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Relations of Azerbaijan with Central Asian Turkic States within the framework of the Organisation of Turkic States*

Abstract

Following the dissolution of the USSR, Turkic States came together for the first time in 1992 at the Summit of Heads of State of Turkic Speaking Countries. The Summit was transformed into the Turkic Council with the Nakhchivan Agreement in 2009 and renamed the Organisation of Turkic States in 2021. This Organisation is one of the most important institutions shaping Azerbaijan's foreign policy. In this context, the support of the Organisation's member Turkic states in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with Armenia is critical; in fact, during the Second Karabakh War, the Organisation of Turkic States issued a statement in support of Azerbaijan. Similarly, the Organisation has been an effective tool in supporting Azerbaijan's foreign policy and increasing its regional and global influence. Moreover, within the framework of the Organisation, Turkic States have had the opportunity to share their experiences in areas such as science, technology, education and culture. This study focuses on the importance of Central Asian countries in Azerbaijan's foreign policy and the relations developed within the framework of the Organisation of Turkic States.

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Keywords: Azerbaijan, Central Asia, Turkic States, Foreign Policy

Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı Çerçevesinde Azerbaycan'ın Orta Asya Türk Devletleri ile İlişkileri

Öz

SSCB'nin dağılmasının ardından Türk Devletleri ilk kez 1992 yılında Türk Dili Konuşan Ülkeler Devlet Başkanları Zirvesi'nde bir araya gelmiştir. Zirve, 2009 yılında Nahçıvan Anlaşması ile Türk Konseyi'ne dönüştürülmüş ve 2021 yılında Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı adını almıştır. Bu Örgüt, Azerbaycan'ın dış politikasına yön veren en önemli kuruluşlardan biridir. Bu bağlamda, Ermenistan ile yaşanan Dağlık Karabağ sorununda Örgüt üyesi Türk Devletlerinin desteği kritik önem taşımaktadır; nitekim İkinci Karabağ Savaşı sırasında Türk Devletleri Örgütü tarafından Azerbaycan'ı destekleyen bir bildiri yayımlanmıştır. Benzer şekilde, Örgüt Azerbaycan'ın dış politikasını desteklemede ve bölgesel ve küresel etkisini arttırmada etkili bir araç olmuştur. Ayrıca, Örgüt çerçevesinde Türk Devletleri bilim, teknoloji, eğitim ve kültür gibi alanlardaki deneyimlerini paylaşma fırsatı bulmuşlardır. Bu çalışma, Orta Asya ülkelerinin Azerbaycan'ın dış politikasındaki önemine ve Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı çerçevesinde geliştirilen ilişkilere odaklanmaktadır.

***Anahtar kelimeler:** Azerbaycan, Orta Asya, Türk Devletleri, Dış Politika*

Introduction

Azerbaijan, which came under Soviet rule in 1920 after a short period of independence, regained its independence in 1991. The political turmoil that lasted for two years ended in 1993 when Heydar Aliyev became President. Firstly, the Nagorno-Karabakh War with Armenia was frozen and then energy diplomacy activities were initiated. The Central Asian Turkic states have started to become an important part of Azerbaijan's foreign policy since these years. The Turkic states, with a common language, religion and ethnic origin, met in 1992 at the Summit of Heads of State of Turkic Speaking Countries. The Summit was institutionalised with the Nakhchivan Agreement in 2009 and transformed into the Turkic Council, which was renamed the Organisation of Turkic States in 2021. This organisation has a great importance for Azerbaijan's foreign policy. Within the framework of the organisation, Azerbaijan both develops its relations with Turkic states and contributes to the strengthening of the Turkic world. This study consists of three parts. First, the main aspects of Azerbaijan's foreign policy after independence are discussed. Then, the importance of the Central Asian Turkic States in Azerbaijan's foreign policy is analysed and finally the relations within the framework of the Organisation of Turkic States are examined.

