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A New Phase for the OTS: The Ankara Summit and Institutional Deepening

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The 13th Summit of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) was held in Ankara on October 30, 2026, under the theme "The Turkic Century: Unity in Language, Thought and Action." Ahead of the summit, at which the chairmanship passed from Azerbaijan to Türkiye, the Turkic States Civilization Park was inaugurated in Beştepe on October 29. The park brings together the Turkic world's shared historical and cultural heritage, traditional architecture, and symbols of civilization such as the Orkhon Inscriptions. Inspired by Ismail Gaspirali's ideal of "Unity in Language, Thought and Action," the summit theme carries particular significance as an expression of the resolve to carry the Turkic world's shared historical and cultural heritage into the future through an approach that strengthens mutual intelligibility, advances political and institutional coordination, and translates common goals into tangible cooperation (Directorate of Communications, 2026a).

As is well known, the OTS has progressively expanded its areas of activity each year in line with the Turkic World Vision 2040, adopted at the 2021 Istanbul Summit. At the Gabala Summit, held the previous year under Azerbaijan's chairmanship, regional peace and security came to the fore, while transport, energy, and the OTS+ format, which envisages cooperation with third parties, were also on the agenda. The Ankara Summit, in turn, focused on translating the institutional and sectoral experience accumulated in previous years into practice, coordinating areas of cooperation, and enhancing the capacity to deliver tangible results (OTS, 2025; 2026a).

The 163-point declaration adopted in Ankara sets out a broad framework, ranging from political and security cooperation to trade, investment, transport, and energy, and from digital transformation to education, culture, and people-to-people relations. Initiatives involving joint training in the defense industry, biosecurity, space technologies, artificial intelligence governance, family and population policies, and athlete mobility may also be regarded as noteworthy emerging areas. Nevertheless, it is anticipated that, alongside the introduction of new areas of cooperation, the implementation of previous decisions and the effectiveness of existing mechanisms will receive close scrutiny in the period ahead (OTS, 2026a; AA, 2026).

As in earlier declarations, the signed Ankara Declaration reaffirmed respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity and encouraged the completion of the OTS Strategy for 2027–2031 and progress on the draft Treaty of Strategic Partnership, Eternal Friendship and Brotherhood. Attention was also given to exploring the possibility of establishing an OTS Defense Industry College in Türkiye and advancing initiatives for a Cybersecurity Council and a Council for Combating Crime. Common diplomatic principles concerning Gaza, Syria, Afghanistan, and Cyprus were recorded, while stronger relations with international organizations and more effective use of the OTS+ mechanism were supported. This framework also calls for a flexible, multilateral approach to cooperation that takes account of the members' differing foreign policy priorities (OTS, 2026a).

In economic and sectoral cooperation, the development of railway connections along the Trans-Caspian Middle Corridor, particularly the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars, Zangezur, and China–Kyrgyzstan–Uzbekistan routes, was among the priority agenda items. Alongside strengthening transport infrastructure, the summit sought to facilitate trade by simplifying border and customs procedures, ensuring mutual recognition of electronic documents, and harmonizing logistics processes. In this context, projects such as the Trans-Caspian fiber-optic link and the completed OTS-SAT CubeSat have provided tangible examples of cooperation in digital connectivity and advanced technologies. In the energy sector, joint initiatives to develop green energy corridors and harness critical minerals came to the fore. More effective use of the Turkic Investment Fund across these areas is important for supporting transport-, energy-, and

technology-oriented cooperation through joint investments and deepening economic integration (OTS, 2026a).

In cultural and humanitarian cooperation, the Ankara Summit, held in the centenary year of the First Turkological Congress, lent particular significance to the wider adoption of the Common Turkic Alphabet and the strengthening of linguistic rapprochement among Turkic peoples. Accordingly, emphasis was placed on increasing the use of the common alphabet in scholarly and literary publications, supporting research on Turkic languages through digital technologies, and developing educational and academic mobility. To extend cultural interaction to broader segments of society, cooperation in areas such as a common museum pass, tourism, youth, and sports was encouraged. In addition, consideration of special passenger lanes at international airports for citizens of OTS member states—an arrangement previously tested by Türkiye—was among the noteworthy initiatives aimed at facilitating people-to-people mobility. An approach was thus advanced that seeks to reinforce linguistic and cultural closeness through practical measures extending from education to tourism and easier travel (OTS, 2026a).

