

THE ORGANIZATION OF TURKIC STATES: OPPORTUNITIES FOR ECONOMIC INTEGRATION



Uzbekistan became a full member of the Organization of Turkic States (formerly the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States, CCTS) in 2019, and by 2022, it had already hosted the OTS Summit in Samarkand. At an Informal Meeting of OTS Leaders in 2024, the President of Uzbekistan outlined the priorities for cooperation within the Organization, including the development of trade, transport routes, and alternative energy, as well as the fight against climate change.

The Secretary General of the Organization of Turkic States, **Kubanychbek OMURALIEV**, in his exclusive interview with the Economic Bulletin of Uzbekistan magazine, which coincided with the launch of the edition titled «The New Era of Turkic Civilization,» addressed key issues, shedding light on the opportunities for further economic integration among the OTS Member States and the Organization's prospects in the coming years.

– Dear Ambassador Omuraliev, today the world is facing global economic changes, where countries, in their search for economic growth, are forced to seek new approaches

and solutions. The active growth of developing economies is gradually changing the established geopolitical landscape, while new centers of influence are impacting the course of

history. What potential do you see for the OTS in terms of integration among its Member States?

– The potential of the OTS in terms of integration is huge and diverse. Our

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shared history, culture, and language are not just factors that bring us together but also a strong foundation for closer cooperation. The fact that there are no political disagreements between Member States creates a positive environment for joint efforts. The high level of bilateral relations, similar views, and strategic interests, especially in the economic field, along with mutual efforts to ensure security, provide a solid base for further strengthening ties.

Given the global geopolitical and economic instability, integration within the OTS is more important than ever. The Organization is attracting attention from many international bodies and countries that want to cooperate as partners or Observers. This growing interest shows that the OTS is becoming a key platform for integration and a stable regional player.

Today, the OTS is rapidly developing and covers over 35 areas of cooperation, ranging from trade, tourism, and agriculture to the digital economy, green energy, and even space research.

The OTS is now entering a phase of practical cooperation, focusing on implementing specific projects. This was evident from the outcomes of recent summits, where important agreements were signed in areas such as the digital economy, civil protection, and food security.

– Are there any plans for the Turkic states to become more actively involved in global economic or political processes within the OTS framework? What are the prospects for the Turkic states to act as a «unified front» on the international stage?

Certainly, the OTS is not aiming to limit itself to internal cooperation. On the contrary, we are focused on active participation in global economic and political processes.

We see that the countries in our Organization have great potential, which gives us unique opportunities to coordinate efforts and tackle global challenges together. Our countries are already starting to take common positions on key issues like sustainable development, green economy, energy security, and transport integration. This process will only grow stronger, allowing us to present a more united front on important global issues in the future.

– How do you assess the current level of economic integration among the Member States of the OTS and their potential for increasing trade? What are the barriers that need to be overcome?

– The level of economic integration between the Member States of the Organization of Turkic States is currently showing positive dynamics. In this context, important guidelines for us are strategic documents such as the Turkic World Vision - 2040 and the OTS Strategy 2022-2026, which provide a clear path toward achieving sustainable economic cooperation among Member States.

Our region sits at a key crossroads between East and West, North and South, covering 4.5 million square kilometers and home to nearly 170 million people. This strategic position offers huge opportunities for expanding trade and economic cooperation. Right now, their total external trade volume stands at \$860 billion, but intra-OTS trade makes up only 5% of that – about \$42.3 billion. While this already doubles the figure from a few years ago, when it was only 3%, we aim to increase it to 10% in the coming years.

To achieve these goals, we are actively developing key mechanisms. One such mechanism is the Turkic Investment Fund, initially established

in 2023 with a charter capital of \$500 million, now has grown to \$600 million. It provides a platform to finance projects that support the growth of internal trade and attract investments. Special attention is also given to supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, which are crucial for job creation and economic diversification. The Fund will also seek financing not only from its own resources but also from other international financial institutions, helping drive economic growth, create jobs, foster innovation, and support socio-economic development in the region.

