

TURKIC REPUBLICS ON THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THEIR INDEPENDENCE AND TURKSOY*

Bağımsızlıklarının 30. Yılında Türk Cumhuriyetleri ve TÜRKSOY

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Abstract

Three decades ago, the Turkic states of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan gained their independence as a result of the dissolution of the USSR. Official contacts began to be established soon after the independence and this process was followed by the institutionalization of the relations. As an organization founded during this institutionalization period, the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TURKSOY) contributed to the nation-state building process of the Turkic states with its activities covering many areas. The main purpose of the article is to highlight the contributions of TURKSOY to the cultural cooperation within the Turkic World through the activities it performed during this thirty years period of independence.

Keywords: TURKSOY, Independence, Cultural Diplomacy, Turkic Republics, Turkic World.

Öz

Türk devletleri Azerbaycan, Kazakistan, Kırgızistan, Özbekistan ve Türkmenistan otuz yıl önce SSCB'nin dağılması sonucu bağımsızlıklarını kazandılar. Bağımsızlığın hemen ardından resmî temaslar kurulmaya başlandı ve bu süreci ilişkilerin kurumsallaştırılması izledi. Uluslararası Türk Kültürü Teşkilatı (TÜRKSOY), bu kurumsallaşma döneminde kurulmuş bir organizasyon olarak, birçok alanı kapsayan faaliyetleriyle Türk devletlerin ulus-devlet inşa sürecine katkı sağlamıştır. Bu makalenin temel amacı, TÜRKSOY'un bu otuz yıllık bağımsızlık döneminde gerçekleştirdiği faaliyetlerle Türk Dünyası içindeki kültürel iş birliğine katkılarını vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: TÜRKSOY, Bağımsızlık, Kültürel Diplomasi, Türk Cumhuriyetleri, Türk Dünyası.

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TURKIC REPUBLICS ON THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THEIR INDEPENDENCE AND TURKSOY

INTRODUCTION

While World War I solidified the nation-state-based World order by burying multi-ethnic empires through the depths of history, the developments in the Russian Empire followed a different course. Following the October Revolution of 1917, the Soviet Union, which had extended across a vast region and was widely recognized as the historical successor of the Russian Empire, had to adopt a variety of policies on nationality in order to survive in the age of the nation-state.

This spurred Soviet policymakers to investigate the ethnic structures of the peoples living within the Union's boundaries, as well as the identities they had previously established, and to embark on an ethnic engineering mission to produce the ideal Soviet citizen.¹ Despite the fact that it contradicted communist theory, the Soviet authorities used a different strategy to maintain the gigantic union's territorial integrity, aware that the concept of "nationality" could not be suppressed in the age of the nation-state. New boundaries and nations were constructed within the framework of this strategy, utilizing a formula that can be defined as "socialist in form, national in content".² Thus, the Soviet Union was the first state to systematically base its political units on ethnicity, as Ronald Suny pointed out.³

In the case of the Turkic Republics, it should be noted that there were Azerbaijani, Kazakh, Kirghiz, Turkmen, and Uzbek names before these attempts, but these names did not constitute a nation for Turkic peoples, but rather micro-identities that may be referred to as large families or tribes.⁴ Furthermore, each of these names had different connotations for

1 İbrahim Hasanoğlu, "Homo Sovieticus: SSCB'de Sovyet Halkı İnşası Çabaları", *Turkish Studies*, 10(1), 2015, p. 312.

2 Turhan Dilmaç, *Özbekistan'da Ulus Kimlik-Dış Politika İlişkisi*, Ötüken Neşriyat, İstanbul 2019, p. 54.

3 Arne Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2003, p. 2.

4 Turhan Dilmaç, *Özbekistan'da Ulus Kimlik-Dış Politika İlişkisi*, Ötüken Neşriyat, İstanbul 2019, p. 43.

each. Under the direction of the commissioner of nationalities, Joseph Stalin, the goal of nationality policies was to enhance sub-identities while weakening identities that encompassed a broader demographic area, such as “Muslim” or “Turkic,” which could constitute a greater threat. In order to bridge the communication gap between Turkic peoples speaking different dialects of the same language, the Cyrillic alphabet was used in various ways in different regions, and attention was taken to make Soviet propaganda in the peoples’ native languages in these republics.⁵

It’s worth noting that, during this time, while different literary and cultural studies in Turkic people’s native languages aided the consolidation of national identity based on specific codes, intellectuals who were too enthusiastic about national ideals were not allowed within the Soviet system. The reason for this was that Soviet leaders who shaped the union’s nationality policies intended to utilize this artificial and constrained nationalism as a control mechanism to protect the Union’s territorial integrity until socialism fully developed.

Although it is a debatable point, it can be said that because socialism never reached the desired level in the Soviet Union, the homo sovieticus, an ideal citizen who prioritized the Soviet doctrine of socialism over religious and national values, was unable to emerge, and the system paradoxically led to the formation of new nations within itself.⁶ New states with completely different foreign policy aims were added to the international system when the Soviet Union began to dissolve along the previously established borders. The Turkic republics among these newly established states, namely Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, will be the focus of this article.

