OBSERVARE
Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa
e-ISSN: 1647-7251
VOL. 17, N.º 2
November 2026–April 2027

JANUS.NET
e-journal of International Relations

NOTES AND REFLECTIONS

STRATEGIC TURKIC REGIONALISM: TÜRKIYE, THE ORGANIZATION OF TURKIC STATES, AND THE RECONFIGURATION OF EURASIAN GEOPOLITICS

HASANOV JAHANGIR
hsnovcahangir978@gmail.com
PhD in Political Sciences at the Academy of Public Administration under the President of Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku (Azerbaijan) https://orcid.org/0009-0002-3741-6918

Introduction

The Organization of Turkic States (OTS) has emerged as a central platform for regional cooperation among Turkic-speaking countries at a time of profound geopolitical transformation (Çetinkaya&Demirel, 2023). As the international system shifts from U.S.-led unipolarity toward a multipolar order characterized by the strategic rise of China, Russia's assertive regional posture, and the growing agency of middle powers (Sakes, 2017), regional institutions like the OTS increasingly serve as arenas for both identity-based solidarity and pragmatic strategic engagement. Türkiye, leveraging its unique geostrategic position linking Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia, has sought to consolidate influence in the region through a combination of economic connectivity, soft power, and infrastructural initiatives—including the Middle Corridor, trans-Caspian energy networks, and trade facilitation projects (Yılmaz, 2019; Özkan, 2020). Yet despite shared linguistic, historical, and cultural affinities, Turkic states continue to pursue multi-vector foreign policies, reflecting both the limits of identity-driven regionalism and the enduring salience of national interests (Ünal & Ertem,2022). By examining Türkiye's engagement with the OTS through a multi-theoretical lens integrating constructivism, neofunctionalism, and intergovernmental perspectives, this study illuminates the dynamics of emerging regionalism, the constraints and opportunities for middle-power agency, and the evolving role of Turkic states within Eurasia's multipolar geopolitical landscape (Bayat, 2023).

The study of regional cooperation among Turkic-speaking states has gradually expanded within the broader literature on Eurasian regionalism and post-Soviet international relations. Scholars have examined the emergence of the OTS primarily through three overlapping analytical lenses: identity-based cooperation, geopolitical strategy, and institutional regionalism (Organisation of Turkic States, 2021). Constructivist perspectives emphasize the role of shared cultural and linguistic identity in shaping cooperation among Turkic-speaking states. The OTS is seen as an institutional manifestation of historical and cultural solidarity, reinforced through educational exchanges, cultural diplomacy, and symbolic political discourse (Bayat, 2023). However,

the literature also highlights the limits of identity-driven cooperation: divergent domestic priorities and national interests constrain political integration (Karimov &Akhmetov, 2021). Realist and geopolitical analyses situate the OTS within the broader Eurasian power landscape (Hughes & Snegovaya, 2022). Türkiye's engagement is interpreted as a strategy to expand strategic autonomy, enhance economic connectivity, and strengthen political influence amid competition from Russia, China, and the EU (European Union, 2025). Concurrently, institutionalist analyses, drawing on neofunctionalism and intergovernmental theory, examine how functional cooperation in trade, transport, and infrastructure may spill over into broader institutional coordination, though the OTS remains largely intergovernmental (Ünal & Ertem, 2022).

Existing research, however, tends to emphasize cultural or historical narratives over contemporary strategic dynamics and Türkiye's middle-power role. This study contributes by integrating identity, institutional, and geopolitical perspectives to assess the OTS's evolution and Türkiye's role in shaping Eurasian regionalism. This study employs a multi-theoretical framework to analyze the OTS and Türkiye's strategy in Central Asia. Constructivism highlights the importance of shared linguistic, historical, and cultural identities in providing the symbolic foundations for Turkic cooperation, while neofunctionalism explains the potential for functional economic and infrastructural integration to produce institutional spillovers (Özkan, 2020). Intergovernmental and liberal intergovernmentalist approaches contextualize the OTS as an arena where member states pursue national interests while negotiating collective action (Bayat, 2023) often constrained by multi-vector foreign policies and external geopolitical pressures. This hybrid theoretical lens allows for an integrated analysis of identity, strategy, and institutional dynamics in the Turkic regional order. A qualitative case-study methodology is employed, combining process tracing, document analysis, and comparative contextualization. Primary sources include official OTS documents, summit declarations, and policy statements from Türkiye and member states (Organization of Turkic States, 2021). Secondary sources include scholarly literature on regionalism, Turkish foreign policy, and Eurasian geopolitics. Process tracing identifies causal mechanisms linking shifts in the international system to Türkiye's strategic initiatives and the institutional evolution of the OTS. Comparative analysis situates the OTS alongside other regional platforms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS, highlighting the organization's unique characteristics and constraints in the multipolar Eurasian context.