1. Main Aspects of the Foreign Policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan

International relations are a system of relations built on the principle of sovereignty and equality of states, and these relations include foreign policy, war and peace, alliances, diplomacy and international organisations (Kan, 2011, p. 4). The sovereign and modern geopolitical system

established by the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 has undergone major changes over the centuries. The two major wars of the 20th century, globalization and the Cold War, which ended with the fall of the Soviet Union, had a major impact on relations between states. While the end of the bipolar system caused great changes in the international world, the collapse of the USSR has created opportunities for the international integration of the independent states that emerged in the post-Soviet space. The Republic of Azerbaijan, which declared its independence in October 1991, is one of these countries. The main parameters that should be emphasized in Azerbaijan's foreign policy after independence are retaining independence, restoring territorial integrity, boosting political autonomy, and securing economic recovery and self-sufficiency (İsmayılov, 2014, p. 81). Foreign policy, which consists of the main goals of a state's internal development, is a set of activities that try to create a system of relations between the national interests of that country and the interests of the outside world adapted to the rules and norms of living together (Həsənov, 2005, p. 177). Each state implements a foreign policy line in accordance with its national interests and first of all reconciles that policy with the future of its people. The territorial integrity, sovereignty, public interest and national security are essential for them (Babayeva, 2014, p. 17). The republics that were part of the Soviet Union could not implement an independent foreign policy before 1991. The relations of the Turkic states, which make up four of these republics, were determined by Moscow, and as a result, the development of relations between the Turkic republics was limited. Establishing an independent and sovereign state after the collapse of the Soviet Union has been one of the main goals of Azerbaijan, as in other post-Soviet countries. However, in 1991-1992, it was not possible to determine the development strategy of Azerbaijan due to the mistakes of the leaders of the country, the political, economic and social crisis in the country, and the war with Armenia. In these years, especially Azerbaijan's foreign policy was shifting in uncertainty, and the government sometimes pursued a policy towards Russia and sometimes towards Türkiye.

As known, Russia was the main force behind Armenia's obviously groundless claims against Azerbaijan's Nagorno-Karabakh territories. Ayaz Mutallibov's pro-Russian foreign policy was not determined by the new geopolitical situation in the region (Babaoğlu, 2009, p. 187-189). Similarly, despite the close relations established with Türkiye, due to deteriorating relations with countries such as Russia and Iran in the same period the foreign policy strategy applied during the period of Abulfaz Elchibey also isolated Azerbaijan from the regional and international area. Therefore, between 1991 and 1993 the foreign policy of Azerbaijan, which was not formed in an objective and balanced political line. After Heydar Aliyev came to power in 1993, Baku's foreign policy strategy started to be formed. The new foreign policy priorities

based on the strategic interests of the state are defined to cover every field and are organized within the framework of specific consistent principles (Həsənov, 2005, p. 191). On May 12, 1994, as a result of the foresight of President Aliyev, a ceasefire agreement was signed with Armenia. Thus, a partial stabilization was ensured and the political and economic strengthening of the country came to the fore. The first step in this process was establishing relations with different countries of the world. The foreign policy strategy determined by Heydar Aliyev was based on the following principles (Məmmədov, 2017, p. 29-30):

- Consideration of international legal norms in interstate relations;
- Respecting the sovereign rights of each country;
- Settlement of controversial issues through peace and negotiation;
- Establishment of economic, scientific and cultural cooperation on the basis of mutual benefit;
- Elimination of problems that prevent the establishment of interstate relations.