President of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdoğan interpreted the summit theme in terms of mutual intelligibility, shared strategy, and putting decisions into practice, identifying a common Turkic language model, digital trade, cybersecurity, and easier travel among the priorities. President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev drew attention to the need to reduce overlapping responsibilities across the many areas of cooperation, implement agreements, and establish a Council of Permanent Representatives. President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev proposed the "Turkic World–100" investment program, a network of joint logistics centers, and sectoral cooperation with third countries through OTS+; President of Kyrgyzstan Sadyr Japarov emphasized the development of energy and transport projects (Directorate of Communications, 2026a; Akorda, 2026; Presidency of Uzbekistan, 2026). While the presidents of Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan emphasized expanding opportunities in tourism, transport, and investment, the president of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), an observer member, underscored that the TRNC is an inseparable part of the Turkic world.

One of the principal expectations for Türkiye's chairmanship is the restructuring of the OTS's steadily expanding areas of activity within implementable, measurable, and sustainable programs. In this regard, it is important to strengthen the Secretariat's specialized personnel and technical capacity; define more clearly the mandates, powers, and responsibilities of institutions such as TURKSOY, the Turkic Academy, and the Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation; reduce institutional duplication; use resources more effectively and efficiently; and improve interinstitutional coordination. Furthermore, developing reliable and comparable joint statistics, together with reporting and evaluation mechanisms that regularly monitor the implementation of activities and adopted decisions, will strengthen the Organization's institutional effectiveness and policy-making capacity. In particular, specifying the funding sources, implementation schedules, and responsible institutions for joint projects in investment, transport, energy, and digitalization will be a key indicator not only of the performance of Türkiye's chairmanship but also of the OTS's overall institutional performance and its capacity to achieve long-term objectives.

At the same time, for the OTS's institutional progress to take lasting root in society, it is necessary to foster an environment in which Turkic peoples can better understand one another and communicate directly, beyond the unifying legacy of their shared history and culture. Accordingly, efforts concerning the common alphabet should be supported by reciprocal language teaching, academic exchanges, publishing, media cooperation, and digital translation technologies. Establishing sustained channels of communication linking public institutions, universities, civil society organizations, and media outlets will, in turn, contribute to the development of a shared public consciousness and to broadening the social foundations of institutional cooperation. The Turkic World Dialogues events, held in the capitals of Turkic states ahead of the summit and in Ankara during the summit, have provided a timely and meaningful example of such efforts (Directorate of Communications, 2026b).

The appointment of Uzbekistan's nominee, Mirvahid Azimov, as Secretary General at the summit constituted an important step in the Organization's institutional development. Azimov's previous service as OTS Deputy Secretary General and Uzbekistan's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs provides valuable experience for coordinating the Organization's increasingly broad areas of activity. Meanwhile, unlike at previous summits, Turkmenistan was represented by President Serdar Berdimuhamedov, and the TRNC maintained its participation at presidential level, while Hungary, another observer member, did not appear in the official family photograph at a time when the foreign

policy priorities of its new government were being reshaped. Azerbaijan, which has made significant contributions to the institutional development of the Organization since its establishment and has now handed over the rotating chairmanship to Türkiye, was not represented at the summit at the level of head of state. While this absence may be understandable in light of the officially stated scheduling and agenda-related reasons, it has nevertheless given rise to assessments suggesting that it cast a shadow over the overall significance of a gathering of such considerable political and symbolic importance, particularly one marking the handover of the chairmanship. Nevertheless, the deep-rooted bonds of brotherhood, mutual trust, and shared commitment to a common future that underpin relations among the Turkic states rest on a strong foundation of solidarity characterized by historical depth and continuity, extending well beyond individual developments and temporary differences. In this regard, complementing the incomplete picture of unity at the Ankara summit through joint initiatives in the period ahead would contribute to strengthening solidarity among the Turkic states and deepening cooperation based on shared interests in ways that benefit all parties.

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