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PAGES: 797-817

ORIGINAL PDF URL: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/2970283>

# The Place and Importance of Kyrgyzstan in Turkish Foreign Policy from a Constructivist Perspective

Medihanur ARGALI<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan are two Turkic states with close historical, linguistic and cultural ties. In addition, although both states are secular, their people mostly belong to the same religion, the religion of Islam. Türkiye sees Kyrgyzstan as its Atayurt (fatherland) and in this context, it is the first state to recognize the independence of Kyrgyzstan in 1991. Of course, bilateral relations are too complicated to be explained by ancestry, language, or religion alone. Because the two countries have been out of contact with each other for many years. The first contact was made with the collapse of the USSR. Since 1991, the two states have developed and continue to develop various political, economic, military and cultural relations. This study will present a holistic analysis by examining the relations of the two states from a constructivist perspective, that is, in an identity sense. The main purpose of the study is to identify the current state of bilateral relations and offer solutions on how to further develop them. In the study, current data were examined by a literature review conducted in Turkish, English and Kyrgyz. The current data in question were analyzed by combining them with a constructivist perspective.

*Key Words:* Turkish Foreign Policy, Türkiye, Kyrgyzstan, Constructivist Theory, Central Asia

## İnşacı Perspektiften Türk Dış Politikası'nda Kırgızistan'ın Yeri ve Önemi

### Öz

Türkiye ve Kırgızistan tarihsel, dilsel ve kültürel olarak sıkı bağları bulunan iki Türk devletidir. Ayrıca her iki devlet laik yapıda bulunmakla birlikte halkları çoğunlukla aynı dine, İslamiyet dinine mensuptur. Türkiye, Kırgızistan'ı Atayurt olarak görmekte ve bu bağlamda 1991 yılında Kırgızistan'ın bağımsızlığını tanıyan ilk devlet olma özelliği göstermektedir. Tabii ki ikili ilişkiler yalnızca soy, dil, din bağıyla açıklanamayacak kadar komplikedir. Zira iki ülke birbiriyle uzun yıllar temassız kalmışlardır. İlk temas SSCB'nin yıkılmasıyla gerçekleşmiştir. 1991 yılından günümüze kadar iki devlet çeşitli siyasi, ekonomik, askeri ve kültürel ilişkiler geliştirmiş ve geliştirmeye devam etmektedir. Bu çalışma, iki devletin ilişkilerini inşacı perspektife göre yani kimliksel anlamda inceleyerek ortaya bütüncül bir analiz koyacaktır. Çalışmanın esas amacı ikili ilişkilerin mevcut durumunu tespit ederek nasıl daha da geliştirileceğine dair çözümler sunmaktır. Çalışmada Türkçe, İngilizce ve Kırgızca literatür taraması yapılarak güncel veriler incelenmiştir. Söz konusu güncel veriler, inşacı perspektifle birleştirilerek analiz edilmiştir.

*Anahtar Kelimeler:* Türk Dış Politikası, Türkiye, Kırgızistan, İnşacı Teori, Orta Asya


### Atıf İçin / Please Cite As:

Argalı, M. (2023). The place and importance of Kyrgyzstan in Turkish Foreign policy from a constructivist perspective. *Manas Sosyal Arařtırmalar Dergisi*, 12(2), 797-817. doi:10.33206/mjss.1255440

**Geliř Tarihi / Received Date:** 23.02.2023

**Kabul Tarihi / Accepted Date:** 22.03.2023

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## Introduction

*In this changeable world, according to the sacred laws,  
everything goes and dies, there is only one thing that does  
not die, and that is culture.*

*Cengiz Aytmatov*

In the ever-changing international structure and inter-state relations, it is essential that the Turkic states in different geographies develop their relations within the framework of common cultural values, create common values and act together in foreign policy in this context. This is because a common culture can lead to the production of a common foreign policy, which can be in the interest of states both together and separately. The strength based on this cultural partnership will form the basis of the relations between Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan and will lead them to take bilateral relations to a higher level. The fact that the God Mountains, which are considered sacred by the Turks, are located within the territory of Kyrgyzstan increases the importance of the country in terms of Turkish history. In this context, Kyrgyzstan is recognised as one of the Atayurt (fatherland) of the Turks. Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that there is an identity bond between Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan.

In addition to the identity bond, the geography of Turkestan, including Kyrgyzstan, covers an extremely critical area (Kafkasyalı, 2012, p. 7). This is because the region has both natural resources and strategic importance. The value of the region has attracted the attention of great powers not only today but also in history. For example, Russia and Britain, the two great empires of the 19th century, engaged in a struggle called the "Great Game" in the region. Tsarist Russia was the winner of this struggle and Turkestan came under Russian rule (Afridi, 2020, p. 232). During this period, the Ottoman Empire had no military power to prevent the Russian occupation of Turkestan. The Ottoman Empire even requested help from Britain to protect its own territory (Kuru, 1999, p. 137). On the other hand, it should be noted that the Ottomans never interfered in the internal affairs of Turkestan even before the invasion of Turkestan (Kuru, 1999, p. 137). In such an international atmosphere, Turks and Kyrgyz remained separated from each other for many years.

The sovereignty of the region passed to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) established following the collapse of Tsarist Russia. Until 1924, the name of the region was "Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic". However, Russians divided the region into parts against a possible unification of Turkestan Turks (Tajibayev, 2012, p. 191). In this context, today's Kyrgyzstan was renamed Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Region in 1924. In 1936, Kyrgyzstan became the Soviet Socialist Republic of Kyrgyzstan in 1936 as one of the 15 Republics forming the USSR (Kaseinov, 2017, p. 226). Before this date, "Muslim" and "Turkestanite" were used as identities in Turkestan and ethnic identities did not exist (Coldoşov, 2017, p. 245). The USSR took various actions to make them forget these identities. For example, only in the 1938 repression, forty thousand Kyrgyz intellectuals were arrested (Dilek, 2019, p. 31). Again, the USSR ensured the use of the Cyrillic alphabet both to prevent the Turkestan peoples from understanding among themselves and to prevent a possible contact with Türkiye (Balci, Alimbekoy, & Boobekova, 2017, p. 537).

As can be seen, Turks and Kyrgyz have been separated from each other for many centuries. The first contact between Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan took place only after the dissolution of the USSR in 1991. The identity definitions of Kyrgyzstan, which started nation-building with the collapse of the Soviet Union, are quite similar to those of Türkiye (Bacık, 1999, p. 64):

- Both countries are of Turkic origin.
- Turkish is the common language, although with some differences.
- The religious belief of the people of both countries is largely Islam.
- Both states are secular.

In addition to all these common features, the cultures of these two societies are similar. In the context of identity, Türkiye attaches great importance to its relations with Kyrgyzstan, which it regards as its ancestral homeland. So much so that the Republic of Türkiye was the first state to recognise Kyrgyzstan after its independence. As it will be analysed later on, Türkiye has provided various assistance to Kyrgyzstan in diplomatic, economic, military and cultural fields. As one of the basic assumptions of the

study, the common identity element is adopted as the reason for Türkiye's aid and the rapprochement of the two states in various fields. In this context, the study will be analysed within the scope of constructivist theory.

Unlike mainstream theories such as realism and liberalism, one of the important contributions of the constructivist theory, which prioritises norms and values rather than interests, is the value given to the concept of identity. Alexander Wendt, who introduced the constructivist approach in the international relations literature, believes that a state first determines its own identity and determines its goals, interests and relations with other states within the scope of this identity (Wendt, 1994, p. 51). In other words, according to Wendt, identity directly affects foreign policy preferences (Wendt, 1994, p. 71).

In constructivist theory, in this context, it is an important issue that how states define "us". Since its foundation, the Republic of Türkiye has based its identity on three identities. These are Turkishness, Muslimness and Westernness (Şahin & Argalı, 2022, p. 31). From time to time, one of these three identities may override the others. For example, during the Cold War, Westernisation remained at the forefront and Turkish foreign policy was developed within the framework of this identity. With the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Türkiye started to emphasise its Turkic identity in Central Asia and the Caucasus and started to work to develop various relations with the related communities in the region.