The foreign policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, which has rich traditions of statehood, is aimed at maintaining and strengthening close relations with the world community. Azerbaijan, located between East and West, became a target of conflicting interests of global powers due to its natural resources and strategic position after gaining independence. Baku, which has implemented a balanced and multi-vector foreign policy in recent decades, applies a wider regional and multilateral cooperation policy. In this context, the Azerbaijani authorities, which have close mutual relations with the states that have influence in the region, along with the USA and Russia, have diplomatic relations with many states. One of the guiding principles in determining the foreign policy strategy of the Republic of Azerbaijan is to align the strategic interests of Azerbaijan with the interests of international power centres that have serious interests in the region and real opportunities to influence it (Babaoğlu, 2009, p. 225). As known, in the modern era, interstate relations are not only between two states, but also between state-civil society, state-people, and state-international organizations. In this context, Azerbaijan is a member of the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the Non-Aligned Movement. Besides, it cooperates with NATO, World Bank, Islamic Development Bank and many other organizations. Azerbaijan, which implements its foreign policy with a balanced diplomacy, is achieving success one after the other in the political and economic fields. Thanks to the successful foreign policy strategy, in the elections held on October 24, 2011, Azerbaijan won the support of 155 countries and became a non-permanent member of the United Nations

Security Council for the following year. In 2016, Azerbaijan was elected as a member of the Economic and Social Council of the UN for the years 2017-2019, having received the votes of 176 of the 184 member states participating in the voting held at the UN General Assembly. In addition, Azerbaijan, a member of the Non-Aligned Movement since 2011, hosted the 18th Summit of Heads of State and Government on October 25-26, 2019. With the Summit held in Baku, Azerbaijan became the Chairman of the Movement for 2019-2022. Moreover, Azerbaijan assumed the chairmanship of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States at the Summit held in Baku on October 15, 2019. Nowadays, it is observed that Azerbaijan is taking the leading positions in international competitions, in various fields of sports. In particular, the transformation of Baku into a center where important international competitions are held around the world has a positive effect on the international reputation of Azerbaijan. The First European Games hosted by Azerbaijan, the "Formula-1" competitions, the "European Grand Prix" and the IV Islamic Solidarity Games are examples of great achievements in the field of sports diplomacy.

2. Factors Determining Azerbaijan's Relations with the Turkic States

Although Azerbaijan's relations with the Turkic Republics have a long history, these relations acquired a different character after the establishment of Soviet power in these republics. In fact, official diplomatic relations were maintained between the Soviet republics until the summer of 1922. However, over time, the powers of the representations abroad were gradually limited and these representations were later abolished. Soon inter-republican co-operation on the territory of the USSR was systematically implemented in all directions and served to strengthen the existing communist ideology and unite the peoples of the USSR (Əhmədov, 2009, p. 29). Thus, all countries living in the Soviet territory had to comply with the ideological demands of the USSR. This situation also restricted the development of relations between Turkic peoples with the same language, religion and ethnic origin.

At the end of 1991, the Turkic republics, including Azerbaijan, declared their state independence, and this process ended with the collapse of the USSR in December. As a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the political and economic relations between the republics weakened for a while, but the newly independent states gradually determined a path in accordance with their foreign policy strategies and began to integrate into the global world system in accordance with this choice. Development of relations with Turkic states in the political, economic, humanitarian and cultural spheres has been one of the priority directions of Azerbaijan's national diplomacy. It is possible to list the factors affecting the development of relations with the Turkic states under seven headings.

First, Azerbaijan has historical and cultural ties with the Turkic peoples, including Türkiye. Like the Turkic states of Central Asia, Azerbaijan was part of the Soviet Union for many years and experienced the same fate with others. After gaining independence, the Azerbaijani authorities, which determined a foreign policy strategy in accordance with the norms and principles of international law, began to develop their relations with the Turkic states within this framework. Along with factors such as religion, language, and race, the development of relations with the Turkic world, where common culture is a unifying element, is one of the priorities of Azerbaijan's foreign policy.

Second, the geopolitical position of the Turkic states is the main factor influencing the development of relations. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan border Afghanistan, while Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan neighbor with China. This situation draws the attention of the US, China and Western countries, especially Russia, to the region, and as a result, the interests of all the great powers of the world coincide in Central Asia. It is very important to develop relations between the Turkic states against these powers that compete in the region for economic, political and security reasons. For example, despite the independence of the countries in the region, Russia insists on maintaining its control over the post-Soviet space. One of the reasons for this is the rich energy resources of these countries. Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, with their oil and natural gas reserves, have the potential both to meet their domestic consumption and to export to foreign countries. The Caspian Sea, bordered by Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan after independence, is also of great importance in terms of energy resources. Shah Deniz, Cheleken, Korchagin and Astrakhan regions stand out with their natural gas reserves. Azeri, Chirag, Guneshli and Kashagan fields have large oil reserves.

