

## THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH (ARTSAKH) CONFLICT AND THE ORGANIZATION OF TURKIC STATES (OTS)

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### Abstract

The main purpose of this research is to analyze the primary objectives of discussions surrounding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the attitudes of Turkic-speaking republics towards this issue in summits of Turkic-speaking states, as well as within the Turkic Council and the Organization of Turkic States (OTS). The OTS serves as an institutional framework for organizing Turkic integration processes. As these integration processes deepen across the Turkic world, challenges to Armenia are expected to increase. This research demonstrates that in previous decades, Turkey and Azerbaijan attempted to cast the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in a pan-Turkic light and to create a united anti-Armenian front; however, the Turkic-speaking republics of Central Asia have largely maintained a neutral stance. Following the 44-Day War, Türkiye initiated a process of Turkic integration encompassing the political, economic, educational, cultural, security, and informational spheres. The strengthening of this integration is likely to pose significant challenges for the region, particularly for Armenia, in areas such as economics, politics, and security.

**Keywords** - Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) conflict, Turkey (Türkiye), Turkic-speaking republics, Turkic Council (Türk Konseyi), the Organizations of Turkic States (Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı), Turkic integration.

### Introduction

After the collapse of the USSR, Turkey saw an opportunity to build relations with Turkic-speaking countries in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Turkey emphasized historical, ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural ties with these countries, while focusing primarily on economic and educational-cultural initiatives. The Turkish leadership organized summits of Turkic-speaking countries and passionately advocated for Turkic unity, a core principle of the Pan-Turkism ideology. Turkey established the closest ties with Azerbaijan, viewing it as the main partner for expanding its influence in the South Caucasus.

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In the early 1990s, Turkey began to show an active interest in the South Caucasus conflicts, with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict becoming a focal point in its politics for several reasons.

Firstly, Azerbaijan was a party to the conflict, and Turkey had already held political plans regarding Azerbaijan since the beginning of the 20th century.

Secondly, Azerbaijan's geographical position and natural resources were crucial for Turkey to extend its influence across both the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

Thirdly, the conflict presented an effective opportunity for Turkey to strengthen its relations with Azerbaijan, ultimately aiming for comprehensive influence, while also applying pressure on Armenia by using the conflict as a precondition to not establish diplomatic relations.

Essentially, Turkey positioned the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a central element of its policy towards Azerbaijan, framing it solely from Azerbaijan's perspective. Türkiye began to advocate for Azerbaijan's interests on both international and regional platforms. In this context, the Turkish-Azerbaijani alliance raised the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict during summits of Turkic-speaking countries, aiming to achieve a unified stance to defend Azerbaijan's interests.

Recently, researchers have increasingly focused on the OTS, its activities, and related initiatives. In his article, Turkish scholar Can Demir examines the issue of the balance of power in Eurasia and links the establishment of the OTS to it. He provides a brief history of the organization's establishment, identity and vision, and analyzes the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing the OTS using a SWOT analysis.<sup>1</sup> The author also addresses the issue of the so-called "Zangezur Corridor" within the context of the Middle Corridor, noting that "the Zengezur corridor, involving transportation routes both for Azerbaijan and for Armenia, provides an opportunity for both countries to increase mutual cooperation, strengthen the security environment and create common areas of economic prosperity".<sup>2</sup>

This approach lacks arguments, especially since the author does not specify what opportunities it creates for Armenia. To ensure security and establish lasting peace in the region, Turkey and Azerbaijan should respect Armenia's territorial integrity and sovereignty, refraining from demanding extraterritorial corridors by the threat of war.

Chinese researcher Zhang Yuyan examined the creation, motivations, and effects of the OTS. The author observes that Azerbaijan's victory in the war in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020, established favorable conditions for the formation of a "union."<sup>3</sup>

Armenian researcher Hayk Demoyan addressed the summits of Turkic-speaking countries and the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. He analyzes how the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is discussed at these summits and reveals the goals of Turkey and Azerbaijan.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Can, Demir, *The Organization of Turkic States: Implications for the Regional Balance of Power*,  *Güvenlik Stratejileri Dergisi TDT Özel Sayısı*, 2022, pp. 39-71.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> Юйянь, Чжан, Организация тюркских государств (ОТГ): Происхождение, мотивы особенности и влияние, *Вестник Пермского университета, Политология*, т. 17, № 1, 2023, с. 80.

<sup>4</sup> Демоян, Гайк, Тюркские саммиты. цели, задачи, приоритеты и позиция в Карабахском вопросе, с. 47, [http://www.noravank.am/upload/pdf/62\\_ru.pdf](http://www.noravank.am/upload/pdf/62_ru.pdf) (accessed March 25, 2023).

The OTS programs and activities have also been studied by Firat Yıldız<sup>5</sup>, Murodjan Mustofaev<sup>6</sup> and others.

Although many researchers from various countries have studied the OTS, studies related to the Nagorno-Karabakh issue in that context are scarce. In this research, we analyze the policy transformations, discussions, and positions concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict during the institutionalization of the OTS. From this perspective, the research aims to address the following issues: 1) the goals of Turkey and Azerbaijan in discussing the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict at the summits of Turkic-speaking countries, as well as the positions of Central Asian Turkic-speaking republics; 2) the approaches and principles adopted by the Turkic Council regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict; and 3) the challenges that the OTS and Turkic integration projects pose for the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Artsakh.

Therefore, while Turkey and Azerbaijan raised the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict at the summits of Turkic-speaking countries and within the Turkic Council, they did not achieve significant success, and the Central Asian Turkic republics maintained a neutral stance towards Armenia. However, given the current conditions of institutionalized pan-Turkic structures, it is unlikely that these states will continue to remain neutral. From this perspective, the OTS poses a significant security challenge for the Republic of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

### **Methodology and scope of research**

This research employs a systemic approach as a general methodological framework. The research problem is explored through various stages of organizing a unified process or system, such as the formation of the OTS and the establishment of its institutional structure. The basis of this study is the documents signed during summits attended by the heads of Turkic-speaking republics, which outline the main issues and discussed approaches.

Using document analysis and content analysis methods, we examined these documents with a specific focus on how they address the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Through document analysis, we investigated the policies pursued by Turkey and Azerbaijan regarding the conflict, as well as the positions of the Central Asian Turkic republics. Additionally, using content analysis, we analyzed the documents related to the OTS to reveal the ideological and strategic transformations concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Armenia.

The scope of the research encompasses the processes from the first summit of Turkic-speaking countries to the present day, which marks the founding of the OTS. From the issues discussed within this framework, we focused solely on observations and actions related to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

During this research, we employed the method of comparative analysis to illustrate the changes related to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. We compared the three stages of

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<sup>5</sup> Yıldız, Firat, *The Political Vision of the organization of Turkic States: An Analysis of the Turkic World Vision 2040*, Eurasian Research Journal, vol. 5, no. 2, 2023, pp. 61-79.