In light of this information, one of the arguments of the study is that the long historical past, cultural, linguistic and religious ties between the two cognate countries have led the two states to develop various political, economic, military and cultural relations. In this context, the aim of this study is to provide a multidimensional explanation of the relations of the two states from an identity perspective, that is, with the constructivist theory. Although political, economic and military relations are important, the study will analyse cultural relations in depth. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, according to the constructivist theory, the most important element of identity is culture. The second is that the most intensive relations between the two states are indeed in the cultural field. The strength of cultural values will carry the relations between the two countries to a higher level. If cultural unity is established sufficiently, this will also affect political, economic and military relations.

The study is important as it presents a holistic approach by analysing the relations between Kyrgyzstan and Türkiye in detail in various aspects. In addition, the unique value of the study lies in the fact that the bilateral relations are analysed in the context of identity, that is, the relations are based on the constructivist theory. In the first part of the study, the theoretical framework of constructionist theory will be explained. In the second part, Türkiye - Kyrgyzstan relations will be presented within the scope of the constructionist theory. Relations between Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan will be analysed in terms of "political/diplomatic", "economic", "military/security" and "cultural" dimensions.

### **Constructivist theory in the context of the theoretical framework**

The developments in the international conjuncture in the 1990s necessitated a review of mainstream international relations theories. This is because these theories were insufficient to explain both the Soviet dissolution and the developments that followed. The capitalist world and the communist world became intertwined, non-state actors gained power in the international system with the effect of globalisation, and the traditional enemy of the West disappeared (Kurnaz, 2016, p. 277). The dissolution of the USSR and Yugoslavia could not be foreseen, the international system could not be defined afterwards, and the terrorist attacks of 11 September could not be predicted and prevented, showing that the international system is much more complex than before. In this situation, theories different from mainstream theories were needed to understand and make sense of international relations (Phillips, 2007, p. 72).

It is in such an atmosphere that constructivist theory began to gain popularity (Phillips, 2007, p. 72). Nicholas Onuf first introduced the constructivist theory to the discipline of international relations in 1989. According to Onuf, our identity plays a dominant role in social relations. Social relations affect our identity and our identity affects our social relations (Onuf, 2012, p. 32). Although Onuf was the first to define the theory in international relations literature, the real popularity of the theory was realised with Alexander Wendt. Wendt, like Onuf, argues that the individual and society mutually construct each other and that this construction produces a structure (Wendt, 1999, p. 90).

The unique value of the constructivist theory and its most important difference from the mainstream theories is its focus on the identities and interests of states. However, both realists and liberals believe that

the identities and interests of states are given, despite the many differences between them (Kurnaz, 2016, p. 277). Moreover, constructivist theory sees the world as a never-ending process of social construction. However, mainstream theories do not emphasise change. According to them, the existing structure is also given. Some realists and liberals even assume the opposite. While the constructivist approach believes that the identities and preferences of actors design and change the structure, mainstream theories argue that the structure affects the behaviour of actors (Kurnaz, 2016, p. 278).

As can be seen, identity is one of the most important concepts that the constructivist approach adds to the discipline of international relations. The constructivist perspective investigates the impact of identity on foreign policy. Accordingly, states determine one or more identities for themselves. Then, they identify interests in line with these identities. Finally, they form foreign policy outcomes by determining behaviour in accordance with these interests. Naturally, constructivists oppose the realists' argument that national interests determine all foreign policy (Wendt, 1999, p. 116). Wendt emphasised that the most important element of identity is the identification of the enemy, citing the need for the Ottoman Empire to explain Europe (Wendt, 1999, p. 120).

Another point on which the constructivists are in consensus is that intellectual factors are more valuable than material structures based on power. Here, intellectual factors include identity, ideology, religion, culture, etc., while material structures include economic power, population, armed forces, technology, etc. Here again, the constructivist perspective differs from mainstream theories. Because classical theories put the elements of material power before normative values (Kurnaz, 2016, p. 282). On the other hand, it should be noted that the constructivist theory does not reject the elements of material power. It only adds intellectual power elements to the material power elements while defining the system. For example, social and cultural relations between two states are as important as political, economic and military relations (Adilbekova, 2022, p. 15).

States define friendly and enemy states through the identities they form and build their alliances based on these identities (J.A. Fresque-Baxter & D. Armitage, 2012, p. 253). In this context, Türkiye, in addition to being Turk and Muslim, has defined its identity as Western and has spent its foreign policy until the 2000s establishing close relations with the West (Karpas, 1975, p. 116). The question to be asked here is whether Türkiye is a Western state. Or to what extent does the West see Türkiye as Western in its definitions? In addition to its Western identity, with the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, Türkiye brought its "Turkishness" identity to the forefront in Central Asia and the Caucasus. In other words, in Central Asia, including Kyrgyzstan, Türkiye has started to formulate a foreign policy based on the Turk identity (Şahin & Argalı, 2022, p. 33).

As can be seen, according to the constructivist perspective, the important factor in the relations that states establish with other states is identity and the perception of interest arising from identity. A state that will put itself at the centre of the world and consider itself superior will naturally tend to see all other states as enemies, and will therefore pursue foreign policies that will focus on military power (Haas, 2004, p. 570). On the other hand, states that will impose more peaceful missions on themselves will use more cultural instruments. Here, how the state sees itself and how it perceives other states is important (Haas, 2004, p. 570). For example, as will be analysed in detail below, Türkiye has built its deepest relations with Kyrgyzstan, which it perceives as a brother for reasons such as being of the same descent, having the same culture, speaking the same language and believing in the same religion, in the cultural context, and cultural relations have led to rapprochement in other areas as well.

As it can be understood, while analysing foreign policy from a constructivist perspective, cultural relations will be emphasised more. This is because the constructivist theory mostly emphasises intellectual/spiritual elements. In this context, it explains the closeness of states with each other or their opposition to each other (Smith, 2001, p. 39). On the other hand, it does not deny the material elements of power. In this context, the political, economic and military dimensions of the relations between Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan will be discussed in this study and a comprehensive analysis will be made.

### **Türkiye's Kyrgyzstan Policies in the Context of Constructivist Theory**

As mentioned before, although the constructivist theory does not reject the elements of material power, it mainly emphasises the elements of intellectual power. In this context, it would be useful to briefly examine Türkiye's identity and values, and in this context, Türkiye's General Central Asia policies before addressing Türkiye's Kyrgyzstan policies in the context of constructivist theory.



First of all, one of the most important issues to be underlined is that the Republic of Türkiye is an imperial successor. In other words, Türkiye has a strong state tradition. With the strength drawn from this background, a new identity was created in 1923 (Çalış & Metkin, 2021, p. 73). The new identity created basically has three components: Turkishness, Westernness and Muslimness (Şahin & Argalı, 2022, p. 31). For many years, in Turkish foreign policy, foreign policies have been implemented by emphasising the Westernisation element of these identities. Undoubtedly, the perceived threat from the USSR played a significant role in the emergence of this situation. In 1991, with the dissolution of the USSR, Türkiye started to emphasise its "Turk" ethnic identity and tried to engage in Central Asia with the "Adriatic to the Great Wall of China" discourse. While shaping its Central Asia policies in this period, Türkiye both prioritised ethnic identity and acted on real political material grounds (Çalış & Metkin, 2021, p. 75).

In light of this information, it will be possible to divide the three identities reflected in Turkish foreign policy into four different periods in the context of analysing Türkiye's Central Asia Policies. The first period is Türkiye's lack of a Central Asia policy between 1923-1991 due to its Western identity and the perceived threat from the USSR. The second period is the period of the first construction of regional policies with the excitement and Turk identity that awakened with the dissolution of the USSR. The third period is the period between 2002 and 2010 when, with the AK Party government in power, the Muslim identity came to the fore in Türkiye, relations with Central Asia were put on the back burner and Türkiye turned more towards relations with the Middle East (Çalış & Metkin, 2021, pp. 82-83). Finally, in 2010, with the deadlock in the Middle East, Türkiye turned towards Central Asia again with its Turk identity (Şahin & Argalı, 2022, p. 33).