Russia, which holds 25 percent of the total natural gas reserves in the region with 3 trillion cubic metres of reserves, is followed by Kazakhstan with 2.9 trillion cubic metres of reserves. Azerbaijan ranks third with 1.4 trillion cubic metres of natural gas reserves. Turkmenistan, the world's fourth largest country in terms of natural gas reserves, has 536 billion cubic metres of natural gas reserves in the region (Karagöl, Kızılkaya and Kaya, 2016). Indeed, American political scientist Z. Brzezinski in his book "The Grand Chessboard" stated that the Caspian region with its rich energy resources will become a region of great geopolitical importance in the world in the early 20th-21st centuries (Zbigniew, 2005, p. 175-178). This means that Azerbaijan will be a key country in the disputes between Russia and energy demanding countries over the region.

Third, Kazakhstan, the tiger of Central Asia, and Azerbaijan, the most powerful country in the South Caucasus, are two partner countries with the same position in relation to the Caspian Sea. The two countries have signed a number of agreements and contracts since the 1990s to exploit the rich energy resources of the Caspian Sea (Özsoy, 2019, p. 473). Regarding Azerbaijan-Turkmenistan relations, there have been serious disputes between the two countries over the Kepez deposit for many years. Turkmenistan has claimed unilateral sovereignty over the oil field 104 kilometres from its shores and accused Azerbaijan of illegally exploiting the Azeri-Chirag oil fields. However, the signing of the final agreement on the legal status of the Caspian Sea in Aktau, Kazakhstan in August 2018 is important for the future of relations between Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan. As a result of the agreement, an opportunity has emerged for the transportation of Turkmenistan gas to Europe via Azerbaijan. As a matter of fact, the two countries have increased their energy diplomacy activities on the sharing and joint exploitation of the deposits in the Caspian region after 2018.

Fourth, the establishment of the Great Silk Road is important for strengthening relations and deepening cooperation among the Turkic states. As it is known, on the basis of the TRACECA project initiated by the European Union, comprehensive negotiations were held in Brussels in 1993 and as a result, the Brussels Declaration was signed (Həsənov, 2016, p. 176). According to the Declaration, it was decided to restore the Silk Road corridor, rebuild and develop transport and communication infrastructures (Həsənov, 2009, p. 4). An international conference on this project was held in Baku in September 1998. In the conference attended by representatives of 32 countries and 13 international organisations, the "Multilateral international transport basic agreement on the development of the Europe-Caucasus-Asia transport corridor" was signed (Həsənov, 2005, p. 172). After the agreement, three projects were prepared by the European Commission. These are "International logistics centres for the Western CIS and Caucasian countries", "Public and technical safety in aviation in TRACECA countries" and "Maritime motorways in the Black and Caspian seas" projects. The aim of these projects is to take a number of measures, such as eliminating technical problems and improving logistics capabilities, including ensuring security (Babayeva, 2014, p. 4). Fifth, in addition to energy and TRACECA, Azerbaijan conducts cooperation with Turkic states in the field of other transport links. As a matter of fact, the Turkic States, located on the route connecting Asia to Europe, have the opportunity to turn this advantage into gains such as regional and global integration, economic input and cultural transfer. The Central Corridor Initiative (Trans-Caspian International Transport Corridor), one of the most prominent projects in this context, starts from China's Xinjiang province and connects to Türkiye via Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan.

