

Hungary and the Organization of Turkic States: Prospects for the Region and Beyond

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Abstract

This study analyzes the political, economic and cultural reasons behind Hungary's participation in the Organization of Turkic States. In the first part, the development process of the Turkic Council which was then transformed into the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) is explained. Giving special reference to the period of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the then President of Türkiye Turgut Özal who foresaw the advantages of closer relations with the current members of the OTS, the preliminary steps towards deeper integration and beyond is summarized. In the second part, the cultural and historical ties of Hungary with the OTS region and member states is depicted. The historical background of Hungary's close relations with the OTS geography, in addition to Hungarian peoples' ethnic, linguistic and cultural ties with the Turkic peoples and Hungary's observer status in the OTS is described. In the third part, the benefits that Hungary wishes to achieve with its observer status in the structure is detailed with a particular emphasis on the Representation Office of the OTS in Budapest and its benefits both for the OTS members and Hungary. In the concluding part, after the summary of what the OTS has achieved in its development process, the fact that the advantages of Hungary's Eastern Opening Policy and its observer status in the OTS opens a new era and that it is bound not only to serve for the good of the OTS region but also Eurasia as well is explained.

Key words: Hungary, Organization of Turkic States, opportunities, cooperation, economic benefits

1. Introduction

Subsequent to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Summits of Heads of State of the Turkic Speaking States commenced in 1992 with the initiative of Türkiye (Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı, s.a.). The leaders of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan all supported this initiative. With the efforts of Türkiye's farsighted leader, President Özal, the first Summit convened in Ankara between 30–31 October, 1992. The then President of Türkiye, reflecting well both on domestic politics in Türkiye and the foreign policy conjuncture, brought together the leaders of the above countries. In Türkiye, supporters of Özal, which proved to be a high majority,

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were ready to embrace the newly independent republics both for deep rooted patriotic and economic reasons (Eren, E. 2022). For the newly independent Turkic states; Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan the idea of independence was utterly new. The main goals of these countries were to realize the establishment of statehood and take a prestigious place in world politics. Türkiye's main goal in the newly shaping environment was to integrate the newly independent states with the market economy and assist them on the way to liberal democracy.

The first summit was hosted by the then President of Türkiye, Turgut Özal. It was attended by the Head of State of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ebulfez Elçibey, the Head of State of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, the Head of State of the Kyrgyz Republic, Askar Akayev, the Head of State of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov and the Head of State of Turkmenistan, Saparmurad Niyazov. It was a historic Summit since the Heads of State of the Turkic Republics after the dissolution of the Soviet Union convened for the first time. At the end of the Summit, the Ankara Declaration (Dışişleri Bakanlığı 1992, Tarihçesi 1994) was signed. The ultimate goal of Özal was to harmonize the customs regulations among the Turkic states, the foundation of a free trade area which would allow the free flow of goods and services, the establishment of an investment and development bank, the development of telecommunications in addition to railroads, highway and air way connections, the transfer of the natural resources of Turkic countries to Europe via Türkiye, and finally the development of the coordination and cooperation among Turkic countries in the field of the economy in order to integrate the Turkic countries into the global economy (Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı, s.a.).

The initial objectives, defined by the leaders of the Turkic states at the first summit, were followed with patience and determination. These goals have been the corner stones for the future work of the Turkic countries. An important part of these targets were either achieved or put into practice in the following years.

This article aims to analyze the evolution of the OTS, Hungary's participation in the Organization, and the benefits both for the OTS countries, Hungary and for the region.

2. A Closer Look into the Development of the Organization of Turkic States

Starting from the year 1992 until 2010, when finally the institutionalization of the Turkic states under one roof was reached by founding the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States, ten summits have taken place. Each summit after 1992, held in 1994, 1995, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2006, 2009 and 2010 respectively, had a different theme and purpose. The Nakhchivan Agreement (vLex, 2009) was signed among Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Türkiye in 2009 on the establishment of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States. The Turkic Council for short, formed its of sub-structures: the Council of the Heads of State, the Council of Foreign Ministers, the Council of Elders (Aksakals), the Senior Officials' Committee and the Secretariat in Istanbul. The primary goals of the Turkic Council were to strengthen the political consultations in the Turkic world, providing momentum to the economic and technological cooperation opportunities and enhancing the relations among the people of the Turkic states.

The Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States was officially formed at the 10th Summit of Turkic Speaking States in Istanbul on 15–16 September, 2010. The Secretariat of the Turkic Council has been located in Istanbul. Ambassador Halil Akıncı was assigned to the position of the Secretary General of the Turkic Council since Türkiye was the host country of the organization. Later, in the post of Secretary Generals were followed in alphabetical order of the member states. Under this regulation, after Türkiye, the second Secretary General Ramil Hasan from Azerbaijan between 2014–2018, the third is Baghdad Amreyev from Kazakhstan between 2018–2022 and currently from the Kyrgyzstan Kubanychbek Omuraliev were appointed.

After the official foundation of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States in 2009, 10 Summits were held respectively in 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 with different themes for cooperation from economy to education, from transport to tourism, from media to youth and sports and to supporting small and medium Enterprises (MFA, s.a.).

Hungary by way of its linguistic, cultural and ethnic affinity to the Turkic world joined the Turkic Council at the 6th Summit in Cholpon Ata in 2018, and received an observer status in the Council (OTS, s.a.). This was an important point as the Turkic Council expanded its geography wider to Europe. In addition to that, the European Office of the Turkic Council was opened in Budapest, which has from then on shouldered the responsibility of establishing political, economic and cultural ties with the European institutions and peoples. Hungary has been the first country in the Turkic Council which is an EU member and the second country as a NATO member after Türkiye.

At the 7th Summit in Baku in 2019, which was another historic Summit, Uzbekistan, which had for a long time been following the Turkic Council from a distance but did not become a member because of its different priorities, became a full member of the Turkic Council (OTS, 2019).

The Summit in 2020 was an extraordinary one as the pandemic did not allow the member and observer states to meet in real time. Still a video conference was held where the focus was on health cooperation and the fight against Covid and maintaining the trade and transportation during the pandemic.

The 8th Summit in Istanbul in 2021 was another important turning point where Turkmenistan received observer status. Turkmenistan had until then followed and sometimes taken part in several meetings before, but this time it decided to apply for an observer status. This very development brought the stage where the chain of the Turkic states in some sort of a way has been completed. Another important factor making the Summit a very historic one was the change of the name of the Turkic Council to the Organization of Turkic States (OTS). With the change in the name, the leaders of the OTS referred to a deeper integration which has been followed ardently as an important goal since the Summit in 1992 (ICCB, 2021).

The 9th Summit of the OTS was held in Samarkand in 2022. The Samarkand Summit was another historic turning point for a number of reasons. The first one was the observer status that was granted to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in the OTS. Although none of the OTS members and observers, except for Türkiye, recognize the TRNC, they accepted its observer status. Another particular development with regard to the Samarkand Summit was the consolidation of the middle corridor with the cooperation in trade, transportation and energy (OTS, 2022).

3. The Turkic Roots of Hungary and its Observer Status in the OTS

When one looks into the roots of the Hungarian people, the first traces would be found in the East, in the Volga region, Western Siberia and the Western parts of Central Asia, North Caucasus and East European steppe. The region for a long period was home to Uralic/Finno-Ugric, Indo-European/Iranian, Altaic, Turkic and Paleo-Siberian languages and their peoples mixed with one another. During this period, most likely in the 5th century BC, the Hungarians appear in history as specific people. According to many scholars and researchers, the background of the Hungarian people in history is a mix and, the linguistic, anthropological, social organization and cultural roots of Hungarian people is diverse.

If the language of the Hungarian people is put under the focus, it could be seen that the language has a Uralic/Finno-Ugric origins. It is also a fact that the Hungarian people from the very early times had come across western Turkic tribes and this left traces in the Hungarian language. Currently, the Chuvash people who now live in the territory of Russia, are the remains of the western Turkic language. The Hungarians, thanks to their diverse mix, had links to the Turkic anthropology and their pre-Christian culture was influenced by the Turkic past, mainly from the Khazars and also had connections to Volga Turks for their musical roots (Hóvári, J. 2022).

Before the conquest of the Carpathian basin by the Hungarians in the 9th century, there were already settlements by the Hungarian groups in the Carpathian basin since 4th century thanks to their East–West migration route. The fact that some scattered Hungarian groups appeared in the Carpathian basin together with the Huns and the Avars before the Hungarian conquest of the region is a disputed issue in various academic research studies.

