

History and Problems of Political Conflict in the Integration of Turkish-Speaking States

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Abstract: The article describes the history of the Organization of Turkic states, the political and economic factors that led to the delay in integration, and the role of historical processes in the integration of Turkic states. The conflicts between the Turkic states and the prospects to end the conflicts, the current problems of economic and political cooperation, the threats against the Turkic integration and the influence of geopolitical processes on integration are analyzed.

Keywords: Turkic world, Turkic states, turkic identity, integration, political integration, economic integration, democracy, conflicts, geopolitics.

1. Introduction

Every nation in the world has its own unique history, culture, and literature. The history of a particular nation does not consist only of past events, but also of the culture, art, and literature created at the time when these events occurred. The culture, art, and literature created by each nation and nation are considered the national heritage and wealth of this nation and are called by the name of this nation. The heritage created by a Turkic nation, in turn, is the universal cultural heritage of all Turkic peoples.

If we talk about Turkic peoples today, the current population of Turkic peoples has reached approximately 200-250 million. Of these, 70 million are Turks of Turkey. Currently, there are six independent Turkic states: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Hungary (in observer status).

2. Methods and level of study

The article is based on generally accepted historical methods - the principles of historicity, systematicity, objectivity, as well as a civilizational approach to the problem and methods of comparative analysis. Most of the published materials on this topic are reflected in the works of the Turkish Mehmet Saray and in the articles and works of Uzbek authors who studied this period, including historians Z. Rakhmonkulova, R. Jalilova, M. Ziyoeva, Sh. Tursunov, Ch. Khudoyorov, R. Kholikova, L. Mirzalieva, Z. Ashurov, B. Imamov and others.

3. Research results

The history of the emergence of the idea of uniting the Turkic-speaking states dates back to 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed. Turkey was one of the first to recognize the Turkic-speaking states that seceded from the USSR and establish diplomatic relations. The emergence of independent states in place of the former union led to the emergence of a new, important direction in Turkish foreign policy. When the question of choosing a new path of development

loomed large for the young independent states that had fallen under the communist regime and were striving for market relations and democracy, the “Turkish model” seemed attractive to these states. The first visits of the leaders of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan to the free democratic world began in Turkey in December 1991. In turn, the emergence of five new independent Turkic states on the world map was warmly welcomed not only by the Turkish government, but also by all political forces in the country. Turkey signed treaties of “Eternal Friendship and Cooperation” with all Turkic states. President TurgutÖzal, who founded Turkey's cooperation with the Turkic countries, predicted that “the 21st century will belong to Turkey and the Turks.” Western countries also expressed hope that Turkey would play an important role in the new development of Central Asia and Azerbaijan and supported Turkey's integration efforts. In the 1990s, Turkey was an active member of NATO, had close economic and political ties with Western countries, and was a country eager to join the European Union.

Turkey has implemented a number of economic and cultural assistance programs to strengthen integration with Turkic countries. Thousands of people have benefited from modern education through the opening of Turkish lyceums and universities, and through grants for citizens of Turkic countries. The abolition of visa requirements for entry into Turkey has led to the strengthening of cultural and economic ties with these countries.

At the same time, the narratives of Turkish politicians, in particular, the claim of TurgutÖzal's successor, Süleyman Demirel, to the Turkic world as a territory “from the Adriatic Sea to the Great Wall of China”, could not but invigorate the forces in the region. Turkey faced strong competition in the form of integration projects of Russia, which did not want to lose Central Asia and Azerbaijan from its sphere of influence, and the economic expansion of China, which is a close neighbor of the countries of the region. In addition, the leaders of the newly independent countries did not want a new “big brother” to emerge.

Several factors contributed to the failure of the integration of the Turkic states that was expected in the early years of independence.

Firstly, the economic crisis and relative political instability that occurred in Turkey in the mid-1990s and 2001 led to a decrease in Turkey's financial assistance and investments to the fraternal Turkic states.

Secondly, the fact that forces opposed to the governments of the Turkic-speaking states were mainly based in Turkey led to a weakening of the governments' trust in Turkey. The presence of Turkish citizens among the participants in the assassination attempts on the leaders of Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan in different years created the basis for a cooling of relations.

Thirdly, since the second half of the 1990s, the issue of joining the European Union has become a priority in Turkey's foreign policy. Joining the European Union is based on values such as free markets, democracy, and human rights. However, the process of transition to a market economy in the Turkic-speaking states has been long and complicated. At the end of the 20th century, the democratization of society in Central Asian countries and Azerbaijan was delayed, and political systems became increasingly authoritarian. Unable to escape authoritarian rule, Turkic-speaking countries preferred to turn to their former metropolis, Russia, and the booming economy of China, rather than to a democratic Turkey that was integrating into European values.

The postponement of Turkey's entry into the European Union forced Turkey, whose economic power was growing and had become one of the world's 20 strongest economies, to pay more attention to the East in its foreign policy. The government of RecepTayyip Erdogan, pursuing an active foreign policy, began to place more emphasis on Turkishness and Muslim identity in geopolitical competition.

Although the establishment of the Turkic Council in 2009 was recognized as an important step towards the integration of Turkic-speaking countries, Turkey's relations with its fraternal countries were not smooth. While it was not difficult to get relations in a positive direction with

Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan, which are rich in gas and oil reserves, the issue of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan was a little more complicated.

The coldness that persisted in Uzbek-Turkish relations for a certain period was due to several factors. First of all, the Uzbek government could not accept Turkey as a friend, since Uzbek opposition activists abroad mainly found refuge in Turkey. Although several investment projects were implemented based on Turkish investment, there were no high-level diplomatic visits between 2003 and 2014. Since 1999, Uzbekistan has not participated in the summits of the Turkic Council. By 2014, Turkish-Uzbek relations began to warm up somewhat.