This initiative also has a political meaning for the Turkic states as it bypasses Russia (Tekir, 2022, p. 56-57). In December 2015, within the framework of President Ilham Aliyev's official visit to China, a memorandum of understanding was signed between two countries on the joint promotion of the creation of the "Silk Road Economic Belt". This project will promote trade and tourism on a global scale, as well as ensure the development of relations between the countries of the region. An important link of the Middle Corridor is the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway project, which was launched in October 2017 with the efforts of Türkiye and Azerbaijan and called 'Iron Silk Road'. With a capacity of one million passengers and six and a half million tonnes of cargo, this line reduces the distance between Asia and Europe to 15 days. Finally, the Zangezur Corridor, which was started to be realised within the scope of the trilateral agreement signed after the Second Karabakh War, connects Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan and Türkiye to Central Asia. The Corridor, which will provide the commercial and logistics connection between the Turkic States, has a strategic importance as it will physically unite the Turkic World.

Sixth, historical and cultural unity, as well as opportunities for cooperation, which are increasingly important with globalization, create a broader basis for the integration of Turkic states. Several organisations such as the Organization of Turkic States, TURKSOY and TürkPa are among the instruments facilitating this integration. Strengthening the independence and sovereignty of Turkic states, expanding the concept of regional and global security, using opportunities for cooperation, etc. these organizations serving the goals to create great opportunities for the development of multilateral relations between Azerbaijan and the Turkic states. Azerbaijan aspires to gain strength in the region and the international world through these organizations.

Today, 90,000 Azerbaijanis live in Kazakhstan, 20,000 in Kyrgyzstan, 68,000 in Uzbekistan, and 33,000 in Turkmenistan (<http://www.diasporamap.com/>). Good neighbourliness and friendly relations between peoples are strengthened through the Azerbaijani diaspora, which is of great importance in terms of conveying the truths of Azerbaijan to the world community, preserving national and moral values, and keeping traditions alive. After all, more than 200,000 Azerbaijani citizens living in the region are one of the other factors that make Central Asia important for Azerbaijan.

3. The Organization of Turkic States and Developing Political Relations

Since 1992, summits between the heads of the Turkic states began to be held to promote comprehensive cooperation. These summits created favorable conditions for the development of mutual and multilateral relations between the Turkic states (İsmayılov, 2014, p. 677). First Summit of Heads of Turkic-Speaking States was held on October 30-31, 1992 in Ankara, the

capital of Türkiye. At the end of the summit, the Ankara Declaration signed and relations between the Turkic peoples arising from a common language, history and culture were mentioned. In addition, it was decided that the spirit of brotherhood, solidarity and cooperation prevails in the relations, and the relations between the states will be further strengthened on the basis of independence, sovereignty, respect for territorial integrity, non-interference in their internal affairs and equality (Vəliyev, 2017, p. 677-678). During the meeting, Turgut Ozal, president of Türkiye, presented a number of proposals such as harmonization of customs legislation between the Turkic republics, creation of a free trade regime allowing free movement of persons, goods and services, creation of a common investment and Development Bank, improvement of telecommunication facilities, transportation of natural resources of Turkic-speaking states through Türkiye to Europe, development of coordination and cooperation. However, these decisions were not welcomed by some leaders, who objected to the inclusion of political issues in the declaration (Aslanlı, 2017, p. 678). This is important to show that despite the integration efforts among the Turkic states, the development of political relations will not be achieved with radical steps and the process should be spread over time. As a matter of fact, it is possible to say that this meeting had an impact on the declining interest of some Turkic states in the Summit opinions over time.

On the other hand, at the fourth meeting held in Tashkent, the name of the Summit was renamed to the Summit of Heads of State of the Turkic Republics. The Tashkent Declaration also touched upon the Armenia-Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and emphasized the importance of the indivisibility of Azerbaijani lands. It was emphasized that the conflict threatens peace and security in the region, and that the UN Security Council supports the peaceful solution of the problem within the framework of the decisions taken. By the fifth meeting, the above mentioned breakthrough has occurred, and Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan interest in the Summit meetings has decreased. For instance, at the seventh summit held on April 26, 2001 in Istanbul, Turkmenistan was represented at the ambassador level and other states were represented at the heads of state level. At the meeting, the President of Kazakhstan proposed the establishment of the Council of Elders and the Parliamentary Assembly of Heads of State of Turkic-Speaking Countries (TurkPA) (Vəliyev, 2017, p. 683). Although Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were represented at the level of heads of state and Turkmenistan at the level of ambassadors at the eighth summit held in Antalya, on November 17, 2006, Uzbekistan did not participate in this summit. This is a clear reflection of the dissatisfaction between countries.

