

# The Turkic Factor as a Component of International Relations in Central Asia: the «Turkic World» Construct

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**Abstract:** The article examines the first years of interstate interaction of the Turkic-speaking states of Central Asia through the prism of constructivism. The evolution of the “Turkic World” construct is traced from the ideas firstly proposed by N.A. Nazarbayev and T. Ozal to the decision to establish a secretariat for meetings of Heads of States. The role of the Turkic factor as a component of regional international relations is revealed. The results of the study indicate the possibility of implementing integration projects in the international political sphere within the framework of the constructivism paradigm, where not only the construct, but also its institutionalizing foundation exist due to the fact that individuals agree to observe conditional rules and to act as if that rules exist, while historically established connections are not an absolutely necessary component of such integration. At the same time, the Turkic factor in Central Asia can be considered as one of the institutionalizing components for regional international relations.

**Keywords:** Central Asia, the Turkic world, the Turkic factor, Organizations of Turkic states.

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## Introduction

The current international political situation has significantly changed the architecture of international relations that has been formed over the past three decades. The clash of civilizations between Russia and the West, the turn to the East creates the need to take a fresh look at traditional Russian partners. In the current conditions, relations with the states of Central Asia are especially important, since they allow reducing the sanctions pressure. The search for asymmetric responses to the challenges of our time requires the study of various models of international integration and their conceptual foundations.

Of significant interest are the integration structures that did not arise as a result of historically established ties. One of them is the Organization of Turkic States, which

includes the Turkic-speaking states of Central Asia, created by politicians based on the Turkic factor.

We recognize international organizations as social constructs. Such a construct is a phenomenon that exists due to the fact that individuals agree, observing conditional rules, to act as if it exists. Therefore, it is important to conceptually comprehend the evolution of the “Turkic world” construct in the context of the influence of the Turkic factor on the development of international relations in Central Asia.

## Materials and Methods

The materials of the study are normative-legal acts of the international and national level.

The following methods were used in the work: the historical-genetic method, which allows revealing the Turkic factor in international relations in Central Asia from the point of view of the evolution of relations, their ideological and value foundations; a systematic method that allows you to explore the regional subsystem of international relations as an integral phenomenon, in the unity of all its connections and relations; the method of event analysis, in which the international political process in the region is presented as a series of political events, each of which has a particular impact on the situation as a whole and behind each of which there are specific actors with their own interests and views; a comparative method that allows you to explore legally significant and legally binding acts signed by participants in the regional subsystem of international relations.

## Results

Recently, the adjective “Turkic” has been increasingly heard from the lips of politicians of various scales to define various social constructs. One of the most used is the concept of “Turkic world”, filled depending on the context of socio-political, cultural or geographical content. So, thanks to the initiative of R.T. Erdogan, N.A. Nazarbayev, despite the change in his role in the political life of Kazakhstan, continues to be the “Aksakal of the Turkic world.”

However, the content of the key concept «Turkic world» is not unambiguous. Hence the uncertainty of the concepts derived from the “Turkic world”, including the “Turkic factor”.

In the expert community, various attempts are being made to meaningfully comprehend these concepts. One of the possible approaches can be a concept that is based on the sign of territoriality, that is, on the basis of the historically established territory of the settlement of Turkic-speaking peoples. This concept was guiding for Turkish politicians

during the disintegration of the Soviet Union (9:45), and remains so today<sup>1</sup>. Domestic experts perceive the historically established borders of the settlement of Turkic-speaking peoples as the borders of the Turkic world only for the purposes of cultural interaction, as evidenced, for example, by the statement about the need to form polycentric cultural centers in Russia and the countries of Central Asia to level the role of Turkey as the center of the Turkic world<sup>2</sup>, made during the international forum "The Turkic factor in the humanitarian dialogue between Russia and the countries of Central Asia".

The conceptual choice as a criterion for constructing the concept of "Turkic world" of a linguistic feature is an appeal to identity. Moreover, identity, by its very nature, can also be considered as a constructed phenomenon.