Türkiye-Kyrgyzstan relations were established in 1991 in the light of ethnic, historical and cultural ties with Türkiye's first orientation towards Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan has always had a special significance for Türkiye, as the Kyrgyz lands are known as Atayurt in Türkiye. One of the assumptions defended in the study is that Türkiye has initiated its Kyrgyzstan policies mostly through cultures, values and identity. It should also be taken into account that the people of both states share the same religion. In other words, in addition to ethnicity and culture, there is also a sharing of religious values. In this context, the Republic of Türkiye was the first state to recognise the Republic of Kyrgyzstan, which declared its independence on 31 August 1991. On 29 January 1992, the two sister republics established diplomatic relations and opened mutual embassies in the same year. These two republics, whose historical roots date back to prehistoric times, continued to maintain their relations as two nation-states as of 1992 (Yaldız & Yaldız, 2020, p. 81). It should also be noted that Türkiye's relations with Kyrgyzstan have progressed on a much more stable level compared to other Central Asian states (Yaldız & Yaldız, 2020, p. 81).

"Political/Diplomatic", "Economic", "Military/Security" and "Cultural" relations of Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan will be analysed respectively. The importance of common values and identity in these relations will be revealed.

### **Political/Diplomatic Relations**

Türkiye was the first country to recognise the independence of Kyrgyzstan. The Presidents Turgut Ozal and Askar Akayev signed the agreement on "Friendship and Cooperation between Kyrgyzstan and Türkiye" (Andican, 2013, p. 3). Within the first two years of independence, the two sister republics signed 29 protocols and agreements, which led to the rapid start of the relationship (Yaldız & Yaldız, 2020, p. 32). In 1997, the "Treaty of Eternal Friendship and Cooperation" was signed and in 1999, the declaration "Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan: Together into the 21st Century" was presented (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

However, in the opposite direction of all these developments, a development that would negatively affect bilateral relations also took place. A Kyrgyz delegation visited Armenia in 1997 and recognised the 1915 events as genocide by laying a wreath at the (so-called) Armenian Genocide Monument (Hovhannisyanyan, 2015, p. 148). This, of course, disturbed both Türkiye and Azerbaijan, which are sensitive to the issue. Although the issue did not cause a major crisis, it led to a deterioration in relations between the two countries (Hovhannisyanyan, 2015).

In the 2000s, due to the international conjuncture and the neo-Ottoman and Muslim values that started to dominate Turkish foreign policy with the AK Party government, Central Asia in general and Kyrgyzstan, in particular, remained in the background for Türkiye. This situation started to change in the 2010s. For example, after the revolution in Kyrgyzstan in 2010, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was the first

president to visit the country in February 2011. This visit broke the ice between the two states and marked the beginning of a serious acceleration in relations (Chotaev, 2017, p. 360). Immediately after the visit, the foundation of today's strategic cooperation was laid with the "Joint Statement on the Establishment of the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council" (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020). Mutual high-level visits between 2012-2013 also ensured the continuation of this foundation (Çotaev, 2017, p. 361).

Another important issue in the developing political/diplomatic relations of the two states is the international or regional organisations that they have joined or even established together.

**Table 1.** *Joint Integration Activities of Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan*

Name of the Foundation	Member Countries	Date of Foundation
TURKSOY	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan	1993
TURKPA	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Türkiye	2008
Turkic Council /Organization of Turkic States	-Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Türkiye founding members -Full Membership of Uzbekistan in 2019 -Hungary, Turkmenistan and TRNC observer members	1992 – Summits of Heads of Turkic – Speaking States 2009 – Turkic Council 2020 – Organization of Turkic States
Turkic Business Council	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Türkiye	2011
Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Türkiye	2012
International Organisation of the Turkic Academy	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Türkiye	2012
Union of Turkic Universities	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Türkiye	2013

The table was created by the author with the data taken from the official website of the Organisation of Turkic States.

As can be seen, relations between Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan have been realised at two levels:

- 1- Bilateral relations between Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan
- 2- Türkiye's integration relations with the Turkic World

Due to Kyrgyzstan's full and unproblematic participation in the summits and institutions/organisations for the Turkic World initiated by Türkiye, Türkiye has provided various types of support to Kyrgyzstan. For example, by creating a link between Kyrgyzstan and important international organisations such as the UN, OSCE and NATO, Türkiye ensured Bishkek's participation in their cooperation (Andican, 2013, p. 3).

In addition to all these, there was another development that negatively affected bilateral relations. On 15 July 2016, the Fetullahist Terrorist Organisation attempted a treacherous military coup in Türkiye. The then Kyrgyz President of Kyrgyzstan Almazbek Atambayev's statements such as "Brother Tayyip" and "I could not sleep the night Erdogan was coming" (Haber7, 2011) about Erdogan until 15 July suddenly changed and he started saying "We are a sovereign country and we should decide for ourselves what is necessary for us or not" (Türkiye Gazetesi, 2016) upon Türkiye's demand for the elimination of FETO. This naturally caused short-term tension in the relations between the two states. However, relations were normalised again in 2017 when Sooronbay Jeenbekov, who was elected instead of Atambayev, came to power (Karakuzu, 2020, p. 79).

In 2018, during Erdoğan's visit to Kyrgyzstan, a meeting of the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council was held between the two states. Relations gained further momentum with the Organisation of Turkic States established in 2020. The last president of Kyrgyzstan, Sadyr Japarov, pays particular attention to relations with Türkiye (Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic in Ankara, 2022).

As a result, Türkiye has provided full support to Kyrgyzstan in the political, economic, military and security fields, as it sees the same closeness in the diplomatic context. It is expected that the relations will develop and progress in the following period.

## Economic Relations

Kyrgyzstan is one of the so-called "transition economies" that tried to transition from a state-centred economy to a free market economy after the dissolution of the USSR. (Canbař, 1999, p. 305) The Bishkek administration naturally faced various economic problems during the transition to a free market economy. In Kyrgyzstan, which lacked basic infrastructure, the gross national product fell by half in the first years of independence. Although the state aimed to give up its control over the economy, the lack of financial means for privatisation prevented this (Çetin & Sertkaya, 2011, p. 61).

Türkiye has extended a loan of 1.2 billion dollars through Eximbank not only to Kyrgyzstan but also to all Central Asian countries. In addition, Türkiye has tried to go head to head with the big states despite all its internal problems, taking into account language, religion, history and cultural affinities. In this context, both large conglomerates and SMEs started to trade and invest in Central Asia with state support (Kuru, 1999, p. 144).

Identity and cultural ties between Kyrgyzstan and Türkiye have also contributed to the development of economic relations between the two countries. Türkiye has cooperated with Kyrgyzstan with its technical knowledge and industrialisation experiences. In this context, the first protocol on Economic and Commercial Cooperation was signed in Ankara in 1991 (Kuru, 1999, p. 144). Although the 1990s were years of both financial problems and terrorism for Türkiye, various economic aids were provided to the sister state Kyrgyzstan (Bostancı, 2016, p. 195).

The Agreements and Protocols Establishing the Trade Infrastructure between Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan are listed as follows: (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Trade, 2020)

- 1997 Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation
- 1998 Agreement on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Customs Matters
- 1999 Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation
- 2018 Agreement on Mutual Promotion and Protection of Investments
- 2018 Dated Memorandum of Understanding on the Establishment of a Joint Customs Council between the Government of the Republic of Türkiye and the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic
- 9th Term Protocol of the Joint Economic Commission dated 2019

As can be seen from the dates, there was a certain rupture in economic relations from the 2000s to the 2010s. However, this does not mean that relations have never continued. For example, despite the coups and the unstable environment in Kyrgyzstan in 2005 and 2010, Türkiye did not stop investing in Atayurt (its fatherland). In 2010, then-Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu visited Kyrgyzstan and conveyed Türkiye's support projects. In 2011, a protocol on Joint Kyrgyz-Turkish Industrial Zones was signed (Andican, 2013, p. 4).