<sup>6</sup> Mustofaev, Murodjan, *The Organization of Turkic States: A New Approach to Global and Regional Challenges, Perception*, vol. XXVII, no. 1, 2022, pp. 105-120.

institutionalization of the OTS, revealing that Türkiye and Azerbaijan have shifted their rhetoric and approaches over time, moving from the idea of Turkic unity to a vision of Turkic integration. In this context, the Republic of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh face various challenges.

The research scope includes the processes from the first summit of Turkic-speaking countries to the present, which marks the establishment of the OTS. Within this framework, we focused specifically on observations and actions pertaining to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

### **Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh Issue in the Agenda of the OTS**

Türkiye began promoting the ideas of Turkic unity and neo-pan-Turkism after the collapse of the USSR. It established diplomatic relations with Turkic-speaking countries and initiated cooperation in political, economic, and educational-cultural fields. One of Türkiye's key projects during this period was organizing summits of Turkic-speaking countries. Through these summits, the Turkish government sought to create a common platform and develop a unified agenda with post-Soviet Turkic-speaking republics. This platform gradually evolved over the decades, ultimately resulting in today's Organization of Turkic States. Chronologically the OTS has gone through three stages of institutionalization.

The first stage involved organizing summits of Turkic-speaking countries, which ultimately led to the creation of the Turkic Council (Türk Konseyi). The second stage marked the active period of the Turkic Council, during which unified structures began to form, and systematic programs were implemented. The third stage was the establishment of the OTS, which initiated integration processes within the Turkic world. Throughout these stages, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict appeared in adopted documents, and issues related to Armenia also remained on the agenda.

During the institutionalization of the OTS, notable ideological shifts emerged concerning both the organization and its stance on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Armenia. While earlier summits saw Türkiye emphasizing unity and commonalities with Turkic-speaking republics, after the establishment of the OTS, the focus shifted to integration. This integration is outlined in several stages, with the ultimate aim of forming a military-political structure under the OTS's auspices.

The first stage of this integration involves establishing a direct land connection between Turkey and Azerbaijan, which would enhance the position Turkey in the Caspian Sea basin and effectively link it by land with the Turkic-speaking countries of Central Asia. This objective presents a dangerous challenge to Armenia's territorial integrity. The Turkish-Azerbaijani alliance seeks to achieve this connection through Armenia's Syunik region, labeling it the "Zangezur Corridor" and presenting it as part of the Trans-Caspian East-West Middle Corridor project.

The policy concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Armenia can be examined from two perspectives: that of Türkiye and Azerbaijan, and that of the Turkic-speaking countries of Central Asia. Following the collapse of the USSR, Turkey recognized Armenia's independence but did not establish diplomatic relations. In early April 1993, after a military operation lasting from March 27 to April 3, the Armenian army gained control of Karvachar (Kalbajar), a pivotal moment in the

Artsakh liberation war, which underscored the defeat of the Azerbaijani armed forces. In response, Turkey unilaterally closed its border with Armenia.

Later, Turkey set three preconditions for reopening the border and establishing diplomatic relations with Armenia: (1) Armenia must abandon territorial claims against Turkey and accept the 1921 Treaty of Kars; (2) Armenia must refrain from mentioning the Armenian Genocide of 1915 and officially renounce its policy of recognizing and condemning the genocide; (3) Armenia must resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in accordance with Azerbaijan's territorial integrity.<sup>7</sup>

It should be mentioned that in the post-Soviet South Caucasus, a number of conflicts emerged, including the Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) conflict. This conflict between Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh escalated into a full-scale war in the early 1990s, ending in victory for the Armenian side. A ceasefire agreement was signed on May 12, 1994, in Bishkek. During this war and in the following decades, Turkey provided Azerbaijan with diplomatic and military support on this issue. Turkish-Azerbaijani relations grew stronger, evolving into a military-political partnership symbolized by the slogan "one nation, two states." Turkey played a direct military role during the 44-Day War, with the Turkish military leading operations. Following this war, Turkey and Azerbaijan elevated their relationship to the highest level of alliance, formalized in the Shushi Declaration.<sup>8</sup>

In international, regional, and bilateral meetings, Turkey and Azerbaijan consistently raised the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, framing it solely from the Azerbaijani perspective. They also introduced the issue to Turkic platforms, including the summits of Turkic-speaking countries.

The Turkic-speaking republics of Central Asia—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan—are members of the OTS, with Turkmenistan holding observer status. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, along with Armenia, are also members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a Russia-led military-political alliance (Uzbekistan left the alliance in 2012). Additionally, Armenia and these countries share membership in the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). However, despite this participation in economic and military-political structures, bilateral strategic cooperation has not developed between Armenia and these countries.

In the early 1990s, the Turkic-speaking republics participated enthusiastically in the summits organized by Turkey and began cooperating with Turkey in political, economic, and cultural spheres. During these summits, Turkey and Azerbaijan, along with these republics, attempted to form an anti-Armenian front on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. However, these republics largely exercised restraint and maintained a neutral position.

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<sup>7</sup> Grigoryan, Aleksandr, Knar Khachatryan and Vahram Ter-Matevosyan, Armenia-Turkey border opening: what determines the attitude of Armenians? *Caucasus Survey*, 2018, p. 3, <https://artsakhlbib.am/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Aleksandr-Grigoryan-Knar-Khachatryan-Vahram-Ter-Matevosyan-Armenia-Turkey-border-opening-what-determines-the-attitude-of-Armenians.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Şuşa Beyannamesi. "Türkiye ve Azerbaycan arasında Şuşa Beyannamesi imzalandı! İşte beyannamenin tam metni." *Haber Global*, June 15, 2021, <https://haberglobal.com.tr/dunya/turkiye-ve-azerbaycan-arasinda-susa-beyannamesi-imzalandi-iste-beyannamenin-tam-metni-115805>.

The situation changed after the 44-Day War when Turkey introduced the Turkic world integration project, positioning Turkey-Azerbaijan relations at its core. In the context of recent geopolitical developments—especially following the onset of the war in Ukraine—there has been a noticeable weakening of Russian influence and an increase in Western engagement, including from Turkey, in the post-Soviet regions.