Starting from the 10th century onwards, the Carpathian basin became the homeland of the Hungarians and in this region Hungarians intermingled and integrated with different Turkic peoples between the 10th and 13th centuries, such as the Pechenegs, the Oghuzes and the Cumans. After the establishment of the Golden Horde, Hungary's connection to the Eastern European Turkic world was hampered, however, the traces of the Turkic cultural tradition in the westernizing Kingdom of Hungary have remained until the present day. In fact, the Hungarian nobility from the middle ages saw themselves as of Turkic origin and Árpád as the continuation of Attila and his sons.

Starting from the 13th century, the Hungarian medieval tradition rooted the Hungarians from the Huns. From the early 19th century where various academic circles stated that the Huns belonged to the Turkic root, the Hungarians became Turkic rooted. The ancient history of the Hungarians became an academic dispute with pro-Ottoman political influence about Finno-Ugric and Turkic roots. The compromise on this was reached only in the 1920s.

The Kingdom of Hungary lost its sovereignty with its defeat in the battle of Mohács in 1526 against the Ottoman army. Hungary lost its power both to the Habsburgs on the one side and the Ottomans on the other. Almost for 150 years, most parts of Hungary and the capital Buda from 1541 was under the Ottoman rule. The Hungarians fought together with the Habsburgs, and stopped the Ottoman advance in the northern and western side of the country. The Ottomans did not manage to conquer the eastern part of the Kingdom and created a pro-Ottoman Transylvania

Principality in 1541 which survived the Ottomans, and Transylvania was separated from the Kingdom until 1867. In 1683, with the failure of the Ottoman army in the siege of Vienna and in the ensuing process with the treaty of Karlowitz in 1699 and Passarowitz in 1718, the Ottoman rule in Hungary came to an end. With the Treaty of Karlowitz, the Ottoman Empire also lost Transylvania (Fodor, 2015).

Starting from the 18th century, the essence of the relations between the Ottomans and Hungary took a different shape, as the Ottomans supported the independence of Hungary from Vienna. More than that, Ottoman land has been home to several thousand of Hungarian refugees. In World War I, the Hungarian soldiers fought on the sides of the Ottoman army as the Ottoman troops were fighting for the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

With the end of WWI, the Ottoman Empire dissolved and Hungary lost 2/3 of its territories with the Trianon Treaty. The Great Turkish leader, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's decisive attitude and the Turkish nation's trust in their leader, brought the national independence for Türkiye and the Sevres Treaty could not be imposed on Türkiye. In this regard, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk has always been seen as a great leader and a hero in the eyes of the Hungarians.

Although the relations between Hungary and Türkiye enjoyed a very high level in the inter-war period, the two friendly countries found themselves on different sides in the Cold War and only the relations were allowed to develop as far as Moscow's interests. The end of the Cold War heralded the beginning of a new era and this time not only for the Hungary's relations with Türkiye but also with the whole of the Turkic world (Hóvári, J. 2022).

4. The Eastern Opening

In the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Hungarian elites' set the goal of joining the main European political and economic structures such as NATO and the EU. Hungary became a member of NATO in 1999 and a member of the EU in 2004. The membership in these structures, however, could not solve the problems faced in the economy, particularly due to the global economic crisis in 2008 and 2009. The situation in the economy had a significant impact on the results of the general elections where the Centre-Right FIDESZ Party came to power in 2010 (Stone, N. 2019). The FIDESZ Party initiated the reforms in economy which rendered positive results. After 2010 FIDESZ launched the "Global Opening" the name of which later on changed to "Eastern Opening" which would translate into Hungary's strengthening of its political and economic ties with the non-EU countries. The main idea of the Government behind this strategy is to increase the relations of Hungary to Asian countries, attract foreign investors from a broad range of regions like Central Asia to Far East, from the Middle East to the Caucasus and to find new markets for the Hungarian export oriented economy (Egeresi, Z. 2020). The Eastern Opening policy has further objectives. One of these goals is to turn Hungary into a base for logistics and transportation between Europe and Asia, making use of Hungary's strategic geographic location which has an easy access to Asia and the former Soviet countries. Another aim of the Orbán government is to assist the small and medium sized Hungarian enterprises to set foot in the Asian markets. The

economies and the natural resources of the Turkic countries, such as Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and the Central Asian States, like Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan played an important role in the decision of the Hungarian government.