Türkiye's Strategic Engagement and the Organization of Turkic States in a Multipolar Eurasia

The evolving global geopolitical environment—characterized by the relative erosion of U.S. influence and the intensification of great-power rivalry between the Euro-Atlantic bloc led by the United States and the Eurasian axis associated with China and Russia—has encouraged regional actors to reassess their strategic orientations (Özkan, 2020), across much of the Global South, states have increasingly moved from isolated action toward the formation of more cohesive regional frameworks, whether through formal organizations or consultative mechanisms, in order to enhance collective agency and reduce vulnerability to external domination. In Central Asia, this dynamic is particularly

evident as Turkic states seek to navigate major-power competition while simultaneously advancing intra-regional economic and infrastructural integration as a means of building resilience against systemic shocks, including the war in Ukraine, instability along the India–Pakistan frontier, and mounting tensions in the Western Pacific (Bölükbaşı, 2025). Within this context, the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) has emerged as an increasingly important regional platform pursuing greater strategic autonomy amid deepening global rivalry. Since 2021, the OTS has sought to evolve from a primarily cultural association into a more consequential political, economic, and security-oriented grouping, reflecting the broader aspiration of Turkic states to consolidate regional influence while balancing pressures emanating from major powers. By drawing upon shared linguistic and cultural ties, together with their strategic geography and resource endowments, OTS member states are asserting a more prominent role in the shifting balance of power across Eurasia (TIKA,2023). Against this backdrop, Türkiye has pursued an increasingly proactive regional strategy, identifying Central Asia as a central pillar of its wider foreign-policy agenda. As a member of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) and a state occupying a distinctive geostrategic position at the intersection of Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia, Türkiye has advanced a range of connectivity initiatives, including the Middle Corridor, the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) the Trans-Caspian energy corridor, and Trans-Caucasian trade routes (Demir, 2022). These projects not only deepen Türkiye's economic interdependence with the region but also reflect its broader ambition to establish itself as a key trade, logistics, and manufacturing hub across Eurasia. Türkiye has become one of Central Asia's leading trade partners, with bilateral trade reaching US$13 billion in 2023—an increase of tenfold over the previous decade (TIKA,2023).

In parallel, Türkiye has expanded its influence through a multidimensional soft-power strategy encompassing media, education, healthcare, and diplomatic outreach. The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) has played a particularly important role in development assistance, while educational exchange initiatives such as the Orhun Process have reinforced cultural and academic linkages. As a NATO member, Türkiye has also engaged in defense cooperation and regional security dialogue, thereby consolidating its role as a strategically consequential actor within the OTS framework. Taken together, these efforts underscore Ankara's determination to strengthen relations with Central Asian states, capitalize on shared cultural affinities, and enhance both regional integration and its own geopolitical standing (Bayat, 2023). Türkiye's engagement with Central Asia, however, is far from uncontested. Despite enduring historical, linguistic, and cultural affinities, the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) continues to face substantial constraints in terms of institutional development, internal cohesion, and functional capacity. At its current stage of evolution, the OTS remains closer to an ethno-linguistic and civilizational framework—comparable in certain respects to la Francophonie or the Community of Portuguese Language Countries—than to a fully fledged strategic alliance capable of articulating unified positions on defense, security (Ünal & Ertem, 2022). Member states continue to prioritize national interests over collective commitments, resulting in differentiated foreign policy orientations, particularly in relation to major external powers including Russia, China, and the European Union (European Union, 2025) While Türkiye seeks deeper strategic coordination, Central Asian

states remain cautious about excessive alignment, instead favoring multi-vector foreign policies that preserve room for maneuver and policy autonomy (Koçak, 2023).