It should be noted that Türkiye has a deficiency in its economic relations with Kyrgyzstan. Turkish capitals in Kyrgyzstan are generally in the service sector. The service sector does not require much investment. Türkiye is not actively involved in areas such as industry. Construction, which is a serious sector that requires investment, is excluded from this. Because Türkiye has serious investments in the construction sector (R. Abdiyeva, C. Ganiyev, & D. Baygonuşova, 2017, p. 174). Another important sector is transport. Especially in the context of the Belt and Road Project initiated by China, relations between the two countries are developing seriously. Kyrgyzstan is the first stop on the road connecting China to Europe, while Türkiye is the last stop.



**Table 2.** *Import and Export Data from Kyrgyzstan to Türkiye between 1994 and 2000*

Million Dollars	Export	Import
1994	3.94	15.042
1995	3.21	38.33
1996	5.25	47.59
1997	7.96	43.74
1998	7.37	37.38
1999	4.60	23.06
2000	7.17	26.76

**Source:** “Торговля со странами мира - Статистика Кыргызстана”, “Trade with the countries of the world - Statistics of Kyrgyzstan -accessed on 11 January 2023, <http://www.stat.kg/ru/news/torgovlya-so-stranami-mira/>

Economic data on bilateral relations are shown above. As can be seen, there is a gradual upward trend in the figures until 1998. In 1997, due to reasons such as Kyrgyzstan's declaration of the so-called Armenian Genocide, increased activities of Russia and China in the region, and developments in Türkiye's domestic politics, a decline started to take place. As mentioned above, the 2000s were again stagnant in bilateral relations.

**Table 3.** *Import - Export Data from Kyrgyzstan to Türkiye between 2010-2016*

Million Dollars	Export	Import
2010	37.20	84.69
2011	54.49	117.08
2012	50.17	175.61
2013	85.65	204.730
2014	85.99	307.96
2015	85.20	166,29
2016	90.00	191,10

**Source:** “Торговля со странами мира - Статистика Кыргызстана” (“Trade with the countries of the world - Statistics of Kyrgyzstan”)

After 2010, Türkiye started to focus on Central Asia again and, as mentioned before, various institutions were established for the region. This situation was naturally reflected in economic relations. As can be seen, economic relations between 2010 and 2014 showed a continuous improvement. However, some important developments in bilateral relations in 2015-2016 also affected economic relations and the figures dropped suddenly. As mentioned above, FETO's coup attempt in Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan's stance in this context were the most important events.

**Table 4.** *Import - Export Data from Kyrgyzstan to Türkiye for 2017-2021*

Million Dollars	Export	Import
2017	131.20	224.92
2018	104.27	290.23
2019	89.85	222.84
2020	74.67	194.880
2021	90.64	321.60

**Source:** “Торговля со странами мира - Статистика Кыргызстана” (“Trade with the countries of the world - Statistics of Kyrgyzstan”)

As of 2017, a steady increase in bilateral economic data is observed again. The 2020 Covid-19 pandemic negatively affected Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan, as it did the whole world. However, when we look at the data in 2021, it seems that there is a big leap at an unprecedented rate. In this case, it is an indication that the relations between the two states are gradually moving to a more advanced level.

During Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Çavuşoğlu's visit to Kyrgyzstan in 2021, he emphasised that Turkish investments in Kyrgyzstan exceeded \$1 billion (MFA, 2021). In March 2022, Minister of Economy and Trade of Kyrgyzstan Daniyar Amangeldiev and Chairman of the Council of Elders of the Organisation of Turkic States Binali Yıldırım met within the framework of the Organisation of Turkic States and discussed the establishment of the Investment Fund of the Organisation of Turkic States and the Kyrgyz-Turkish Development Fund (Kabar, 2022).

## Military/Security Relations

The first military/security agreement between the two brotherly countries was the "Agreement on Cooperation in Military Education between the Governments of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Türkiye" signed in 1993 (MFA, 2020). In the context of regional states, including Kyrgyzstan, solving their security problems with Russia within the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, Türkiye's military relations with these states have not developed as much as in other areas. However, this does not mean that there are no relations at all. For example, a military grant agreement was signed between the two states on 29 October 1999. In December of the same year, a logistics implementation protocol was signed between the two states (Hürriyet, 2022). However, as mentioned above, since the relations have stagnated since the 2000s, these agreements have not received much attention.

During the rapprochement period from 2010 to the present, Türkiye has been regularly providing the necessary support to the Kyrgyz Armed Forces every year. For example, in 2013, the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) delivered the following to the Kyrgyz Armed Forces (Dünya, 2013):

- 1 Land Rover personnel cargo transport vehicle
- 3 Land Rover ambulance vehicles
- 20 field phones produced by ASELSAN
- 35 hand-held radios
- 4 long distance fixed centre radios
- 21 petticoats with night vision system
- 10 frequency hopping back radios
- 1 mine detection system

Following the delivery ceremony, Kyrgyzstan stated that the vehicles they received from Türkiye were in compliance with the United Nations standards and thanked Türkiye (Dünya, 2013). After this date, there were no serious agreements, protocols or cooperation until 2018 due to the FETO factor in bilateral relations. In 2018, 12 cooperation agreements were signed between the two states (T.C. CSGB, 2018) and the tension caused by FETO eased to some extent.

In 2019, the Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan to Ankara Kubanchbek Ömüraliyev (currently serving as Secretary General of the Organisation of Turkic States) and Minister of National Defence of the Republic of Türkiye Hulusi Akar held a meeting. After thanking Akar and Türkiye for their assistance, Ömüraliyev stated that Türkiye should establish a Military Institute for the Kyrgyz Armed Forces. In addition, he requested to increase the number of Kyrgyz military students in Türkiye (Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic in Ankara, 2019).

In 2020, the two states came to the table again. The parties agreed to enhance cooperation in the field of military training, defence industry and security. During this meeting, the parties agreed on a "joint fight against terrorism and extremism" and "combating threats to the national security issues of the parties". Moreover, Türkiye presented a comprehensive report on FETO to the Kyrgyz side and agreed to cooperate with the Kyrgyz government on this issue (Global Savunma, 2020).

Similarly, in 2021, Minister of Industry and Technology Mustafa Varank and Minister of Energy and Industry Doskul Bekmurzaev signed an agreement to develop relations in the field of industry and technology, after which it was decided to establish an Organised Industrial Zone in Kyrgyzstan (TRT News, 2021).

In 2022, Hulusi Akar, Minister of National Defence of the Republic of Türkiye, and Major General Baktibek Bekbolotov, Minister of Defence of Kyrgyzstan, met in Ankara. After their meeting, Akar and Bekbolotov signed the "Road Map for Activities Related to Military and Military-Technical Cooperation between Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan" (TRT News, 2021). In his speech after the meeting, Akar referred to the basic brotherhood ties between Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan, common culture and heritage and said the following (savunmasanayiidergilik, 2022):

*"The stability and security of Kyrgyzstan is very important both for us and for the region. Our relations are developing rapidly, comprehensively and steadily on the basis of brotherhood. In addition to the previous ones, we have concretised the work on defence and security issues within the framework of the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council put forward by our President and Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov last June by signing the road map today. We have the opportunity to make our bilateral and military relations more comprehensive and develop them by sharing the knowledge and experience of the armed forces of Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan. We are ready to share with our brothers whatever we can do in technical and consultancy matters."*

Hulusi Akar also mentioned the joint fight against FETO in his speech. He expressed his hope that the necessary measures would also be taken by Kyrgyzstan (savunmasanayiidergilik, 2022).

