Program, is critical in this regard. These connectivity projects are also relevant for increasing strategic importance of the region for global politics. According to ambassador Halil Akıncı, former Secretary General of the Turkic Council, there has been a strategic logic guiding the organization from the outset. This has been described as a "middle-tier" or "middle-belt" approach, which in recent years has found concrete expression in the Middle Corridor initiative, a project linking the Turkic states more closely through infrastructure, trade, and connectivity (TekeTek, 2025).

The OTC is designed as a multi-purpose regional organization that aims to develop cooperation among its members on various issue areas. A landmark step in cultural and symbolic integration came with the creation and adoption of a 34-letter common alphabet based on the Latin script in September 2024 in Baku (Turkic Academy, 2024), an initiative spearheaded by Türkiye. This move underscores the region's ambition to forge a shared identity while enabling smoother communication across borders. Such initiatives illustrate how cultural affinity is being translated into concrete unifying practices. Recently the member states signed the first official agreement of cooperation on AI and a common large language model platform. There is also environmental and climate cooperation. Complementing this has been municipal cooperation, where city-to-city partnerships create bottom-up linkages that ground the OTS in everyday governance and bring regionalism closer to citizens' lives.

In recent years steps have also been taken advancing security cooperation. In fact, there has been an increasing number of security-themed meetings, such as the first meeting of Internal Affairs Ministers

and the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting of National Security Councils Secretaries in September 2025. Notably, the Karabakh Declaration included an agreement to “continue joint activity in the field of the defense industry” among members, recalling the decision to develop a joint security “Road Map” from last October’s meeting of National Security Councilors. Such agreements and cooperation could herald increased defense and security alignment among OTS members (Toghrol & Shifman, 2024). The first meeting of the Heads of Defense Industry Institutions of the OTS occurred in July 2025 in Istanbul, alongside the International Defense Industry Fair. The participants discussed institutionalizing a multilateral platform for defense industry collaboration under the OTS framework (Organization of Turkic States, 2025d).

These developments point to an increasing degree of “actorness.” The OTS is no longer merely an imagined community bound by historical and linguistic ties but is emerging as a regional organization capable of projecting a collective identity and pursuing common interests. It is positioning itself as a more visible and influential player in regional and global affairs.

However, the OTC also faces significant challenges. The concept of *regionness* also provides a useful lens to identify the constraints that complicate the OTS’ trajectory. Just as the OTS has progressed from symbolic expressions of cultural affinity to concrete cooperation, it continues to face challenges that slow or even obstruct its evolution into a consolidated regional actor.

The first set of challenges stems from within the region itself. Internal cohesion remains fragile, as member states differ significantly in their economic structures and foreign policy priorities. These divergences weaken the capacity of the OTS to act collectively. An important consideration in this regard is about sovereignty concerns: governments remain reluctant to transfer authority to regional institutions, fearing encroachments on national autonomy. Domestic politics add another layer of unpredictability, as changes in leadership, government priorities, or public attitudes can easily disrupt integration efforts. Moreover, member states often prioritize different aspects of cooperation. While Central Asian states tend to be more inward-looking and to favor collaboration on non-political issues, Türkiye, supported increasingly by Azerbaijan, has sought to expand organization’s agenda to include security and foreign policy matters. Ankara’s push for the recognition of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) as an observer in 2022 exemplifies this tendency. Recently, at the 12th Turkic States Summit convened in October 2025 in Gabala, Azerbaijan, President Erdoğan called upon the Turkic states to strengthen the role of the OTC in regional security (Demir & Tekin, 2025). Taken together, these dynamics reflect the difficulty of moving from loosely connected *regional society* to a more institutionalized and effective *regional actor*.

A second set of challenges arises from the broader geopolitical environment. Great powers, namely China, the European Union, Russia and the United States, view the Turkic world as strategically significant and often intervene to advance their own agendas and interests. Russia, historically dominant in Central Asia and the Caucasus, remains wary of any organization that might dilute its influence and is particularly sensitive to expressions of Pan-Turkic solidarity. China’s Belt and Road Initiative offers substantial economic and infrastructure opportunities but also creates asymmetrical dependencies. The EU has intensified its outreach, exemplified by the EU–Central Asia Summit in Samarkand in April 2025, offering alternative partnerships that may weaken OTS cohesion. Washington’s sponsorship of a peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia, under which the Zangezur Corridor would be managed by the US, highlights how external actors compete to shape regional connectivity and influence (Al Jazeera, 2025).

