

H.E. BAGHDAD AMREYEV: «THE UNITY OF THE TURKIC PEOPLE INTO ONE BIG FAMILY IS DICTATED BY FATE»

The warm and cordial relations among the member states of the Organization of Turkic States, the unique style and development, cooperation and brotherhood in all spheres are the result of the initiatives and proposals, efforts and demands of the leaders of this organization.

The major objectives of organization are to encourage cooperation among Turkic-speaking states and to contribute to the region's and the world's peace and security. Throughout its history, member countries have reaffirmed their dedication to fundamental values like democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

The close ties rooted in the common history of the countries that make up the OTS allow for multilateral and mutually salutary cooperation in all spheres, especially economic, educational and cultural, as well as building confidence.

Thanks to the efforts of the member states' leaders, the Turkic world is progressing stronger every year in the regional and international arena.

What steps have been taken to develop cooperation between Turkic-speaking countries and to strengthen the Organization of Turkic States? What tasks are the organization facing right now and what are plans and projects for the following years? Baghdad Amreev, the Secretary General of the Turkic States Organization, touched upon those issues in an exclusive interview with the magazine "Bright Uzbekistan".

Baghdad Kultaevich, the Organization of Turkic States has been running for more than 12 years. Can you briefly tell us what has been done and what goals have been achieved within this period?

– First of all, I would like to point out that the unification of Turkic nations into one large family, based on ethnic identity and common values, was a natural phenomenon, decreed by the fate, and has always been just a matter of time.

If in the modern era such rapprochement dates back to the moment the new independent Turkic states appeared, when the first summit of the heads of Turkic-speaking states was held in 1992 in Ankara, then the signing of the Nakhichevan Agreement, historic for the Turkic world, in 2009 provided an

opportunity to institutionalize views on this Turkic world through the prism of precisely this common Turkic identity and unite under the wing of the same family, then called the Turkic Council.

The signing of this important document marked the inception of a new stage in the fruitful partnership of the Turkic-speaking countries, based on inextricable ties and commonality of history, language, centuries-old traditions, culture and spiritual values.

Institutionally, there were established structures such as the Council of Heads of State, the Council of Foreign Ministers, the Council of Elders of Turkic-speaking States and the Committee of Senior Officials. The Secretariat of the Organization began to function.

There has indeed been done a lot over the past decade. First and foremost, I would like to emphasize that thanks to the leaders of the OTS, we have achieved unprecedented mutual political trust at the highest level. There have been held many summits of state heads, where all have focused on different topics of interaction. Each summit has become a turning point in the development of multilateralism.

There have been taken consequential steps to develop cooperation between the Turkic countries and intensify the Organization. Through various mechanisms, including meetings of relevant ministers and working groups, we have managed to establish multilateral cooperation in various fields, including politics, commerce and economy, investment and finance, energy, transport, information and communication technologies, tourism, culture and education, youth and sports.

There have been launched affiliated organizations, such as the Turkic Academy, the International Fund for Turkic Culture and Heritage, the Turkic Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which have been formed to become key platforms for expanding Turkic cooperation.

The Organization of Turkic States has achieved a quantitative and, importantly, qualitative expansion of membership through the accession of Uzbekistan as a full member, Hungary and Turkmenistan as observer countries. The European office of the Organization has been introduced in Budapest, which is designed to become a conductor of the organization's interests in European organizations.

Over the years of its existence, the Turkic Council has proven its efficacy as a fully functioning international body with an effective mechanism for establishing cooperation among Turkic-speaking countries in various areas of cooperation, as well as an efficient tool for defending the common interests of its members.

How did the pandemic affect the Turkic world during 2020-2021?

- I can safely say that this period was a remarkable one for the whole Turkic world. The Turkic world, thanks to the tireless efforts of the pragmatic leaders of our countries, has become stronger in the regional and international arena.

Turkey has proved its growing role not only in regional politics, but also in the international arena. Azerbaijan's spectacular victory in the Karabakh war and the liberation of occupied lands have radically altered regional politics. Kazakhstan has always held a prominent position in Eurasian affairs while Uzbekistan is confidently intensifying its economy with a new image. On the other hand, Kyrgyzstan is gaining stability with a new government, and Turkmenistan, with its status of permanent neutrality, is consistently advancing issues of achieving long-term, universal and lasting security in a world where Hungary actively links the Turkic world to the West.

