
Introduction: Celebrating the 25th Anniversary of the Independence of the Turkic-Speaking States

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When the Turkic-speaking states gained their independence from the Soviet Union, which disintegrated largely peacefully towards the end of 1991, few international experts realized the significance of the newly independent Turkic-speaking states for the international system. Today, it is a widely shared belief that the independence of the Turkic-speaking states has substantially transformed not only the regional makeup of the Caucasus and Central Asia but also the interactions between the post-Soviet space and its neighbouring regions.

The independence declarations of the Turkic-speaking states in the Caucasus and Central Asia; namely Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, were enthusiastically recognized first by Turkey in early 1992. Turkey recognized these independence declarations without any hesitation.

Ankara welcomed these declarations as a positive move that could contribute to regional peace and stability as well as development. Turkey also provided strong diplomatic support and generous technical and economic assistance to these Turkic-speaking states.

The re-entry of the Turkic-speaking states into the international system was also a welcome development for all countries of the world since it eliminated the artificial barriers created by the Soviet Union and the Cold War practices and allowed for further international cooperation. Likewise, the development of socio-economic as well as cultural relations among the Turkic-speaking peoples was also expected to contribute to the advancement of interactions between the Turkic-speaking states and other countries globally. In this context, Turkey's lead in recognizing the independence of the Turkic-speaking states was followed by the other members of the United Nations in 1992, when they also realized the importance of welcoming the Turkic-speaking countries into the international community.

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This special issue of *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs* is devoted to marking the 25th anniversary of Turkey's recognition of the independence declarations by the Turkic-speaking states. It seems that this anniversary is an appropriate time to assess both the performance of the Turkic-speaking states in strengthening their independence and the development of bilateral and multilateral relations among Turkey and the other Turkic-speaking countries. Not surprisingly, the diplomatic issues and international challenges facing the Turkic states after 25 years of independence have been widely studied by a wide range of academics, experts, and diplomats.

In response to the call for papers to this special issue of *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs*, many authors submitted their papers to the journal to be considered for inclusion. Our academic referees blind reviewed all of these submissions individually.

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Although all of the submitted papers included invaluable insights about the topic of this special issue, the following five articles have been selected for inclusion in our special issue upon the positive recommendation of the academic referees. The selected articles of this special issue were judged to have a strong potential in contributing significantly to our understanding of the Turkic-speaking states as well as to their relations among themselves.

The diplomatic and economic aspects of the partnership between Turkey and the Turkic-speaking states is explored in the article entitled "Trade Relations Between Turkey and Kazakhstan on the 25th Anniversary of the Independence of Kazakhstan". The authors of this article, Nevzat Şimşek, Cengizhan Canaltay, and Hayal Ayça Şimşek have been doing research on this region for several years and work at the Eurasian Research Institute, which is based in Almaty. The close diplomatic relations between Turkey and Kazakhstan have brought many business opportunities

for both countries. The authors demonstrate that in less than a quarter century, the volume of exports between Turkey and Kazakhstan has multiplied by 39 times, while imports increased 110 times. As for investment sector, Turkey is the fourth largest investor country in non-energy products. The article highlights the importance of the close relations between Turkey and Kazakhstan in increasing the trade volume between these countries. This win-win model of diplomatic and economic partnership could be considered as a positive example for the other countries too.

In his article titled “Azerbaijan’s Foreign Policy on the 25th Anniversary of Restored Independence,” the Special Envoy Amb. Arastu Habibbeyli from Azerbaijan’s Presidential Administration, analyses the evolution of Azerbaijan’s foreign policy over the last 25 years of its independence. In this article of the special issue, the author investigates under what circumstances Azerbaijan became a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, how it evolved from being a recipient of international aid to becoming a donor country, how the country has become a reliable energy partner, and finally, how its robust economy has recovered from the severe economic crisis in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse. Azerbaijan’s success story under very challenging regional circumstances

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The following article, which is entitled “A Quarter-Century Pursuit of Independence: Politics of Trade, Energy, and Economic Development in Uzbekistan” is authored by Halil Burak Sakal, a PhD candidate in the International Relations Department at Middle East Technical University. The author scrutinizes the political economy of independent Uzbekistan from a historical perspective. Halil Burak Sakal explores Uzbekistan’s post-Soviet development in three periods and argues that the Uzbek economic model is an important part of Uzbek independence, and, since its independence, helped its economy survive at least two global financial crises without entering into any hegemonic relationship with the advanced economies. In this article, the author presents an optimistic outlook for the future of the Uzbek

economy under the political leadership of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, and predicts closer cooperation between Uzbekistan and its Central Asian neighbors as well as Turkey.

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The importance of close and friendly relations between the Turkic-speaking countries is further highlighted in the fifth article, written by Firat Purtaş, Deputy Head of TÜRKSOY, and Professor of International Relations at Gazi University in Ankara. This article is entitled “Cultural Diplomacy Initiatives of the Turkic-Speaking Republics.” The author explores the initiatives of cultural diplomacy which the Turkic-speaking nations have undertaken at a global level. The main argument put forward in the article is that the newly independent Turkic-speaking republics have determined a culture-based policy for their state building. The article demonstrates convincingly

that as a regional cultural cooperation organization, TÜRKSOY has been a very effective common platform and has played a key role in the revival and promotion of the national cultures of the Turkic-republics globally.

The special issue concludes with an analysis of another important multilateral platform for strengthening closer cooperation and friendly relations among the Turkic-speaking republics, the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic-Speaking Countries (TurkPA). Ercan Durdular, Senior Advisor to the Speaker of TGNA, explores from an analytical perspective this attempt at promoting parliamentary diplomacy among the Turkic-speaking states. This article, which is entitled “The Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic-Speaking Countries (TurkPA): Beyond Parliamentary Diplomacy,” discusses the current status and activities of TurkPA. It argues that TurkPA constitutes an effective forum for parliamentary diplomacy and serves as the parliamentary dimension of the cooperation and integration of Turkic-speaking nations. The author also demonstrates how, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Turkic-speaking nations displayed their dedication to acting together in a coordinated way by establishing TurkPA. In fact, as Ercan Durdular shows, TurkPA has a strong potential for contributing to the diplomatic

resolution of regional problems as well as to the harmonization of laws and policies towards regional integration.

In conclusion, I hope the readers of this special issue will find these articles to be noteworthy contributions to the literature at a time when we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the independence declarations by the Turkic-speaking states. I also believe that the analytical insights of these articles could stimulate further discussions about the future prospects of the Turkic-speaking states. Last but not least, I would like to note that this

special issue of *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs* is dedicated to the well-founded fraternal ties between Turkey and the other Turkic-speaking states. Happy anniversaries!!!

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