The IX Summit was held in Nakhchivan in October 2009 after three years. This meeting was an important step towards the unity of the Turkic states. The Nakhchivan Agreement signed by the heads of state of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Türkiye established the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States (Turkic Council) as an intergovernmental organisation. Within the framework of the Agreement, the following were envisaged as the objectives of the Council (<https://www.-turkkon-.org/tr/temel-belgeler>):

- Strengthening mutual trust between the parties;
- Protection of peace in the region and outside the region;
- Acceptance of general relations on foreign policy issues;
- Coordinating measures to combat international terrorism, separatism, extremism and cross-border crime;
- Development regional and bilateral cooperation in all areas related to common goals;
- Creation of favorable conditions for trade and investment;
- Provision of social and cultural development along with comprehensive and sustainable economic growth;
- Discussing the rule of law, good governance and protection of human rights;
- Expansion of mutual relations in the fields of science, technology, education and culture;
- Promotion of interaction and communication in mass media;
- Promotion of information exchange and legal cooperation in legal matters.

In addition, within the Council the Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation on August 23, 2012, the International Turkic Academy on August 28, 2014, the Union of Turkic Universities on March 29, 2013, and the Organization of the Eurasian Law Enforcement Agencies with Military Status on January 25, 2013 (TAKM) were established (Balçı, 2017, p. 5). Within the framework of the Council, activities are carried out in the fields of political, economic, customs and transport, culture, education and science, tourism, diaspora and international cooperation. According to the decisions made in the Nakhchivan Agreement, the meetings of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the member countries are held one day before the summit meetings (Aslanlı, 2017, p. 711).

Regular consultations on security issues have been held between member states since 2013. In these meetings, security-related issues such as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, regional conflicts, and the fight against international terrorism are discussed. In all summits held by the Turkic Council, the parties have emphasised the importance of resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in a short time on the basis of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of the international borders of the Republic of Azerbaijan (<http://->

/www.mfa.gov.az/content). Despite occasional differences of opinion in bilateral relations, the support of the Turkic states to Azerbaijan within the framework of the Council is very critical. The decisions taken within the framework of the Council not only contribute to the development of bilateral relations, but also demonstrate the international integration of the Turkic world and increase the influence of the Turkic Council.

2018 was a year in which crucial steps were taken for the unity of the Turkic world. At the sixth Summit held in Kyrgyzstan on 3-6 September, Hungary joined the Organisation as an observer member, while the President of Uzbekistan was the guest of honour. On the other hand, at this meeting, the President of Türkiye proposed that trade between the Turkic States should be carried out in their own currencies (Avcı, 2018). The next meeting of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States was held in Baku on 15 October 2019 and Azerbaijan assumed the chairmanship of this Summit. The Summit was attended by the Presidents of Türkiye, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, the Prime Minister of Hungary and the Deputy Prime Minister of Turkmenistan. The Heads of State signed the Baku Declaration of the 7th Council of the Turkic Council and a number of decisions, as well as the Joint Declaration on the full accession of Uzbekistan to the Turkic Council. Other decisions taken at the Summit are as follows (Güler, 2019):

- At the seventh summit, it was announced that Türkiye's Operation Peace Spring would contribute to the fight against terrorism;
- Nazarbayev was accepted as the honorary president of the Turkic Council;
- The President of Türkiye requested support from the Council members to lift the unfair isolation and embargo against the Turkish Cypriots;
- Nursultan Nazarbayev suggested using the name "Organization of Turkic States" instead of "Council of Turkic-Speaking Countries";
- Nursultan Nazarbayev stated that the preparation of the strategic document called "Turkic Vision 2040" is important;
- The President of Türkiye stated that quotas are one of the biggest obstacles to trade between member countries and emphasized that it is important to remove quotas between member countries;
- The issue of the member countries of the Turkic Council having a single diaspora instead of separate diasporas came to the fore.

