

Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

Examining the Security Dimension of the Organization of Turkic States by Addressing Border Issues: Kyrgyz-Tajik Border Conflict*

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Abstract

This study aims to evaluate the Organization of Turkic States' approach to security with a special focus on border issues in the region after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The emergence of independent states in the Caucasus and Central Asia led to border conflicts with neighbouring countries. While some of these disputes have been resolved through agreements, others persist. Given the potential for border issues to escalate into conflicts, achieving peaceful resolutions is crucial for regional stability and fostering interstate cooperation. Within this framework, 1999 Batken Events hold significant importance. These events not only epitomize the persistent border issues between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan but also bring regional border disputes into the forefront of attention. Today, border disputes present a significant challenge for the Organization of Turkic States, which is expanding its cooperation among member states and claims to pursue an effective security strategy. It can be argued that the

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OTS's efficiency in peacefully resolving border disputes, which are sensitive security matters, could directly affect the organization's future international standing.

Keywords

Organization of Turkic States, border issues/problems, Turkic World, Kyrgyz-Tajik border dispute, security, Batken Events.

Türk Devletleri Teşkilatının Güvenlik Boyutunun Sınır Sorunları Bağlamında İncelenmesi: Kırgızistan-Tacikistan Sınır Anlaşmazlığı*

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Öz

Bu çalışma, Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasının ardından bölgedeki sınır sorunlarına özel olarak odaklanarak Türk Devletleri Teşkilatının güvenlik yaklaşımını değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Kafkasya ve Orta Asya'da bağımsız devletlerin ortaya çıkması komşu ülkelerle sınır çatışmalarına yol açtı. Bu anlaşmazlıkların bir kısmı anlaşmalarla çözümlenirken bir kısmı da devam etmektedir. Sınır sorunlarının çatışmalara dönüşme potansiyeli göz önüne alındığında, barışçıl çözümlere ulaşmak bölgesel istikrar ve devletler arası iş birliğinin desteklenmesi açısından hayati önem taşımaktadır. Bu çerçevede, 1999 yılında Batken'de yaşanan olaylar büyük önem taşımaktadır. Bu olaylar sadece Kırgızistan ve Tacikistan arasındaki süregelen sınır sorunlarını özetlemekle kalmamış, aynı zamanda bölgesel sınır anlaşmazlıklarını da ön plana çıkarmıştır. Günümüzde sınır anlaşmazlıkları, üye devletler arasındaki iş birliğini genişleten ve etkili bir güvenlik stratejisi izlediğini iddia eden Türk Devletleri

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Teşkilatı için önemli bir zorluk teşkil etmektedir. Hassas güvenlik meseleleri olan sınır anlaşmazlıklarının barışçıl yollarla çözümünde örgütün etkinliğinin, örgütün gelecekteki uluslararası itibarını doğrudan etkileyebileceği söylenebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı, sınır sorunları/problemleri, Türk Dünyası, Kırgız-Tacik sınır anlaşmazlığı, güvenlik, Batken Olayları.

Introduction

The idea of Turkic World integration is based on cooperation between states and strengthening the ties between Turks spread all over the world. The Turkic World¹, whose geographical extent transcends the borders of the member states of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), has experienced significant developments, particularly since the end of the Cold War. The potential for collaboration among the countries that gained independence from the Soviet Union (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan) and Türkiye has presented a significant opportunity for the initiation of substantial projects.

The first and most prominent of these projects is the Turkish Speaking Countries Summit (its name was changed to the Turkic Speaking Countries Summit in 2001), constituted an annually held sharing platform since 1992 although it was interrupted from time to time. The Nakhchivan Agreement signed by Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Türkiye at the 9th Summit on October 3, 2009, enabled the formation of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking Countries. Therefore, a highly valuable and concrete step has been taken towards the integration of the Turkic World with the structure also known as just the Turkic Council. While Uzbekistan became a full member of the Council in 2019, observer membership status was gained by Hungary in 2018, by Turkmenistan in 2021 and by the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in 2022. In addition, at the summit held on November 3, 2023, the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) became the first non-state actor to participate as an observer member.