Another important issue in the field of military/security in bilateral relations is UAVs and UCAVs. In the region, UCAVs were used for the first time in the conflict between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. According to Tajik officials, Kyrgyzstan used Turkish-made TB2 Bayraktars. The State Committee for National Security of Kyrgyzstan inaugurated a base for Bayraktar TB2 UCAVs of the Border Guard Service. The UCAVs were purchased by Kyrgyzstan from Türkiye in 2021 (AA, 2022). This, of course, reflected positively on Kyrgyzstan's relations with Türkiye, which gained superiority in striking against Tajikistan. The fact that Bayraktar was sold to Kyrgyzstan instead of Tajikistan is in line with the definition of identity reflected in Türkiye's foreign policy, i.e. constructivist theory.

In September 2022, in the resumed war between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan accused Türkiye of selling the same weapons to Tajikistan. In response, Kyrgyzstan's new Foreign Minister Jeenbek Kulubayev made the following statements (defencemanayist, 2022):

*"Yes, that's right. We asked a question to the embassy, and we can confirm it. We told the Turkish side to be careful about this because the problems between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have not been resolved. But Türkiye says that this is 'business'. They say that military-technical co-operation will continue."*

Although this situation caused Kyrgyzstan's reaction, it was later revealed that these allegations were not true. Tajikistan purchased its existing UCAVs from Iran, not Türkiye. Thereupon, the Kyrgyz State Committee for National Security made the following statement (Kula, 2022)

*"Against the source of information available in the media about the purchase of Turkish Bayraktar UAVs by the Tajik side, we inform you that, according to available reliable information, the Tajik side has not signed contracts with Baykar, the manufacturer of Bayraktar UAVs, and other Turkish UAV manufacturers. In this regard, information about the purchase of Turkish Bayraktar UAVs by the Tajik side is not confirmed."*

In fact, Türkiye's decision to sell UAVs/SUAVs only to Kyrgyzstan instead of Tajikistan, causing Tajikistan's rapprochement with Iran, was criticised by many parties. However, Türkiye nevertheless stood behind the brotherly country. Here, it would be useful to underline the importance of identity in foreign policy once again. As can be seen, Türkiye's military/security-related aid and bilateral cooperation with Kyrgyzstan have developed to a certain level and continue to develop. However, if we make a discourse analysis from the above information, for the Turkish side, the development of the security dimension of bilateral relations seems to depend on Kyrgyzstan's attitude towards FETO. If the Kyrgyz side acts in line with Türkiye's sensitivities on this issue, it can receive much more serious assistance from the Turkish side.

## Cultural Relations

Cultural relations are perhaps the most important issue in analysing the relations between Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan in the context of identity perspective. Because culture is one of the most important components of identity. Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan have a common ancestry as well as cultural similarities. However, of course, there are some differences between the two brotherly peoples who have not been in contact with each other for many years. In order to bridge these differences, Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan have established various cultural relations.

Cultural relations between states are important in many aspects. For instance, since ancient times, states have been using hard power elements based on military and economic methods to achieve their political goals. Although the hard power elements result in a quick return, they undermine the prestige of states in addition to the loss of life and property. For this reason, states avoid using hard power elements as much as possible. Soft power, based on cultures, values and identities, provides prestige to states in contrast to hard power (Nye, 2005, p. 20). The application area of soft power is public diplomacy. There

are numerous definitions of public diplomacy (Fitzpatrick, 2010, p. 89). What is agreed upon is the tools used by states in this context, such as language, education, tourism and religion.

Türkiye's public diplomacy started institutionally with the establishment of the Public Diplomacy Coordination Office in 2010 (Yazar, 2020). However, its historical background is older. With the dissolution of the USSR, Türkiye established the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) in 1992 to improve its relations with Central Asia and the Caucasus (Ekşi, 2017, p. 11). Institutional Turkish public diplomacy is based on TIKA. Conversely, the logic of public diplomacy in the Turkic World is even older than this. "Unity in language, unity in ideas, unity in work", which was mentioned a century ago by İsmail Gaspıralı, a thinker who is very closely related to both Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan, is the basis of public diplomacy in the Turkic World. In this context, Gaspıralı should be recognised as the ancestor of public diplomacy in the entire Turkic World (Ekşi, 2017).

Türkiye's public diplomacy towards the Turkic World in general and Kyrgyzstan, in particular, can be categorised under four headings: communication, institutional structure and education, and religion.

**Table 5.** *Türkiye's Cultural Activities in the Turkic World*

Educational /Linguistic Tools of Türkiye	Corporate Tools of Türkiye	Communication Tools of Türkiye	Religion Tools of Türkiye
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Kyrgyzstan-Türkiye Manas University</li> <li>•Big Student Project/Türkiye Scholarships</li> <li>•TTOMER</li> <li>•Kindergartens, Primary Schools, Secondary Schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•TURKPA</li> <li>•TURKSOY</li> <li>•Yunus Emre Institue</li> <li>•TIKA</li> <li>•YTB</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Media Forum/Platform of Turkic-speaking Countries</li> <li>•BYEGM/Dirctorate of Communications</li> <li>•TRT/TRT Avaz</li> <li>•Turkish TV Series</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Faculties of Theology</li> <li>•Relegiouse High Schools / Colleges of Theology</li> <li>•Mosques and mausoleums</li> </ul>

Note: The table was created by the author.

Cooperation in the field of education, which is the most basic tool in cultural relations between the two states, started with a decree signed between Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan on 12 July 1991. The most important aspect of the decree is the creation of Turkish course contents with the work of teachers and academics from Türkiye in Kyrgyzstan (Ağgün, 2017, pp. 429-430). In addition, Türkiye initiated the Great Student Project and invited students from Kyrgyzstan to universities in Türkiye with various scholarships (Tongut & Yavuz, 2014, p. 135). Kyrgyz students studying in Türkiye will get to know Türkiye and Turks and become a bridge between the two countries. For example, in 2020, Kyrgyz students who came with Türkiye Scholarships introduced their country by making local dishes of Kyrgyzstan in Ankara. (TRT News, 2020) This is the best example of this identity closeness and cultural interaction.

Another important factor in the field of education is Kyrgyzstan Türkiye Manas University. The university is one of the best universities in Kyrgyzstan (Chotaev, 2017, p. 335). Manas University became operational in 1995 as a result of the "Agreement between the Republic of Türkiye and the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic on the Establishment of Kyrgyzstan-Türkiye Manas University in the Capital City of Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek", and the founding agreement of the university was signed during the visit of Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev to Türkiye in 1997 (Ağgün, 2017, p. 431). The university is also an important bridge between the two countries. In addition, ORASAM (Centre for Central Asian Studies), established in 2011, and the Turkish Civilisation Research and Application Centre, established in 2002, are also very important. ORASAM conducts research on political science and international relations as well as social sciences in general. The Research and Application Centre for Turkish Civilisation, on the other hand, aims to create a common Turkish culture and introduce it to the world (Karakuzu, 2020, pp. 83-84).

Apart from these, Türkiye has also opened kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools and high schools in Kyrgyzstan. Yet, there is a situation that should be underlined here. Turkish schools should not be confused with FETO schools. Since the 2016 coup attempt in Türkiye, FETO schools, as well as Sebat educational institutions, have been closed in various countries. Ankara demands Kyrgyzstan

adopt a similar attitude. Thus, cultural cooperation between the countries has unfortunately acquired a political dimension. In 2020, instead of Sebat's schools, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Turkish Maarif Foundation signed agreements on the opening and operation of private educational institutions in the Kyrgyz Republic (ORASAM, 2021).

In 2021, Turkish Foreign Minister Cavusoğlu announced that the Turkish Maarif Foundation would open its first school in Central Asia in Kyrgyzstan. "The Maarif school will be the first Maarif Foundation school to be opened in Central Asia," Cavusoğlu said at a joint press conference with Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Ruslan Kazakbaev. This is an indication of the importance we attach to Kyrgyzstan" is an example of the constructivist approach in Türkiye's foreign policy. In response, Kazakbaev underlined that Kyrgyzstan and Türkiye are two brotherly countries (Daily Sabah, 2021).

