



## UZBEKISTAN'S TRANSITION TO LATIN ALPHABET AND LESSONS LEARNED

There are many Turkic people of the same origin with a total population of over 200 million. These people use various alphabets, especially Latin, Cyrillic and Arabic. The differences in the alphabets used, despite the similarities in the sound structure of Turkic languages, may shadow the fact that they have common points. However, the process of transition to the Latin alphabet, which has been brought to attention in independent Turkic states in recent years, has increased the possibility of creating a common Turkic language alphabet. Looking at the transition history of Turkic people to the Latin alphabet, Turkey made the transition first in 1928, Azerbaijan in 1991, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in 1993, we can see that most countries started this process right after the collapse of the Soviet Union. After Kazakhstan, which decided to switch to the Latin alphabet in 2017, the issue of alphabet change has been on the agenda in Kyrgyzstan as well. It is not an odd situation that the transition to the Latin alphabet in Turkic states faces various difficulties and criticisms. Within the framework of the mentioned discussions, this study aims to examine Uzbekistan's transition to the Latin alphabet, which has the largest population in Central Asia.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, similar to other Central Asian countries, identity building process was initiated in Uzbekistan. In this direction, the "Law on Transition to the Uzbek Alphabet Based on Latin Letters" was accepted at the eighth meeting of the Uzbekistan State Assembly on September 2nd, 1993, and the process of transition to the Latin alphabet was initiated. Despite the atmosphere of those years, we can summarize the main goals of Uzbekistan's transition to the Latin alphabet as follows: 1) To determine the rank of the Uzbek language, increasing the level of practical use and thus, ensuring the dominance of the Uzbek language; 2) To improve the political, social and economic situation of the country; 3) To create a new educational system in accordance with the national interest; 4) To improve the geopolitical position and relations with neighboring countries; 5) To speed up the modernization process; 6) To raise a free generation. When these principles are taken into account, it can be said that the transition of Uzbekistan, which has recently gained its independence, to the Latin alphabet was a sign of great political will for Tashkent.

According to the adopted law, the Latin-based Uzbek alphabet was envisaged to start its use in primary schools in 1995 and then gradually expand it to all educational levels. It was aimed to use the Latin alphabet throughout the country by September 1st, 2005. In the two years following 1993, new rules of Uzbek language spelling were determined and approved. Later, street names, names of public transportation vehicles, names of markets and institutions were converted to the Latin alphabet. At this stage, a number of names previously spelled in Russian was transferred into Uzbek. The children, who started primary school on September 1st, 1996, began to read and write using the new alphabet. Accordingly, textbooks were prepared for primary school first graders and in 2005, for the first time, diplomas of university graduates were prepared using the new alphabet.

Although it has been 25 years since the official adoption of the Latin alphabet in Uzbekistan, there are still the difficulties with the transition process. Although there are many reasons behind these difficulties, the most important one is that the alphabet was changed several times. This phenomenon naturally prevented the spread of the alphabet throughout the society. The law adopted in 1993 was changed with additional regulations in 1995. The new amendment aimed to increase the number of letters in the Latin-based keyboard to be more than 26, double letters and apostrophe were replaced by special and accent signs in the alphabet adopted in 1993. For instance, in 1995, the letter/sound "o" was replaced with "ae"; letters "C ç, Ş ş", were replaced with double letters "Ch ch, Sh sh". As a result, three double consonants "Hg hg", "Ch ch", "Sh sh", and two specially signed sounds "G' g'", "O' o'" were introduced. In terms of information technology, the Latin-based Uzbek alphabet consists of only Latin-based letters. In the Cyrillic alphabet of Uzbek language, there are only four letters on top of the Russian letters such as O, K, F and h. In the new alphabet, the letters O and F are used as O' and G' with apostrophes; the letters K and h, as Q and H; some sounds are accepted as double letter "Yo yo", "Yu yu", "Ya ya". We can see that such a transition changes the national character of the language. In short, the Latin-based Uzbek alphabet of 1995 consists of 29 letters and an (') (apostrophe) symbol. Although the number of letters in the new alphabet is seven letters less than the Uzbek-Cyrillic alphabet, some sounds had to be met with double letters due to the absence of special signs and symbols, and when an (') sign was added, the words became longer in character number compared to the old ones. Some researchers state that texts written in the Latin alphabet of 1995 increased by approximately 10-15% compared to those written using the Cyrillic alphabet. Another point that should be mentioned here is that the experience of transition to the Latin alphabet in the years 1930-1940 was not taken into account in the process of making the new alphabet. In fact, at the 1st Turkology Congress held in Baku in 1926, it was decided to switch all Turkic people in the Soviet Union from using the Arabic alphabet to the Latin alphabet. As a result, in 1930, Uzbekistan switched from the Arabic alphabet to the Latin alphabet and used this alphabet until 1940. The lack of characters to determine sounds and disregarding previous experience make it difficult to adopt and widespread the use of the Latin alphabet.

