

## Turks in the Changing World Order: The Organization of Turkic States

Demircan, Necati

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Demircan, N. (2022). Turks in the Changing World Order: The Organization of Turkic States. *The Defence Horizon Journal*. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-81345-8>

### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer Free Digital Peer Publishing Licence zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den DiPP-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:  
<http://www.dipp.nrw.de/lizenzen/dppl/service/dppl/>

### Terms of use:

This document is made available under a Free Digital Peer Publishing Licence. For more information see:  
<http://www.dipp.nrw.de/lizenzen/dppl/service/dppl/>

## *Turks in the Changing World Order: The Organization of Turkic States*



Source: shutterstock.com/Efasein

**Author:** Necati Demircan is a PhD student in the Department of Global Studies at Shanghai University. He is an author of Quixote Globe and editor of the Belt & Road Initiative Quarterly. He also writes articles for the Turkish daily *Aydınlık* newspaper. His research interests mainly focus on Chinese and Turkish foreign policies. The views contained in this article are the author's alone.

**Abstract:** The increasing cooperation of Turkic Speaking States under the umbrella of the Organization of Turkic States attracted attention while the world was on the verge of a global change. The unity of the Turks was evaluated as "Pan Turkism" and "Turan". Some researchers interpreted the rise of Turkism as increasing competition in Eurasia against China and Russia. It is an important discussion topic how the Turk states should understand the development of cooperation. It is necessary to evaluate the geopolitical position of the Turk states in the Belt and Road Initiative and the global balance of power. This study evaluated the rise of Turkism in the 21st century and the role of the organisation of Turkic states in the global order.

**Bottom-line-up-front:** The Organization of Turkic States may play a role in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The thesis of seeing the rise of Turkism as an Atlantic-centered threat is rotten. Especially in Turkey and Kazakhstan, Turkism develops with a Eurasian-centered understanding.

**Problem statement:** How to evaluate the rise of Turkism in the 21st century and the role of the Organisation of Turkish States in the global order?

**So what?:** The strategic position of the Turkic states in the Belt and Road Initiative may rise as the third pole in the region in consensus. The third pole of the Turkic states is an attempt to take their place in the multipolar world instead of creating conflict with Russia and China.

The 8th Summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States (Turkic Council) in İstanbul made a historic decision. The organisation, established with the aim of encouraging cooperation between Turkic speaking states in 2009, transformed into the Organization of Turkic States.

The speech of Kazakhstan's founder, Nursultan Nazarbayev, who played an important role in the unification of the Turk states, at the Baku Summit in 2019 suggested that the council's name be "Council of Turkic States", instead of "Turkic Speaking".[1] Nazarbayev's proposal was accepted by Turk States leaders at the summit, where he was honored with the title of Aksakal (Elder/ Honorary Chairman of the Organization of Turkic States) of the Turkic World. In addition, Nazarbayev gave the message in his speech that a new page of history was opened and interaction between Turk states should be taken to a new level. The emergence of the need for institutionalisation of the organisation shows that it is the most important reason for the change. The decisions to open the council's general secretariat building in İstanbul, strengthen the organisation's secretariat, create the Turkic Investment Fund, and prepare the Organization of the Turkic States Strategic Road Map for 2022-2026 prove this. Secondly, the organisation's transformation on the 30th anniversary of the independence of the Turkic states in Central Asia also gives a message. The Turkic States in Central Asia gained their independence after the global change. Now, the world is on the brink of change again and the Turk States want to strengthen their place in the new world order to be established.

There were some debates about whether the organisation will play a role against Russia and China after transforming the Organisations of Turkic State. The coming together of the Turk states was considered the rise of Turkism. Therefore, the most important question is whether or not rising Turkism is a threat to Eurasia. Another question is how the organisation will play a role in the changing World order.

### **Rise of Turan**

Turan and Pan-Turkism debates started between the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Three ideas were dominant in the fall of the Ottoman Empire. The idea of Ottomanism was based on the idea of having Ottoman citizens living in the Ottoman Empire. The idea of Islamism wanted to create an Islam empire where Muslims lived in the Ottoman Empire and around the world. The idea of Turkism aimed to unite the Turks. Pan-Turkism was occurred by affected rising nationalism in Europe at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Especially, Pan-Turkism appeared reaction against Pan-Slavism.[2] Therefore, Yusuf Akçura and Ismail Gasprinsky appeared in Crimea as the first Pan-Turkists and had Tatar roots.

Ziya Gökalp, the founder of Turkism, described "Turan" as a name of the union that includes only Turks. Gökalp used Turan to describe the great Turk state with all Turkic roots because the word "Turk" has become a name given only to Turkish citizens in Turkey today. However, Gökalp stated that Turkishness is the unification of Oghuz and Turkmen tribes (establishment of Turkey). His distant target (ideal) is the unification of Oghuzs, Tatars, Kazakhs, Kyrgyzs, Uzbeks and Yakuts in language, literature, culture under the name of Turan.[3]

In 1917, Arpad Zemlenyi, a Hungarian Turkist, defined the Turan Union as a respectful approach to the common racial and traditional values that come from the depths of history and working to bring the peoples who are a part of these shared values closer to each other.[4] What stands out in the definition of the two types of Turan is that it does not involve creating an economic union or a common market. In short, we can define Turan as the cooperation of Turk states with a common history and culture. This cooperation certainly has a more emotional meaning than the European Union. However, Turan does not mean that independent Turk states will act as a single state. The most realistic equivalent of this in the 21st century is a cooperation organisation.