Another important training centre established by Türkiye in Bishkek is TTOMER. TTOMER is particularly important in terms of Türkiye's language activities (Karakuzu, 2020, p. 83). The main purpose of TTOMER in Kyrgyzstan is to deepen cultural relations by teaching Turkish to the Kyrgyz people. Founded in 1996, TTOMER operates within Kyrgyzstan-Türkiye Manas University. In addition, Turkish language education is also provided in the cities of Osh, Jalalabad and Karakol. The words of Ahmet Gozubol, Director of TTOMER at the time, "Our aim is to strengthen the cultural ties between the two brotherly communities, to find out their commonalities, and to build bridges for the two brotherly countries to get to know each other" (AA, 2021) reveal Türkiye's perspective towards Kyrgyzstan.

Another element that improves the cultural relations of the two states is the Turkic Council, which was established in 2009 and has now turned into the Organisation of Turkic States. The main purpose of the organisation, of which Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan are founding members, is to ensure various integrations in the Turkic World. In other words, it is to ensure common communication. Thanks to this organisation, the Turkic States will be able to remain in solidarity with each other and take action around a common discourse. The most important proof of this was the common attitude of the Turkic States during the 2nd Karabakh War (Şahin & Argalı, 2022, p. 29).

Another important institution is the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic Speaking Countries (TURKPA) established in 2008. In 2009, the Statute and Secretariat of TURKPA were established in Azerbaijan and it was decided to have its headquarters in Baku. Its main objectives can be listed as follows (TURKPA, 2018):

- Development of political/diplomatic dialogue between Turkic States through diplomacy
- Ensuring closeness and cooperation between Turkic States by using structures such as history, culture and language
- Development of relations based on mutual benefit and equality among the Turkic States

In 2022, Kyrgyzstan hosted the TURKPA General Assembly Meeting. At the meeting, the discourse "We are Turks, not Turkic speakers" attracted attention (Mehmet Yahya Çiçekli, 2022).

Another relevant organisation is the International Organisation of Turkic Culture (TURKSOY) established in 1993. TURKSOY is the Turkic UNESCO. Its main aim is to develop brotherhood in the Turkic World. It is also very important in terms of introducing the hidden common values of the Turkic World to the world. At the same time, TURKSOY is the first institutional structure established for the integration of the Turkic World (TURKSOY, 2022).

One of the most successful institutions of Türkiye in Kyrgyzstan is TİKA. TİKA was established in 1992 with the dissolution of the Soviet Union for the region. TİKA, which is particularly active in Kyrgyzstan, has a presence in many fields from education to health. TİKA determines the deficiencies of Kyrgyzstan and focuses on their elimination (Ünal, 2016, p. 365). In this context, TİKA improves its activities in Kyrgyzstan from year to year. For instance, according to the activity report published by TİKA in 2005, TİKA carried out activities in Kyrgyzstan in four main areas: "social infrastructure", "cultural cooperation", "production" and "economic infrastructure" (Say & Joldoshev, 2022, p. 7). By 2020, these four areas were diversified as "administrative and civil infrastructure", "economic infrastructure and services", "health", "education", "production sectors" and "other" (Say & Joldoshev, 2022, p. 15).



According to TİKA's 2021 annual report, TİKA established the Turkic World Culture and Education Kitchen within the Department of Cookery and Culinary Arts within the Prof. Dr Turan Yazgan Institute of Social Sciences in Celalabad (TİKA Annual Report, 2022, p. 112). In addition, in 2021, TİKA opened various courses such as welding, furniture production and sewing-embroidery to support vocational training. A total of 1084 women participated in the courses opened for women in 2021 (TİKA Annual Report, 2022). In addition, the construction of a hospital with a capacity of 72 beds was completed in Bishkek. With the signing of the Bishkek Kyrgyz-Turkish Friendship Hospital, the hospital started to be jointly operated by the Turkish and Kyrgyz Ministries of Health (TİKA Annual Report, 2022, p. 118).

In the field of media and journalism, within the framework of the Reporter Training Programme (MEP), training was provided in areas such as war reporting, personal safety, the law of war and first aid. Separate local training was organised in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Following this local training, 20 press members from these countries were invited to Türkiye for advanced training at TRT (TİKA Annual Report, 2022, p. 130).

Finally, one of TİKA's most important aids to Kyrgyzstan in 2021 belongs to the field of art. Kyrgyz Film, the national film studio of Kyrgyzstan, requested assistance and equipment from TİKA in the field of storing important documents and transferring works to digital media. In this context, the broadcasting rights of the films to be digitised will be given to TRT together with MediaManas (TİKA Annual Report, 2022, p. 147). In addition, MediaManas has been broadcasting TRT Türkiye's Voice of Türkiye Radio broadcasts on Manas Radio and on its website since 2007 (MediaManas, 2021). One of the most important factors in cultural relations is TV series/films. Because the media will help peoples who are located in distant geographies and who may never come into contact with each other to establish traditional ties by crossing geographical boundaries (Giddens, 2005, p. 114). In this context, a study on the cultural impact of Turkish television programmes was conducted on a sample of the majority-educated - young population in Kyrgyzstan. The answers to the question "I follow Turkish TV series with interest" revealed that 51% of the participants watched Turkish TV series with interest (Bilis, Bilis, & Sydygalieva, 2018, p. 417). In the question "Turkish TV series realise cultural interaction", 49% of the participants said yes, 29% were undecided and 22% said no. In other words, while the rate of watching Turkish TV series in the country is more than half, the number of those who believe that these series turn into cultural interaction is less (Bilis, Bilis, & Sydygalieva, 2018, p. 418).

Apart from TİKA, one of Türkiye's institutional structures in the region is Yunus Emre Institute, which was established in 2009. The main purpose of the Institute is the teaching and dissemination of the Turkish language and Turkish culture. It should be noted that Yunus Emre Institute is not present in Kyrgyzstan. However, it carries out joint activities with other Turkish organisations in Kyrgyzstan. Within the scope of the Yunus Emre Institute Turcology Project, TİKA supports Turkish language education in Kyrgyzstan (AA, 2018). On the other hand, the absence of Yunus Emre Institute in Kyrgyzstan is a negative situation. As it is known, in addition to many European institutes, the Confucius Institute is also located in Kyrgyzstan.

Another important institution, the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) was established in 2010. The main mission of YTB is to develop economic and cultural relations between Türkiye and Turkish descendants and related communities living abroad. In this context, one of the important target groups of YTB is the Kyrgyz people. One of its main objectives is to improve the NGO awareness of Turks and people of Turkish descent (YTB). YTB continues to carry out joint diaspora activities of the Turkic World, which is one of the important fields of activity of YTB, in cooperation with the Organisation of Turkic States. YTB's 2022 activities for the Turkic States can be listed as follows: Diaspora collaborations, bilateral activities and signed agreements, 105 projects and activities, 18,656 students who have been granted scholarships to date, 1,429 students continuing their education and receiving scholarships, 14,000+ Türkiye graduates, 6 Türkiye graduates' meetings, 2 alumni associations (Gündem, 2022).

In 2010, following the establishment of the Prime Ministry Public Diplomacy Coordination Office, the Media Forum of Turkic Speaking Countries was established to increase communication among the Turkic World. One year later, the Forum was renamed the Media Platform of Turkic Speaking Countries. The platform, which meets regularly every year, continues its activities within the framework of the Organisation of Turkic States (Turkic States, 2014). Established in 1920, the General Directorate of Press and Information (BYEGM) is one of the oldest institutions in Türkiye. In 2010, after the Public

Diplomacy Coordinatorate was established, BYEGM also assumed the secretariat duty of this institution. In 2018, the institution was closed down and replaced by the Directorate of Communications (T.R. Directorate of Communications).