At the 8th Summit of the Council held in Istanbul on 12 November 2021, the name of the Turkic Council was changed to the OTS as a reflection of a common will, beyond being symbolic. At the meeting held with the theme of “Green Technologies and Smart Cities in the Digital Age”, the “Turkic World 2040 Vision Document” was also accepted, and it was decided to prepare the “2022-2026 Organization of Turkic States Strategic Road Map” for the implementation of the document. With the Samarkand (2022) and Astana (2023) Summits held in the following years, significant decisions were taken for the institutionalization of the OTS, and the areas of cooperation gradually diversified. Today, the OTS has become an

increasingly solid platform with its will to work together from tourism to migration, from agriculture to health.

The OTS, which is an official international organization with its founding agreement, legal personality, and institutional structure, can be categorized regional cooperation organization. However, the common will and the declarations announced after the summit meetings reveal that the OTS will exhibit a global approach beyond being regional (Baki 148; Erkiner and Eray 226–29). It should also be noted that the OTS is an umbrella organization as it includes organizations such as the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TURKSOY), the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic States (TURKPA), the Turkic Academy, Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation and the Union of Turkic Chamber of Commerce and Industry (TCCI). This reinforces the international attribute of the OTS, enhances its institutional structure, and expands the framework of its role (Terzioğlu 58).

Certainly, the OTS will define its future role based on the advancement of historical and cultural connections, the sustained commitment to political integration, and the measures aimed at addressing global challenges (Mustofaev 116–18). While common moral ties create invaluable opportunities for the integration of the Turkic World, political, economic and social relations have been developed especially thanks to the facilitation and encouragement of an institutional structure like the OTS (Kaygusuz 231–32; Tiyek and Balcı 828–30). It's crucial to stress that the enthusiasm generated at this point should be directed towards achieving multi-dimensional goals, grounded in the principle of mutual benefit and guided by rational comprehension. Given the numerous challenges and opportunities awaiting resolution within member states, their respective regions, and the Turkic World at large, the influence, guidance, coordination, and policy development capacity of the OTS as an umbrella organization will be paramount in this regard.

While the OTS is widely recognized as a fundamental cornerstone on the path towards Turkic World integration, significant curiosity has emerged regarding the specific issues and areas of cooperation through which member states will foster closer relations. Particularly, what kind of policy the OTS will follow on military and security-related issues is one of the most interesting issues. It's worth noting that a key factor that will bring states closer together

is their capacity to pursue common foreign and security policies, among other areas of collaboration. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the relations between Turkic states have experienced fluctuations, with periods of desired development as well as occasional disruptions and challenges. It's evident that the multidimensional relations established between Türkiye and Azerbaijan haven't been replicated at the same level among other Turkic states. Therefore, while developing a common policy in the military and security domains may be a long-term objective, it would be highly beneficial to prioritize establishing a shared understanding and fostering cooperation initially. Member and observer states, as well as the broader Turkic World, face various security challenges, including border disputes, radical movements, terrorism, instability in neighbouring regions and countries, and transnational crimes. While some of these issues are common among the states, others are unique to specific nations. Furthermore, international and regional developments also present challenges in terms of security. In this context, the approach of the OTS towards national, regional, and international security matters can significantly impact the maintenance of peace and security, particularly within the Turkic World.

Border issues, the primary focus of this study, have been a significant challenge among the states of the Turkic World. Internal border disputes and conflicts with neighbouring countries in the region, such as the Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan conflict, have arisen periodically. It's important to recognize that the policies of the former Soviet Union contributed to the emergence of substantial border problems among regional states. While most states in the region have managed to resolve border disputes with China, thanks in part to China's military and political influence, internal border issues persist and remain unresolved to this day.

As an institutional and multi-purpose political organization, the OTS mentions its security-related objectives in both its founding agreement and summit declarations. The organization aims at striving to enhance the security and stability of Member States in alignment with their commitments under international agreements, specifically those pertaining to upholding and reinforcing sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the inviolability of internationally recognized borders. This commitment includes refraining from interference in internal affairs. Although security is a significant topic

in cooperation areas and strategic goals, the Organization does not have a military aspect. For this reason, political and moral support and solidarity initiatives come to the fore in the internal and external security problems faced by the members. It would not be surprising if the Organization is expected to take an active role in border issues between member states and their neighbours.