In the Eastern Opening policy of the Hungarian government, Türkiye is perceived as a key actor with its developing economy, technology and the human resources which Hungary saw as necessary to developing its relations in politics aside from trade. In this regard, in 2013 the High Level Strategic Cooperation Council was established between the two countries which led to the realization of further bilateral visits between the two countries at the level of President, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. While Türkiye supports Hungary's efforts in organizations, such as NATO, OECD and WTO, Hungary, on the other hand, bolsters Türkiye in its EU membership process. The opening of a Representation Office of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in Budapest in 2014 is another example of the dynamically developing relations. Moreover, Hungary exerts efforts for Türkiye to expand its relations with the Visegrad-4 countries, particularly in periods when Hungary holds the rotating chairmanship of the Group. In fact, on 12 March 2015 Türkiye and Hungary signed the "Friendship and Cooperation Agreement" with the article 5 of which the sides committed themselves to coordinating their policies and cooperating actively within the framework of international organizations, such as the UN and NATO, including the candidacy of each other to international and regional organizations, committees and missions.

As part of the Eastern Opening policy of the Hungarian government and the impetus reached in developing the bilateral relations with Türkiye, Hungary became observer at the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic Speaking Countries (TURKPA) in 2014 and received an observer status in the International Turkic Academy in 2017 which are the affiliated organizations with the Turkic Council (Egeresi, Z. 2020). In September 2018, the Prime Minister of Hungary, Viktor Orbán participated in the work of the 6th Summit of the Turkic Council where Hungary was granted an observer status.

5. The OTS Representation Office in Budapest and its Benefits for Hungary

The developing relations between Hungary and the Turkic Council spawned the offer by Hungary for the opening of a representation office for the Turkic Council in Budapest. At the 10th Extraordinary Meeting of Council of Foreign Ministers of the Turkic Council, which was held in Budapest on 19 September 2019, the first and only Representation Office of the Turkic Council was opened with the participation of the Foreign Ministers of the member states. With the opening of the Representation Office, it is intended to establish and further develop relations between the Turkic Council member states and the EU, the European countries and institutions.

The observer status of Hungary and Hungary providing a Representation Office to the OTS at the very first glance may not seem to be very important developments. However, Hungary is the first EU member country in the OTS and presents numerous opportunities both for the OTS members and for itself. For the OTS, the benefits can be listed as the member countries would have more access to the EU institutions and European countries through Hungary in terms of

political contacts and representation, commerce and cultural links. Some of the OTS countries still do not have embassies in some of the capitals of Europe, particularly in the V4 (Baranyi, T. P. 2022). The Representation Office in Budapest provides the opportunity to the aforementioned countries to have more contacts with the European capitals, as each member country has a project director in the Budapest Office. Without doubt, this is a two-way approach in which also the European countries will also benefit on the way to increasing trade and investments in Central Asia.

The opening of the European Office of the Turkic Council in Budapest was also a message by Hungary with which Hungary committed itself to representing the interests of the Organization of Turkic States in Europe. Moreover, the Hungarian government put forth its willingness to open embassies and establish bilateral strategic partnerships with the member countries of the OTS. The benefits of Hungary's joining the OTS are manifold. As the OTS is operating in many fields on a project basis, Hungary has started to reach positive outcomes since 2019 on a wide range of issues from politics to the economy, transport, customs, tourism, culture, education and sports. With the initiation of the activities of the Representation Office, the relations between the OTS member states and Hungary have started to increase rapidly. After the Representation Office became operational in 2019, it realized events directed towards not only politics, the economy and transportation but also to soft power diplomacy as well.