Today, Turk States covered a large part of Eurasia with their geography and population. There are six independent Turk republics in Eurasia: Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Also, Turk people live in autonomous regions such as the Siberian Altai Republic, Bashkortostan, Chuvashia, Uyghur Autonomy Region, Tatarstan, and Dagestan Republics. Approximately 200 million Turks live in Eurasia. These Turk states have common linguistic, religious, cultural and historical ties. The incarnation of Turkic states, which come from the same historical and cultural roots, under the umbrella of the Organization of Turkic States, can be interpreted as a revival of Turan. However, the critical question is, what does Turan represent today?

Today, Turan defines as the Organization of Turkic States. The organisation creates a structure that brings culturally closer to each other and deepest economic cooperation between states. It is quite absurd to think that it means more to Turan than this. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Turkists were living in the imperial era. Pan-Germanism and Pan-Slavism had an effect on that time. Therefore, Turkists had dreams far from reality that might create Turan in Central Asia. However, Turk States gained their independence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is not possible to evolve another structure beyond cooperation. At the heart of the cooperation lies the economic and political independence of the organisation's members.[5]

### **Turkism is not a Threat to China and Russia**

Chinese researchers see the organisation's name change as the rise of Turkism (Pan-Turkism) and argue that it is risky. They claim that the organisation may trigger the rise of extreme nationalism, which could intensify ethnic conflicts and hit regional stability and security. They assume that competition between Turkey, China and Russia will increase.[6] Turkism was perceived as a threat by Russia and China in Central Asia and the Caucasus. The most important reason for this was ethnic nationalism, the fact that imperialist states such as Germany, Japan, Britain and the US were a tool in the fight against communism during and after the Second World War. A similar process took place in Turkey. After Turkey's entry into NATO, nationalist and Islamic conservative political movements were used to fight against communism. Because of communism, "Turkists" saw Russia and China as enemies.

During the Second World War, Germany gave importance to the propaganda of rescuing the "captive Turks" to bring Turkey into the war. For example, in 1941, Nuri Killigil began meeting with the German

ambassador in Ankara, Franz von Papen, and by giving covert support to the Turanist movement in Turkey, he won the alliance of the Germans. Nuri Pasha's views were turned into a report by Ernst Woermann, the undersecretary of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs responsible for Turkish affairs. He pioneered the establishment of the SS Turkestan Legion Regiment with Pan-Turkist ideas (CIA-RDP81-01043R003500080004-7.). After the defeat of Hitler, the US took up the argument of "rescuing the captive Turks" as a tool of the "Cold War". In West Germany, institutes and rescue associations were founded, and political parties were formed, which received money from the state budget in Turkey. The Turanist view of history gradually predominated in school curricula.[7] The CIA tried to dismantle Turkism from its Kemalist and revolutionary character and replace it with a racist and anti-communist character.[8]

The difference in basic understanding between Kemalist Turkism (Eurasianism) and racist Turanism (Atlanticism) is clearly understood. In the Kemalist history thesis, Central Asia is only the homeland where Turks lived in the past. For the racist Turanists, Central Asia is still their homeland today, and the racist Turanist history focuses on "captive Turks". Kemalist Turkism owns all the history on the territory of today's Turkey. (Anatolian civilisations such as Hittite and Ionian) racist Turanist history denies this.[9] While Kemalist Turkism is peaceful, Racist Turanism is aggressive. Before Turkey became a member of NATO, Kemalist Turkists established friendly relations with Russia, Iran and China in foreign policy and did not see communism as a threat. Racist Turkists such as Nihal Atsız, supported by the CIA to fight communism, saw communism as an enemy, particularly China and Russia.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the CIA sought to create a moderate Islamist and Turkist wave in Turkic states through Fetullah Gülen schools. In his 2010 book, MIT (National Intelligence Service) Foreign Intelligence Bureau Head Nuri Gündeş explained that the FETO (Gülen) schools in Eurasia in the 1990s provided bases for hundreds of CIA agents. It hosted American CIA agents with diplomatic passports as "English teachers" in schools opened by the Gülen community, especially in the Turkic States.[10] FETO had 29 schools in Kazakhstan, 13 schools in Tajikistan, 12 schools in Kyrgyzstan, 20 schools in Turkmenistan and one school in Uzbekistan. FETO used Turkism as a cover in Central Asia by organising events such as the International Turkish Olympics to teach Turkish. With the purging of FETO, hence the CIA and Gladio from within the state, on July 15, the Turkists got rid of their Atlanticist character and returned to their essence. Today, Turkism has a more Eurasian character than ever before. The fact that the chairman of the MHP, (*Turkish* Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, English: Nationalist Movement Party) Devlet Bahçeli, does not see China as an enemy is the most important indicator of this

change. Today, Turkism is Eurasianism. On the other hand, Eurasian Turkism does not have an imperialist character.