These dynamics situate the OTS within a contested geopolitical arena, where external actors frequently shape, constrain, or compete with its initiatives. Such pressures fragment the region and complicate the OTS’s efforts to consolidate its identity and pursue autonomous regional strategies.

Türkiye’s strategy for deepening cooperation among Turkic states cooperation rests on leveraging shared Turkic identity to promote alignment in economic, defense, connectivity and foreign policy domains. This approach strengthens Ankara’s position as a regional power, mitigates its *cuspness*, and supports its pursuit of strategic autonomy amid in an increasing multipolar international order (Altunışık, 2026).

However, Türkiye's pursuit of an independent regional course faces multiple constraints. It must contend with the presence of existing Eurasian frameworks, including the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which limit the space for autonomous Turkic initiatives. Furthermore, such an independent course is also challenged by the policies of Türkiye's traditional allies the US and the EU. The US's role as an overseer and guarantor of the Zangezur Corridor, while not completely disadvantageous to Türkiye as it is to Iran for example, nonetheless weakens Ankara's ambition for independent regional leadership. Similarly, the decisions of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan to open embassies or appoint diplomatic representatives in the Republic of Cyprus and to endorse the EU position on the Cyprus conflict in the context of a 12 billion Euro partnership deal, illustrate both the limits of Türkiye's influence and the enduring pull of the external actors on the Turkic states (Uslu, 2025).

## **5. Conclusion**

The evolution of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) reflects a broader transformation in the regional order of Eurasia, where identity, geopolitics, and functional cooperation increasingly intersect. From its origins as a forum for cultural solidarity, the OTS has gradually developed into a more institutionalized platform for collaboration in connectivity, trade and security in addition to variety of issues. This trajectory demonstrates a growing sense of *regionness* and a gradual consolidation of Turkic actorness within an emerging multipolar global order. As such it is a successful project of region building.

Yet, the organization's progress remains uneven. Internal divergences among member states, persistent concerns over sovereignty, and differing priorities continue to constrain deepening cooperation. Externally, the region's geopolitical landscape remains contested, as global and regional powers such as Russia, China, the European Union and the US compete for influence, sometimes limiting the OTC's room for maneuver.

Within this context, Türkiye has positioned itself as the main driver of Turkic integration, seeking to translate cultural proximity into geopolitical and economic alignment. This strategy enhances its regional standing and supports its aspiration for strategic autonomy but also exposes inherent limits of leadership in a region marked by overlapping loyalties and competing external influences.

In sum, the OTC embodies both the possibilities and constrains of regionalism in Eurasia. Its future will depend on whether its members can create an institutional depth and navigate the delicate balance between cooperation, autonomy, and the pressures of a highly competitive geopolitical environment.