Over the years, the Organization has demonstrated its ability to successfully carry out its mandate more than a decade ago in Nakhchivan. As many experts have assessed, in recent years the activities of the OTS have been well organized, well-planned, considerably advanced, and goal-oriented. As a result, it has become more visible, respected, and attractive. A clear indication of this is the fact that about 15 countries have requested observer status in the Turkic Council. It is also noteworthy that there were five summits during previous three years.

It is fair to emphasize that during the Karabakh war, the Turkic world passed an essential test. Turkic nations unanimously supported the brotherly Azerbaijani people. Also, they rejoiced over Azerbaijan's victory in this war of liberation.

One major achievement was that the organization took swift and proactive steps to cooperate in numerous areas against the COVID-19 pandemic at such a difficult time for the whole world. In fact, the Turkic-speaking countries

were the first in the world to convene an emergency summit to unite efforts in the fight against the pandemic. Immediately after the summit, the organization launched a system to monitor the development of the epidemiological situation, established effective cooperation and exchange of experience in the fight against coronavirus through such mechanisms as the Health Ministers' meeting, a standing coordination committee, and ensured the effective work of the "supply chain group". The Turkic countries provided one another with active support in the delivery of medical equipment and medicines. We, the Turkic countries, were the first among international organizations to establish fruitful cooperation with the WHO by signing a bilateral memorandum and adopting an action plan.

Within the Organization, a Transport Coordinating Committee was formed to promptly resolve the problems induced by the pandemic and coordinate transport and transit operations.

Trade ministers met online and agreed to create a green corridor to make it easier to cross borders for essential goods, medicines and medical equipment.

The WHO has named the organization the most effective international organization in the world in the fight against the pandemic. And at the end of last year, through the efforts of countries, a humanitarian supply was organized with more than 600,000 doses of vaccines to a number of African countries.

What tasks are currently facing the Organization of Turkic States? What plans and projects do the OTS have for the years ahead?

– I would like to note that the countries of the Turkic States Organization have a huge untapped potential in the scope of economy, human resources, science and technology.

In terms of the current tasks facing the Organization, this is further ensuring the solidarity and unity of the nations of the Turkic countries, accentuating the OTS as an authoritative and effective regional structure capable of offering pragmatic initiatives and specific projects to Member States that meet their interests, thereby creating healthy competition among similar organizations in the region.

Undoubtedly, the OTS follows the directions of the state heads and the agreements earned between nations when establishing plans and programs for the upcoming years. These instructions and agreements are reflected in the decisions of the 8th summit and the Istanbul Declaration, which consists of as many as 121 points.

I will not elaborate on the document, since it is available on the Organization's website and in the media. As it is clear, we do not have a hidden agenda; all the plans, programs and projects are result-oriented and equally serve the interests of our Member States.

At the same time, there is something I want to stress that in the short run, the OTS's efforts will primarily be aimed at strengthening the economic component, this is, first of all, the establishing the Turkic Investment Fund, intensifying the role of the Turkic Chamber of Commerce and Industry, adopting the "Comprehensive Trade Facilitation Strategy", developing the agreed measures to lift trade barriers, create free economic zones and develop e-commerce.

Since its beginning, the OTS has traveled a short but successful route. Yet, we are now embarking on a new one. We shall strive relentlessly to attain the targets proposed by leaders. I personally believe that the Turkic world's future is bright, and that the new period ahead will illuminate our shared destiny even more.

In November 2021, Istanbul hosted the Summit of the leaders of the Turkic Council countries. Can you please tell how the event went? What important topics were addressed?

– The 8th Summit of the Turkic States Organization was a truly historic event that is recalled as a consequential turning point for the Organization, when relations between member states entered a new era of closer and more comprehensive cooperation. The summit went off successful. This is the united opinion of the summit attendees as well as several politicians, diplomats, and analysts who all observed this historic event.

The historic magnitude of the summit is also evidenced by the critical verdicts adopted at its conclusion, with the presidents of the Turkic states signing a decision to change the name "Turkic Council" to "Organization of Turkic

States," which will help realize real potential, intensify cooperation and strengthen the role of the Organization in the international community.

The leaders also adopted a document "Vision for the Turkic World 2040," which defines the Organization's long-term goals for comprehensive development and more intense integration into the Turkic world.