These changes have also affected the politics of Central Asian republics. Following the 44-Day War, a process of strengthening relations between Turkey and the Turkic-speaking republics has begun, which now includes military and strategic cooperation. Simultaneously, these countries have begun to support integration policies, and a subtle shift in their policies toward Armenia is evident. After the 44-Day War, the leaders of these countries largely defended Azerbaijani narratives in their statements. One of the earliest statements came on September 28, 2020, when Azerbaijan launched its attack on Artsakh: “By means of this statement, the Turkic countries reaffirmed their commitment to the norms and principles of international law and reiterated the importance of an early resolution of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict on the basis of sovereignty, territorial integrity and the inviolability of the internationally recognized borders of the Republic of Azerbaijan”.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict as a Topic at the Summits of Turkic-Speaking Countries**

The first summit of Turkic-speaking countries took place in Ankara on October 30-31, 1992. This summit focused on broader issues and can be characterized as an exploratory meeting. For Turkey, it was crucial to gauge the attitudes of the newly independent Turkic republics, which were seeking new platforms for cooperation and viewed Turkey as a potential partner. Cooperation with Turkey held particular significance for Azerbaijan, especially after A. Elchibey became president and emphasized Pan-Turkism rhetoric. During this time, Turkey monitored the developments in Nagorno-Karabakh and began to support for Azerbaijan. While Ankara recognized the independence of the Republic of Armenia, it did not establish diplomatic relations with the country.

The first summit of Turkic-speaking countries was convened at Turkey's initiative to capitalize on the vacuum created in the post-Soviet region and to gain influence. In this context, Turkey began to take active steps in the fields of economic, trade, education, and culture. It was no coincidence that Turkey placed significant emphasis on economic cooperation, particularly regarding energy resources.<sup>10</sup>

Concurrently, the rise of neo-Pan-Turkic ideas became evident, as Türkiye emphasized the unity of the Turkic world, which it argued shared common problems and goals. In this context, Turkey and Azerbaijan attempted to frame the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. During the summit, the Turkish-Azerbaijani side sought to persuade the leaders of other Turkic-speaking countries to condemn Armenia and adopt a separate document addressing the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict; however, they were unsuccessful. It was noteworthy to observe the stance of the leaders of the Central

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<sup>9</sup> Mustofaev, p. 112.

<sup>10</sup> Demoyan, c. 34-36.

Asian Turkic-speaking countries, who suggested that the resolution of the conflict should be left to both parties.

Türkiye is interested in the energy resources of Turkic countries for two main reasons: to meet its own internal needs and to serve as a transit country for transporting these resources to Europe. During this summit, the Turkish leadership expressed enthusiasm about the possibility of creating a Turkic world, with President Turgut Özal even dubbing the 21st century the “Turkic century.”

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In other words, Türkiye and Azerbaijan's attempts to involve the Turkic-speaking countries of Central Asia in an anti-Armenian front were unsuccessful, as these countries maintained a neutral stance.

The second summit of Turkic-speaking countries occurred on October 18, 1994, in Istanbul. By this time, the Bishkek ceasefire had been signed, and Türkiye had unilaterally closed the Armenian-Turkish border, setting forth preconditions for normalizing relations with Armenia. The statement signed at the end of the summit states the following regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: “The heads of states emphasized the need for a peaceful settlement of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, based on the relevant resolutions<sup>13</sup> of the UN Security Council”<sup>14</sup>.

Starting from the second summit, all subsequent summit statements included references to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Essentially, the Turkish-Azerbaijani sides succeeded in having the conflict mentioned in these statements. However, general formulations indicate that the Turkic-speaking countries maintained their previous neutral stance.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, c. 47.

<sup>12</sup> Ankara Bildirisi, [https://web.archive.org/web/20180712222351/turkkon.org/Assets/dokuman/11\\_Ankara-Bildirisi1992\\_1.DevletBaskanlariZirvesi\\_20140418\\_104048.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20180712222351/turkkon.org/Assets/dokuman/11_Ankara-Bildirisi1992_1.DevletBaskanlariZirvesi_20140418_104048.pdf) (accessed April 26, 2023).

<sup>13</sup> In 1993, amidst the active military operations, the UN Security Council adopted four resolutions concerning Azerbaijani-Karabakh conflict: 822 (April 30, 1993), 853 (June 29, 1993), 874 (October 14, 1993), 884 (November 12, 1993). The primary and most important requirement of these resolutions was the immediate cessation of fire, all military and hostile acts. For more: The UN Security Council and the Conflict between Azerbaijan and Karabakh, <http://www.nkr.am/en/un-and-karabakh-conflict> (accessed April 30, 2023).

<sup>14</sup> Istanbul Bildirisi, [https://web.archive.org/web/20220307214014/https://www.turkkon.org/Assets/-dokuman/10\\_IstanbulBildirisi1994\\_2.DevletBaskanlariZirveBildirisi\\_20140418\\_103924.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20220307214014/https://www.turkkon.org/Assets/-dokuman/10_IstanbulBildirisi1994_2.DevletBaskanlariZirveBildirisi_20140418_103924.pdf) (accessed May 1, 2023).

During the third and fourth summits of the Turkic-speaking countries,<sup>15</sup> the importance of resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict based on the resolutions adopted by the UN Security Council was mentioned again, and it was noted that "the non-resolution of this conflict will harm the strengthening of the peace process, confidence, and security in the region".<sup>16</sup> Overall, the previous approach was reiterated. However, it is noteworthy that the resolution of the conflict was conditioned on establishing peace and security in the region. Türkiye and Azerbaijan considered this approach one of the key foundations of their future policies. On the surface, it appeared that the UN Security Council resolutions favored Azerbaijani interests, particularly the call for the "immediate withdrawal of Armenian troops from occupied territories". However, these resolutions also included demands directed at the Azerbaijani side, which official Baku consistently avoided implementing.

The fifth summit took place on June 9, 1998, in Astana. The Astana Declaration states that the UN Security Council resolutions and the three principles adopted at the Lisbon Summit should serve as the foundation for establishing relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan and for resolving the conflict.<sup>17</sup> The Lisbon summit took place on December 3, 1996. The Minsk Group<sup>18</sup> was informed of the three principles that should be part of the settlement of the conflict: 1) the territorial integrity of the Republic of Armenia (RA) and the Republic of Azerbaijan; 2) the legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh as defined in an agreement based on self-determination, granting Nagorno-Karabakh the highest degree of self-government within Azerbaijan; 3) guaranteed security for Nagorno-Karabakh and its entire population, including mutual obligations to ensure compliance by all sides with the provisions of the settlement.<sup>19</sup> The RA voted against this statement and presented its arguments: 1) the RA has no doubts about the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh or the right to reunify with RA. RA recognizes the political identity of the Nagorno-Karabakh people, the integrity of its territory, and the right to ensure security with its own forces; 2) Nagorno-Karabakh gained its status and level of security by resisting the military attack initiated by Azerbaijan, showing a clear sense of political identity and determination to manage the destiny of its people by its own forces; 3) RA realizes that in order to establish a stable and lasting peace in the region, it is necessary to find a resolution acceptable to all

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<sup>15</sup> The third summit took place on August 28, 1995, in Bishkek and the fourth summit took place on October 21, 1996, in Tashkent.