Moreover, during the first president's term, Uzbekistan did not seek to pursue an active foreign policy. In international affairs, Uzbekistan chose a somewhat cautious and closed policy. This process is called the policy of "self-defense" by Bernardo Teles Fazendeiro, a professor at the University of Coimbra. Such a foreign policy was a decisive factor in the failure of not only the Turkic world, but also the integration of Central Asia.

The Uzbek government actively participated in the initial negotiations between the leaders of the Turkic states. At the 1992 Ankara summit, which decided the further fate of the integration of the Turkic states, the presidents of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan opposed the creation of political institutions regulating the relations of the allied states.

The Kyrgyz factor in the relations of the Turkic states is completely unique. In the conditions of political instability and frequent changes of power through revolutions, the relations of Turkey and other Turkic states with Kyrgyzstan have been sometimes conflicting, sometimes warm.

The Turkish government has been paying Kyrgyzstan's membership fees to the UN and other international organizations for many years [9]. In 2011, Turkey waived Kyrgyzstan's state debt in the amount of \$ 51 million [10]. In the 2015 Russia-Turkey standoff, the Kyrgyz government sided with Russia, while the Turkish government's demand to close Turkish schools linked to FethullahGulen, the mastermind of the 2016 coup, provoked a sharp protest from the Kyrgyz president [11]. It is worth noting that Russia has a strong influence in Central Asia, and Turkic states such as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have strategic alliances with Russia within economic and military blocs. The shooting down of a Russian fighter jet by the Turkish military in 2015 caused a conflict in Moscow-Ankara relations. A month later, at the CSTO summit in Moscow, the governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan acknowledged their support for Russia [12]. Even the leader of Kyrgyzstan, AlmazbekAtambayev, called on the Turkish leadership to apologize to Russia.[13] The change of power in Uzbekistan in 2016 undoubtedly played an important role in the acceleration of the integration of the Turkic states. Uzbekistan is of great importance due to its second largest population after Turkey and third largest economy, as well as its rich history of Turkic identity. Uzbekistan's choice of a pragmatic foreign policy since 2016 has made the implementation of integration a reality. An important step towards integration was taken when Uzbekistan expressed interest in membership in the organization in 2018. At the VIII Istanbul Summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States, held in Istanbul on November 12, 2021, the organization was renamed the Organization of Turkic States, and Turkmenistan also received observer status in the organization. Currently, the general secretariat for coordinating the organization's activities is located in Istanbul, Turkey.

Nevertheless, it will take a lot of time and effort for the relations of the Turkic-speaking countries to reach the status of close alliances. A number of factors currently hinder the deepening of integration.

1. Turkey is geographically isolated from the Turkic-speaking countries. Turkey shares a border only with Azerbaijan, which is also very short (17 km). The Turkic countries of Central Asia do not have borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan. This means that there are logistical and transport problems.
2. Turkmenistan, which has observer status in the Organization of Turkic States, is not in a hurry to integrate yet. The political system in the country indicates a desire not only for integration

within the organization, but also for distancing itself in bilateral relations. At the request of the Turkmen government, a visa regime was introduced for Turkmen citizens to enter Turkey [14]. In addition, Turkmenistan has the status of eternal neutrality.

3. Russia and China are not interested in the emergence of a union led by Turkey in Central Asia and the Caucasus. In particular, the integration of Turkic peoples may raise the problem of the struggle for independence of the Turkic peoples living in Russia and China.

4. Turkic-speaking countries are members of various military blocs. Turkey is an important NATO member, while Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are members of the CSTO under Russian control. If the current conflicts between NATO and Russia over the war in Ukraine and between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the conflict over Karabakh become serious, there is a risk of division among the Turkic-speaking countries.

5. Democratic values are deeply rooted in Turkey. Values such as strong competition between political parties, free and fair elections, parliamentarism, democratic succession of power, human rights, and an independent press are close to those of the European Union. In the Central Asian countries and Azerbaijan, such democratic principles have not yet risen to the level of values. It is difficult to predict the future of authoritarian regimes, since the negative or positive deviation of relations with other countries may depend more on the personal ambitions of the ruler.

The Turkic countries have historical, cultural, religious, and linguistic commonalities. This commonality is associated with the Turkish and Muslim identity. However, national and religious factors cannot always be the decisive factor in integration. Considering the ongoing conflicts and wars between countries that are ethnically and ideologically close to each other in the world today, it becomes clear that other values should be the basis for integration.

Like the example of the European Union, which is the best example of successful integration, there should be common goals, common values that unite the Turkic states. In the modern world, this can be the idea of unity, democracy, freedom, mutual respect and joint action for common development.

The Turkic-speaking states have a vast territory with a total area of almost 4.5 million square kilometers, and the total volume of the gross domestic product is more than 1.5 trillion dollars. The volume of mutual trade between Turkic states is 536 billion dollars [15].

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, all countries are interested in increased economic integration, and economic cooperation between countries is growing. The volume of mutual trade between countries is increasing year by year. However, the problem of transport and logistics remains one of the main factors complicating the economic integration of the Turkic states, which are not geographically connected to each other.

Turkey considers the Turkic-speaking states as its strategic partners and seeks to protect the Turkic states in the international arena. Azerbaijan-Turkey relations are seen as “one nation, two states”. The strategic alliance of the two countries was especially clearly manifested in the 2020 Karabakh war.

The importance of political integration has become more important than ever in the current turbulent period. Although the unity of the Turkic-speaking states is not yet observed in geopolitical processes, the time has come to unite goals and generalize interests. The next stage of cooperation can be seen not only in strong economic integration. Perhaps it is natural that political integration will also be achieved on the basis of strong economic integration.

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