The political, social and economic situation of Uzbekistan after independence is closely related to the transition to the Latin alphabet and its widespread use. From an economic point of view, the transition to the new alphabet in Uzbekistan coincided with the economic crisis period in the 90s, which caused the lack of financial support required for this transition period. From a political perspective, the administration's inability to properly regulate the language reform prevented the development of the new alphabet. Researcher Artem Kosmarskiy states that the Uzbek political elite's refusal to give up their old habits of using the Russian language slowed down the radical changes in language politics and linguistics in Uzbekistan. This indecisiveness, lack of will and changes

in the structure of the alphabet prevented the widespread use of the new alphabet. Undoubtedly, renaming only street names and public transportation vehicles was not sufficient for the integration of the new alphabet.

Although the Latin alphabet started to be used gradually in official documents, the continued use of two languages did not provide the expected results. Although textbooks, children's literature and classical Uzbek literature were written using Latin alphabet, the Cyrillic alphabet is preferred in electronic information tools and in the business world. The media, literary works, scientific studies and religious books in the country continue to be published mostly in Cyrillic. Only the titles of the books are translated to Latin, showing lack of will in this area. In addition, use of Cyrillic when writing program titles, film subtitles and advertisements on television channels continues to be a serious obstacle to the widespread use of the Latin alphabet. Vladimir Mikhailovich Alpatov, one of the well-known Russian commentators, states that the continued use of Latin and Cyrillic characters together in Uzbek slowed down the transition to the new alphabet based on Latin.

The abovementioned problems show that the issue of transition to the Latin alphabet in Uzbekistan should be reconsidered. In this context, in May 2019, a special working team was established at Ali Shir Nevai Tashkent State University on the development of the Latin alphabet and the process of making some changes was initiated. This working group, taking into account the changes in 1993, discussed the 1995 regulations and prepared a new study. Since 2019, it has been decided to celebrate October 21st as the "Uzbek Language Festival." On October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the President of Uzbekistan, Shavket Mirziyoyev, adopted a new decree on the development of the Uzbek language and language policy. In fact, in this decree, a road map for the development of Uzbek language has been determined for the period of 2020-2030.

To conclude, there are some problems in Uzbekistan's transition to the Latin alphabet. It can be stated that these issues were caused due to the political, social and economic conditions of Uzbekistan in the first periods after independence. In the near future, Tashkent should pay special attention to the widespread use of the Latin-based Uzbek alphabet with changes aimed at gaining a national significance. In this context, it is important that the Uzbekistan administration considers the 34-letter alphabet, which was decided in the meetings, held at various levels in 1991-1993. Transition to the Latin alphabet means having an advanced writing system suitable for the world standards and for the information systems and telecommunication technology, which are highly sought today. In line with this goal, the transition process of the Turkic people in Central Asia to the Latin alphabet is of critical importance for all Turkic people, as well as for the states concerned. Unity in the alphabet will strengthen the bonds of brotherhood, as well as strengthen the cooperation and communication between people politically, socially and economically. As a final word, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan should consider the experience of Uzbekistan in transition to the Latin alphabet in order to enable more successful transition.