In addition, the Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of the Turkic States, established in 2019 and representing over 2 million companies, actively promotes the strengthening of business ties and the exchange of experience among entrepreneurs. In 2024, the General Assembly of the Union was held in Baku, Azerbaijan, where new governing bodies were elected and specialized committees, such as the committee on logistics and support for young entrepreneurs, were created. These initiatives are already beginning to yield results, and in the coming years, we expect significant growth in joint projects across various sectors of the economy, including agriculture.

Another important step is the establishment of the Trade Facilitation Committee (TFC), which aims to optimize trade processes, reduce barriers, and create a more favorable environment for trade between the Turkic states.

However, we understand that there are also certain challenges. First and foremost, these include differences in the economic and legal systems of the countries, as well as logistics and infrastructure issues. To increase trade volumes and strengthen economic integration, it is essential to continue working on simplifying procedures, improving infrastructure, and removing administrative barriers.

Each step in this direction strengthens our collective economic potential and benefits not only individual countries but also the entire Turkic world. In the future, we can expect even closer cooperation, which

will help create new jobs, improve the lives of our citizens, and strengthen the positions of Turkic states on the international stage.

– Considering the natural resources and geographical location of our countries, which energy cooperation initiative do you see as the most promising? How do you assess, for example, the agreement between Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan on the transfer of «green» energy between the three countries?

– The development of energy cooperation between our countries is one of the key priorities of the OTS, as reflected in the Organization's key documents, including the Nakhchivan Agreement, the Turkic World Vision – 2040, and the Astana Declaration. All Turkic countries have great potential in producing, exporting, and transporting energy resources. Together, the Turkic states rank 14th among the largest economies in the world and 3rd among the biggest energy suppliers. By combining our strengths, we can open up many opportunities and strengthen our position in the global economy.

The agreement between Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan on strategic partnership in the transfer of «green» energy is a prime example of successful integration within the OTS. It opens up new opportunities for sustainable development, energy security, and the export of clean energy to European markets.

Firstly, it enables the connection of the energy systems of the three countries and the creation of a «green bridge» along the Middle Corridor. Kazakhstan plays a key role as a transit hub, linking the systems of Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. This coordination will allow for the export of renewable energy to Europe, positioning the Turkic countries as an important supplier of clean energy.

Secondly, the countries involved are working hard to boost their «green» energy capacity. Uzbekistan aims to reach 40% of renewable energy sources by 2030, creating extra power for export. Azerbaijan has great potential for wind energy, especially in the Caspian Sea area. Its capacity is estimated at 157 GW, which is much more than the country needs.

This project is also attracting the attention of international financial institutions and investors. Advanced technologies and new investments will create thousands of jobs and accelerate the region's transition to a «green» economy.

As a result, the implementation of this agreement will not only enhance the region's energy security but also strengthen the position of the participating countries as leading suppliers of renewable energy. Additionally, it is an important step towards fulfilling global climate commitments and shaping an environmentally sustainable future for the entire region.

– Transport infrastructure plays a key role in regional integration. What projects are currently being implemented to improve connectivity between the Turkic countries? Is the Organization of Turkic States involved in the development of the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor?

– Transport infrastructure indeed plays a key role in regional integration and economic cooperation. One of the most significant projects in this area is the Trans-Caspian International Transport Corridor, or the Middle Corridor. This route, with deep historical roots connecting Asia and Europe, shortens the distance by 2,000 kilometers compared to the traditional Northern Corridor and speeds up the delivery of goods three times faster than by sea. Today, thanks to this corridor, goods can be delivered from China to Europe in just 15 days.

It is expected that by 2030, the transport volume along the Middle Corridor will triple, reaching 11 million tons annually. The development of this corridor is a key priority in the Turkic World Vision – 2040 strategy, aimed at creating the shortest and safest transportation route between the East and the West, while integrating the Turkic countries into global logistics networks.