The primary objective of this research is to assess the security aspect of the OTS, a significant entity in the integration of the Turkic World, particularly concerning its approach to border issues. The study aims to investigate the actions taken, ongoing efforts, and potential measures by the organization, which aims to foster multi-dimensional relationships among its member states, to address border-related challenges between member states or with other nations. Although OTS is not primarily a military or security-oriented organization, it is believed that member states' collaboration in addressing security issues will contribute to stronger unity. As a case study, the research focuses on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border dispute, a well-known crisis, and explores the initiatives taken by OTS in resolving this conflict. Two main points require emphasis. Firstly, the subject's scope is significant, particularly concerning border issues within the Turkic World. Due to the specific scope of the article, it's impractical to cover all border problems comprehensively. Secondly, the focus of this study is specifically on the border issues between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. This selection is justified by the timeliness and ongoing resolution efforts surrounding this particular issue.

For the study, key documents, summit declarations and press statements of the OTS since 2009 are examined in detail. Hence, the analysis is intended to be conducted based on official documents and statements. In the conclusion, a comprehensive assessment is conducted regarding the potential role that OTS can play in the peaceful resolution of border issues. The significance of addressing security concerns for the organization's future is underscored, particularly in light of the positive momentum generated by the Karabakh Victory in the Azerbaijan-Armenia War within the Turkic World. The study is anticipated to provide a special contribution to the field by exploring a distinct aspect of the OTS and advocating for the Organization to actively engage in addressing border disputes, which represent a potential obstacle to integration.

Security Dimension of the Organization of Turkic States

In the Nakhchivan Agreement, which constitutes the founding document of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking Countries and its current name, the Organization of Turkic States, the parties are;

[...] desiring to jointly contribute to strengthening peace, ensuring security and stability, in the region and in the whole world as a whole, in terms of development of processes of political multipolarity, economic and informational globalization” and “reaffirming their adherence to purposes and principles of the United Nations and other universally recognized principles and norms of international law, including sovereign equality, territorial integrity and inviolability of internationally recognized borders of states, as well as those related to maintenance of international peace, security and development of good-neighbourly and friendly relations and cooperation among states (*Nakhchivan Agreement*).

expressions are mentioned. The Agreement also includes the following statements regarding security for purposes and tasks:

- Maintaining peace, strengthening security and confidence in the region and in the world as a whole,
- coordination of the actions to combat international terrorism and separatism, extremism, trafficking in human beings, drug trafficking, as well as the assistance to international policy on control over illicit traffic in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances (*Nakhchivan Agreement*).

It is crucial to highlight that, alongside its numerous objectives and duties, the OTS has emerged as a political entity committed to bolstering the security and stability of its member states. Moreover, it aims to contribute to the promotion of regional and international peace, uphold international law and norms, and collaborate with other regional initiatives and actors. Beyond being a structure that serves a single purpose, the OTS is a general/multi-purpose organization that develops multi-dimensional relationships among its members and adopts a solution-oriented approach to various problem areas. Thus, even though it is not a military structure, the Organization has

expressed its stance on security issues in the Summit Declarations and other statements throughout the process.

“Cooperation on Foreign Policy and Security Issues” constitutes one of the main headings in the declarations published since the first summit of the OTS in 2011. In the introduction of the declarations, it is particularly underlined that the aim is to strengthen the stability and political and economic security of the member states, and to support principles such as territorial integrity, sovereignty, inviolability of borders and non-interference in internal affairs. For example, in the Final Declaration of the 8th Summit, where the name of the OTS referred to above was adopted, and the common will regarding security was put forward as follows:

Aiming at strengthening security and stability of the Member States in accordance with the generally recognized norms and principles of international law, in particular the respect of and support for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of the internationally recognized borders, non-interference in internal affairs (*Istanbul Declaration of the 8th Summit 2*).

Undoubtedly, it is necessary to consider the security dimension of the OTS in three general contexts: national security problems of the member states, security problems in the regions where the member states are located, and security problems in the international arena that affects steady of the members. As the full and observer members of the OTS are located in a wide area from the central of Europe to the east of Asia, they face many risks, dangers and threats. Created on a strong and solid umbrella of unity idea, it is obvious that the OTS can achieve this goal by ensuring the stability and trust of its members. In other words, the role that members will play in institutionalizing and increasing the influence of the Organization depends on their success in solving their internal problems, handling their problems with their neighbours, and providing the ability to protect themselves from all kinds of threats. At this point, as an organization that shares many ties, the OTS will be deeply beneficial in terms of its reputation in ensuring the security of the member states and contributing to regional and international peace.