⁵ Martha B. Olcott et al., *The Soviet Multinational State: Readings and Documents*, Routledge, New York 2015, p. 234.

⁶ Haugen, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

TURKIC REPUBLICS ON THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THEIR INDEPENDENCE AND TURKSOY

The article is divided into three main sections: In the first section, apart from the Soviet Union's structural problems, the independence process of the aforementioned states is briefly outlined in relation to national and separatist movements inside these republics. The second section focuses on the formation of the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TURKSOY) after explaining the first interactions of the five newly independent republics with Turkey as well as the institutionalization of relations within the Turkic World. Finally, the third section contains details about the cultural diplomacy initiatives of TURKSOY which is the first organization to utilize common Turkic culture and identity as a more effective tool in cultural diplomacy. It highlights the organization's efforts to strengthen cultural ties between the mentioned countries.

INDEPENDENCE PROCESS OF THE TURKIC REPUBLICS

The independence movement of Azerbaijan was fed by the rebellious currents created in the Azerbaijani public opinion by the developments following the escalation of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict with Armenia. By 1989, Moscow had failed to find a solution to issues such as confrontations, blockades, and forced displacements between the two Soviet republics, and the Azerbaijani population had become even more disobedient and mistrust of the center.

While in the past ruled a system that ruthlessly absorbed the potential opposition, the Azerbaijani people started to follow the Popular Front Party which was an alternative political elite to the Azerbaijan Communist Party. This front, which was founded by Azerbaijan's finest intellectuals, was far more successful than the government in influencing public opinion with the nationalist ideas it formed around the Karabakh issue. Despite its fear of Moscow's retaliation, the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan

Nihal KESKİN
Fatih ALİYİ
Bilal ÇAKICI

adopted a series of decisions on September 23, 1989, as a result of the pressures of the Popular Front which has been expanding its membership throughout the country.⁷ These decisions had crucial importance on the path to independence. According to them, Azerbaijan was a sovereign state with borders that included Nagorno-Karabakh, and it had the right to split from the Soviet Union whenever it deemed appropriate. During the public protests, the official flag of the Azerbaijan SSR was replaced with the flags of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, which was created in 1918 under the leadership of Mehmed Emin Resulzade.

In October of 1989, the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan formally recognized the Popular Front. Despite the fact that the Communist Party officially controlled the government, it was no longer able to rule the people. According to the Communist Party politicians, Azerbaijan was richly rewarded for its contributions to the union and it was never the victim of a Moscow-based colonial endeavor, contrary to the claims of the Popular Front.⁸

While Azerbaijan's internal unrest deepened, the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, which had appeared to be slowing down in 1989, accelerated in January 1990 as a result of Moscow's failed mediation efforts. Despite the fact that the leader of the Popular Front, Abulfaz Elchibey, stated in an interview with Turkish journalist Mehmet Ali Birand in 1989 that there was no situation that required Moscow to use hard power and that the front's program was demanding only the people's right to self-determination in line with Gorbachev's ideal of democratization, Moscow declared a state of emergency in Baku in January 1990.⁹ The Red Army's entry into Baku was followed by the violent massacre of the civilian population as a result

7 Fahir Armaoğlu, *20. Yüzyıl Siyasi Tarihi 1914-1995*, Timaş Yayınları, İstanbul 2017, p. 832.

8 "Azerbaycan'da Neler Oluyor? | Kasım 1989 | 32. Gün Arşivi", *YouTube*, <https://youtu.be/0rNyZSkRsVw>, (Date of Accession: 20.10.2021).

9 "Azerbaycan'da Neler Oluyor? | Kasım 1989 | 32. Gün Arşivi" *YouTube*, <https://youtu.be/0rNyZSkRsVw>, (Date of Accession: 20.10.2021).

TURKIC REPUBLICS ON THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THEIR INDEPENDENCE AND TURKSOY

of this declaration, and later the incident became known as Qanlı Yanvar (Black January).¹⁰ This massacre further distanced the people from the center and instead of appeasing, it strengthened the independence movement.

The Supreme Council of Azerbaijan adopted the Declaration on the Republic of Azerbaijan's State Independence on August 30, 1991. On October 18, 1991, the Supreme Council approved and adopted this constitutional act, and Azerbaijan regained its independence after 71 years of Soviet period. While removing the terms "socialist" and "soviet" from its name, Azerbaijan also declared itself as the legal successor of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic established in 1918.¹¹

As for Uzbekistan, there were several elements in its independence movement that were similar to those in Azerbaijan: ethnic conflicts in which Stalin-era displacements were very effective, Red Army intervention in the republic to stop conflicts with Moscow's decision, and a Popular Front that adopted anti-communist, pan-Turkist, and secular values. Under the pressure of the Unity People's Movement, the Supreme Soviet of Uzbekistan declared its sovereignty without a territorial separation from the Union in June 1990, in an atmosphere where internal conflicts with the Meskhetian Turks continued who were exiled to Central Asia in 1944. When Islam Karimov was appointed as the leader of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan in the same year, things changed dramatically, and the opposition, notably the Union People's Movement, was rapidly weakened. Karimov was a supporter of Gorbachev's overthrow on August 19.¹² After the coup attempt failed, Uzbekistan declared independence from the Soviet Union on August 31, 1991.