A major part of this project is the construction of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway. In December 2024, the first stone for this crucial infrastructure project was laid in Jalal-Abad. Once completed, it will significantly shorten transit times and

increase the capacity to transport up to 15 million tons of goods annually.

Moreover, the OTS actively cooperates with international organizations such as the UN Economic Commission for Europe and the International Road Transport Union to optimize transportation operations. One of the significant steps in this direction is the implementation of the eTIR system, which is based on the UN Convention on International Road Transport. This system facilitates secure data exchange between countries and significantly speeds up customs procedures. In January 2025, the OTS signed an action plan for the implementation of the eTIR system by the end of 2025, marking an important step in modernizing customs procedures and accelerating transport operations.

A key example of this process is Türkiye, which began integrating eTIR in 2020 with the goal of boosting its competitiveness in logistics and trade. Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan also became the first countries to successfully conduct transport operations using eTIR in 2022. It is expected that the full implementation of eTIR within the OTS will reduce waiting times and improve the use of customs resources, helping to remove trade barriers and enhance the efficiency of transit operations.

It is important to highlight the significant agreements signed at the Samarkand Summit in 2022. Among them are the establishment of simplified customs corridor and on international combined freight transport. These initiatives will play a crucial role in simplifying customs procedures and improving logistics, making transport routes between the OTS countries faster and more efficient.

– What are the priority goals the OTS sets for itself in the next 5–10 years?

– Over the past 15 years, the Organization of Turkic States has made impressive strides in fostering unity, strengthening cooperation, and promoting sustainable development among its Member States and Observers. As we look to the future, we have set new, ambitious goals for the coming years.

As I mentioned earlier, one of the key documents guiding our work is



the Turkic World Vision – 2040. This strategic document sets long-term goals and directs the efforts of the OTS in key areas. Among the priority tasks are, of course, deepening economic integration, accelerating the adoption of digital technologies, ensuring environmental sustainability, and enhancing security.

If we talk about plans for 2025, this year the Chairmanship of the OTS has passed to the Kyrgyz Republic, and we will operate under the slogan «Empowering the Turkic World: Economic Integration, Sustainable Development, Digital Future, and Security for All.» This slogan reflects our key priorities and emphasizes our commitment to a more interconnected, sustainable, and future-oriented Turkic world.

Under Kyrgyzstan's chairmanship, a series of events are planned aimed at deepening ties between our countries and expanding cooperation beyond the Turkic world. One of the highlights will be the first meeting of the heads of government and vice presidents of the Member States of the OTS, marking an important step towards enhancing economic and sectoral interaction.

Overall, the Organization will continue its ambitious agenda for 2025, focusing on strategic cooperation. We have already made significant progress in areas such as the economy, transport, education, and tourism. However, there is always potential for further development. In particular, we will continue to strengthen and expand cooperation in the 35 existing

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One of the priorities will be the continuation of negotiations on the Free Trade Agreement in the areas of investments and services. This is an important step that will help eliminate barriers to economic interaction and create a more integrated trade space.

Furthermore, we will continue to expand cooperation with international organizations and regional structures such as the UN, OIC, African Union, and ASEAN. Today, we are closer to these structures than ever before, and it is important for us to synchronize efforts in advancing our common interests.

In addition, in 2025, we will have two significant summits – an Informal Summit in Hungary and the 12th Summit in Azerbaijan. These will serve as important platforms for discussing key decisions and launching new initiatives that will define the

further development trajectory of the Organization.

– *At the Informal Summit of the OTS in Shusha, the President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, emphasized the importance of developing «common and unified approaches to Afghanistan» in the new realities of the world. What work is being done in this direction?*

At the last summit in Bishkek, the Bishkek Declaration emphasized the importance of creating a working group on Afghanistan within the OTS. According to this decision, the foreign ministers of the Member States of the OTS have been tasked with preparing a draft statement for the Council of Heads of State. This statement is expected to be adopted at the Informal Summit in Hungary with the goal of developing a unified approach from all OTS Member States regarding the situation in Afghanistan amid the new challenges.