The establishment of strong cooperation among Turkic states will lead to a unity of regional interests, which will be highly beneficial for countries to

address both their individual and shared security challenges. The security community within the OTS can play a facilitating role in addressing issues that contribute to regional instability, such as the situation in Afghanistan, counterterrorism efforts, enhancing military capacity, and combating cross-border crimes (Sarı 150–57). Undoubtedly, the OTS was not established for security/military purposes like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) or the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). However, following a problem-solving, conciliatory, mediator and supportive strategy in solving security problems will provide an unquestionably valuable aspect to the Organization. It should not be forgotten that there are several security problems such as wars, civil conflicts, terrorist attacks, activities of cross-border criminal groups, irregular migration and cyber-attacks in both Eastern Europe, the Middle East, the Caucasus, and Asia. At this point, the OTS's development of cooperation and common struggle will have a positive impact on international relations.

The attitude of the OTS towards the security of Turkic World as well as the member countries is also essential. The definition of the Turkic World refers to a broad concept beyond the state borders, including neighbouring and kindred communities that speak Turkish and share common values (Purtaş 94). The term Turkic World encompasses a broad definition, as it includes Turkic communities residing in various locations worldwide, beyond the borders of the Turkic states. It is obvious there are plenty of similar or unique problems experienced by Turks living around the world. The role that the OTS could assume at this juncture will determine its future impact, and it's natural for Turkic communities to have such expectations over time.

The OTS is based on a multi-dimensional organizational mentality. At this point, it is clear that the development of security and military relations will play a decisive role in the future of the integration. For instance, sharing and cooperation established on the defence industry may create a situation that will complement other areas of cooperation (Emeklier et al. 97–98). The decision to hold the Meeting of The Heads of National Security Councils of Member and Observer Countries of the OTS on a regular basis at the Samarkand Summit, held on 29 June 2022, has been a significant development in the field of security. Article 19 of the declaration

published after the summit stated: “Instruct the continuation of security consultations within the OTS on a regular basis among the governments and state bodies of the Member States to ensure close coordination and cooperation on security issues of common interest; It is noteworthy that the phrase ‘and call for closer cooperation in the field of defence industry and military collaboration’” (*Samarkand Declaration of the Nineth Summit*). The second meeting was held in Tashkent on 19-20 October 2023. This situation can be described as a concrete initiative to develop a common security perspective (Özsoy 52).

Border Problems of Turkic States

Addressing the origin of border issues among Turkic states solely from the period of their independence overlooks the underlying roots of the problem. However, delving into this historical context may deviate from the primary focus of the study. Therefore, the developments post-1990 will be briefly assessed. As previously noted, the study’s main focus is on the OTS’s approach to border issues, thus border disputes between states will be discussed briefly.

As mentioned in the introduction, this study cannot delve into the border issues among Turkic World countries themselves and with China due to constraints in both word count and the study’s focus. While the Central Asia region exhibits multiple border challenges, the analysis refrains from including China to maintain coherence with the study’s core theme and word limit. It’s worth noting that China’s resolution of its border disputes predates those among other regional states. Consequently, it’s not suitable for analysis within the framework of this study. This decision is supported by the principle of upholding the status quo outlined in post-Soviet agreements such as the Minsk agreement of December 8, 1991, which dissolved the Soviet Union, and the Almaty Declaration signed on December 21, 1991, in Kazakhstan’s capital at the time, Almaty (Dadabaev 554–68).

In this context, while the countries in the region have expressed their desire to maintain sovereignty over the territories assigned to them during the Soviet Union era, they have also attempted to sideline unresolved issues. Despite attempts to overlook these problems, the presence of regions like

the Fergana Valley in this geographical area has highlighted the necessity of addressing these issues.

Border issues between Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, neighbouring the Fergana Valley, began to emerge nearly a decade after they gained independence. The need to address these border problems, which had been overlooked, became apparent following the Batken incidents in 1999 (Ceccarelli; Tashtemkhanova et al.)