10 Cahanşir Efendiyev, "Black January in the World Press", *Milliyet Araştırmalar Merkezi*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20200113054126/https://milliyet.info/2019/12/18/black-january-in-the-world-press/>, (Date of Accession: 22.10.2021).

11 Azar Abbasov, *Azərbaycan'da Anayasal Gelişim*, Istanbul Commerce University, Social Sciences Institute, (Unpublished Master's Thesis), Istanbul 2017, p.86.

12 "Uzbekistan: Russian and Soviet Rule", *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Uzbekistan/Russian-and-Soviet-rule#ref346074>, (Date of Accession: 22.10.2021).

If we look at the developments in Kazakhstan at the end of the 1980s, the loosening from the center seen throughout the union was felt there as well. The Justice Association, which started its activities in April 1989, and Kazakh Literature Newspaper were the pioneers of the nationalist movement in Kazakhstan.¹³ In 1989, the Kazakh language was declared the primary official language, with Russian taking second place in governmental affairs. This was a significant step forward on the path to independence. As a result of the Azat Party's efforts, Kazakhstan's Supreme Soviet declared sovereignty over its territory on October 25 of the following year, without splitting from the Soviet Union. Kazakhstan later declared full independence on December 16, 1991.

As for Turkmenistan, because of its politically conservative nature, it was one of the republics least affected by the fragile environment of the 1980s, even in a geography like Central Asia. Following the coup attempt in August 1991 to Gorbachev, news from other Soviet republics relating to independence declarations and the gradual disintegration of the center to which the Turkmen authorities were closely connected, pushed Turkmenistan towards independence. After all, Turkmenistan declared independence on September 27, 1991, following the 94 percent affirmative vote results of the referendum held on September 26, and continued on its path as an independent nation-state under the leadership of "Turkmenbashy" Saparmurad Niyazov.¹⁴ Turkmenistan was recognized as a permanent neutral state by the United Nations General Assembly on December 12, 1995, with the unanimous support of 185 member states.¹⁵

Finally, despite being one of the Soviet Union's calmest republics, tensions began to rise in Kyrgyzstan as well in 1990. The Kyrgyzstan Democratic Movement, which was formed as a result of the merger of

¹³ Armaoğlu, *op.cit.*, p. 835.

¹⁴ "Report on Turkmenistan's Referendum on Independence", *U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe*, Ashkhabad 1991, p. 1.

¹⁵ "General Information", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan*, <https://www.mfa.gov.tm/en/articles/2>, (Date of Accession: 25.10.2021)

TURKIC REPUBLICS ON THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THEIR INDEPENDENCE AND TURKSOY

24 small political groups and had a strong influence in the parliament, was striving for change. The coup attempt on August 19 in Moscow had an accelerating effect for the independence decision of Kyrgyzstan, as in other Turkic republics. The communists, who had temporarily taken control during the coup attempt, stated their intention to depose the liberal Kyrgyz leader Akayev. Following the failure of the coup, Kyrgyzstan declared full independence on August 31, 1991.¹⁶

THE FIRST INTERACTIONS WITH TURKEY ON THE ROAD TO THE FOUNDING OF TURKSOY

While the disintegration of the Soviet Union itself was a significant development in the evaluation of the world order, Turkey had to reshape its foreign policy as a country that was primarily affected by the situation because of its close historical and cultural ties with the five Turkic states that gained independence. Despite the fact that Turkey was not fully prepared for the radical changes since the dissolution occurred at a time when Turkey was less effective in the international arena than it is now, it embraced the events with great joy. Indeed, when this excitement was combined with ideological differences, the fact that there were many diverse groups that saw the newly independent five states from friendly but differing perspectives contributed to a slight diversion from reality in the first interactions with them. The idea that there was a homogenous Central Asia was extremely widespread not just in Turkey, but also in the West, as a result of being drawn to different Cold War blocks for many years, and perhaps under the influence of misleading historical data.¹⁷ However, as a result of the first interactions, it was clearly understood that

¹⁶ "Kyrgyzstan (10/01)", *US Department of State*, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/outofdate/bgn/kyrgyzstan/19356.htm>, (Date of Accession: 29.10.2021).

¹⁷ Aşegül Aydınğün-Çiğdem Balım, eds., *Bağımsızlıklarının Yirminci Yılında Orta Asya Cumhuriyetleri Türk Dilli Halklar-Türkiye ile İlişkiler*, Atatürk Kültür Merkezi Yayınları, Ankara 2012, p. 5.

the political borders drawn by the Soviet regime, which did not coincide with the ethnic, cultural and natural borders in the region, were adopted by these states over time.