It is visible that the OTS Representation Office has realized several events until today. These events cover a large range of areas which converge on the main areas of activity of the OTS (Turkkon s.a.). One of the most significant events realized by the Representation Office has been the Turkic Business Forum on 23 September 2021 in Budapest which is a key effort towards economic cooperation among member states and which gives particular info as to why Hungary is expecting to gain from its OTS partnership. The Forum was attended by the Secretary General of the OTS, Baghdad Amreyev, the State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary, Tamás Varga, the CEO of Hungarian Export Promotion Agency, Kristóf Dr. Szabó, as well as the Board Members of the Turkic Chamber of Commerce and Industry, as well as more than 100 business representatives from the Member and Observer States. In the opening speeches delivered at the Forum, the Executive Director of the Representation Office, Ambassador János Hóvári stressed that economic cooperation is the main area of cooperation between Hungary and the Turkic Council. Having referred to the total GDP of the member states in the Turkic Council, which is around 2 trillion USD with a population of 180 million people, János Hóvári stated that the central geographic location of the OTS countries carries a strong potential and offers a great number of opportunities for the development of the economy and trade within the region and beyond. According to Ambassador Hóvári, the region especially for the past three years has experienced in a very productive and vivid period in terms of the economy and trade. Since 2009, when the economic cooperation started to increase with the region, the Hungarian exports to the OTS geography have increased by 77% and the trade flow has doubled. According to the statistics underlined by the Executive Director, in 2021 the Hungarian exports to the Turkic Speaking States increased by 44% and since 2009 the imports from the Turkic Speaking States to Hungary have

increased by 159%. In this respect, Hóvári explained the intention of Hungary to increase its cooperation with the OTS countries in all areas with a special emphasis on economic and trade relations (Turkkon 2021).

The above statements of the Executive Director display the fact that Hungary, by way of its Eastern Opening and its observer membership in the OTS, spares no effort to increase the trade volume with the Turkic world and tries to reach a smart deal for the natural resources in the region. Particularly under the current circumstances where Russia is fighting a war with Ukraine, the Hungarian administration seems to be looking for ways of reaching economic gains in this relationship. In fact, when the total trade turnover among the OTS member states and the potential economic profit is considered, the strategy of the Hungarian government seems to be relevant. The Organization of Turkic States' total population constitutes 2% of the world's population and the size of the land of the Turkic states covers 4.5 million km², which is 0.9% of the world's total area. The total GDP of the member states ranks 13th as a whole globally. The proportion of the total GDP of the OTS members in the world's GDP is about 1.8%. In 2020, the total trade turnover among the OTS member states was around 560 billion USD, which is about the 3% of global trade (Baghirov, O. 2022). This figure reveals the fact that there exists an enormous trade potential among the OTS member and observer states, and this potential can be further utilized if necessary efforts are deployed in this regard.

Hungary, being aware of this economic potential, looks for more ways to seize the economic opportunities. Economic tools in addition to diplomatic efforts are deployed in this direction. For the companies coming from the OTS countries, Hungary opened credits worth of 577 million Euros.² Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Péter Szijjártó stated in Baku in 2019 that Hungary has doubled its trade with the countries of the Turkic Council, which now stands at some 4 billion dollars (Egeresi, Z. 2020).

Another crucial area of cooperation among the OTS member states is transportation. Particularly after the start of the Russia-Ukraine war, the critical importance of the middle corridor increased, which is the route connecting the Eastern world from China to Europe.³ The Middle Corridor has the potential to transport up to 10 million tons annually, in up to 200,000 containers. The efforts of the OTS members to develop the Middle Corridor have already begun to yield significant results as the volume of freight transportation via this route increased by 101% in 2021, compared to the previous year (Baghirov, O. 2022).

The transportation through the middle corridor already increased by 120% from January to March 2022 when compared to the same period in 2021. The leading companies from Denmark, Finland, and Germany, such as Maersk, Nurminen Logistics, CEVA Logistic, Azerbaijan's ADY container, and some Chinese rail operators have started to use the Middle Corridor. The volume of cargo passing through the Middle Corridor in 2022 is expected to be six times higher than in the

² EUR 195 million for Hungarian-Turkish businesses; EUR 80 million for Kazakh-Hungarian cooperation; EUR 80 million for Hungarian-Uzbek cooperation; EUR 80 million for Hungarian-Azerbaijani cooperation; and 27 million for Hungarian-Kyrgyz cooperation.

³ The middle corridor connects the way from China to Kazakhstan and to Azerbaijan through the Caspian and from thereupon to Georgia and Türkiye to Europe.

previous year. (Eldem, T. 2022). Another important development which further adds to the significance of the Middle Corridor is the victory of Azerbaijan over Armenia in 2020. Until the end of this war, the connection between Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic had not been established. With the victory of Azerbaijan, the Zangezur corridor is opened which is expected to add to the smooth operation of the middle corridor, as this new connection also provides a route between Türkiye and Central Asia.