This strategic document serves as a kind of "message of the present Turkic world leaders to future generations", which is primarily aimed at developing political cohesion, advocating more dynamic cooperation under the auspices of the Organization on the whole spectrum of interaction between the Turkic countries.

The heads of states signed the declaration of the eighth summit, which defines bilateral and multilateral, regional, international and global issues affecting the interests of the Turkic world.

During the summit, the regulations was approved on observers and partners, thereby demonstrating in practice the organization's openness in building constructive partnerships with third states and international organizations.

As I have already mentioned, several countries have expressed a desire to establish different formats of cooperation with the OTS, with which we feel elated. This speaks of the reasonably good reputation of the Organization, and that the authority of the Organization of Turkic States is progressing, and we are on the right track.

Many other issues canvassed during the summit, which are also equally critical and will raise the Organization's activities to a qualitatively new level, will significantly magnify its role and authority in the international arena.

Please, tell us about "Turkic World Vision-2040".

- Despite the great achievements over the past two or three years, the Member States of the Organization are required working with patience to face the challenges of the 21st century.

The document "Turkic World Vision-2040" is precisely dedicated to define our common views and points of contact for 20 years ahead while maintaining the positive dynamics that have been created over the years.

"Turkic World Vision-2040" is a strategic document, which is a so-called "road map" for accentuating cooperation between the Turkic states for the next two decades in priority areas, in particular, in politics, economy, transport and customs, information and communication technologies, energy, tourism, health, environment, agriculture, culture, education and science, youth and sports, work with diasporas. In other words, it touches virtually all areas of traditional interaction among Turkic countries.

The document proposes long-term measures for member states' development and integration efforts, which builds on the development of political cohesion to act as one on a wide range of international issues: supporting more dynamic cooperation under the auspices of the Organization through the convergence of economic policies and all relevant regulatory frameworks; pursuing full trade integration; creating a single Turkic investment area; realizing digital integration; enhancing transport and energy networks and ensuring intra-regional mobility.

Together with the promoting of the "Turkic World Vision 2040," the activities of the Organization will be structured around a five-year strategy and work programs to pursue long-term objectives.

What is the rule of membership in the Organization? Is it possible for other non-Turkic countries to enroll in?

– According to Article 22 of the Nakhchivan Agreement, only Turkic-speaking states can join the OTS. As a rule, these are the states where the majority of the population belongs to the Turkic nations and one of the Turkic languages is a state language.

So, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey and Uzbekistan, being Turkic countries, are the member states of the Organization while Hungary enables an observer status. Turkmenistan also joined the alliance as an observer since November 12, 2021. There is no exaggeration in saying that the OTS has finally decided on its composition, since there are no other Turkic states in the world.

Obviously, the nature of the OTS does not allow unlimited expansion of its membership, and observers can also be only those countries that have one of the Turkic or related languages as one of their official languages. In this

regard, we have established a partner status of the OTS. Now, practically any state can become a partner, provided that it is ready to make a real contribution to the development of mutually beneficial cooperation in one or another sphere.

How do you assess the role and place of the OTS in ensuring peaceful coexistence and common prosperity in the region?

- I want to emphasize that we are primarily an ethnic family; a unity of loved ones based on a common identity. In addition, there is our own agenda focusing on certain common needs of our members. Our efforts as a regional organization are not directed towards third parties, whether they are states or other organizations.

The Nakhchivan Agreement clearly reflects the organization's desire to jointly contribute to strengthening peace, ensuring security and stability in the region and in the world, generally.

What we want is to unleash the enormous potential of decent neighborliness, unity and cooperation in the spirit of equality, mutual trust, mutual benefit, mutual consultation and the pursuit of common development.

The expert community and analytical circles evaluate the OTS as a "new geopolitical reality" in the Eurasian zone. This, in our opinion, is true.

As I have often stated, we have had no conflicts or grievances with the outside world during the Organization's existence. On the contrary, there has been a growing trend of interest in forming cooperation with the OTS, demonstrating our commitment to peaceful coexistence and prosperity once more.

And the OTS is ready for pragmatic and constructive cooperation with third parties for the benefit of our common interests.

Recently, Uzbekistan has joined the Organization. How do you assess its place in the OTS in the short term?