The most important move of BYEGM towards the Turkic World is the establishment of the aforementioned Media Forum of Turkic Speaking Countries together with the Strategic Research Centre of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Currently, the Directorate of Communications continues various negotiations with Kyrgyzstan. For example, in 2021, the Director of Communications, Prof. Dr Fahrettin Altun met with the Minister of Culture, Information, Sports and Youth Policy of Kyrgyzstan, Kayrat Imanaliyev. During the meeting, Imanaliyev stated that they have always received full support from Türkiye and quoted the following words, emphasising brotherhood "Everyone has seen Türkiye's support to Azerbaijan in its just cause", "We are also very happy when we see our brothers from Türkiye in Kyrgyzstan" (the Republic of Türkiye, Directorate of Communications, 2021).

Another important instrument on the issue is TRT. Especially in 2009, TRT Avaz was restructured to directly address the Turkic World. It is very important that TRT Avaz broadcasts in Turkish, Azerbaijani, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Turkmen and Uzbek for unity in language, which is the first step of the above-mentioned strategy of unity in language, unity in idea, and unity in work. It is very successful in introducing not only Türkiye to the Turkic World but also the Turkic World to Türkiye. For example, the programme "On the Roads of Kyrgyzstan" broadcasted by TRT Avaz has aroused serious sympathy for the ancestral homeland in Türkiye (TRT Avaz, 2017).

In addition to the unity of lineage, language and culture between Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan, the religious beliefs of both countries are the same. In Kyrgyzstan, where religion was suppressed for 70 years due to the Soviet system, Türkiye is undoubtedly the right address to apply for religious education. Religion is an important foundation of societies and plays an important role in inter-communal relations. Türkiye immediately took action to fill the religious and spiritual gap in Kyrgyzstan after independence. In this context, one of Türkiye's first moves was the Faculty of Theology of Osh State University established in 1993. This theology faculty started education with the signing of the "Academic and Cultural Cooperation Protocol" between Ankara University and Osh State University (Pay, 2008, p. 110). Arashan Faculty of Theology, also within Osh State University, was first opened in 1996 as a Qur'an Course and then continued its activities as the Faculty of Theology (Murzaraimov & Köylü, 2021, p. 745).

Another theology faculty established with the support of Türkiye is located within Kyrgyzstan Türkiye Manas University. Although the necessary protocols for this faculty date back to 1995, it was only established in 2011. One of the most important projects of the Faculty of Theology of Kyrgyzstan Türkiye Manas University with the help of TİKA and the Turkish Religious Foundation is "Writing and Translation of Textbooks on Theology in Kyrgyzstan into Kyrgyz" (Murzaraimov & Köylü, 2021, p. 746).

Another aid provided by Türkiye to Kyrgyzstan in the field of religion is Imam Hatip High Schools and Secondary Schools. The first of these is Osh State University Imam Hatip High School opened in 2013. In addition, Türkiye Diyanet Foundation contributes to the education of this high school (Erdem, 2019, p. 136). Moreover, the education expenses of the students studying in this high school are also covered by the Turkish Religious Foundation and the books are brought from Türkiye free of charge (Erdem, 2019, p. 137). Another important educational centre is the I. Arabayev Kyrgyz State University Theological College was established in 2016. The school is actually of Kyrgyz origin and has received significant financial support from Türkiye (Murzaraimov & Köylü, 2021, p. 750). In 2016, an Imam Hatip Secondary School was opened in Bishkek within the Bishkek Turkish Primary and Secondary School (Murzaraimov & Köylü, 2021, p. 751).

Finally, Türkiye has been building mosques and mausoleums in Kyrgyzstan. The first of these is the Koçkor Mosque of 1996. The second is the Erdem Mosque of 2005 (Murzaraimov & Köylü, 2021, p. 752). Thirdly, one of the most important mosques opened by Türkiye is the Imam Serahsi Mosque. In 2018, President of the Republic of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdoğan personally attended the opening of the mosque, which is the largest mosque in Central Asia (Daily Sabah, 2018). In addition to the mosques, Türkiye has also built a mausoleum in Kyrgyzstan. After the construction of the Imam Serahsi mausoleum in 2012, the Turkish Diyanet Foundation sent various religious books to the mausoleum (Turkish Diyanet Foundation, 2022).

The most important issue that connects Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan is the common history and culture. As seen in this context, Türkiye has very serious cultural investments in Kyrgyzstan. One of the most important issues to deepen the cultural cooperation between the two countries is education and media. Furthermore, Türkiye's investments and contributions to the education system of Kyrgyzstan will improve the political, economic and military relations between the two states and ensure integration between the two peoples.

### Theoretical Analysis of Relationships

Identity is the basis of the constructivist theory, which emerged by challenging mainstream international relations theories such as realism and liberalism. Accordingly, identity and society are in mutual interaction with each other. This mutual interaction builds a structure. According to the constructivist theory, identity is also very important in the behaviour of states or other international actors. Accordingly, actors determine certain identities for themselves. These identities consist of "us" and "not us". If we think in a constructivist context, Türkiye has determined its identities as "Turk", "Muslim" and "Western". With the disintegration of the USSR, Türkiye began to highlight its "Turkic" identity in the geography of Central Asia and the Caucasus. In other words, in the geography of Central Asia, including Kyrgyzstan, which constitutes the sample of the study, Türkiye (among other factors) follows a foreign policy based on Turkic identity. These two states speak the same language, come from the same lineage and believe in the same religion. For these reasons, relations have been established and developed in the context of identity as well as real politics. It should be noted that "cultural relations" are kept in the foreground in the examinations made in the context of identity.

It should be noted that the constructivist theory accepts the material power elements of the mainstream theories and adds the spiritual power elements to them. Accordingly, economic, political and military relations between Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan can be included in the "material" power elements, while cultural relations can be included in the "spiritual" power elements.

The first important symbol of political relations in the context of identity is that Türkiye was the first state to recognize Kyrgyzstan. This symbol is not forgotten by Kyrgyzstan and is frequently mentioned on special occasions. Since this date, the two countries have developed various political relations in the context of identity. On the other hand, it is useful to remember that these two states/peoples have been separated from each other both geographically and mentally for many years, as Kyrgyzstan remained under Russian occupation for many years and the two states were located at different poles during the Cold War. Therefore, the bond between them has weakened. However, this is not an insurmountable problem. Because the two states have shown their intention to overcome this problem by establishing various integration institutions. TÜR SOY, TÜRKPA, Turkic States Organization, Turkic Business Council, Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation, and Turkic Academy International Organization are some of these organizations. As can be seen, identity is extremely active in bilateral relations.

The economic relations between the two states are perhaps one of the most important areas where identity is kept at the forefront. Because Türkiye has offered various aids to Kyrgyzstan, which is trying to establish its state by gaining its new independence and has a transition economy. Türkiye has given 1.2 billion dollars of loans not only to Kyrgyzstan but to all Central Asian countries through Eximbank. Unlike Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are very rich in natural resources. Even if we assume that Türkiye acts with a win-win principle in these areas, it is obvious that the aid given to Kyrgyzstan, which is weak and poor in terms of land, is unrequited.

Relations in the military field are relatively sluggish compared to other fields. However, ammunition, tools and equipment are provided to the Kyrgyz army by the Turkish Armed Forces at certain periods and training is given. Türkiye should approach the "Tajikistan issue" and Kyrgyzstan should approach the "FETO issue" more carefully so that military relations can develop further and progress smoothly.

Finally, the most important network of relations is cultural relations. Perhaps the most important bridge that creates the identity bond between the two states is culture. As the famous Kyrgyz writer Aitmatov said, In this changeable world, according to the sacred laws, everything goes and dies, there is only one thing that does not die, and that is culture. The common culture between the two states feeds the common identity, and the common identity feeds the common culture. Türkiye has certain activities for the development of a common identity and common culture in the region. These are communication, institutional structure and education, and religion, respectively.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

According to constructivists, both in the structure of the international system and in the behaviour of states, spiritual/intellectual elements are as important as material elements. The constructivist approach, which does not reject the importance of material elements, believes that material elements are formed by ideas, discourses and thoughts. Another important point is identity. Identity defines states and other actors. A state determines where it will be in the world, how it will look at the world and what kind of foreign policies it will pursue through its identity. In this context, for Türkiye, the Turkic States, including Kyrgyzstan, are perceived as brothers.