Hungary, together with the OTS Representation Office in Budapest, hosted the 5th meeting of the Ministers in charge of Transport of the Member and Observer States of the OTS on 14 October, 2021 in Budapest (OTS, 2021). The meeting was hosted by Minister of Innovation and Technology of Hungary, László Palkovics and moderated by Secretary General Baghdad Amreyev, and also attended by the Elder of the OTS from Türkiye Binali Yıldırım.⁴ During the meeting, Minister Palkovics informed the parties about the current efforts of the Hungarian Government on transforming the country into a strategic transport hub in Europe, building modern railroad infrastructure and ensuring efficiency and transparency in the transport sector. OTS Elder Binali Yıldırım highlighted the significant economic potential of the Turkic States. Underlining significant steps taken by the member countries to improve the infrastructural capacity and transit potential of the Trans-Caspian East-West-Middle Corridor, Mr. Yıldırım stressed the importance to put further efforts to decrease logistical costs and accelerate the speed of the transport and customs operations through the corridor.

The Ministers of Transport Meeting was a critical milestone on the way to utilizing the middle corridor by way of speaking about the obstacles to the realization of this huge project. With the statements of Minister Palkovics, Hungary put forward its willingness to the realization of this project and committed itself to the connection of the middle corridor to Europe by way of strengthening the infrastructure.

Energy is another salient and promising area of cooperation among the OTS member and observer states. The OTS member states possess a huge potential in terms of oil and gas reserves. According to BP Statistical Review of World Energy, the global oil reserve for the year 2020 is announced as 1.73 trillion barrels. With its 48,3% ratio, the Middle East is the first region which holds the most reserves which is followed by Central and South America with 18,7%, North America with 14%, Eurasia with 8,4%, Africa with 7,2%, Asia-Pacific with 2,6% and Europe with 0,8% (TPAO 2021). When the gas reserves are considered, it is again the Middle East region that possesses the largest reserves with 40,3% which is followed by the Eurasian region with 30,1%, the Asia-Pacific with 8,8%, North America with 8,1%, Africa with 6,9%, Central and South America with 4,2% and Europe with 1,7% (TPAO 2021).

These figures faithfully demonstrate that the Eurasian continent holds a considerable size of the oil and gas reserves in the world, which could be a critical source in the route between Asia

⁴ The following dignitaries were also taking part: the Minister of Transport and Communications of the Kyrgyz Republic, Erkinbek Osoev, the Minister of Transport and Infrastructure of the Republic of Türkiye, Adil Karaismailoğlu, the Deputy Minister of Digital Development and Transport of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Rahman Hummatov, the Vice-Minister of Industry and Infrastructural Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Ruslan Baymishev, the Deputy Minister of Transport of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Abdusamat Muminov and the Minister of State for Transport Policy of the Ministry for Innovation and Technology of Hungary László Mosóczi.

and Europe. Among the OTS member states, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are important gas and oil suppliers. Within the cooperation among the OTS states, the OTS geography could be both a supplier and a transit corridor for the other regions in the oil and gas sectors. After the initiation of the Southern Gas Corridor in which Trans Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) and Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) are essential parts, various European markets and consumers started receiving gas from the project. The Trans Caspian Pipeline (TCP) Project is also under discussion now where the Turkmen gas could be transferred to Europe through Azerbaijan. In the same vein, Kazakh oil could be transported from Azerbaijan onwards to Europe.

In fact, the recent deal reached between the European Commission and Azerbaijan to double imports of natural gas by 2027 is a peculiar sign that the OTS region's unique outlook starts to gain momentum. The Russia-Ukraine war has revealed the fact that the energy dependency of the European continent on Russia could only be reduced by way of new arrangements with the OTS member states. In this regard, Hungary could be a bridgehead for the connection with the energy rich countries of the region and Europe.

The OTS Ministers of Energy have convened three times; in 2021, in 2022 and in 2023 respectively, in order to coordinate energy cooperation among the OTS member and observer states. Since in Almaty in 2022 Hungary indicated its intention to host the next meeting of the ministers in charge of energy in Budapest, Hungary hosted the recent energy ministerial meeting on 30 March 2023 (SZON 2023). This way, Hungary has once again put forward its intention to be an energy hub in Europe.