In general, it can be said that there are seven different border problems in the Central Asia region. These are between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Some of these problems were solved in time and some are in the process of solution. Furthermore, to maintain the integrity and originality of the study and to stay within necessary limits, a detailed examination will be conducted on the border issue between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. These border disputes are of significant contemporary importance and are perceived to contribute to the resolution process of the broader 'Turkic World states' border issues.

The most challenging or unresolved area in the solution process pertains to the border disputes among the three states neighbouring the Fergana Valley. The main reason for this is that the location of the Fergana Valley is important both geopolitically, economically, religiously and historically (Kohl; Karimov et al.; Gulomjonovna and Sobirjonovna) and both Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are struggling to dominate this region. To grasp the primary reasons for this, it's essential to examine the natural resources of the countries. In the region, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan stand out as the two poorest countries in terms of natural resources. However, they possess significant potential in terms of water resources. Especially Tajikistan has small industries concentrated in hydroelectricity production (*Tacikistan Ülke Bülteni*). Likewise, Kyrgyzstan has a rich potential in terms of water resources. Unlike these two countries, Uzbekistan is not rich in water resources and needs the water resources of the Fergana Valley. In this context, it would be correct to link the main issue of dispute between the three countries to the control of water resources.

Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan share a 1395 km border and the demarcation of border works for 1170 km of these borders started in 2000 after the Batken clashes in 1999, and with the agreement signed in Bishkek on 5 September 2017, most of the border problems were tried to be eliminated (Joldoshov). Border problems between the two countries date back to the 1920s. Joldoshov states that the basis of the border problems between the two countries started from the period when the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic and the Soviet Socialist Republic of Uzbekistan were organized in the form of an intra-country division in the summer months within the framework of ethnic-based census. Because, as Joldoshov expresses, the fact that the Kyrgyz still lead a nomadic life and accordingly were not in the village at the time of the census affected the borders determined as a result of the ethnic-based census framework and caused the Kyrgyz population in the villages to appear either small or non-existent (Joldoshov 314). For this reason, Uzbekistan argues that the borders of the two countries should be determined based on the 1924-1927 documents, while Kyrgyzstan claims that the 1955 documents should be taken into account (Dadabaev 561; Toktogulov 95; Megoran 478). When the problems between the two countries are analysed in general, it can be said that the problems stem mostly from the fact that both countries put forward different theses and more interestingly, the documents presented by the two sides contradict each other (Joldoshov 312).

Although the problems regarding the unresolved border problems between the two countries continue, with the agreement signed between the two countries in Bishkek on 5 September 2017, the problem was tried to be solved by reaching an agreement for 85% of the border problems, i.e. 1170 km (Toktogulov; Joldoshov; Dadabaev). It should be noted here that the main problematic issues, which are difficult to resolve between the two countries, could not be resolved in 2017. However, it is necessary to say that the relations between the two countries have improved especially with the Mirziyoyev period and the will to solve this problem has been emphasized (Mokrenko; Ailchiev).

On 26 March 2021, Chairman of the National Security Committee of Kyrgyzstan Kamchibek Tashiev stated at a press conference that the border problems between the two countries were completely resolved as a result of

the negotiations. He stated that a special protocol was signed as a result of the session of the delimitation and demarcation commission in Tashkent at the meetings held after 2017 to resolve the remaining 15% (Taşiev: Kırgız-Özbek). The latest development towards the resolution of border problems between the two countries took place with the visit of Uzbek President Mirziyoyev to Bishkek on 27 January 2023. In 2021, the protocols prepared as a result of the meetings, letters on the approved and signed agreements on the determination of the last disputed part of the border issues were exchanged and the border issues were finalized (Chekirov). To briefly state, the border problems that have lasted for 30 years were resolved between the two countries as of 2023.

Another prominent problem in the region, which is also the scene of conflicts from time to time, is the border problems between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Negotiations were initiated in 2002 for the solution of the border problems between the two countries, but this problem has not been resolved until today. According to Joldoshov, the primary reason for the ongoing issues between the two countries is the disparity in the dates of official documents, similar to the situation between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. According to him, while Tajikistan demands that the borders be determined according to 1924, Kyrgyzstan wants the borders to be resolved within the framework of documents dated 1958-1959 and 1989 (Joldoshov 316). From time to time, clashes between the two countries take place in the Batken region. In the last clashes in September 2022, many people were killed, and hundreds of people were injured. These clashes, especially in September, have also significantly affected the peace of people in the region (Abdyldaev and Ulukbek Uulu; Aliyev Tayfur).