## Politics, Foreign Affairs, and Security

- A solemn presidential inauguration ceremony after Emomali Rahmon was re-elected with 90.92% of votes held in Tajikistan. This is Emomali Rahmon's fifth presidential term that will last until 2027. After the inauguration ceremony, President Rahmon delivered a keynote speech, in which he outlined the main ways and directions of development promising to double GDP growth rate and to turn Tajikistan into an energy independent country (Asiaplustj.info, 30.10.2020).
- President of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, received Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan, Ruslan Kazakbayev, during his working visit in Nur-Sultan. During the meeting President Tokayev stated that Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan has close relations and sees each other as reliable ally and strategic partner. In turn, Kazakbayev declared his gratitude to President Tokayev for all the assistance provided to Kyrgyzstan during corona pandemic and its intention to deepen the bilateral cooperation (Kazinform, 30.10.2020).
- The Eurasian Economic Commission held an online forum "Alignment of the Eurasian Economic Union and China's Belt and Road Initiative", which was attended by Belarus's First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Aleksandr Guryanov. In his speech, Guryanov mentioned that Belarus considered China to be the strategic direction for its foreign policy. He also noted that full participation in China's initiative would improve the economies of the partner countries. Belarus called on financial institutions to increase co-financing of the joint projects (BelTA, 27.10.2020).
- National Defense Minister of Turkey, Hulusi Akar, visited Nur-Sultan where he met with his Kazakh counterpart, Nurlan Yermekbayev. The sides emphasized bilateral relations between the two states with common history, past and values, mentioning constructive and close relations between the Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and First President of Kazakhstan Elbasy Nursultan Nazarbayev and President of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. The Ministers exchanged views on issues of regional security and cooperation in the defense industry (Aa.com.tr, 26.10.2020).
- Mejlis of Turkmenistan ratified an agreement with Russia on cooperation in the field of security. The document was previously introduced by the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, and ratified by the State Duma of Russia. In accordance with the agreement, the parties shall not allow the use of their territory to the detriment of each other's security. The strategic agreement also aims to provide for cooperation between the countries in the fight against terrorism, organized crime, drug trafficking and money laundering (Centralasia.news, 16.10.2020).
- Ukraine appointed its first honorary consul to Azerbaijan. The ceremony of the appointment of Ukraine's Honorary Consul in Shamakhi was held at the Embassy of Ukraine in Azerbaijan. At the ceremony, the newly appointed Honorary Consul, Mehrali Gasimov, received a consular commission and an official certificate from Ukraine's Ambassador to Azerbaijan, Vladyslav Kanevskiy. The new consulate in Shamakhi will cover the Agdash, Agsu, Qobustan, Goychay, Ismailli and Shamakhi districts of Azerbaijan (Ukrinform.net, 27.10.2020).