Culture and education are also amongst the important parts of the cooperation between the OTS states and Hungary, both by way of its Foreign Ministry and the Representation Office promotes these areas accordingly.⁵ These activities created awareness in the Hungarian public of the Turkic world. Moreover, the contacts made during these activities opened the way for further enhancing the relations and the opportunities of cooperation. The "Reception on 3 October Turkic Unity Day" is a particularly significant event, showing the solidarity of the Turkic peoples in the capital of Hungary. When the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary Péter Szijjártó made a speech at the event, he underlined that "Eastern Opening" foreign policy orientation of Hungary has served as the road map in enhancing cooperation with the OTS Member States and has provided the incentive to attain Observer State status in 2018. Touching upon the satisfactory level of trade turnover between Hungary and OTS, Szijjártó underlined that the volume of foreign trade reached USD4 billion in the year 2020 and will continue to increase in the upcoming period. Péter Szijjártó also said that EXIM Hungary has opened substantial credit lines in the OTS Member States and will take active part in investment projects. The Minister further indicated that Hungary is willing to contribute to the Joint Investment Fund to be established under the auspices of the OTS. Szijjártó also asserted that despite geographical distance Hungary and OTS Member States have managed to establish beneficial and strategic partnership, as well as brotherly cooperation. In this respect, H.E. Szijjártó underlined the assistance provided by the OTS Member States in the

⁵ Some of the cultural events organized by the Representation Office in 2021 can be listed as the Armin Vambery Exhibition, Competition in High Schools of Hungary on the Turkic World, organizing joint events with TURKSOY in Budapest such as seminars, conferences and concerts.

form of medical equipment during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was also pointed out that cooperation in the field of education is worthy of attention in that 870 scholarships have been allocated in the Hungarian higher education institutions during the 2021–2022 academic year for the students from the OTS Member States (Turkkon 2021).

Foreign Minister Szijjartó's statements mainly show the intentions of Hungary towards the OTS and how the relationship between Hungary and the OTS could work for the benefit of Hungary in the areas of the economy, culture and education. In fact, the interaction among the OTS states mainly in the areas of the economy, trade, culture and education are the driving forces behind the cooperation among the states. Despite the Covid pandemic, which was hampering the efforts for joint projects all over the globe, the OTS did not stop its operations and even managed to move further.

6. Conclusion

The idea of bringing together the members of the OTS started in 1992 after the fall of the Soviet Union. The main challenge at the time was to adapt the newly developing countries of the former Soviet Union to the global market economy and the values of global thinking. These challenges were overcome to a large extent with the help of solidarity among the member states in 30 years. The main goal, as it can be seen from the agenda and activities of the OTS until now, however, is to reach a deeper integration in the fields of politics, economy and culture. The summits of Turkic Speaking Heads of State have gradually evolved into the formation of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States and finally to the Organization of Turkic States at the Summit in Istanbul in 2018. The Summit in Istanbul and the name change thereof displays a reference to a deeper integration in the system.

With the observer status of Hungary in the network of the OTS, the cooperation among the OTS states has reached a new stage. It is not only from the lenses of the OTS members but also from the eyes of Budapest, Hungary is more than an observer as it provides the one and only Representation Office to the OTS and the key to cooperation with Europe. With Hungary's participation in the structure, new doors of opportunity and benefits have opened to all of the OTS member and observer states.

The main principles of the OTS were laid down at the consecutive Summits of Turkic Speaking States starting with 1992 and these were later on institutionalized with the formation of the OTS. Among these principles, the formation of a deeper integration in terms of the economy and trade has always been underlined. In fact, after 30 years in the process important stages have successfully been concluded. Under the current agenda of the OTS, new challenges and opportunities arise particularly with the Hungary's participation in the organization.

After a successful cooperation period in 30 years among the newly independent states of the OTS from the former Soviet Union, now the challenges and opportunities of a new global environment appear on the scene. The competition in the world, especially under the shadow of Russia-Ukraine war and the US-China rivalry, ushers in both challenges and opportunities to the

OTS geography in the areas of trade, transport and energy. Thanks to Hungary's linkage to the system, the opportunities outweigh the challenges in the aforementioned key sectors. Within the context of areas of cooperation in politics, economy and culture, the fields of trade, transportation and energy looms over the horizon as the promising areas. These fields of cooperation are not only beneficial for the OTS members but also to Europe and beyond, in parallel with the founding principles of commitment to maintenance of international peace, security and development of good-neighborly and friendly relations.

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