## References

- Acharya, A. (2012). Comparative regionalism: A field whose time has come? *The International Spectator*, 47(1), 3-15.
- Acharya, A. (2014). Global international relations (IR) and regional worlds: A new agenda for international studies. *International Studies Quarterly*, 58(4), 647-659.
- Alaranta, T. & Silvan, K. (2022). Türkiye in Central Asia: Possibilities and limits of a greater role. *FIIA Briefing Paper*. [https://www.fiaa.fi/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/bp328\\_toni-alaranta-kristiina-silvan\\_Türkiye-in-central-asia.pdf](https://www.fiaa.fi/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/bp328_toni-alaranta-kristiina-silvan_Türkiye-in-central-asia.pdf)
- Ali, T. & Shifman, R. (23.07.2024). *OTS rides the middle corridor to the summit*. Caspian Policy Center. [https://caspianpolicy.org/research/middle-corridor/ots-rides-the-middle-corridor-to-the-summit?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://caspianpolicy.org/research/middle-corridor/ots-rides-the-middle-corridor-to-the-summit?utm_source=chatgpt.com)
- Aliyev, İ. (@presidentaz) (2024, February 16). Our family is the Turkic World (Post). X. <https://x.com/presidentaz/status/1758367933196013679>
- Al Jazeera (2025, September 10) Azerbaijan-Armenia agreement: US entry upsets balance of power in the South Caucasus. <https://studies.aljazeera.net/en/policy-briefs/azerbaijan-armenia-agreement-us-entry-upsets-balance-power-south-caucuses>
- Altunışık, M. B. (2024). Türkiye's "Return" to Central Asia in a shifting global and regional context: New opportunities and limitations. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 26(5), 716-731.
- Altunışık, M. B. (2023). The trajectory of a modified middle power: an attempt to make sense of Türkiye's foreign policy in its centennial, *Turkish Studies*, 24(2-4), 658-672.
- Altunışık, M. B. (2014). Geopolitical representation of Türkiye's cuspness: Discourse and practice. In M. Herzog & P. Robins (Eds.) *The Role, Position and Agency of Cusp States in International Relations*, (p. 25-41). Routledge.
- Altunışık, M. (2026). Türkiye as a Cusp State: Conceptualization and implementation. *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace* 15 (1), 28-43.
- Assembly of Turkic States (2006). *The history*. <https://aots.ilerimun.com/study-guide/the-history>
- Atmaca, Ö. & Torun, Z. (2022). Geopolitical visions in Turkish foreign policy. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 24(1), 114-137.
- Aydın, M. (2003). Between Euphoria and realpolitik: Turkish policy toward Central Asia and the Caucasus. In T. Y. Ismail & M. Aydın (Eds.) *Türkiye's Foreign Policy in the 21st Century: A Changing Role in World Politics*, (p. 3-24). Taylor & Francis Group.
- Aslan, D. (2025, April 17). *Cyprus shift by Turkic states deals blow to Turkish strategy*. Daily Sabah. <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/news-analysis/cyprus-shift-by-turkic-states-deals-blow-to-turkish-strategy>
- Çetinkaya, A. F. & Demirel, N. (2023). Analyzing the impact of the Organization of Turkic States on the foreign trade of member countries. *Cogent Social Science*, 10(1), doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2023.2288370
- European Union External Action (2022, March 3). *Basis for the EU-Central Asia Cooperation*. [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/basis-eu---central-asia-cooperation\\_en#top](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/basis-eu---central-asia-cooperation_en#top)
- Hashimova, U. (2019, September 23). Uzbekistan joins the Turkic Council. *The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/09/uzbekistan-joins-the-turkic-council/>
- Hale, W. (2013). *Turkish Foreign Policy Since 1774*. Routledge.
- Hettne, B. & Söderbaum, F. (2000). Theorising the rise of regionness. *New Political Economy*, 5(3), 457-472.
- Kahveci, H. & Kuşçu Bonnenfant, I. (2023). Turkish foreign policy towards Central Asia: An unfolding of regionalism and soft power. *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace*, 12(2), 195-218.
- Köstem, S. (2017). When can idea entrepreneurs influence foreign policy? Explaining the rise of the 'Turkic World' in Turkish foreign policy. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 13(3), 722-740.
- Laruelle, M. (2022). The end of the Post-Soviet order: How Putin's war has hurt Russia in Central Asia and the Caucasus. *Foreign Affairs*. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/central-asia/end-post-soviet-order>
- Meena, A. (2025). China's growing role in Central Asia. *E-International Relations*. <https://www.e-ir.info/2025/02/16/chinas-growing-role-in-central-asia/>
- Omırgazy, D. (2025, May 21). Kazakh president calls for deeper Turkic Cooperation at Budapest Summit. *The Astana Times*. <https://astanatimes.com/2025/05/kazakh-president-calls-for-deeper-turkic-cooperation-at-budapest-summit/>