While acknowledging that each has different political and economic goals, Turkey's policies toward the Turkic World have taken a broader regional and holistic approach, rather than being focused on specific countries or peoples. Turkey was the first country to recognize the five Turkic republics, open embassies in each, and allow them to open embassies within its boundaries. The Turkish leaders' exciting and romantic discourses towards the Turkic World were reinforced by key collaborations and efforts over time, despite the fact that they were at first caught unprepared for their independence. It can be said that the cooperation, which was initiated with a strong motivation, was supported by many negotiations and agreements, especially between the years 1991-93, and an intense rapprochement process was experienced between the countries. During this time, the first significant efforts toward the institutionalization of relations were taken. The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) which was founded in January 1992, in the Summits of Heads of State of Turkic Speaking States which met for the first time in October 1992, and the Turkic States and Communities Friendship, Brotherhood, and Cooperation Meetings, the first of which was held in March 1993, are examples of this period's achievements.¹⁸

During this period, relations within the with Turkic World were strengthened by high-level visits. In September 1991, Kazakhstan's President, Nursultan Nazarbayev, made his first official visit to Turkey. Nazarbayev referred to the twenty-first century as the "Turkic Century" during his visit.¹⁹ The leaders of the states of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and

18 Mustafa Durmuş-Harun Yılmaz, "Son Yirmi Yılda Türkiye'nin Orta Asya'ya Yönelik Dış Politikası ve Bölgedeki Faaliyetleri", Ayşegül Aydingün-Çiğdem Balım, eds., *Bağımsızlıklarının Yirminci Yılında Orta Asya Cumhuriyetleri Türk Dilli Halklar-Türkiye ile İlişkiler*, Atatürk Kültür Merkezi Yayınları, Ankara 2012, p. 487.

19 Mustafa Aydın, "Türkiye'nin Orta Asya-Kafkaslar Politikası", Mustafa Aydın at al., eds., *Küresel Politikada Orta Asya (Avrasya Üçlemesi I)*, Nobel Yayınları, Ankara 2005, p. 101-147.

TURKIC REPUBLICS ON THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THEIR INDEPENDENCE AND TURKSOY

Turkmenistan all visited Turkey in the same year in search of cooperation. The leaders of the Turkic World gathered in Ankara for the Heads of State of Turkish Speaking States Summit on October 31, 1992, as a result of Turkey's efforts to continue relations between the Turkic World with stronger steps in an institutional framework. The summit ended with an emphasis on developing cooperation in the fields of economy, culture, transportation, education and security.

The foundation of the Turkic Culture and Arts Joint Administration TURKSOY, which is the subject of this article, was one of the decisions made during this summit. Following this summit, in accordance with the decisions taken, the culture ministers of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Turkey came together in Istanbul and Baku to determine the details, and finally, at the meeting held in Almaty, they signed the agreement which established TURKSOY.²⁰

Over time, the five founding states of TURKSOY remained as members, while those who are not independent states joined as observers, such as six Russian Federation autonomous republics, the Autonomous Region of Gagauzia (Moldova), and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which is isolated by the international community even in the fields of culture and art.²¹

CULTURAL DIPLOMACY AND TURKSOY

Cultural diplomacy, according to the definition of Cummings, is the interchange of ideas, information, art, and other cultural components among nations and their peoples in order to create mutual understanding.²²

20 Salim Ezer, *Cultural Diplomacy As a Foreign Policy Tool Of Turkey: The Case of TURKSOY*, Middle East Technical University, The Graduate School of Social Sciences, (Unpublished Master's Thesis), Ankara 2019, p. 24.

21 Firat Purtaş, "Cultural Diplomacy Initiatives of Turkic Republics", *Perceptions*, 22(1), 2017, p. 97.

22 Milton Cummings, *Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: A Survey*, Center for Arts and Culture, Washington 2003, p. 1.

While cultural diplomacy, a soft power aspect, was a weapon utilized by the poles against each other during the Cold War, with the influence of globalization, it has evolved into a larger notion in terms of substance and subjects of study.²³ Cultural diplomacy is becoming increasingly important in foreign policy making as soft power elevates its significance in today's international system. Cultural diplomacy, which has gained wider place in foreign policy circles as a result of governments' increased use of soft power, provides new avenues for states to pursue common national interests. As a result of the exchange of components that make up their cultures, nations gain a better understanding of each other's mindsets, interests, and objectives, and as a result, numerous contributions can be made to foreign policy makers, particularly when resolving conflicts by meeting on a common ground.²⁴

Cultural diplomacy in international relations gained a different dimension with UNESCO, which was established under the umbrella of the United Nations after the Second World War.²⁵ Indeed, TURKSOY is a cultural diplomacy organization modeled after UNESCO's structure, with the aim of strengthening relations within the Turkic World.²⁶ Hence, TURKSOY is the auspices of the cultural integration of Turkic peoples and functions as the UNESCO of the Turkic World, strengthening cultural ties and brotherhood among Turkic peoples and carrying out activities to introduce Turkic culture to the World. TURKSOY, in accordance with

23 Fırat Purtaş, "Türk Dış Politikasının Yükselen Değeri: Kültürel Diplomasi", *Gazi Akademik Bakış*, 7(13), 2013, p. 3.

24 Erman Akıllı, "Turksoy, Turkic Council and Cultural Diplomacy: Transactionalism Revisited", *Bilig-Journal of Social Sciences of the Turkic World*, 1(91), 2019, p. 11.