The Council does not threaten Russia and China. On the contrary, it plays an important role in the unification of Eurasia. Binali Yıldırım, Deputy Chairman of the AKP (*Turkish*: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, *English*: Justice and Development Party), stated that China and Russia are natural members of the Organization of Turkish States and that the union aims to strengthen regional economic and cultural cooperation.[11]

### **The Position of Turkic States in the Multipolar World Order**

The organisation of Turkic States can contribute to three poles in the Eurasia order. It is noteworthy that the idea of the organisation arose from the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, who proposed the idea of the Eurasian Union in 2006. Considering the Turkic states' cooperation in the Eurasian Economic Union, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Belt and Road Initiative, one can say that it forms the basis of unity in Eurasia. In addition, Eurasia and the Turk States form the railway and road leg of the Belt and Road Initiative. Nazarbayev suggested that the name of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Corridor be the "Turan Corridor". This situation shows that the Turk states understand the strategic importance of the Belt and Road Initiative. It also proves the geostrategic importance of the Turk States in Eurasia.

Turkey's rapprochement with Russia played a role in ending the 30-year-long Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the last war, revealing the positive results of the Turk states working in cooperation with Russia and China. Azerbaijan's latest victory in Nagorno-Karabakh strengthened the communication between the Turk states and Turkey as well as Turkey's cooperation with Russia. The sending of 2030 soldiers by the Collective Security Treaty Organization after the protests in Kazakhstan proves the place of the Turk states in the world order to be established around China and Russia.

## Conclusion

The Turk states are at the heart of the land trade flowing from Asia to Europe. In particular, the US strategy to encircle the China seas makes railroads a safe alternative in the Belt and Road Initiative. This situation increases the strategic importance of the Turkic states. It seems that the development of cooperation between Turk states in the unification of Eurasia does not pose a threat to China or Russia. In particular, the crushing of FETO, which the CIA created to fight anti-communism in Turkey, on July 15, 2016, weakened Atlantic-centred Turanism and brought Eurasian-centered Turkism to the fore. Thus, Turkism moved away from its Atlanticist character. On the contrary, Turkey, Azerbaijan and other Turk states are developing cooperation with Eurasian countries. This situation reveals that it is necessary to change the sceptical and cautious thoughts towards Turkism.

The organisation of Turkic States aims to deepen economic and cultural cooperation rather than create political unity. Political unity can only be established by unifying the whole of Eurasia. The Turkic states can only be one pillar of this. As long as the organisation of Turk states acts together with China and Russia in the region, it can achieve success. Otherwise, it will not be successful.

- 
- [1] Türkiye Azerbaycan, "Türk Konseyi 7. Zirvesi Bakü'de Gerçekleştirildi," last accessed on January 17, 2022, <https://www.turkiyeazerbaycan.com/haber/turk-konseyi-7--zirvesi-baku-de-gerceklestirildi>.
- [2] Jacob M Landao, "Pan-Turkism: From Irredentism to Cooperation" (Hong Kong, Hurst&Company, 1995): 8.
- [3] Ziya Gökalp, *Türkçülüğün Esasları*, (İnkılap ve Aka Kitapevi, 1976): 38-42.
- [4] Tarık Demirkan, *Macar Turancıları*, (İstanbul, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2000): 87.
- [5] Mehmet Seyfettin Erol, "Turkic Council and Russia," last accessed on November 25, 2021, <https://www.ankasam.org/turkic-council-and-russia/?lang=en>.
- [6] Yan Jin, Regional countries have reasons to guard against the Organization of Turkic States, last accessed on November 25, 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202111/1239128.shtml>; and <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/D6cpVTaxef38z97f9AryPA>.
- [7] Doğan Avcıoğlu, *Türklerin Tarihi I*, (İstanbul, Tekin Yayınevi, 1978): 30.
- [8] Doğu Perinçek, *Bozkurt Efsaneleri ve Gerçek*, (İstanbul, Kaynak Yayınları, 2003): 176-178.
- [9] Doğan Avcıoğlu, *Türklerin Tarihi I*, (İstanbul, Tekin Yayınevi, 1978): 27.
- [10] Nedim Şener, CIA'in Orta Asya'daki tetikçisi FETÖ, last accessed on November 25, 2021, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/nedim-sener/ciain-orta-asyadaki-tetikcisi-feto-41631596>.
- [11] *Sputnik*, Aksakallılar Konseyi Başkanı Yıldırım: Rusya ve Çin Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı'nın doğal üyesidir, last accessed on November 25, 2021, <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20211126/aksakallilar-konseyi-baskani-yildirim-rusya-ve-cin-turk-devletleri-teskilatinin-dogal-uyesidir-1051186836.html>.