- Organization of Turkic States (2025a). *Presidential Summits*. <https://www.turkicstates.org/en/presidential-summits>
- Organization of Turkic States (2025b). *Turkic World vision 2040*. <https://www.turkicstates.org/en/news/turkic-world-vision-2040>
- Organization of Turkic States (2025c). *Samarkand Declaration of the 9th Summit of the Organization of Turkic States*. <https://www.turkicstates.org/en/news/samarkand-declaration-of-the-9th-summit-of-the-organization-of-turkic-states>
- Organization of Turkic States (2025d). *The 1st Meeting of the Heads of Defense Industry Institutions of the OTS is held in Istanbul*. <https://www.turkicstates.org/en/news/the-1st-meeting-of-the-heads-of-defense-industry-institutions-of-the-ots-was-held-in-istanbul>
- Pantucci, R. & Yau, N. (2022). Paving the digital Silk Road with the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. *The RUSI Journal*, 167(3), 28–41.
- Peng, N. (2023, January 10). Berdimuhamedov's China visit pushes forward China-Central Asia relations. *The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2023/01/berdimuhamedovs-china-visit-pushes-forward-china-central-asia-relations/>
- Primiano, C. B. & O'Neill, D. C. (2025). Central Asia and Russia's invasion of Ukraine: Drifting away from Moscow's orbit? *Asian Security*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14799855.2025.2559230>
- Rudenshield, E. (15.01.2025) *Trans-Caspian trajectory: A new US strategy for Central Asia and Caucasus*. Caspian Policy Center. <https://www.caspianpolicy.org/research/south-caucasus/trans-caspian-trajectory-a-new-us-strategy-for-central-asia-and-caucasus>
- Shariffi, Y. & Koseoglu, A. (2022, December 23). Iran's pivot to Central Asia: Motivations and challenges. *Middle East Monitor*. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20221223-irans-pivot-to-central-asia-motivations-and-challenges/>
- Sim, L. & Aminjonov, F. (2022). Statecraft in the steppes: Central Asia's relations with China. *Journal of Contemporary China*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2022.2136937>
- Sorbello, P. (2025, April 18). Central Asia opens diplomatic rift with Türkiye over Cyprus. *The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2025/04/central-asia-opens-diplomatic-rift-with-turkiye-over-cyprus/>
- TekeTek (2025, May 5) *Interview with Ambassador Halil Akıncı* (Video) YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8Rvle6L2hY>
- Turkic Academy (2024). Declaration on Common Turkic Alphabet. <https://www.turkicacademy.org/en/biografiya/declaration-common-turkic-alphabet#:~:text=The%20Turkic%20Academy%20is%20pleased,prepared%20and%20adopted%20in%20English.>
- Turkic States (2009). Nakhichevan Agreement on the Establishment of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States. <https://www.turkicstates.org/u/d/basic-documents/nakhchivan-agreement-on-the-establishment-of-the-cooperation-council-of-turkic-speaking-states-1-en.pdf>
- Tüysüzöğlü, G. (2023). The Eurasianist transformation of Turkish foreign policy after the coup attempt: An evaluation in the context of the SCO. *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, 17(1), 83-105.
- Qoraboyev, I. (2025). Understanding Central Asia's position on Northern Cyprus: Between principles, pressures, and pragmatism. *The Hague Research Institute*. <https://hagueresearch.org/understanding-central-asias-position-on-northern-cyprus-between-principles-pressures-and-pragmatism/>
- Uljevic, S. (2024). *India's engagement with Central Asia and competition with China in a multipolar World order 2.0*. Routledge.
- Umarov, T. (2022). *Russia and Central Asia: Never closer, or drifting apart*. Carnegie Politika. <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/88698>
- Uslu, N. (2025). *EU-Central Asia Summit and the Cyprus issue*. Ibn Haldun University, Haydar Aliyev Center for Eurasian Studies. <https://avryasya.ihu.edu.tr/en/eu-central-asia-summit-and-the-cyprus-issue-april-2025-samarkand>
- Vanderhille, R., Joireman, S. F. & Tulepbeyava, R. (2020). Between the bear and the dragon: Multivectorism in Kazakhstan as a model strategy for secondary powers. *International Affairs*, 96(4), 975-93.

## **About the Author**

### **Meliha Altunışık**

**Middle East Technical University | [maltunis\[at\]metu.edu.tr](mailto:maltunis[at]metu.edu.tr) | ORCID: 0000-0002-8435-6682**

Prof. Dr. Meliha Altunışık is a professor in the Department of International Relations at Middle East Technical University (METU) in Ankara. She was a Fulbright Scholar at Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University in 1988-89 and received her Ph.D. in political science from Boston University in 1995. She has written mainly on international relations of the Middle East and Türkiye's foreign policy, including on ideology and pragmatism in foreign policy, cusp states, rentier state theory, humanitarian diplomacy, regional powers, regional rivalries and regionalism related to the Middle East and Türkiye.