<sup>16</sup> Taşkent Bildirisi, [https://web.archive.org/web/20220307214006/https://www.turkkon.org/Assets/-dokuman/08\\_TaskentBildirisi1996\\_4.DevletBaskanlariZirveBildirisi\\_20140418\\_103822.p](https://web.archive.org/web/20220307214006/https://www.turkkon.org/Assets/-dokuman/08_TaskentBildirisi1996_4.DevletBaskanlariZirveBildirisi_20140418_103822.p) (accessed May 1, 2023).

<sup>17</sup> Türkçe Konuşan Ülkeler Devlet Başkanları V. Zirve Bildirisi, [https://web.archive.org/web/2022030820-0439/http://turkkon.org/Assets/dokuman/07\\_AstanaBildirisi1998\\_5.DevletBaskanlariZirveBildirisi\\_20140418\\_103743.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/2022030820-0439/http://turkkon.org/Assets/dokuman/07_AstanaBildirisi1998_5.DevletBaskanlariZirveBildirisi_20140418_103743.pdf) (accessed May 1, 2023).

<sup>18</sup> The OSCE Minsk Group was established in 1992, whose purpose has been to encourage a peaceful, negotiated resolution to the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh. Three main co-chairmen are Russian, France and the United States.

<sup>19</sup> Лиссабонский документ 1996 года (1996), Лиссабон, с. 14, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/-2/4/39543.pdf> (accessed May 16, 2023).



sides to the conflict, which will not give priority to the vital interests of any side and will enable the resumption of negotiations without preconditions.<sup>20</sup>

During this period, negotiations on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue were at an impasse. Azerbaijan emphasized the principle of territorial integrity as outlined in the Lisbon principles, asserting that Nagorno-Karabakh would be considered a part of Azerbaijan, despite the mention of high self-governance. Essentially, these principles these principles satisfied Azerbaijan during this period.

The sixth and seventh summits mentioned that the resolution of the conflict was based on the UN Security Council resolutions and the three principles adopted at the Lisbon Summit.<sup>21</sup> The eighth summit, held on November 17, 2006, in Antalya, discussed the Nagorno-Karabakh issue in relation to stability and cooperation in the South Caucasus. Additionally, the Antalya statement presented the resolution of the issue for the first time within the framework of Azerbaijan's independence, territorial integrity, and inviolability of its borders.<sup>22</sup> These principles subsequently became the foundation of Azerbaijan's foreign policy, which was also supported by Turkey.

The ninth summit of Turkic-speaking countries took place on October 3, 2009, in Nakhichevan. This summit was significant as it resulted in the establishment of the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States through the Nakhichevan Agreement. The agreement outlined the fundamental principles, structures, and areas of activity for the Turkic Council.<sup>23</sup> The main structures of the Turkic Council are the Council of Heads of States, the Council of Foreign Ministers, the Senior Officials Committee, the Council of Elders of Turkic-Speaking States, and the Secretariat.<sup>24</sup> The summits of the Turkic-speaking countries led to the establishment of the Turkic Council as an institutional structure tasked with implementing specific programs and developing strategies aimed at unifying the Turkic world.

The tenth summit of Turkic-speaking countries was held on September 15-16, 2010, in Istanbul. The tenth summit of Turkic-speaking countries took place on September 15-16, 2010, in Istanbul. The statement signed at the conclusion of this summit reaffirmed the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict within the context of Azerbaijan's independence, territorial integrity, and the inviolability of its borders.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Hayrapetyan, Albert, *The Legal Aspect of Nagorno-Karabakh Issue*, (Yerevan: Tntesaget Publishing House of Armenian State University of Economics, 2022). pp. 66-68.

<sup>21</sup> The sixth summit was held on April 8, 2000, in Baku and the seventh summit took place on April 26-27, 2001, in Istanbul.

<sup>22</sup> Türk Dili Konuşan Ülkeler Devlet Başkanları 8. Doruk Toplantısı Antalya Bildirisi, [https://web.archive.org/web/2/https://turkicstates.org/Assets/dokuman/04\\_AntalyaBildirisi2006\\_\\_8.Devlet\\_BaskanlariZirvesiortakbildirisi\\_20140418\\_103555.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/2/https://turkicstates.org/Assets/dokuman/04_AntalyaBildirisi2006__8.Devlet_BaskanlariZirvesiortakbildirisi_20140418_103555.pdf) (accessed 04.05.2023).

<sup>23</sup> Türk Dili Konuşan Ülkeler İşbirliği Konseyi'nin Kurulmasına Dair Nahçıvan Anlaşması, [https://web.archive.org/web/20110831135958/http://turkkon.org/docs/02\\_a\\_NahcivanAnlasmasi\\_Turkce.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20110831135958/http://turkkon.org/docs/02_a_NahcivanAnlasmasi_Turkce.pdf) (accessed 04.05.2023).

<sup>24</sup> Nakhchivan Agreement on the Establishment of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States, [https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel\\_belgeler/nakhchivan-agreement-on-the-establishment-of-the-cooperation-council-of-turkic-speaking-states-1-en.pdf](https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel_belgeler/nakhchivan-agreement-on-the-establishment-of-the-cooperation-council-of-turkic-speaking-states-1-en.pdf) (accessed April 7, 2023).

<sup>25</sup> Türk Dili Konuşan Ülkeler Devlet Başkanları 10. Zirve Toplantısının Bildirisi, [https://web.archive.org/web/20220307214014/https://www.turkkon.org/Assets/dokuman/10\\_IstanbulBildiri\\_si1994\\_2.DevletBaskanlariZirveBildirisi\\_20140418\\_103924.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20220307214014/https://www.turkkon.org/Assets/dokuman/10_IstanbulBildiri_si1994_2.DevletBaskanlariZirveBildirisi_20140418_103924.pdf) (accessed May 1, 2023).

With Turkey's support, Azerbaijan brought the Nagorno-Karabakh issue to the forefront of discussions at the summits of Turkic-speaking countries, incorporating it into the adopted declarations. Initially, the solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh issue was presented based on the UN Security Council resolutions and the Lisbon principles. However, over time, this solution became linked to the principles of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and the inviolability of its borders. On the other hand, despite the efforts of Turkey and Azerbaijan, the Turkic-speaking countries of Central Asia refrained from condemning Armenia, did not adopt an anti-Armenian position and remained neutral.

### **The Turkic Council's Position on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict**

The declarations signed at the conclusion of all Turkic Council summits address the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The first summit of the Turkic Council took place on October 21, 2011, in Almaty. The Almaty Declaration emphasizes the importance of a peaceful settlement of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which is regarded as a significant obstacle to lasting stability and regional cooperation. The declaration reaffirms the commitment to the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the inviolability of the borders of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is considered crucial for achieving peace, stability, and prosperity in the Eurasian region.<sup>26</sup> This marked the beginning of discussions on the conflict in the context of security issues, as Azerbaijan portrayed it as a threat to its security.