Türkiye's position is further complicated by intensified competition from other external actors. China's Belt and Road Initiative and associated infrastructure investments, Russia's longstanding political and security influence, and the European Union's €12 billion Global Gateway package for Central Asia—focused on critical raw materials, transport connectivity, and the green energy transition—each constitute powerful alternatives to Turkish initiatives. Internal institutional weaknesses also remain pronounced (European Union, 2025) In Türkiye, the absence of a robust organizational infrastructure dedicated to the OTS continues to constrain long-term strategic planning and the elaboration of a coherent vision for the Turkic World 2040 agenda (Turkic World Vision- 2040). Without deeper institutionalization—through the establishment of specialized think tanks, academic centers, and strategic planning units equipped with effective feedback mechanisms—Türkiye's regional influence may be increasingly challenged by more coordinated and better-resourced external actors, as illustrated by the first EU–Central Asia Summit in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, on 3–4 April 2025. Accordingly, Ankara must do more than expand its economic and diplomatic presence; it must also cultivate stronger political solidarity, strategic coherence, and institutionalized action within the OTS, moving beyond soft power alone (Najiyeva, 2025).

> *The subsequent sections of this article analyze the evolution of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) within the broader framework of Türkiye's geopolitical strategy in Central Asia. It examines the ways in which Ankara deploys economic, cultural, and strategic instruments to consolidate its regional presence while simultaneously confronting significant structural constraints and navigating complex interactions with major global powers. By assessing Türkiye's engagement with regionalism through the OTS framework, the study seeks to illuminate the potential trajectories of Eurasian geopolitics and the prospective role of Turkic states within an increasingly multipolar international order* (Karimov & Akhmetov, 2021).

Roots and Frameworks: Türkiye, Central Asia, and the Emergence of Turkic Regionalism

The idea of Turkic unity—understood as the pursuit of solidarity, cooperation, and a shared political identity among Turkic-speaking peoples—has long occupied an important place in Türkiye's foreign-policy imagination toward Central Asia, with intellectual and strategic roots extending to the late Ottoman period. Although Turkish nationalism acquired greater domestic prominence after the 1950s, Türkiye did not develop a consistent or comprehensive regional policy for much of the post-Soviet era, nor during the Cold War (Özkan, 2020). This relative strategic ambivalence stands in notable contrast to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's earlier activist vision, which anticipated the eventual independence of Turkic republics and envisaged them as "our own brothers and sisters of one language, one faith." In contemporary terms, the emergence of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) may be interpreted through multiple international relations

perspectives: from a constructivist standpoint, it reflects the institutionalization of shared identity, historical memory, and cultural affinity; from a realist perspective, it serves Türkiye's broader search for influence, strategic depth, and balancing capacity in a contested geopolitical environment; and from a regionalist perspective, it represents an evolving framework for political coordination and interdependence among states seeking greater autonomy within a multipolar order (Ünal & Ertem, 2022).

Early initiatives toward Turkic outreach in Türkiye began to take shape after the 12 September 1980 coup, particularly under the liberalizing agenda advanced by Turgut Özal's government from 1983 onward, which coincided with the ascendance of new Turkish political and intellectual currents. In this context, some strands of strategic thinking drew on Cold War-era geopolitical frameworks associated with Zbigniew Brzezinski and Nicholas Spykman, especially the notion that the consolidation of Turkic and Islamic identities could help offset the influence of resurgent Eurasian powers, notably Russia (Brzezinski,1997) Spykman's Rimland thesis, in particular, suggested that the geopolitical weight of the Eurasian heartland could be constrained through control of the surrounding coastal belt, including strategically significant states such as Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. Yet this early orientation remained fragmented, ideologically uneven, and only weakly institutionalized, limiting its policy continuity and practical effectiveness (Hughes, Snegovaya, 2022).

From the perspective of international relations theory, this trajectory can be interpreted in several ways. Constructivism emphasizes the role of identity formation, historical memory, and cultural affinity in shaping Türkiye's evolving imagination of the Turkic world. Neofunctionalism highlights the potentially cumulative logic through which limited cooperation might generate broader spillover into political and institutional integration, even if such dynamics remained muted in the early period (Bayat,2023). Liberal intergovernmentalism and intergovernmentalism, by contrast, underscore the primacy of state preferences, domestic constraints, and bargaining among sovereign actors, helping explain why Türkiye's engagement with Central Asia remained selective and strategically cautious. During these years, Türkiye's attention remained firmly oriented toward the European Union, while Central Asia was often viewed less as a space of immediate strategic value than as a geographically distant and politically peripheral region with limited tangible returns, rather than as a community of cultural kin (European Union, 2025).