Language is one of the universally recognized markers of self-identification of individuals. S. Huntington, who singled out the Turkic sub-civilization of Islamic civilization (7:57), directly pointed to the language as a significant sign of civilizational identity. At the same time, in the international political circulation, the limits of the Turkic world must be considered limited by the territory of recognized Turkic-speaking states. Turkic-speaking Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan can be seen as the Central Asian part of the Turkic world.

However, the analysis of the linguistic situation even within the states of Central Asia does not allow us to speak of an identificationally significant linguistic identity. Despite the geographical proximity and the resulting common historical destiny, the territory of the four Turkic-speaking states of Central Asia is inhabited by speakers of five Turkic languages (excluding representatives of non-titular Turkic-speaking peoples, for example, the Uighurs), which, according to the classification of Turkic languages, belong to four groups (1). When compared with the "other", which in relation to the Central Asian Turkic languages can be Russian, Chinese or Farsi, one can speak of a certain degree of identity of the Turkic languages of the region. The struggle for increasing the degree of identity of the Turkic languages is one of the goals of Turkish policy in the Turkic-speaking space. The transition from Cyrillic to Latin and further to a common alphabet – these are its initial stages, which, despite the difficulties, can be achieved. At the same time, it should be noted that the Russian language continues to remain in the position of the lingua franca for Central Asia, which, among other things, is evidenced by the initiative of the President of Kazakhstan to create an organization to support and promote the Russian language under the auspices of the Commonwealth of Independent States<sup>3</sup>.

The processes of decentralization in the "late" USSR, which ended with the disintegration of the Union itself, created the necessary conditions for the return of the «Turkic factor» to the political foreground after decades of oblivion.

1 Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan ve Bahçeli, Türk Dünyası Haritası ile poz verdi. [President Erdogan and Bahçeli posed with a map of the Turkish World.] Haber7.com. Available from: <https://www.haber7.com/siyaset/haber/3163248-cumhurbaskani-erdogan-ve-bahceli-turk-dunyasi-haritasi-ile-poz-verdi>

2 The Turkic factor today. The Center for Geopolitical Studies "Berlek-Unity". Available from: <http://berlek-nkp.com/meropriyatiya-obschie/7871-tyurkskiy-faktor-segodnya.html>.

3 Putin Supported Tokayev's Proposal to Create an Organization to Promote the Russian Language. Gazeta.Ru. Available from: [www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2022/10/07/18743683.shtml](http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2022/10/07/18743683.shtml).

The beginning of such a return can be considered the official visit of the President of Turkey T. Ozal at the invitation of the President of the Kazakh SSR N.A. Nazarbayev in March 1991. On March 15, 1991, they signed the "Cooperation Agreement between the Kazakh SSR and the Republic of Turkey", which became the first international treaty of Kazakhstan (the text of the agreement was prepared by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kazakh SSR)<sup>4</sup>. It follows directly from the preamble that the desire for cooperation is motivated by the historical commonality of cultures, language and traditions of peoples<sup>5</sup>.

Despite the normative declaration of the historical commonality of cultures, language and traditions of peoples, it was objectively possible to speak only about a certain linguistic community, since one can speak about the commonality of cultures and their constituent part "traditions only in relation to the Middle Ages.

Thus, the leaders of Soviet Kazakhstan and Turkey in the international political space launched the process of forming such a construct as the "Turkic world", the driving force of which was the inter-Turkic linguistic affinity. As an equally important reason for this process, one should mention the ideology of Turkism, which is the conceptual basis of inter-Turkic unity. But since both sides repeatedly assured about the absence of pan-Turkic aspirations (4:113; 3; 5:102), we will not take it into account, although we will not forget about its presence.

The next significant step was the holding at the end of October 1992 in Ankara of the first summit of the heads of Turkic-speaking states, in which the presidents of all independent Turkic-speaking countries took part. As a result of the summit, the Ankara Declaration was signed, which became the basis for interstate multilateral cooperation of the Turkic-speaking states at the highest level and proof of the acceptance by the leadership of Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan of the spatial construct proposed by N.A. Nazarbaev and T. Ozal.