25 Purtaş, *op. cit.*, 2013, p. 3.

26 Salim Ezer, *Cultural Diplomacy As a Foreign Policy Tool Of Turkey: The Case of TURKSOY*, Middle East Technical University, The Graduate School of Social Sciences, (Unpublished Master's Thesis), Ankara 2019, p. 6.

TURKIC REPUBLICS ON THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THEIR INDEPENDENCE AND TURKSOY

the protocol it signed with UNESCO in 1966, supports projects such as “sustaining of cultural diversity”, “the preservation of intangible cultural heritage” and the “rapprochement of cultures” with all its means.²⁷

From its establishment in 1993 until the mid-2000s, TURKSOY concentrated its cultural diplomacy activities mostly on its member states. This is because, as previously implied, member states needed to improve their understanding of one another and share their experiences. However, in the mid-2000s, as newly independent Turkic states began to take control of the challenges they’ve been facing following their independence, they escalated their cultural diplomacy initiatives to a global scale²⁸ and TURKSOY’s operating area has been increased as a result of this.

TURKSOY carries out variety of cultural events in various parts of the world, from Europe to the US, from the Islamic world to Eurasian region, with the aim of expanding its influence beyond member countries, and one of the essential requirements for accomplishing this goal is forming partnerships with international organizations from around the world. Hence, TURKSOY works in coordination with the Turkic Council, the Turkic Academy and the Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation in order to achieve its common organizational goals with them. It also collaborates with international organizations and institutions that share similar ideals and purposes with itself such as the United Nations, UNESCO, the Council of Europe, EU Parliment, ISESCO, IRCICA, and the International Foundation of CIS Countries for Humanitarian Cooperation.²⁹

27 Dusen Kasseinov, “The Importance of TURKSOY on the 10th Anniversary of the Nakhchivan Agreement”, *Center of Analysis of International Relations, Special Publication-Turkic Council: 10th Anniversary of the Nakhchivan Agreement*, Baku 2019, p. 42.

28 Purtaş, *op. cit.*, 2013, p. 93.

29 Dusen Kasseinov, “The Importance of TURKSOY on the 10th Anniversary of the Nakhchivan Agreement”, *Center of Analysis of International Relations, Special Publication-Turkic Council: 10th Anniversary of the Nakhchivan Agreement*, Baku 2019, p. 44.

In this century, when the Turkic World's frontiers have spread to Europe and it is seen a critical necessity for TURKSOY to expand its activities to the West,³⁰ the developments following the collaboration between TURKSOY and the EU Parliament demonstrated the importance of working in collaboration with other international organizations. The proposals for cooperation made by member of the EU Parliament from Poland Ryszard Czarnecki during his visit to the TURKSOY General Secretariat on October 14, 2021, opened an important door in this regard.³¹ As a reflection of this visit, between November 15th-17th, the joint event "Culture Days of Khiva in Brussels" was organized with TURKSOY's initiatives. Following the opening event, on November 16th, the round-table meeting titled as "Preservation of the Cultural Heritage of the Silk Road" was held in the European Parliament which was very important for the promotion of Khiva, the Capital of the Turkic World in 2020.³² Although the activities in Brussels aimed to promote Khiva and Uzbek culture in particular, as the Secretary General of TURKSOY Dusen Kaseinov stated, the main aim of these activities in a broader sense was to strengthen the cultural bridge between the Turkic World and Europe.³³

TURKSOY, which takes active initiatives in the field of cultural diplomacy by increasing the number of projects each year, has made some of its activities "traditional" by repeating them on a regular basis. TURKSOY's traditional activities are the nevrüz celebrations, declarations of the cultural capitals of the Turkic World, declarations of the commemorative years, art ensembles, artistic gatherings and gatherings of the poets which will be outlined in detail in the following sections.

30 Ruhi Ersoy, "An Outlook on the Turkish Cultural World in the 21st Century, Specific to Khiva, the Capital of the Turkic World", *Unpublished Report on the Round-table Meeting in the EU Parliament*, Brussels 2021, p. 12.

31 "Polonyalı Parlamenter Ryszard Czarnecki TÜRKSOY'u Ziyaret Etti", *Turksoy*, <https://www.turksoy.org/tr/news/2021/10/17/polonyali-parlamenter-ryszard-czarnecki-turksoy-u-ziyaret-etti>, (Date of Accession: 25.11.2021).

