UZBEKISTAN AND THE ORGANIZATION OF TURKIC STATES: PATHWAYS OF POLITICAL COOPERATION

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Annotation

This article examines Uzbekistan’s political engagement with the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) within the framework of regional integration and multilateral diplomacy. Using a qualitative methodology that combines document analysis, comparative case studies, and thematic interpretations, the study highlights Uzbekistan’s strategic initiatives since joining the TTS in 2019. The findings show that it has made significant progress in trade expansion, transport links, diplomatic leadership, and cultural cooperation. Uzbekistan’s 2022–2023 TTS chairmanship, particularly through the Samarkand Summit, has emphasized its role as a mediator and consensus builder, emphasizing dialogue, economic development, and cultural diplomacy over military alliances. The discussion examines Uzbekistan’s engagement in the broader geopolitical context of Eurasia and shows how the country leverages historical and cultural ties to achieve contemporary strategic goals. This study confirms that Uzbekistan's cooperation with the TUT reflects a long-term vision of integration, presenting it as a key architect of Turkic unity and a central player in shaping the future of regionalism.

Keywords: *Uzbekistan foreign policy, Organization of Turkic States, Regional integration, Multilateral diplomacy, Trade and transport corridors, Samarkand Summit, Cultural diplomacy, Eurasian geopolitics.*

Introduction

The political cooperation between Uzbekistan and the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) represents a significant transformation in the country’s foreign policy orientation since 2019. Uzbekistan’s accession as a full member of the OTS marked a decisive step in strengthening ties with Turkic-speaking nations, reflecting both historical-cultural affinities and pragmatic geopolitical considerations. The OTS, established to promote unity, economic integration, and collective security among Turkic nations, has become an increasingly influential platform in Eurasia. For Uzbekistan, participation in this organization is not merely symbolic; it is a strategic choice aimed at enhancing regional stability, expanding economic opportunities, and consolidating cultural identity within the Turkic world.

Uzbekistan’s political engagement within the OTS has been characterized by active diplomacy, leadership initiatives, and institutional reforms. The country’s chairmanship of the organization in 2022, inaugurated at the Samarkand Summit, underscored its commitment to shaping the future of Turkic cooperation. During this period, Uzbekistan emphasized priorities such as transport connectivity, energy security, and sustainable development, while also advocating for deeper cultural and educational exchanges. These

initiatives illustrate how Uzbekistan seeks to balance national interests with collective goals, positioning itself as both a bridge and a driver of integration among Turkic states.

Furthermore, Uzbekistan’s cooperation with the OTS must be understood within the broader context of shifting regional dynamics. The decline of post-Soviet isolation, the rise of new economic corridors such as the Trans-Caspian route, and the growing importance of multilateral diplomacy have created favorable conditions for Uzbekistan to pursue a proactive role. By aligning its foreign policy with the objectives of the OTS, Uzbekistan not only strengthens bilateral relations with member states but also enhances its visibility and influence in global affairs. This introduction sets the stage for analyzing the mechanisms, outcomes, and implications of Uzbekistan’s political cooperation with the OTS in subsequent sections of the article.

Literature Review

Scholarly research on Uzbekistan’s engagement with the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) has expanded considerably since the country’s accession in 2019. Early studies emphasized the symbolic dimension of Uzbekistan’s membership, highlighting cultural and linguistic ties as the foundation of Turkic solidarity (Aydin, 2020). These works argued that Uzbekistan’s participation reinforced the historical narrative of Turkic unity, while simultaneously providing a new platform for regional diplomacy.

Subsequent analyses shifted toward the strategic and economic implications of OTS membership. Scholars such as Kassenova (2021) and Yilmaz (2022) examined how Uzbekistan’s foreign policy recalibration under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev prioritized regional integration, particularly through transport corridors and trade facilitation. Their findings suggest that Uzbekistan’s active role in the OTS is closely linked to its broader agenda of diversifying foreign partnerships and reducing dependency on traditional power centers.

Another strand of literature focuses on the political and security dimensions of cooperation. Research by Ismailov (2021) and Balci (2023) highlights Uzbekistan’s preference for non-military approaches within the OTS framework, emphasizing economic development and cultural diplomacy as tools for stability. These studies underscore the distinctiveness of Uzbekistan’s strategy, which contrasts with more security-oriented policies pursued by other regional organizations such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

Finally, comparative works situate Uzbekistan’s OTS engagement within the broader landscape of Eurasian multilateralism. Scholars note that the OTS provides Uzbekistan with a unique platform to balance relations with major powers while advancing its own regional leadership ambitions (Kuru, 2022). This literature suggests that Uzbekistan’s political cooperation within the OTS is not only about Turkic identity but also about pragmatic statecraft in a rapidly evolving geopolitical environment.

Taken together, the existing scholarship demonstrates that Uzbekistan’s political cooperation with the OTS is multidimensional: it is simultaneously cultural, economic, and strategic. However, gaps remain in the literature, particularly regarding the long-term institutional impact of Uzbekistan’s chairmanship and the sustainability of its integration initiatives. Addressing these gaps is essential for a comprehensive understanding of Uzbekistan’s role in shaping the future of Turkic cooperation.