Of conceptual interest is the preamble of the Ankara Declaration, which contains the motives of the parties that prompted them to start cooperation in the chosen format: «Halklar arasındaki ortak tarih, dil ve kültürden kaynaklanan özel bağları kaydederek...»<sup>6</sup> (the parties declare the existence of special ties based on the common history, language and culture of the peoples).

A feature of the Ankara Declaration is that on the part of the Republic of Turkey, the document was also signed by the Prime Minister, which, in the conditions of a parliamentary republic, speaks of the importance the Turkish leadership attached to what was happening.

Years later, at the VII summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States, N.A. Nazarbayev, recalling the meeting in the Turkish capital, actually reproducing the

4 Arystanbekova A.H. 30 Years Ago, the First Visit of the President of Turkey to Kazakhstan Took Place. *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*. Available from: <https://kazpravda.kz/articles/view/30-let-nazad-sostoyalsya-pervii-vizit-prezidenta-turtsii-v-kazahstan> (дата обращения 26.09.2020).

5 Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Kazakh SSR №336 dated May 28, 1991 "On Submitting For Ratification to the Supreme Soviet of The Kazakh SSR the Agreement on Cooperation Between the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic and the Republic of Turkey" Information and legal system of regulatory legal acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan «Әділет». Available from: <http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/P910000336>

6 Ankara Bildirisi (1992). Türk Dili Konuşan Ülkeler İşbirliği Konseyi. [Ankara Declaration (1992). Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking Countries.] Available from: [http://turkkon.org/Assets/dokuman/11\\_AnkaraBildirisi1992\\_1.DevletBaskanlariZirvesi\\_20140418\\_104048.pdf](http://turkkon.org/Assets/dokuman/11_AnkaraBildirisi1992_1.DevletBaskanlariZirvesi_20140418_104048.pdf).

content of the preamble of the Ankara Declaration, said that "only the first months of the history of the new independent states in Central Asia were going on, but already at that time we clearly understood the special significance of relations between our fraternal peoples based on commonality history, language, culture and traditions". Through the Ankara Declaration, according to the first President of Kazakhstan, the will and determination of the fraternal countries "to develop mutual cooperation in the wide area of the Turkic world" was recorded<sup>7</sup>.

At the same time, the Nazarbayev–Ozal initiative was a bid for leadership within the framework of the emerging construct, at the same time for leadership at different levels.

Turkish claims to leadership in the Turkic world at that time were taken for granted in the post-Soviet republics, because Ankara assumed an unspoken obligation to ensure the favorable integration of the newly emerging states into the world community (6).

Claims N.A. Nazarbayev were claims for leadership in the Central Asian part of the Turkic world, which was tantamount to claims for leadership in post-Soviet Central Asia, which could not be fully realized against the will of Uzbekistan. The constant competition between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, rooted in the Soviet period and continuing to the present, has determined that there is still no regional leader (2:7).

The second summit of the heads of Turkic-speaking states took place on October 18–19, 1994 in Istanbul. As a result of the summit, the presidents signed the first Istanbul Declaration<sup>8</sup>, the content of which was in line with the international agenda. Considerable attention was paid to the issues of peace, security and stability. Thus, the parties called for a peaceful resolution of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, issues related to the situation around Tajikistan and Afghanistan, as well as the situations in Cyprus, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The parties agree to provide assistance and show solidarity in the event of war, natural disasters and other emergencies<sup>9</sup>.