32 Ryszard Czarnecki, "Role of TURKSOY in Promoting Turkic Culture", *New Delhi Times*, <https://www.newdelhitimes.com/role-of-turksoy-in-promoting-turkic-culture/>, (Date of Accession: 30.11.2021).

33 "Hiva Kültür Günleri Başlıyor", *Turksoy*, <https://www.turksoy.org/tr/news/2021/11/15/hiva-kultur-gunleri-basliyor>, (Date of Accession: 10.12.2021).

TURKIC REPUBLICS ON THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THEIR INDEPENDENCE AND TURKSOY

NEVRUZ CELEBRATIONS

The Turks' golden age in Ergenekon, their mythological homeland, ended with a devastating drought, according to Turkish mythology, and it was the she-wolf Asena who led the Turks out of that wretched place. The day of Nevruz marks the Turks' liberation from Ergenekon. In connection to the mythology, Nevruz is associated with the beginning of new life, or the renewal of nature. In this way, it resembles the Christian Easter holiday.³⁴ Many peoples in the Northern Hemisphere over a broad area of Eurasia traditionally celebrate Nevruz with various rituals on March 21st when the day and night have the same duration.³⁵ Hence, it is celebrated not only by Turkic peoples but also by communities that are geographically close to them. While there were doubts in the past about the Nevruz celebrations even in Turkey due to unfavorable political connotations, this tradition is now celebrated globally with the efforts of TURKSOY member countries.

Nevruz is of critical importance in terms of uniting the Turkic World around common values, as it is the only common holiday celebrated by Turkic peoples, besides the Ramadan Feast and Aid-al-Adha. The Nevruz tradition was added to UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2009 after Turkey, Iran, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, and India submitted a joint submission. On February 23rd, 2010, the United Nations General Assembly designated March 21st as International Day of Nevruz, after Azerbaijan's suggestion.³⁶

Besides Nevruz celebrations it has been holding in Turkey and Turkic republics since 1995, TURKSOY has brought the joy of Nevruz to audiences worldwide with historical celebration events held in major venues and cities of the world including UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, Strasburg, in

34 "Nevruz Celebration", *Insight Turkey*, 3, March 1997, p. 132.

35 Dusen Kasseinov, "TURKSOY: The Global Actor of Cultural Cooperation in the Turkic World", *Fifth Summit of the Turkic Council: A Rising Actor in Regional Cooperation in Eurasia*, Center for Strategic Research (SAM), Ankara 2015, p. 20.

36 Kasseinov, *op.cit.*, 2019, p.45.

the United Nations General Assembly Hall in New York, in Washington, London, Sarajevo, Mostar, Cetinje, Tiran, Gostivar, Plovdiv, Sofia, Brussels and Berlin.³⁷ Hence, with the initiatives of TURKSOY, colourful Nevruz celebrations depicting the abundance, livelihood, love, brotherhood, mutual sharing and peace brought about by the revival of nature with the arrival of the spring season reached out to the whole world. The biggest Nevruz celebrations of TURKSOY were held in Turkistan, the Cultural Capital of the Turkic World 2017 in Kazakhstan in cooperation of TURKSOY with TİKA, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency and the Yunus Emre Institute with the contribution of nearly 200 artists from 22 countries.³⁸ Young artists from Europe and Asia came together in the homeland of Yassawi and celebrated Nevruz, one of the most important traditions of Turkic civilization along with the declaration of Turkistan as Cultural Capital of the Turkic World.

Nevruz celebrations were also held in various cities of Europe such as Bucarest and Constanta in Romania, Komrat and Cisinou in Moldova, and of Asia such as Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan and Almaty in Kazakhstan, hence contributing to the rapprochement of all Turkic peoples with the arrival of spring. The Nevruz celebrations of TURKSOY included not only artists from its members but also artists from other countries such as Germany, Austria, the United Kingdom, Romania, Belgium etc. which helped the tradition to become recognised all over the world over the years.³⁹ Thanks to the cultural diplomacy carried out by TURKSOY, “Nevruz” has become the symbol of the rapprochement of Turkic peoples and the trademark of the worldwide promotion of Turkic culture.

³⁷ Fatih Aliyi, *International Organization of Turkic Culture, TURKSOY in the Balkans*, Ankara 2020, p.102.

³⁸ Aliyi, *op. cit.*, p.108.

³⁹ Salim Ezer, *Cultural Diplomacy As a Foreign Policy Tool Of Turkey: The Case of TURKSOY*, Middle East Technical University, The Graduate School of Social Sciences, (Unpublished Master’s Thesis), Ankara 2019, p. 46.