In the declarations of the second, third, and fourth Turkic Council summits, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is mentioned again, linking its resolution to the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the inviolability of Azerbaijan's borders.<sup>27</sup> Peace, stability, and prosperity in the Eurasian region are also connected to the conflict.<sup>28</sup> The third summit highlights economic cooperation and emphasizes the importance of the Central/East-West Corridor, which includes the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, connecting Central Asia to Europe via Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Declaration of the First Summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States, Almaty, October 21, 2011, [https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel\\_belgeler/first-summit-declaration-8-en.pdf](https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel_belgeler/first-summit-declaration-8-en.pdf) (accessed 07.04.2023).

<sup>27</sup> The second summit of the Turkic Council was held on August 23, 2012, in Bishkek, the third was held on August 16, 2013, in Gabala, Azerbaijan and the fourth was held on June 5, 2014, in Bodrum. The second summit was held under the theme "Educational, Scientific and Cultural Cooperation," and the fourth summit was held under the theme "Cooperation in Tourism."

<sup>28</sup> Declaration of the Second Summit of the Turkic Council, Bishkek, August 23, 2012, [https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel\\_belgeler/2nd-summit-declaration-9-en.pdf](https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel_belgeler/2nd-summit-declaration-9-en.pdf) (accessed April 7, 2023). Declaration of the Third Summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States, p. 3, [https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel\\_belgeler/third-summit-declaration-10-en.pdf](https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel_belgeler/third-summit-declaration-10-en.pdf) (accessed April 10, 2023). Declaration of the Fourth Summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States, p. 2, [https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel\\_belgeler/fourth-summit-declaration-11-en.pdf](https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel_belgeler/fourth-summit-declaration-11-en.pdf) (accessed April 10, 2023).

<sup>29</sup> Declaration of the Third Summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States, p. 3, [https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel\\_belgeler/third-summit-declaration-10-en.pdf](https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel_belgeler/third-summit-declaration-10-en.pdf) (accessed April 10, 2023).

The fifth, sixth, and seventh Turkic Council summits<sup>30</sup> reiterate the importance of an early settlement of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict based on the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and inviolability of Azerbaijan's internationally recognized borders.<sup>31</sup>

An extraordinary meeting of the Turkic Council was held via video conference on April 10, 2020, themed "Solidarity and Cooperation in the Fight Against the COVID-19 Pandemic."<sup>32</sup> Azerbaijan's President I. Aliyev initiated this meeting, which focused on issues related to COVID-19 and healthcare. To some extent, Azerbaijan addressed the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict during this meeting, particularly regarding the military aspect of its resolution. Securing neutrality of the Turkic-speaking republics of Central Asia would have been an important accomplishment for Azerbaijan, especially considering that Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are allies of Armenia within the CSTO.

Following the extraordinary meeting, the 44-Day War took place from September 27 to November 9, 2020, during which Azerbaijan achieved victory with direct assistance from Turkey. After the war, a shift in the rhetoric of the Turkish-Azerbaijani alliance became evident, linked to the change in the South Caucasus status quo. In this new context, Turkey openly seeks to establish stronger influence in the region, coinciding with a weakening of Russia's position. Notably, Turkey initiated processes of Turkic integration following the 44-Day War.

Turkey continues to support Azerbaijan's policies regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Republic of Armenia. Several observations can be made in this regard: 1) From November 9-10, 2020, until mid-September 2023, Azerbaijan, backed by Turkey, has repeatedly violated the November 9 agreement,<sup>33</sup> aiming to secure a final resolution to the conflict according to its own terms, including the incorporation of Nagorno-Karabakh into Azerbaijan, which implies ethnic cleansing; 2) Azerbaijan has continued to create tension and instability in the region with the goal of "integrating" Nagorno-Karabakh, a policy that Turkey supports; 3) Starting on December 12, 2022, Azerbaijan imposed a blockade on the Lachin Corridor, severing the connection between Artsakh and Armenia and cutting off electricity and gas supplies.<sup>34</sup> As a result, Azerbaijan created a humanitarian crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh with the aim of

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<sup>30</sup> The fifth summit of the Turkic Council was held on September 11, 2015, in Astana, the sixth summit was held on September 3, 2018, in Cholpon-Ata and the seventh on October 15, 2019, in Baku. The sixth summit was held under the theme "Cooperation in Youth and National Sports" and the seventh summit was under the theme "Supporting the Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs)."

<sup>31</sup> Declaration of the Fifth Summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States, p. 4, [https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel\\_belgeler/5th-summit-declaration-12-en.pdf](https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel_belgeler/5th-summit-declaration-12-en.pdf) (accessed April 11, 2023). Declaration of the Sixth Summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States, [https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel\\_belgeler/sixth-summit-declaration-13-en.pdf](https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel_belgeler/sixth-summit-declaration-13-en.pdf) (accessed April 11, 2023). Declaration of the Seventh Summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States, p. 5, [https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel\\_belgeler/seventh-summit-declaration-14-en.pdf](https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel_belgeler/seventh-summit-declaration-14-en.pdf) (accessed April 11, 2023).

<sup>32</sup> Baku Declaration of the Extraordinary Summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States, [https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel\\_belgeler/extraordinary-summit-baku-declaration-2020-17-en.pdf](https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel_belgeler/extraordinary-summit-baku-declaration-2020-17-en.pdf) (accessed 12.04.2023).

<sup>33</sup> <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64384> (accessed May 4, 2023).

<sup>34</sup> Shahverdyan, Lilit, Blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh enters second day, Eurasianet, December 13, 2022, <https://eurasianet.org/blockade-of-nagorno-karabakh-enters-second-day>.

dismantling Artsakh's autonomy and state institutions, primarily targeting the Defense Army. 4) On September 19-20, 2023, Azerbaijan launched military operations in Nagorno-Karabakh, resulting in the occupation of the entire territory, the forced dissolution of state institutions, and, effectively, ethnic cleansing<sup>35</sup>; 5) Türkiye has introduced a new precondition for establishing relations with Armenia: the signing of a peace treaty with Azerbaijan.

After the war, discussions surrounding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict have shifted in a completely new direction. Azerbaijan, with Türkiye's support, has initiated the reconstruction of the so-called "liberated" territories, which are, in fact, occupied. Azerbaijan is also attempting to involve Turkic-speaking republics in this process, though largely symbolic.

An informal meeting of the Turkic Council was held via video conference on March 31, 2021, under the theme "Turkistan - A Spiritual Capital of the Turkic World." The Turkestan declaration states: "Commending the liberation of territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan from military occupation and welcoming the end of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict".<sup>36</sup> Notably, the statement refers to the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict as resolved, implying that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict no longer exists—a claim that does not reflect reality.