Education is one of the most significant aspects in the issue of forming the identity of an individual; it is also the main tool for homogenizing the language environment. Therefore, for example, the Kyrgyz-Turkish University "Manas" financed and managed on a parity basis implements the following mission:

joint training of those who strive for lifelong education, including representatives of Turkic-speaking states and communities, the training of highly qualified, with moral principles and universal values, a high sense of responsibility to society, modern, able to compete in the

<sup>7</sup> The VII summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic-speaking States was Held in Baku. Official website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Available from: <https://ru.president.az/articles/34442>

<sup>8</sup> İstanbul Bildirisi (1994). Türk Dili Konuşan Ülkeler İşbirliği Konseyi. [The Istanbul Declaration (1994). Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking Countries.] Available from: [http://turkkon.org/Assets/dokuman/10\\_IstanbulBildirisi1994\\_2.DevletBaskanlariZirveBildirisi\\_20140418\\_103924.pdf](http://turkkon.org/Assets/dokuman/10_IstanbulBildirisi1994_2.DevletBaskanlariZirveBildirisi_20140418_103924.pdf). (date of application: 30.01.2018)

<sup>9</sup> Bişkek Bildirisi (1995). Türk Dili Konuşan Ülkeler İşbirliği Konseyi. [The Bishkek Declaration (1995). Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking Countries.] Available from: [http://turkkon.org/Assets/dokuman/09\\_BiskekBildirisi1995\\_3.DevletBaskanlariZirveBildirisi\\_20140418\\_103851.pdf](http://turkkon.org/Assets/dokuman/09_BiskekBildirisi1995_3.DevletBaskanlariZirveBildirisi_20140418_103851.pdf). (date of application: 30.01.2018).

international labor market, able to contribute to the world education system, including the education system of the Turkic world of personalities<sup>10</sup>.

The first intermediate result of the development of the Nazarbayev–Ozal initiative was the Tashkent summit, held in October 1996. The key event of the meeting was the decision to establish a secretariat for meetings of heads of state<sup>11</sup>. The Secretariat was entrusted with the functions of preparing materials for meetings of the heads of Turkic-speaking states and heads of foreign affairs agencies, holding events aimed at promoting the language, culture and achievements of the Turkic-speaking states, and providing opportunities for publications about the life of the Turkic peoples.

Within the framework of the "Turkic World" construct – in its international political understanding – a primary institutionalizing structure was created to ensure the development of the interstate integration process, which indicates that the heads of state – the subjects of construction – have agreed on general conditional rules that all participants will follow. integration process. Thus, the initial stage of the formation of the "Turkic world" construct, realized by the willful efforts of the heads of the Turkic-speaking states exclusively, has ended.

The Istanbul meeting in 1994 can be considered the next step in the process of constructing the Turkic world, since the initiative of Nazarbayev–Ozal moved into practice.

Separately, it should be said in connection with the Second Summit that the Turkish side focused on the situations in Cyprus, as well as in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is an attempt to consider (in accordance with the ideas of a certain part of the Turkish elite (8)) these states that arose on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire as an integral part of the Turkic world. Thus, the boundaries of the implementation of the Nazarbayev–Ozal concept are being fixed.

In August 1995, the third summit meeting of the heads of Turkic-speaking states took place in Bishkek. The most important in the context of promoting the Nazarbayev–Ozal idea was the decision to establish joint higher educational institutions

## Conclusion

The fruit of the political thought of Nazarbayev–Ozal, which has turned from abstraction into an applied version in five years, confirmed the possibility of implementing integration projects in the international political sphere within the framework of constructivism, where not only the construct, but also its institutionalizing basis exist due

10 The Mission of the University. Kyrgyz-Turkish University "Manas" official website. Available from: [http://intl.manas.edu.kg/ru/about\\_manas/mission](http://intl.manas.edu.kg/ru/about_manas/mission) (date of application 20.02.2021).

11 Taşkent Bildirisi (1996). [The Tashkent Declaration (1996). Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking Countries.] Türk Dili Konuşan Ülkeler İşbirliği Konseyi. Available from: [http://turkkon.org/Assets/dokuman/08\\_TaskentBildirisi1996\\_4.DevletBaskanlariZirveBildirisi\\_20140418\\_103822.pdf](http://turkkon.org/Assets/dokuman/08_TaskentBildirisi1996_4.DevletBaskanlariZirveBildirisi_20140418_103822.pdf). (date of application: 30.01.2018).

to the fact that individuals agree, observing conditional rules, act as if they exist. At the same time, the Turkic factor in relation to Central Asia can be considered as one of the institutionalizing components for regional international relations.

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