TURKIC REPUBLICS ON THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THEIR INDEPENDENCE AND TURKSOY

CULTURAL CAPITALS OF THE TURKIC WORLD

In 2010, during the 10th Summit of the Heads of Turkic Speaking States in Istanbul, TURKSOY proposed launching a project modeled after the European Capital of Culture practice. Following the acceptance of this proposal, Astana was declared as the first Cultural Capital of the Turkic World in 2012 and it was followed by Eskishehir in 2013, Kazan in 2014, Merv in 2015, Sheki in 2016, Turkestan in 2017, Kastamonu in 2018, Osh in 2019, Khiva in 2020, and Bursa in 2022.⁴⁰

During the declared year, cultural capitals host a variety of cultural events including artistic gatherings, theater, musical performances with contributions of TURKSOY and the organizations working in collaboration with it. The opening and closing ceremonies, as well as the meetings of the Permanent Council, are the two main events traditionally held in the declared cultural capitals and receive the most attention.⁴¹ Cultural capitals, which receive visitors from all over the world on the occasion of events throughout the year, make significant contributions to the city and country economy as a result of the dynamism in the tourism sector.⁴² Cultural Capitals of the Turkic World title today has become a highly praised title which cities of the Turkic World compete with each other to obtain. The project, which is extremely rich in terms of cities and cultures, has been quite effective in terms of introducing the cultural accumulation of the member states to the rest of the world, and it aims to expand its worldwide impact.⁴³

40 Purtaş, *op. cit.*, 2017, p.100.

41 Ezer, *op. cit.*, p.50.

42 Akıllı, *op. cit.*, p.13.

43 Erkam Temir, "Türk Dünyası Kültür Başkentleri ve İletişim Stratejileri", Fırat Yıldız, ed., Türk Dünyası Kültür Başkentleri, Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık, Ankara 2020, p.50.

COMMEMORATIVE YEARS AND ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES

In conformity with its primary focus, TURKSOY attaches great importance to commemorating the illustrious personalities who have made significant contributions to Turkic culture and transmitting their legacy to younger generations.⁴⁴ Adopting a wide-scale approach to the notion of culture and following up activities carried out worldwide to foster cultural interaction within this framework, TURKSOY officially started the Commemorative Years declarations project in 2010 based on the practice of UNESCO⁴⁵

The first commemorative year declared by TURKSOY was dedicated to Zeki Velidi Togan in 2010. The following commemorative years were dedicated to Abdullah Tukay, Nikolay Katanov, Mirza Fethali Ahundzade, Mukan Tulebayev, Magmutguly Pyragy, Toktogul Satylganov, Haldun Taner, Simion Kadyshev, Yusuf Khass Hajip, Molla Panah Vagif, Chingis Aitmatov, Magjan Jumabay, the minstrel Aşık Veysel, Imadeddin Nesimi and Abai Kunanbayev.⁴⁶ The opening events of commemorative years are traditionally held in TURKSOY Headquarters and takes place in the presence of the Term Coordinator of TURKSOY and ministers of culture or senior officials of the related country and are broadcasted to the large public by the press media.

TURKSOY also held numerous academic conferences and artistic events to promote scholars, intellectuals, and artists whose commemoration year has yet to be declared. In this regard, TURKSOY pioneered the promotion of illustrious personalities by initiating the “Pioneers of the Turkic World” conference series in 2017, with the contributions of academics around the Turkic World. One of the greatest mystic poets and thinkers Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, Muhammed Hussein

44 International Organization of Turkic Culture, *Türk Dünyasının Öncüleri*, Ankara 2018, p. 5.

45 Purtaş, *op. cit.* 2017, p. 101.

46 Ezer, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

TURKIC REPUBLICS ON THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THEIR INDEPENDENCE AND TURKSOY

Shahriar, Alikul Osmonov, Konstantin Ivanov, Bekir Sitki Chobanzade, Zeynalabid Batırmurzayev, Ali-Shir Nava'i and many other intellectuals were promoted in Turkey via this project.⁴⁷

ART ENSEMBLES

While contributing to numerous projects for the development of the culture and art of the Turkic World since 1993, TURKSOY also pioneered the establishment of three different art ensembles that bring together artists from its member countries.⁴⁸ Since its establishment in 2010, the first art ensemble of TURKSOY, the Youth Chamber Orchestra has successfully enchanted its audiences with its colourful performances of common melodies of the Turkic World while taking the stage in important cultural centers of Europe, America and Eurasia.⁴⁹ The Youth Chamber Orchestra of TURKSOY is composed of talented young artists from the organization's member countries and the repertoire of the orchestra changes every year.⁵⁰

Another ensemble established by TURKSOY is the Youth Chamber Choir of TURKSOY, which was established in Ankara in 2015 by gathering talented conservatory students from Turkic World. This choir has a significant role in the adoption and dissemination of choir music among Turkic peoples. Bringing together thirty two students from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey and Turkmenistan, the Youth Chamber Choir represented Turkic republics at the European Choir Games in 2015, winning three gold medals among more than 100 choirs and 5000 choir members from 37 nations.⁵¹