During this meeting, former President of Kazakhstan N. Nazarbayev proposed a name change for the Turkic Council. The foreign ministers of the member states and the Secretariat were tasked with preparing the necessary documents for the next summit. Additionally, the Secretariat was instructed to draft the "Turkic World Vision 2040" and "Turkic Council Strategy 2020-2025" documents. It is important to note that member states were required to prepare their own drafts, which would be discussed and adopted as a unified text at the upcoming summit. The document also refers to Armenian-Azerbaijani relations, expressing solidarity with the government and people of Azerbaijan in their efforts to rehabilitate, rebuild, and reintegrate conflict-affected territories. It further supports the normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan based on mutual recognition, respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the inviolability of internationally recognized borders.<sup>37</sup>

The 8th Summit of the Turkic Council took place on November 12, 2021, in Istanbul, under the theme "Green Technologies and Smart Cities in the Digital Age". During this summit, the "Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States" was renamed the "Organization of Turkic States". The "Turkic World Vision-2040" was adopted as a strategic document guiding future cooperation in various fields of common interest within the Turkic World. The declaration congratulates Azerbaijan once again on its victory in the 44-Day War, while also expressing support for the normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan based on mutual

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<sup>35</sup> Scheffer, David J., *Ethnic Cleansing Is Happening in Nagorno-Karabakh. How Can the World Respond?*, Council on Foreign Relations, October 4, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/article/ethnic-cleansing-happening-nagorno-karabakh-how-can-world-respond>.

<sup>36</sup> Turkistan Declaration of the Informal Summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States, [https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel\\_belgeler/unofficial-turkistan-summit-declaration-2021-18-en.pdf](https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel_belgeler/unofficial-turkistan-summit-declaration-2021-18-en.pdf) (accessed April 12, 2023).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

recognition, respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the inviolability of internationally recognized borders. Member and observer states express readiness to contribute to Azerbaijan's post-conflict rehabilitation, reconstruction, and reintegration efforts.<sup>38</sup> It is important to note that this approach represents the stance of the member states in general and does not necessarily reflect the positions of Turkey and Azerbaijan. It should be noted that Azerbaijan, with the support of Turkey, violated Armenia's territorial integrity in 2021-2022, and the Turkic-speaking republics allied with Armenia did not take any action which highlights the reliance of the CSTO on Moscow for its functionality. At the Istanbul summit, considerable emphasis was placed on enhancing economic relations among the Turkic-speaking states, both bilaterally and within the framework of the Organization of Turkic States. Additionally, significant attention was directed toward global economic projects, particularly the East-West International Trans-Caspian Middle Corridor. To facilitate transportation operations along this corridor, a directive was issued to finalize the "Agreement on International Combined Freight Transport among the Member States of the Organization of Turkic States." This agreement is considered a significant step toward enhancing transport capabilities across the Trans-Caspian International East-West Middle Corridor.

In this context, the summit "highlighted the Zangezur Corridor as an emerging opportunity to improve connectivity along the Trans-Caspian International East-West Middle Corridor and the relevant authorities of the Member states were urged to support the efforts of the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan for its soonest operationalization".<sup>39</sup>

It should be noted that Turkey and Azerbaijan have mentioned the phrase "Zangezur Corridor" in their discussions, presenting it as a part of the aforementioned mega project. Their vision for the corridor involves granting it an extraterritorial status and placing it under Azerbaijani (in fact Turkish) control.

### **The Organization of Turkic States and Its Impact on the Security of the Republic of Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic**

The first summit of the Organization of Turkic States (the 9th summit of the Turkic Council) was held on November 11, 2022, in Samarkand under the theme "New Era for Turkic Civilization: Towards Common Development and Prosperity," which is a significant and ambitious goal.<sup>40</sup> The OTS consists of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, and Uzbekistan, while Turkmenistan, Hungary, and the

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<sup>38</sup> Declaration of the Eighth Summit of the Organization of the Turkic States, p. 2, [https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel\\_belgeler/eighth-summit-declaration-15-en.pdf](https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel_belgeler/eighth-summit-declaration-15-en.pdf) (accessed April 11, 2023).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> The Samarkand Summit marked the end of the mandate of Baghdad Amreyev as the Secretary General of the Organization of Turkic States and in this position was appointed the Ambassador of the Kyrgyzstan to Turkey Kubanychbek Omuraliev. Amreyev was appointed by a special decision of Heads of States as the President of Turkic Investment Fund. Kadirova Elvira, Economic integration and transport connectivity under the spotlight of the summit of the Organization of Turkic States in Samarkand, News Central Asia, November, 14, 2022, <https://www.newscentralasia.net/2022/11/14/economic-integration-and-transport-connectivity-under-the-spotlight-of-the-summit-of-the-organization-of-turkic-states-in-samarkand/>.

unrecognized Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus<sup>41</sup> hold observer status. During this summit, several cooperation programs were presented to facilitate integration in various fields within the OTS framework, with the European Union cited as a model.<sup>42</sup>

It is important to understand the goals and objectives of the Organization of Turkic States. Turkey assumes the role of coordinating all previously established structures and mechanisms, including economic, cultural, and educational initiatives.<sup>43</sup> The creation of this organization reflects Turkey's aim to establish a foundation for Turkic integration, driven by linguistic, cultural, historical, and ethnic commonalities. Over the past few decades, Turkey has invested considerable effort in fostering these connections.<sup>44</sup> The "Turkic World Vision-2040" document outlines the overall framework for cooperation in the economic, cultural, educational, security, and political spheres between Turkey and the Turkic republics over the next two decades.<sup>45</sup> Currently, Turkey places particular emphasis on the economic and educational-cultural aspects of integration, in line with its available resources.

In the economic sphere, steps are being taken to strengthen bilateral cooperation between Türkiye and the Turkic-speaking republics, with a focus on enhancing the economic strength of the Turkic world. Efforts are underway to establish a Turkic common capital, and to that end, the member states have decided to establish the Turkic Investment Fund during the recent extraordinary summit.<sup>46</sup> The Vision-2040 document emphasizes the strengthening of cooperation in the fields of transport and customs, energy, health, information and communication technologies, tourism, environment and agriculture and gives a great place to the People-to-People cooperation.<sup>47</sup>

The document also highlights the significance of communication and transport routes, particularly the Trans-Caspian East-West Middle Corridor, for the development

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<sup>41</sup> Worthy of attention is the fact that the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus was given observer status in the OTS. TRNC is an unrecognized state (it was recognized only by Turkey), so its membership in OTS should be considered an important political step. Essentially, with this step, grounds are created for the recognition of the TRNC by the member-states of the organization. Turkey, in turn, is trying to create grounds for the international recognition of the TRNC with this step. According to the information circulating in the press, the Central Asian Turkic countries (mainly Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan) were not in favor of granting observer status to the TRNC, but they gave in at Turkey's insistence. In fact, it can be concluded that the principle of equality of its members within the organization has a formal nature.