Since the 2010s, Türkiye's approach has undergone a notable transformation, reflecting a more strategically oriented vision that extends beyond cultural affinity and accords greater agency to Central Asian states. A conjunction of developments—not least the heightened securitization of Turkish politics following the failed coup attempt in 2016—enabled the AKP-led ruling elite under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, together with its nationalist coalition partner MHP under Devlet Bahçeli, to place renewed emphasis on closer relations with Turkic Eurasia, the Caucasus, and Pakistan (Çetinkaya, Demirel, 2023). This reorientation infused the Turkish-Islamic synthesis of the 1980s and 1990s with more opportunistic and revisionist undertones, while also reinforcing Erdoğan's pursuit of "agency, independence, and leadership" for a "New Turkey" ostensibly free from external tutelage. In this context, Central Asia was no longer conceived merely as a transit corridor or a remote peripheral space, but increasingly as a strategic arena in

which Türkiye sought recognition as an autonomous actor within an emergent Eurasian order (Özkan, 2020).

This strategic reorientation has been shaped by broader geopolitical realignments, including Türkiye's growing disenchantment with the European Union accession process, persistent instability in the Middle East, the structural limitations of partnerships with Gulf Arab states, and a more pronounced pivot toward Eurasia through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' "Asia Anew" (Yeniden Asya) initiative. This policy framework seeks to engage systematically with the rising influence of Turkic states and the expanding role of China in the region. As the late scholar Mert Bayat of the Turkish Naval Academy observed, contemporary Turkish strategic thought synthesizes multiple traditions of geopolitical analysis to position Türkiye as a critical connector between the Eurasian continental heartland and maritime trade corridors in the Mediterranean (Lee, 2025). This orientation underscores Ankara's expanding ambitions in Central Asia and beyond. Given Central Asia's landlocked geography and limited access to southern seas, the region has a strong incentive to cultivate relationships with states possessing maritime capabilities, particularly Türkiye. In this context, Türkiye's seaborne connectivity reinforces its capacity to function as a reliable transit hub, linking Central Asia to European markets (Kahveci & Bonnenfant, 2023)

Conclusion

The OTS exemplifies how regional organizations in Eurasia navigate the intersection of identity, strategy, and geopolitics. Türkiye's engagement highlights the potential for middle-power agency, combining economic, infrastructural, and soft-power initiatives to consolidate influence. However, structural constraints—including limited institutional capacity, multi-vector member-state policies, and external geopolitical competition—require Ankara to pursue deeper institutionalization, stronger policy coordination, and expanded intellectual infrastructure. By balancing leadership with respect for member autonomy, Türkiye can strengthen the OTS as a credible platform for regional cooperation, contributing to the broader reconfiguration of Eurasian geopolitics in an increasingly multipolar world.

References

Bayat, M. (2023). *Eurasian strategic connectivity and Turkish foreign policy*. Turkish Naval Academy Press.

Brzezinski, Z. (1997). *The grand chessboard: American primacy and its geostrategic imperatives*. Basic Books.

Çetinkaya, M., & Demirel, E. (2023). Analyzing the impact of the Organization of Turkic States on the international system. *Semantic Scholar*. https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Analyzing-the-impact-of-the-organization-of-Turkic-%C3%87etinkaya-Demirel/3129077cd34af226

Demir, C. (2022). The Organization of Turkic States: Implications for the regional balance of power. *Güvenlik Stratejileri Dergisi [Security Strategies Journal], 18*(4), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.19195/1305-1712.18.4.1

Eldem, T. (2022). The Middle Corridor and the geopolitics of connectivity between Europe and Asia. *Asian Affairs, 53*(1), 96–112.

European Union. (2025). *Global Gateway: EU strategy for critical raw materials, transport modernization, and green energy transition in Central Asia*. European Commission.

Grafova, D. (2021). The outlook on Turkey's foreign policy from different paradigms of international relations. *Political Science, 2*, 64–89.

Gökçe, E. (2021). Pan-Turkism revisited: Cultural identity and regional strategy in Turkey's Central Asia policy. *Central Asian Survey, 40*(4), 612–634. https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2021.1950409

Hughes, J., & Snegovaya, M. (2022). Middle powers and multipolarity in Eurasia: Regional strategies and institutional adaptation. *International Politics, 59*(4), 457–480. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-021-00310-7

Kahveci, E., & Bonnenfant, Y. (2023). Soft power and regional identity in the Turkic world. *Central Asian Affairs, 10*(2), 145–163.

Karimov, R., & Akhmetov, T. (2021). Regional organizations in Central Asia: Institutional development and geopolitical implications. *Central Asian Survey, 40*(2), 152–171. https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2021.1882354

Kaya, İ. (2022). Increasing realism in Turkish foreign policy in the post-Davutoğlu era. *Insight Turkey, 24*(4), 45–68.