47 International Organization of Turkic Culture, *loc. cit.*

48 "TÜRKSÖY Sanat Toplulukları", *loc. cit.*

49 Aliyi, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

50 Ezer, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

51 Purtaş, *op. cit.*, 2017, p. 100.

The third ensemble established upon the initiatives of TURKSOY is the Orchestra of Traditional Instruments which considers it a mission to bring the ethnic and traditional music of the Turkic World to a wider audience in all Turkic languages.⁵² The Orchestra of Traditional Instruments of TURKSOY gave its first concert within the framework of Nevruz celebrations of TURKSOY held in Ankara, Istanbul, New York and Washington DC in March 2016.⁵³ The Orchestra includes traditional instruments of the Turkic World such as dombra, baglama, syrnai, sherter, kamancha, komuz, tar quray, nay, qaval, rubab, topshur, qanun and so on.

ARTISTIC GATHERINGS

One of the events of TURKSOY, which has been organized periodically and has become a tradition over the years is artistic gatherings. It is organized by the gathering of artists from the Turkic World working in various fields such as painting, sculpture, photography, opera, literature, media and theater.⁵⁴ Since 1999, the TURKSOY Painter's Gatherings have been held once a year. Through these events, TURKSOY not only brings the Turkic world together under one roof, but it also uses art as an effective tool to promote Turkish culture by showing its extensive collection of paintings in major cities throughout the world⁵⁵ TURKSOY's Opera Days have been held 22 times, with over 35 concerts involving hundreds of musicians. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus hosted all of the event's opening and closing concerts. Photographer' Gatherings of TURKSOY have been organized in conjunction with the Cultural Capitals of the Turkic World events, and the photographs selected after the gatherings are added to the catalogs and promoted internationally through TURKSOY photography exhibitions.⁵⁶

52 Kasseinov, *op. cit.*, 2019, p. 46.

53 International Organization of Turkic Culture, *TURKSOY Halk Çalgıları Orkestrası*, Ankara, p. 2.

54 Kasseinov, *op. cit.*, 2019, p. 46.

55 Purtaş, *op. cit.*, 2017, p. 99.

56 Ezer, *loc. cit.*

TURKIC REPUBLICS ON THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THEIR INDEPENDENCE AND TURKSOY

CONCLUSION

By the 1980s, a growing number of nationalist movements demanding sovereignty had been added to the numerous structural issues that were already pushing the Soviet Union's disintegration. Finally, when the Union began to disintegrate along previously drawn republic borders, five of the fifteen newly founded independent states were the Turkic states of Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan which are the focus of this article.

While these new governments struggled with the identity crisis and attempted to establish an internal administrative system, they started to take steps for their own interests in foreign policy for the first time outside of the Soviet frame. During the thirty-year period from their independence to the present, the Turkic republics have been successful to varying degrees in issues such as the completion of sovereign and fully independent state construction; full integration with the regional and international community; establishment of national economy; general development projects; national culture, art, and educational policies and so on.

During this period, which is long for human life but incredibly brief for state life, could be said to have achieved a successful developmental stage. In the process of recovering from their Soviet past, the Republic of Turkey, which was the first country to recognize the Turkish republics after their declaration of independence, became an exemplary model for them as a Turkic republic that adopted liberal, democratic, and western centric policies.

TURKSOY was founded in 1993, during a period when the Turkic countries' intergovernmental relations were developing with high motivation through instruments such as intergovernmental contacts, summits, and agreements. TURKSOY has carried out many important

activities with its member countries, including reviving the politicized and almost forgotten Nevruz tradition in Anatolia as the common holiday of the Turkic World, organizing commemorative meetings about thinkers Ganjavi, Abay, Canbil, Abdullah Tukay, Muhtar Avezov, Nikolay Katanov, and Semen Kadishev who were not well known in Turkey and bringing together the leading artists and cultural scholars of various countries and regions.

On the thirtieth anniversary of the independence of the Turkic Republics, TURKSOY has been producing joint projects in all fields of culture and art, from literature to fine arts, painting to music, sculpture to photography, and continues to implement them all over the world, particularly in its member countries. TURKSOY, which has a huge library by pioneering the publication of hundreds of books since the independence of the Turkic Republics. Being conscious that if even the tiniest piece of the enormous Turkic World puzzle is missing, the puzzle will never be finished, TURKSOY has made it its mission to promote and protect the unique culture of the Turkic peoples living as a minority in non-Turkic nation-states. TURKSOY, referred to as the Turkic World's shared culture and art center, organizes meetings of artists and intellectuals in a variety of fields. This common center also plays a vital role in social rapprochement by organizing painters' meetings, opera days, theater festivals, poets' meetings, and intellectuals' gatherings.

All in all, the last thirty years of the Turkic Republics have been a period full of successes in which continuous developments have been achieved in terms of cooperation and integration within the Turkic World and TURKSOY has made very significant contributions to this process. The transition from rebuilding national identity to employing it as a tool in cultural diplomacy has reached a critical moment in this process, and developments continue to follow a positive course.

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