<sup>42</sup> Yuyan, Zhang, c. 81.

<sup>43</sup> The OTS also functions as an umbrella organization for existing cooperation mechanisms such as the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TURKSOY), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Turkic Speaking Countries (TURKPA), International Turkic Academy, Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation and Turkic Chamber of Commerce and Industry. For more: <https://www.turkicstates.org/en/organizasyon-semasi> (accessed May 2, 2023).

<sup>44</sup> Minasyan, Nelli, *Turkish Initiatives in the Direction of Turkic Integration: Prerequisites and Tendencies*, *Contemporary Eurasia: International Journal of Eurasian Geopolitics*, vol. XI, no. 2, 2022, p. 25.

<sup>45</sup> *Turkic World Vision-2040*, <https://turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/haberler/turkic-world-vision-2040-2396-97.pdf> (accessed April 28, 2023).

<sup>46</sup> Turkic world sets up investment fund to boost economic integration, *Daily Sabah*, March 16, 2023, <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/economy/turkic-world-sets-up-investment-fund-to-boost-economic-integration>; Turkic Investment Fund to Have Authorized Capital of \$500 million, *The Astana Times*, March, 30, 2023, <https://astanatimes.com/2023/03/turkic-investment-fund-to-have-authorized-capital-of-500-million/>.

<sup>47</sup> Firat, pp. 75-76.

of the Turkic world. Turkish and Azerbaijani officials frequently mention this corridor in their speeches. By analyzing the “Vision-2040” document and Turkey's policy in the South Caucasus and Central Asia, it becomes evident that one of Turkey's key objectives is to achieve political integration with the Turkic-speaking republics within the framework of the OTS. Ultimately, Turkey aims to form a strategic union or alliance with the Turkic republics.<sup>48</sup>

The Samarkand Declaration reaffirms support for the normalization of relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia based on mutual recognition, respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the inviolability of internationally recognized borders. Furthermore, the declaration emphasizes the readiness to contribute to the post-conflict rehabilitation, reconstruction, and reintegration efforts in Azerbaijan.<sup>49</sup> It is worth noting that while the declaration does not explicitly mention the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, it focuses on post-conflict reconstruction, reflecting the position of the Turkish-Azerbaijani alliance.

Summarizing the results of the summit, we can conclude that the member states primarily focused on economic issues, influenced by current geopolitical developments, particularly the Russian-Ukrainian war. In these circumstances, the significance of energy resources and countries with reserves has increased. Turkey aims to capitalize on this situation and become an economic and energy hub between Europe and Asia, leveraging the resources and opportunities of Turkic nations.

President of Turkey, R. T. Erdoğan, and other leaders of Turkic states emphasized economic matters in their speeches.<sup>50</sup> Erdoğan specifically highlighted the development of trade, transport, and energy sectors within the framework of the OTS. In the energy sector, they are striving to enhance the importance of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, aiming to establish it as a crucial route for oil supply to Europe. Following the summit, it was reported that Kazakhstan would begin transporting its oil through this pipeline starting from January 1, 2023. It can be assumed that such an agreement was reached during the summit.

The plans presented in the transport sector are ambitious. The Trans-Caspian East-West Middle Corridor was extensively discussed during the summit. Turkey recognizes the geopolitical significance of Turkic countries and their energy resources but acknowledges the need for improved transport hubs, particularly towards the oceans. Therefore, the development of transport infrastructure becomes a primary objective. It was announced during the summit that a unified transport system would be established within the OTS framework. The initial stage involves: 1) increasing the capacity of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, 2) enhancing transport connections between Europe and Asia through the construction of the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan-China<sup>51</sup> and Termez-

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<sup>48</sup> Minasyan, p. 31.

<sup>49</sup> Samarkand Declaration of the Ninth Summit of the Organization of Turkic States, [https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel\\_belgeler/ninth-summit-declaration-16-en.pdf](https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel_belgeler/ninth-summit-declaration-16-en.pdf) (accessed April 19, 2023).

<sup>50</sup> Musayeva, Farida, Organization of Turkic States Summit, Modern Diplomacy, November 13, 2022, <https://modern diplomacy.eu/2022/11/13/2022-organization-of-turkic-states-summit/>.

<sup>51</sup> Lillis, Joanna, China, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan sign landmark railroad deal, Eurasianet, September 15, 2022, <https://eurasianet.org/china-kyrgyzstan-uzbekistan-sign-landmark-railroad-deal>.

Mazar-e-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar<sup>52</sup> railways, and 3) opening the “Zangezur Corridor”.<sup>53</sup> The first steps towards creating a unified transport system will include defining customs privileges and establishing free trade zones.

Analyzing Turkey's policy in the South Caucasus and Central Asia, along with Turkic integration processes, it becomes evident that Turkey places great importance on the so-called “Zangezur Corridor”. Turkey proposes economic projects to support this initiative, particularly as part of the East-West mega project. However, its true significance lies in its geopolitical implications. The establishment of such a corridor would connect the Turkic world by land, reshaping the geopolitical landscape in Eurasia. Currently, Turkey and Azerbaijan are working to address the issue of the “Zangezur Corridor.” Turkey has made the normalization of Armenia-Turkey relations contingent upon the establishment of the corridor, employing military threats to achieve this through Azerbaijan. While other Turkic-speaking states support this project, they have not yet expressed their backing openly. Furthermore, the “Zangezur Corridor” has become an existential goal for the OTS in terms of developing comprehensive transport infrastructure. As a result, we should anticipate increased and more intense pressure on Armenia, potentially escalating to military aggression. Iran's role in this matter is significant as it is the only country opposing the plan at the highest level. The problem directly affects two states, Armenia and Iran, as it violates Armenia's territorial integrity and eliminates the Armenian-Iranian border, which holds great economic, political, geopolitical, and even civilizational importance for both nations. Russia and China should also take this issue seriously, considering its implications for their respective interests.

In his article, Can Demir evaluated the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities of the OTS as an integration organization. The author mentions geographical location, availability of energy resources, and common culture as strengths of the organization. Additionally, he considers the influence and policies of Russia and China in Central Asia to be one of the weaknesses. The researcher views the Trans-Caspian East-West Middle Corridor and particularly the “Zangezur Corridor” as important opportunities for the OTS.<sup>54</sup>

The Second Extraordinary Summit of the Organization of Turkic States took place in Ankara on March 16, 2023, under the theme “Disaster-Emergency Management and Humanitarian Assistance”. This summit was initiated by I. Aliyev, president of Azerbaijan.<sup>55</sup> The reactions of the Turkish leadership were noteworthy, especially the statement by Foreign Minister M. Çavuşoğlu: “...Türkiye stands for strengthening unity and cooperation in the Turkic world...The support provided to Türkiye proved once

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<sup>52</sup> Termez-Kabul-Peshawar Railway Line Initiative Work to Start Soon, August 3, 2022, <https://bakhtarnews.af/en/termez-kabul-peshawar-railway-line-initiative-work-to-start-soon/>.