In this context, the government delegations of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan met in Batken on 25-29 April to discuss border problems and discuss solutions (PolitKlinika [PolitClinic]). As a result of these negotiations, the parties reached an agreement on the determination of the intersection point of the state borders of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (Adilov). When evaluated in this framework, it can be stated that there is a will to solve the problems between the two countries. The talks between the two countries continued on 2 October 2023 and it was decided to continue the understanding on the solution of border problems (“Büt Köygöylördü Çeçet”; Abdyldaev and Ulukbek Uulu).

Another development towards the solution of border problems took place on 4 February when Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Jeenbek Kulubayev and Tajik President Emomali Rahman met. As a result of the ongoing negotiations, 196 km of border problems were resolved. The border between the two countries is 970 km long and it is stated that 90% of the problems have been resolved with the negotiations that started in 2022 (“Kırgızstan Menen Tajikistan”).

In summary, the conflicts that occurred in 2022 have been a turning point for the resolution of border issues between the two countries. The impact of these conflicts on both nations, as they strive to protect their territorial integrity, naturally influences their domestic political dynamics. Consequently, it is plausible that the Kyrgyz-Tajik border, where nearly 90% of the issues have been addressed, will see resolution in 2024.

Case Study: OTS’s Approach Towards the Kyrgyz-Tajik Border Issue

Firstly, it’s necessary to highlight that prior to the commencement of this study, it was expected that the OTS would exert significant influence in resolving border issues related to its members and actively participate in the process. However, the research findings indicated that this influence was either minimal or non-existent, which consequently impacted the study’s outcome.

At the Almaty summit held in 2011 as the first summit of the Organization, it was stated that OTS aimed to strengthen the economic and political security of states in terms of sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of borders.

In article 20 of the declaration;

Reiterated their position on the inadmissibility of forcible change of the borders, noted their conviction that strengthening of the struggle of the international community against acts of aggression threatening peace and stability, sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, is a determining factor for the maintenance of global security (*Declaration of the First Summit*).

Even though the organization clearly stated its approach to border issues within the scope of this article, the member countries only emphasized Azerbaijan’s Nagorno-Karabakh problem in the declaration.

Although the principles of inviolability of borders, territorial integrity and non-interference in internal affairs were emphasized at the summit held in Bishkek in 2012, an approach was adopted only towards Azerbaijan's Nagorno-Karabakh problem, as stated in the 2011 Almaty Summit (*Declaration of the Second Summit*). These elements have been maintained in all summits up to 2019, and other border issues in the region have not been addressed in any way.

The Kyrgyz-Tajik war was mentioned, at least in part, at the Istanbul Summit, where the name of the organization was changed to the Organization of Turkic States. In this context, the organization stated in the Article 9 of the Declaration that it supports negotiations between the two countries to solve the problem (*Istanbul Declaration of the 8th Summit*).

Conflicts between the two countries in 2022 have been put on the agenda of the OTS. The declaration issued after the Samarkand summit reads as follows;

Express support to the efforts of the Kyrgyz Republic to find a peaceful solution to the situation at the Kyrgyz-Tajik border in line with the fundamental principles of international law, reiterate the importance of resolving disputes exclusively by political and diplomatic means; in this context express the readiness of the Member States to assist in the efforts of Kyrgyzstan for development and reconstruction of infrastructure in the Kyrgyz Republic (*Samarkand Declaration of the Nineth Summit*).

In line with the decision taken at the Istanbul Summit, the organization this time backed a political and diplomatic solution to the problem, while noting that Kyrgyzstan could be helped with infrastructure development and reconstruction.

At the Astana Summit in 2023, it can be seen that the focus was only on signing the Agreement on Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation for the Development of Central Asia in the 21st Century between the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Tajikistan, the Republic of Turkmenistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan (*Declaration of the Tenth Summit*).

An examination of the OTS website shows that only four different pieces of information have been entered for the two border issues in question. This information relates to the Kyrgyz-Tajik border issue and was written by the Secretary General. The first statement was issued on 30 April 2021 and provided information on the peaceful resolution of the situation that had arisen at that time. It also expressed satisfaction with the ceasefire and the work done to reduce tensions (The Foreign Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic).