Koçak, M. (2023). Potential of the Organization of Turkic States in the international system: Promises and vulnerabilities. *Insight Turkey, 25*(4), 45–68. https://www.jstor.org/stable/48754797

Lee, J. (2025). Regional leadership through international institutions: Türkiye and the Organization of Turkic States amid geopolitical upheavals. *Korea Journal of International Studies, 23*(3), 535–562. https://kjis.org/journal/view.html?spage=535&volume=23&number=3

Mustofaev, M. (2022). The Organization of Turkic States: A new approach to global and regional challenges. *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs, 27*(1), 129–154. https://doi.org/10.20991/perception.1139303

Morneau, J. (2024). *Theory of strategic autonomy: U.S. foreign policy between alliances and autonomy* (Doctoral dissertation, Concordia University). https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/id/eprint/993641/1/Morneau_PhD_S2024.pdf

Najiyeva, M. (2025). Türkiye's cultural diplomacy and soft power strategy in the region of Central Asia. *International Journal of Advanced Research, 13*(11), 152–156. https://www.academicpublishers.org/journals/index.php/ijai/article/view/7467

Organization of Turkic States. (2021). *Declaration on the transformation of the Turkic Council into the Organization of Turkic States*. OTS Secretariat.

Özkan, M. (2020). Türkiye's strategic reorientation toward Central Asia: Connectivity, soft power, and the OTS. *Journal of Eurasian Studies, 11*(3), 245–263. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.euras.2020.06.002

Sakwa, R. (2017). *Russia, China, and the multipolar world: Geopolitics and regional orders*. Routledge.

Sari, B. (2023). Security aspect of the integration in Turkic World under the Organization of Turkic States. *Insight Turkey, 25*(4), 69–92. https://www.jstor.org/stable/48754798

Sharipov, A. Sh. (2020). The role of Turkish soft power diplomacy in the current development of Central Asia. *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology, 17*(7), 7684–7697. https://archives.palarch.nl/index.php/jae/article/view/3395

Stănescu, M. (2024). A small state's security strategy in a changing geopolitical environment. *Balkan Security Forum, 12*(3), 45–68.

Sucu, M., Özer, S., & Aydın, A. (2021). The transformation of middle powers in Eurasian regional politics. *International Politics Review, 9*(2), 188–205.

TİKA – Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency. (2023). *Annual report: Development initiatives in Central Asia*. TİKA.

Ulusoy, H. (2023). 100 years of continuity in Turkish foreign policy: A constructivist perspective. *Foreign Policy Review, 19*(2), 45–68. https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/3258249

Ünal, D., & Ertem, H. (2022). The OTS and Turkic regionalism: Institutional capacity and policy challenges. *International Studies Review, 24*(1), 102–120. https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viaa020

Yaşar, İ. H. (2025). Türkiye's public diplomacy tools in Central Asia: An inter-institutional comparative analysis. *İletişim ve Diplomasi, 15*, 167–188. https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/iletisimvediplomasi/article/1785337

Yesevi, A., & Kuru, A. (2019). Turkey's soft power strategy in Eurasia: The role of TİKA and educational diplomacy. *Insight Turkey, 21*(3), 89–108.

Bölükbaşı, Y. Z., Bilici, İ., & Yücel, G. (2025). The Organisation of Turkic States: An emerging actor in the context of geopolitical opportunities and limitations? *Janus, 14*(1), 45–68. https://janusnet-ojs.autonoma.pt/index.php/janus/article/view/269

Dunyamaliyeva, N. Z. (2025). International security as a determinant in the activities of the Organization of Turkic States. *Baltic Journal of Legal and Social Sciences, 15*(1), 88–102. http://www.baltijapublishing.lv/index.php/bjlss/article/view/2881

Yılmaz, A. (2019). The Middle Corridor and Türkiye's Eurasian connectivity strategy. *Asian Journal of Political Science, 27*(4), 381–401. https://doi.org/10.1080/02185377.2019.1675980

How to cite this note
Jahangir, Hasanov (2026). Strategic Turkic Regionalism: Türkiye, the Organization of Turkic States, and the Reconfiguration of Eurasian Geopolitics. *Janus.net, e-journal of international relations*. VOL 17, N.º 2, November 2026-April 2027, pp. 781-788. https://doi.org/10.26619/1647-7251.17.2.07