<sup>53</sup> Samarkand Declaration of the Ninth Summit of the Organization of Turkic States, p. 4, [https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel\\_belgeler/ninth-summit-declaration-16-en.pdf](https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel_belgeler/ninth-summit-declaration-16-en.pdf) (accessed April 19, 2023).

<sup>54</sup> Can, pp. 46-66.

<sup>55</sup> Ankara Declaration on the Extraordinary Summit of the Organization of Turkic States, [https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel\\_belgeler/2nd-extraordinary-summit-ankara-declaration-2023-20-en.pdf](https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/temel_belgeler/2nd-extraordinary-summit-ankara-declaration-2023-20-en.pdf) (accessed April 19, 2023).



again that our strength lies in unity”.<sup>56</sup> It should be noted that in recent years, Aliyev has been increasingly active on Turkic platforms. Organizing this summit, he aimed to introduce several issues of Azerbaijan and support Erdoğan, particularly in the context of rebuilding the disaster-stricken area after the earthquake and providing support for the upcoming elections. Analyzing the speeches of the Turkic state leaders, it can be concluded that economic cooperation, including transport and communication issues are the central ones. The final agreement on the establishment of the Turkic Investment Fund was also signed. Moreover, within the framework of the OTS, Turkey and Azerbaijan continued their policy regarding the so-called “Zangezur Corridor”.

Turkey leads efforts within the OTS to develop a unified foreign policy and establish civil defense mechanisms, as outlined in the “Vision-2040” document. The unification of foreign policy and coordination of security spheres are discussed. Although Ankara's statement did not explicitly mention the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, Aliyev referred to it in his speech. He continues to threaten and put forward new unreasonable demands and preconditions not only regarding this issue but also matters related to the Republic of Armenia.<sup>57</sup>

In summary, on this platform, Turkey and Azerbaijan frame the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as an issue of reconstructing the “liberated” territories. Their goal is to ultimately appropriate the territories of Nagorno-Karabakh, which aligns with Azerbaijan's policy of cultural genocide. Additionally, Azerbaijan seeks capital investments from Turkic-speaking states in these territories. It is worth noting that the main investments come from Turkey, while other Turkic-speaking states mostly engage in smaller projects, such as building schools. For instance, Uzbekistan is constructing a school in Fizuli.<sup>58</sup> The inauguration of the school occurred during President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's official two-day visit to Azerbaijan, which took place on August 23-24, 2023.<sup>59</sup> During the summit, President Aliyev announced that Azerbaijan had signed contracts worth \$3 billion with Turkish companies for the restoration of the “liberated” territories in Karabakh and Eastern Zangezur, as part of a broader plan for a “Great Return.”

The OTS, as a Turkic integration structure, poses challenges for the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Artsakh, particularly in terms of security. The idea of Turkic unity, which reflects the concept of Pan-Turkism, serves as the foundation of this organization. The challenges Armenia faces should be examined both in the short and long term, covering economic, political, and cultural dimensions. In the short term,

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<sup>56</sup> Cavusoglu: Power of Turkic-speaking states is in unity, Report News Agency, March 16, 2023, <https://report.az/en/region/cavusoglu-power-of-turkic-speaking-states-is-in-unity/>.

<sup>57</sup> Ghazanchyan, Siranush, Aliyev's speech a clear manifestation of territorial claims – Armenia MFA, Public Radio of Armenia, March 16, 2023, <https://en.armradio.am/2023/03/16/aliyevs-speech-a-clear-manifestation-of-territorial-claims-armenia-mfa/>.

<sup>58</sup> Shavkat Mirziyoyev to attend opening ceremony of a school built by Uzbekistan in Azerbaijan, March 24, 2023, <https://kun.uz/en/news/2023/03/24/shavkat-mirziyoyev-to-attend-opening-ceremony-of-a-school-built-by-uzbekistan-in-azerbaijan>.

<sup>59</sup> Turksyoy, Timucin, New School Established with Uzbek Assistance Inaugurated in Azerbaijan's Karabakh Region, Caspian News, August 24, 2023, <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/new-school-established-with-uzbek-assistance-inaugurated-in-azerbajjans-karabakh-region-2023-8-24-0/>.

the primary challenge is the so-called “Zangezur Corridor,” which threatens Armenia's territorial integrity and sovereignty, ultimately undermining the state’s functionality.

## **Conclusion**

Thus, the topic of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been introduced for discussion at the summits of Turkic-speaking countries, as well as in the Turkic Council and the OTS, primarily at the initiative of Turkey and Azerbaijan. At the summits of Turkic-speaking countries, the Turkish-Azerbaijani bloc aimed to garner condemnation of Armenia from the Turkic countries in Central Asia, but these countries have maintained their neutrality. Nonetheless, the documents adopted at the end of the summits mention the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, initially linking its resolution to the resolutions of the UN Security Council, but later presenting it based on the principle of preserving Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. Turkey and Azerbaijan continue to pursue this policy today, attempting to remove this conflict from the international relations agenda.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was also discussed within the Turkic Council, an existing institutional structure that Turkey sought to unite the Turkic states around. Additionally, within the framework of the Turkic Council, projects and mechanisms were developed to strengthen cooperation among the Turkic states. Economic cooperation, particularly communication projects such as the Trans-Caspian East-West Middle Corridor, holds a prominent position in this regard.

Following the 44-Day War, integration processes were initiated under Turkey’s leadership, culminating in the establishment of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS). In the post-war rhetoric of Turkey and Azerbaijan, the focus shifted from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to the restoration of the “liberated” territories, and they sought to involve other Turkic republics in this process. Due to geopolitical developments, the issue of communication has become more critical, and in this context, the Turkish-Azerbaijani tandem introduced the concept of the so-called “Zangezur Corridor.” They present it as an economic project that would also benefit Armenia, within the framework of the East-West project. However, this is untrue for two reasons: 1) They desire extraterritorial territory, which violates Armenia's territorial integrity and restricts its capabilities; 2) The “corridor” holds geopolitical significance as it would connect Turkey and the Central Asian republics via the shortest land route. Consequently, the OTS poses challenges for Armenia, primarily in terms of security, followed by economic, political, and even cultural aspects.

It should be noted that while the Turkic republics of Central Asia previously maintained neutrality, this is unlikely to be the case in the context of integration.

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