- Uzbekistan's accession to the Organization of Turkic States was a momentous event in strengthening the unity of the Turkic world. The country's participation as a full member not only meets the fundamental

interests of the entire Turkic world, but also, given its growing capacities and geopolitical location, provides a strong impetus to its activities accentuates cooperation among member states and diversifies the agenda of the Organization of Turkic States.

As an integral part of the Turkic world, Uzbekistan has always been present in the process of the OTS formation. It has always been and remains a country, whose spiritual heritage is one of the fundamental foundations, the economic and cultural "cradle" of the Turkic-Islamic civilization.

With the accession of Uzbekistan to the OTS, other member countries revised their attitude towards the Organization and even more intensified their activities within its framework and began to place great hope on the role of this structure in promoting their regional interests.

Previously untapped opportunities for mutually beneficial partnership among Member States that are opening up, thanks to specific initiatives put forward by Shavkat Mirziyoyev, President of Uzbekistan, at the summits in Baku in October 2019, April 2020, Turkestan in March 2021, and Istanbul in November 2021.

Pragmatic proposals and initiatives proposed by Uzbekistan promote the intensification of the trade, economic, transport and logistics component of cooperation within the Organization and serve to further promote our common history and the promotion of cultural heritage, as well as to bring Turkic people closer together.

For example, 2021 was a productive year for the Turkic world with the consequential events. Uzbekistan's role in this cannot be overestimated. In June this year in Kokand the VI Meeting of Tourism Ministers discussed the implementation of the project "Tabarruk Ziyorat", initiated earlier by President of Uzbekistan. As of meeting's endings, the project was fully supported and consented to form a working group for its implementation, and to create a tourist map of pilgrimage sites throughout Turkic countries.

In addition, the city of Kokand has been declared "First tourist capital of the Turkic world". During 2022, large-scale events are planned in the OTS's member states to promote the tourism potential and brand of this city.

Last September, there was first-ever Uzbekistan Young Entrepreneurs Forum initiated by the leader of Uzbekistan and was attended by more than 250

young entrepreneurs all over from Turkic countries. The Forum also hosted the 5th Meeting of Youth and Sports Ministers of the OTS.

In honor of the announcement of Khiva as the "Cultural Capital of the Turkic world", in September 2021, the International Cultural Forum "Central Asia at the Crossroads of World Civilizations" was held in Khiva, as well as the 38th meeting of the Permanent Council of Ministers of Culture of the Turkic Member States.

A platform for IT professionals was launched by organizing a special forum on the role of innovation and technological development in the Turkic region as part of the week of innovative ideas "InnoWeek-2021" last November in Tashkent.

Moreover, together with the Uzbek side, the OTS organized a number of international events, such as conferences dedicated to the life and work of Yusuf Khos Khodjib, Mahmud Kashgari and Alisher Navoi.

A landmark was the establishment, on the initiative of President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirmonovich Mirziyoyev, of the international award of the Organization of Turkic States named after Alisher Navoi "For contribution to the unity of the Turkic world", which once again confirms the recognition of his special role and contribution to the unification of the Turkic people.

This year Uzbekistan is expected to demonstrate even more activity. After all, it was not in vain that Uzbekistan proposed for the first time to hold the inaugural summit of our organization with a new name at home.

In what aspects does the OTS differ from other international structures?

– As I have aforementioned, we are primarily an association of loved ones on the basis of a common identity. Undoubtedly, the member states have strong ties based on a common history, language, culture and values, which are the most powerful foundation for the development of pragmatic cooperation in various fields.

Another key factor is that there are no political problems between the Member States and their positions practically coincide in matters of regional and global cooperation. The application of the principle of consensus in

decision-making within the Organization ensures proper consideration of the positions of all Member States in its activities.

The combination of these two elements contributes to facilitating and accelerating the decision-making process and turning the OTS into an effective mechanism for interaction.

Your wishes to the international project Bright Uzbekistan.

– First of all, let me note that for the second year we have been successfully cooperating with the project Bright Uzbekistan, which covers events in the Turkic world from a rather interesting perspective. We are very pleased with this cooperation.

Therefore, with all my heart I wish the team Bright Uzbekistan further success and grand achievements in the implementation of intriguing projects. And I wish your readers to be firm in their spirit, inexhaustible in optimism, as well as decent health and good luck!