These decisions taken at this meeting in political, economic and institutional fields are very important for the future of the Turkic World. It is a great success that Turkmenistan's membership in the Organization was brought to the agenda in the subsequent meetings and that

the name of the organization was changed to the Organization of Turkic States. On the other hand, this Summit also shows that the member countries of the organization are trying to determine a strategy to solve the problems they face from a common perspective in the international arena.

It is very important that the President of Turkmenistan personally attended the extraordinary meeting held in 2020 in online format due to the Covid 19 pandemic. Following Azerbaijan's victory in the Second Karabakh War, an online meeting was also held in an informal format on 31 March 2021, which was attended by all Turkic states. It is noteworthy that, in the published statement, the Turkic States declared their solidarity with the government and people of Azerbaijan in their efforts for the revitalisation, reconstruction and integration of the conflict-affected regions. The eighth meeting, held in Istanbul on 12 November 2021, was held under the name "Organization of Turkic States" with the participation of all heads of state. Turkmenistan's participation in the summit as an observer member is an important step in building institutionalisation on solid foundations. As a matter of fact, the documents adopted within the framework of the meeting were aimed at further development of institutionalisation and integration. In this context, the Summit adopted the "Vision of the Turkic World 2040" and instructed the preparation of the "Strategic Road Map of the Organisation of Turkic States 2022-2026" for implementation steps. It is also important that the first strategy document prepared by the organisation coincided with a period when the number of its members increased.

At the Ninth Summit held in Samarkand in November 2022, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus joined as an observer member and it was stated that Turkish Cypriots are part of the Turkic world. Thus, the Organisation of Turkic States has become an important international organisation with a population of 173.8 million and a GDP of 1.183 billion dollars (Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı Azerbaycan Cumhuriyeti Ekonomik Reformların Analizi ve İletişim Merkezi 2023, p. 6). The inclusion of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which has not yet been recognised by any country other than Turkey, has created expectations of recognition by the Turkic states in the coming years. In addition, following Azerbaijan's victory, the gathering of the Heads of the National Security Councils of the Member and Observer States of the Organisation of Turkic States at the Summit in 2022 should be seen as a noteworthy step in the context of developing a common security perspective.

Conclusion

In the 90s, when there was no strong institutionalisation among the Turkic States, bilateral relations were quite limited and sometimes problematic. However, after the establishment of the Turkic Council in 2009, it is seen that the member states have turned towards cooperation

with more concrete steps. The Organization of Turkic States, which is an important initiative in increasing the influence of the Turkic states in the regional and global arena and developing relations between member countries, is an important organization in terms of Azerbaijani foreign policy. Contrary to the attitude of countries to act according to their own foreign policy priorities in bilateral relations, a common area of interest is determined in multilateral relations or Organization memberships. States that are part of the international system can increase their sphere of influence through regional-global cooperation and joint decisions. As a matter of fact, by becoming a member of the Organization of Turkic States, Azerbaijan gained the opportunity to improve its relations with member countries, and on the other hand, it was able to find support for the solution of the problems it encountered in foreign policy. For example, Azerbaijan, which established partnerships with Turkic states in fields such as energy, transportation and trade, was able to gain the support of the member countries of the Organization in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. On the other hand, although it is a coincidence that the status of the Caspian Sea was determined in 2018, when the number of member states of the Organisation of Turkic States started to increase, it is seen that Turkmenistan-Azerbaijan relations, which have gained great momentum since then, are also reflected in the Organisation of Turkic States.

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