In another information issued on 30 April 2021, the Turkic Council expressed its concern over the escalation of the conflict between the two parties and its satisfaction with the start of negotiations between the foreign ministries of the parties, the rapid implementation of the ceasefire between the parties and the reduction of tensions. The key aspect of this statement is the Turkic Council's call for both parties to exercise caution and implement collaborative measures to stabilize the situation, refraining from actions that could exacerbate tensions further ("Statement by the Secretary General").

On 28 January 2022, the Secretary-General's statement expressed concern over the renewed Kyrgyz-Tajik conflict and called for a cessation of hostilities and a peaceful resolution of the conflict. This statement, in which the OTS condemns the use of weapons against civilians, calls on both sides to take the necessary measures ("Statement by the Secretary General").

Another statement issued on 16 September 2022 expressed concern about the ongoing conflict and again stressed that it should be resolved through diplomatic means. It is also important that the OTS condemned the attacks on civilians and public schools. It also supports the Kyrgyz Government's efforts to resolve the conflict peacefully ("Statement of the Secretary General").

In this context, it can be emphasized that the OTS has not carried out a comprehensive study on border problems and conflicts. It can be said that the OTS has not been able to put forward a complete policy on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border, which is the most influential and unresolved border problem on the agenda today, and that it has a limited impact on this issue in its final declarations and statements.

There could be various reasons behind this situation. Firstly, despite its waning influence, Russia historically held considerable sway over the countries in

the region. Russia sometimes utilizes regional events, particularly border disputes like the Kyrgyz-Tajik one, to further its own interests and convey messages to Central Asian nations. This can be interpreted as Russia asserting its influence as a dominant player in the region or signalling its enduring strength to regional countries. Additionally, the organization may opt not to directly challenge Russia within this context. Secondly, the organization is still evolving from a security standpoint, and its pronouncements on regional events could impact both its stability and the perceptions of other nations. Consequently, member states often endorse the peaceful resolution of their border disputes through restrained statements, mindful of the organization's development and regional dynamics. Lastly, recognizing the potential for border issues to escalate into conflicts, as seen throughout history, there's a collective emphasis on promoting peaceful resolutions to these problems. This entails a cautious approach within the organizational framework, aiming to avoid excessive entanglement in such events. Moreover, there's a concerted effort to prevent member countries from resolving disputes through coercion or external pressure, leveraging the organization's presence to facilitate peaceful solutions.

Conclusion

The study aimed to thoroughly examine the origins of border disputes, the variety of border issues, and the approach adopted by the OTS toward these matters. The research unequivocally demonstrates that despite any inclination among regional states to disregard looming border problems, the dynamic nature of the geographical landscape they inhabit, continually accommodating diverse structures, necessitates prompt resolution of these issues. Since the events of 1999, border issues in the region have garnered widespread attention, yet they remain unresolved despite the passage of many years, occasionally leading to conflicts between neighbouring states. While several factors contribute to the prolonged persistence of these problems, the primary obstacle stems from differing historical narratives among bordering nations. This thesis consistently emerges as a prominent factor, particularly evident in the border disputes between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Although the main thesis of the study is that the OTS has an impact on the current solution of the border problems, as a result of the studies and

researches it was found that the role of the Organization is almost non-existent. While the primary argument of the research suggests that the OTS plays a pivotal role in addressing current border challenges, the outcomes of numerous studies indicate that the organization's influence is largely negligible. It is noteworthy to reiterate that the OTS's inclination towards assuming a central role in resolving regional border issues remains uncertain. Nevertheless, this stance can be attributed primarily to practical limitations and geopolitical intricacies impeding the organization's efficacy. Moreover, the lack of consensus among member states, particularly concerning historical agreements, and the absence of enforceable mechanisms within the organization further diminish its capacity to intervene effectively in border disputes. These findings highlight the complex array of factors constraining the OTS from fulfilling its intended mandate as the primary mediator in addressing border disputes in Central Asia.