Research Methods

This study relies on a qualitative research design that combines document analysis, comparative case studies, and thematic interpretation to examine Uzbekistan’s political cooperation with the Organization of Turkic States (OTS). The primary sources of data include official speeches delivered by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, declarations and communiqués from OTS summits such as the Samarkand Summit of 2022 and the Astana Summit of 2023, as well as policy papers issued by the OTS Secretariat. These materials provide direct insight into Uzbekistan’s political priorities and institutional commitments. Secondary sources consist of scholarly articles, think tank reports, and journal publications, including works by Aydin (2020), Kassenova (2021), Ismailov (2021), and Balci (2023), which offer analytical perspectives on the broader context of Turkic cooperation and Uzbekistan’s role within it.

The research also employs comparative case studies to situate Uzbekistan’s policies alongside those of other OTS member states such as Turkey, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Kyrgyzstan. This comparative approach highlights both similarities and differences in strategies of regional integration, security, and economic diplomacy, thereby clarifying Uzbekistan’s distinctive contribution to the organization. In addition, thematic interpretation is used to identify and analyze recurring concepts such as economic integration, transport connectivity, cultural diplomacy, and security cooperation. By coding these themes across different sources, the study ensures that Uzbekistan’s initiatives are systematically linked to the overarching objectives of the OTS.

To support the qualitative analysis, statistical data on trade and transport were drawn from the World Bank, Uzbekistan’s State Committee on Statistics, and reports from international organizations such as UNESCO and the OSCE. These figures provide empirical evidence of the economic and cultural outcomes of Uzbekistan’s cooperation within the OTS. By combining documentary analysis, comparative case studies, thematic coding, and statistical data, the research methods employed in this study allow for both descriptive and analytical insights. This integrated approach ensures that the findings are reliable, contextually relevant, and reflective of Uzbekistan’s evolving role in Turkic regional cooperation.

Results

The study demonstrates that Uzbekistan’s political cooperation with the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) has produced significant and measurable outcomes in recent years. One of the most notable achievements is the expansion of trade relations. Uzbekistan’s trade turnover with OTS member states has grown rapidly, rising from approximately 3.3 billion US dollars in 2016 to more than 10 billion US dollars by 2024. Turkey, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan have become Uzbekistan’s leading partners within the framework of the organization, while the establishment of the Turkic Investment Fund in 2022 created new opportunities for joint ventures and financial collaboration.

Another important result is the advancement of transport and connectivity initiatives. Uzbekistan has actively promoted the Middle Corridor, also known as the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, which links Central Asia to Europe through Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey. The country has invested in logistics hubs and

introduced digital customs systems to accelerate and secure trade flows. Participation in the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway project has further strengthened Uzbekistan’s access to European markets, positioning the country as a central actor in Eurasian connectivity.

Diplomatic leadership has also been a defining outcome of Uzbekistan’s engagement with the OTS. During its chairmanship in 2022–2023, Uzbekistan hosted the Samarkand Summit, where it introduced initiatives focused on the green economy, energy security, and cultural exchange. By emphasizing dialogue and economic cooperation rather than military alliances, Uzbekistan positioned itself as a mediator and consensus-builder within the Turkic world. These efforts contributed to the institutional strengthening of the OTS, including closer coordination with TURKSOY and the Turkic Academy.

Finally, cultural and educational cooperation has expanded considerably. Uzbekistan has increased student exchange programs and joint research projects with universities across the Turkic world. Cultural diplomacy initiatives, such as heritage festivals and language promotion, have reinforced a shared identity among member states. UNESCO-supported projects have highlighted Uzbekistan’s role in preserving Turkic cultural heritage sites, further enhancing its soft power within the organization.

Overall, the results confirm that Uzbekistan’s cooperation within the OTS is not limited to symbolic participation but reflects a strategic commitment to regional integration. Trade volumes have tripled, transport corridors have been expanded, and diplomatic leadership has enhanced the visibility of the organization. These achievements demonstrate Uzbekistan’s growing influence in shaping the future of Turkic cooperation and its broader geopolitical positioning in Eurasia.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Uzbekistan’s political cooperation with the Organization of Turkic States has evolved into a strategic partnership that delivers concrete results in trade, transport, diplomacy, and cultural exchange. The country’s accession to the OTS and subsequent chairmanship marked a turning point in its foreign policy, signaling a commitment to deeper regional integration and collective development. The expansion of trade volumes, the advancement of transport corridors, and the strengthening of cultural ties all demonstrate that Uzbekistan’s engagement is not limited to symbolic gestures but reflects a long-term vision of cooperation.

Uzbekistan’s approach within the OTS emphasizes dialogue, economic growth, and cultural diplomacy as the foundations of stability, distinguishing it from more security-oriented regional organizations. This strategy has allowed Uzbekistan to consolidate its role as a bridge between Central Asia and the wider Turkic world, while also enhancing its global standing. Looking ahead, Uzbekistan’s initiatives in areas such as green economy, energy security, and educational cooperation are likely to further strengthen the OTS and contribute to the emergence of a more cohesive and influential Turkic bloc.

Ultimately, Uzbekistan’s cooperation with the OTS demonstrates how a nation can leverage historical and cultural ties to achieve modern geopolitical objectives. By combining economic pragmatism with cultural solidarity, Uzbekistan has positioned itself

as a key architect of Turkic integration, ensuring that its voice will remain central in shaping the future of Eurasian regionalism.

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