## Economy, Finance, and Energy

- Kazakhstan is constructing a 100 MW wind farm in the southern part of the country, which will reduce annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by approximately 262 thousand tons. For the implementation of the project, the country attracted loans from international financial institutions. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development supported the project by providing \$24.8 million, while the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China and the Green Climate Fund allocated \$34.3 million, \$13.3 million and \$22.9 million, respectively (Kazinform, 26.10.2020).
- China continues to strengthen its position in terms of trade with countries of the Eurasian Economic Union. According to China's Vice-Minister of Commerce Wang Shouwen, despite the slight reduction in trade due to the pandemic from January to August of this year, China's share in the union's foreign trade increased to 20%. China also increased investments to the EAEU, which grew by 7.9% compared to last year's indicators reaching \$710 million (TASS, 27.10.2020).
- China certified 98 companies from Belarus to export their products to its own market. Belarus can increase supply of milk products to China as 56 of all 98 certified enterprises are milk-processing companies. As the result of active works towards certification since 2015, Belarus's agricultural exports increased from \$0.3 million in 2015 to \$131 million in 2019. The country's agricultural exports consist of meat products (44%), dairy products (40%), flax fiber (6%), and rapeseed oil (6%) (BelTA, 26.10.2020).
- South Korea's Posco International Corporation which specializes in the grain business purchased 68 thousand tons of feed wheat from Ukraine. South Korea becoming a promising market for Ukraine's wheat export where the country annually consumes 3.43 million tons of wheat, while produces less than 20 thousand tons, or less than 1% of its needs. In September 2019, the Posco built a grain terminal in Ukraine with a capacity of 2.5 million tons (Ukrinform, 27.10.2020).
- The UzAuto Motors considers expanding financing opportunities and plans to attract additional funds through issuing Eurobonds. According to the company's statement, they plan to issue \$300 million where the maturity period of the Eurobonds will vary from five to seven years which would be placed on the London Stock Exchange (UzDaily, 30.10.2020).
- Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan Ruslan Kazakbaev had a working visit to Kazakhstan, where he met with the Chairman of the Board of Kazakh Export JSC Ruslan Iskakov. The parties discussed issues of bilateral economic cooperation and representatives of Kazakhstan expressed their concerns for the operation of Kazakh companies like Kaz Minerals Bozymchak, Jerooy, Jamgyr and Vertex Gold Company. During the meeting parties agreed to diversify mutual trade flows using financial and insurance instruments of the Kazakh Export (24.kg, 30.10.2020).

## Society and Culture

- An event dedicated to the Republic Day of Turkey entitled "The State with a high flying flag" was organized by the International Turkic Academy with the support of the Turkish Cultural Center of Yunus Emre. It was attended by government officials from Turkic states, representatives of diplomatic missions, public figures, scientists and media. A book exhibition about the founder of the Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and screening of a documentary about Atatürk prepared by the Academy were organized at the meeting (International Turkic Academy, 29.10.2020).
- Embassy of Turkey to Moldova donated tablets and laptops to Moldovan teachers and students. The reception event of consignment of the material aid was held at the Embassy of Turkey in Chisinau and attended by the Minister of Education of Moldova, Igor Sarov, and Ambassador of Turkey to Moldova, Gürol Sökmensüer. The consignment included 140 tablets and 6 laptops, worth 27,000 euros in total (Moldpres.md, 28.10.2020).
- The Embassy of Kazakhstan in Czech Republic and the National Academic Library of Kazakhstan held an online presentation of Abai's Book of Words translated to Czech. The event was attended by public figures, scientists and mass media. Festival of Days of Culture of Kazakhstan in Prague was also marked by screening of documentaries dedicated to Abai's 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary and Al Farabi's 1150<sup>th</sup> anniversary (Kazinform, 29.10.2020).
- Members of the State Committee on Water Management of Turkmenistan held an online meeting with the Ministry of Water Resources of Uzbekistan to discuss important issues of cooperation in the field of water management. The Turkmen delegation reiterated its commitments to solve problems of the Aral Sea, as well as water and energy issues in Central Asia. The sides emphasized the need to work towards the implementation of important joint projects showing mutual respect for each other's positions (Kun.uz, 31.10.2020).
- Inauguration of a new office of the Turkic Council was held in Budapest. The ceremony was attended by the Secretary-General of the Turkic Council, Baghdad Amreyev, as well as Ministers and top diplomats from different Turkic states. The new Turkic Council office will further enhance cooperation among Turkic states in areas of economy, trade, customs, information technologies, logistics, diaspora and education uniting the East and the West (Aa.com.tr, 20.09.2020).
- The Ambassador of Turkmenistan to Turkey, Ishankuli Amanlyev, received a delegation from the Kecioren district municipality of Ankara. The sides exchanged views on relations of the two Turkic states and supported the idea of development of contacts between the twin cities of Turkey and Turkmenistan. In particular, the parties discussed holding of the Days of Turkmen Culture, conferences, exhibitions and other events after the coronavirus pandemic (Centralasia.news, 27.10.2020).