The Nakhchivan Agreement, the founding agreement of the organization, states the aims and principles of the UN, but also emphasizes the protection of territorial integrity and internationally recognized borders of states, as well as international peace and security, and the development of good neighbourly and friendly relations and cooperation among states. In this context, the aim of the organization is to strengthen mutual trust, friendship and good neighbourliness between the parties (*Nakhchivan Agreement*). This is also clearly stated in Vision 2040 (*Turkic World Vision – 2040*).

As mentioned previously, there is an expectation for the Organization to operate more efficiently in a region where numerous challenges exist. However, upon examining the Charter of the Organization, the Summit Declarations, and statements made by the Secretary-General, it becomes evident that the Organization prefers not to delve too deeply into these issues. The primary reason for this is the organization's novelty and the lack of a clearly established environment of trust between member countries. On the other hand, it's worth noting that while the Organization may not be directly involved in on-the-ground actions, it appears to be fostering encouragement among the countries in the region. This is particularly evident in statements made by Azerbaijan following the victory in Nagorno-Karabakh, which emphasize the importance of promoting relations and trust among the countries.

While it should be noted that the founding agreement of the OTS dates back to 2009, it should be emphasized that it is still a new structure. Although they are connected to each other by many common ties, it has not been possible to establish a political unity among the Turkic states for many years. Many political, economic, social and security-related factors on a national, regional and global basis can be cited as the reasons for that. With this intellectual infrastructure, members of the OTS show the will to form a union more slowly and surely. Certainly, the advancement of this union hinges on the establishment of unified economic, security, and foreign policy frameworks. Among these, border issues, falling under the purview of security, emerge as particularly delicate matters. As extensively deliberated in the study, Turkic states contend with varying degrees of border disputes, ranging from minor to severe, both among themselves and with neighbouring nations. Thus far, OTS has adopted a reactive approach toward border issues, emphasizing the significance of peaceful negotiations.

As a developing organization that directs its members to closer cooperation, it seems to be a conscious choice for the OTS not to address border problems at its Summits, which are a harsh policy element that can cause serious disagreements among members, create debates and create divisions regarding regional problems. But undoubtedly, solving the border problems of the member states will enable them to focus on their political, economic and social development, and will also enable them to become stronger militarily. It is clear that members who are more developed, stronger and have resolved their problems with their neighbours will contribute more to the Organization in achieving its goals. The Turkic States' ability to resolve their border issues peacefully will be very decisive in terms of integration and seizing global opportunities for the Turkic World in general. Thus, it would not be wrong to expect the OTS to follow a more active policy, play a mediator role and contribute more to regional security on border sharing, solution of border problems and border security.

It's evident that the success and sustained existence of the OTS hold immense importance for the future of the Turkic world. It's also clear that the OTS faces various risks both presently and in the future. This study aimed to highlight the potential danger posed by any crises or conflicts among Turkic states themselves or with neighbouring countries in the

new context of Central Asia and the Caucasus following the Soviet legacy. Such situations could severely undermine decades of integration efforts. Therefore, it would be highly beneficial for the OTS, which lacks a military agenda or presence, to develop peaceful methods for resolving border disputes in regions where Turkic states are located. Assuming a mediating role grounded in principles of equity could help the OTS enhance its status as an internationally recognized and respected actor. Effectively addressing border issues among its members and neighbouring states by preventing conflicts, the OTS could establish itself as a pivotal actor, thereby avoiding potential crises in the future.

In conclusion, it is imperative for an organization that includes member states grappling with border issues to take a more proactive stance in resolving these disputes. It is essential to define whether the organization operates with a security, military, political, or economic framework, and to encourage more active engagement and transparent communication regarding these issues. Resolving border disputes in the region will not only contribute to political stability within the countries involved but also enhance the political and economic efficacy of the organization both regionally and globally.

Contribution Rate Statement

The authors' contribution rates in this study are equal.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of this study. There is no conflict of interest between the authors.

Notes

1 The concept of the Turkic World can be used in different meanings. In a narrow sense, it can define the countries that are members of the Organization of Turkic States, and in a broad sense, it describes a wide area within the Turkic World, which we can define as Kosovo, Montenegro, Hungary in the west, Mongolia or China in the east, and includes Türkiye, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. It can refer to all independent Turkic states, semi-autonomous regions within Russia, and the territories of Turkic peoples living all over the world. For more information: (Bay et al. 58).

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