The relations between these two brotherly countries started as official relations between two nation-states with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In 1991, Türkiye was the first state to recognise Kyrgyzstan. Since then, both countries have been developing policies to improve bilateral relations with the feelings of historical ties and common culture. Although the identity proximity paves the way for the rapprochement of the two states, it should not be forgotten that these two states/peoples have been separated from each other both geographically and mentally for many years. Naturally, the bond between them has weakened. However, this is not a problem that cannot be overcome.

The Kyrgyz remained under Russian occupation for many years. Türkiye, on the other hand, pursued Western-oriented policies both during the Ottoman and Republican Periods. For the first time, with the USSR's occupation of Afghanistan, the Kyrgyz were settled in Van, Türkiye, and in this context, the ground was prepared for the creation of a common identity. In 1991, official relations began. Türkiye provided various kinds of assistance to its brother republic, which was trying to establish its nation-state by gaining its new independence. While providing economic, political and cultural assistance to Kyrgyzstan, Türkiye also provided assistance for the integration of Kyrgyzstan into the international arena and the existing system. Although the period of rapprochement in the 1990s ended in the 2000s for various reasons, it started again in the 2010s. The 15 July process undermined the bilateral relations, which were quite good until 2016. However, after the change of government in Kyrgyzstan, relations started to improve again. Both bilateral and multilateral relations in the context of Türkiye's relations with the Turkic World tend to increase day by day. Nevertheless, the relations of these two states, which share the same identity, should go beyond the point of strategic partnership.

Türkiye, Kyrgyzstan and other Turkic states can provide a stronger outlook by pursuing a common foreign policy in the international arena, just like the Karabakh issue. They can also act more economically integrated with each other. Since its independence, Türkiye has been providing assistance to Kyrgyzstan for its transition to a free market economy. Kyrgyzstan has serious economic problems. These problems can be solved both bilaterally and through multiple projects within the Turkic World. In addition to political/diplomatic and economic relations, these two states should continue their close relations militarily for stronger unity. In order to develop all these relations, the two states should take some mutual steps.

- In order for Türkiye to help Kyrgyzstan in various fields, especially in the economy, Kyrgyzstan needs to take more confident steps against FETO, which is Türkiye's Achilles'. FETO is a terrorist organisation and Kyrgyzstan should understand Türkiye's sensitivity and act accordingly. It is important that the two states act jointly not only on FETO but also on terrorism.

- In order to improve the relations between the two states, the people should get to know each other better and trust each other. In this context, mutual country visits should be popular, especially among young people. In this context, the states should intervene in issues such as flight tickets and accommodation. Mutual student exchange programmes would also be useful.

- Bilateral trade should be developed. Turkish investments in Kyrgyzstan should increase. In this context, Türkiye is far behind Russia and China.

- Just as Kyrgyzstan respects Türkiye's sensitivities on FETO, Türkiye should continue to stand by Kyrgyzstan in its fight against Tajikistan.

## Ethical Declaration

In the writing process of the study titled "*The Place and Importance of Kyrgyzstan in Turkish Foreign Policy from a Constructivist Perspective*", there were followed the scientific, ethical and the citation rules; was not made any falsification on the collected data and this study was not sent to any other academic media for evaluation.



Since the document analysis is examined in this study, there is no requirement for an ethics committee decision.

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## TÜRKÇE GENİŞ ÖZET

Uluslararası ilişkilerde kültür, gün geçtikçe daha önemli bir yer tutmaya başlamıştır. Aynı soydan gelen ancak günümüzde farklı coğrafyalarda yaşayan Türklerin, ortak kültüre sahip olması oldukça önem arz etmektedir. Zira devletlerarası ilişkiler, kültürel değerler çerçevesinde gelişebilir. Böylelikle söz konusu

devletler ortak dış politikalar belirleyerek uluslararası arenada daha yüksek bir sese sahip olurlar. Bu kültür ortaklığına dayanan güç, Türkiye – Kırgızistan ilişkilerinin de temelini oluşturmuştur. Kırgızistan, Türkiye için son derece önem taşımaktadır. Türkiye Türkleri, Kırgızistan'ı Atayurtları olarak görmekte ve Kırgızlarla ilişkilerin geliştirilmesine değer vermektelerdir. Kültüre ek olarak aynı dili konuşan ve aynı dine inanarak bu iki halk arasında ciddi kimliksel bağlar bulunmaktadır.

Elbette ki iki devlet arasındaki ilişkiler yalnızca kimliksel bağla incelenemeyecek kadar geniştir. Kırgızistan'ın içerisinde bulunduğu Orta Asya ya da daha doğru adıyla Türkistan, Türkiye için yalnızca duygusal anlamda değil reel-politik açılarından da önem taşımaktadır. Bu önemli nedeniyle bölge jeopolitiği açısından ondokuzuncu yüzyıldan itibaren büyük güçlerin oyun alanı olmuştur. Jeopolitik yarışı kazanan Çarlık Rusya, bölgeyi işgal etmiş, bölge Çarlık rejiminin devrilmesiyle kurulan SSCB'ye katılmıştır. Nihayetinde Kırgızistan, Özbekistan, Kazakistan, Tacikistan ve Türkmenistan 1991 yılında bağımsız devletler olarak ortaya çıkmışlardır. 1991 tarihi bu bağlamda uzun süre birbirinden ayrı kalmış Türk Dünyası'nın miadıdır.

İki devleti birbirine bağlayan kimliksel alanlar şu dört kategoride toplanabilir: (a) Her iki ülkede Türk kökenlidir; (b) Türkçe, her ne kadar farklılıklar gösterse de, ortak dildir; (c) Her iki ülkenin insanlarının da büyük ölçüde dini inancı İslamiyet'tir; (d) Her iki devlet de laiktir. Tüm bu müşterek özelliklerin yanı sıra halkların kültürleri de benzerdir. Türkiye, Türk Dünyası ise ilişkilerine son derece önem vermektedir. Kırgızistan ile ilişkileri de hem Ankara – Biskek bağlamında hem de Türkiye ve Türk Dünyası bağlamında hızla gelişmektedir. Öyle ki tüm diğer Türk Devletleri gibi Kırgızistan'ı da tanıyan ve temsilcilik açan ilk devlet Türkiye olmuştur. Böylece, 1991 yılından itibaren siyasi, ekonomik, askeri ve kültürel alanda çeşitli ilişkiler kurulmuş, geliştirilmiştir.

Çalışma, iki devletin ilişkilerini çok yönlü bir biçimde ele almaktadır. İki kardeş ülke arasındaki ilişkiler çıkar ve güç kavramlarını ön plana çıkaran realizm, liberalizm gibi ana akım teorilerle değil kimlik kavramının etkisini inceleyen inşacı teori ile açıklanmıştır. İnşacı yaklaşım, ana akım teorilere eleştirel bir bakış sunmaktadır. Güç ve çıkar gibi kavramlarla maddi unsurları reddetmemekle beraber düşünsel, tinsel unsurları ön plana çıkaran inşacı yaklaşıma göre devletlerin kimlikleri, dış politikalarını etkilemektedir. Bu bağlamda önemli olan husus devletlerin "biz"i ve "bizden olmayan"ı nasıl tanımladığıdır. "Biz"i tanımlayan parametlerin benzeştiği devletlerin ortak dış politika üretme ihtimali yüksektir. Görüldüğü üzere Türkiye ve Kırgızistan'ın kimlikleri benzeşmektedir. Bu kapsamda yoğun ilişkiler geliştirerek ortak dış politikalar üretirlerse uluslararası arenada sesleri daha yüksek çıkabilir.

İki ülke arasındaki siyasi/diplomatik ilişkiler, Kırgızistan'ın bağımsızlığının hemen ardından dönemin devlet başkanları Turgut Özal ve Askar Akayev arasında imzalanan "Kırgızistan ve Türkiye Arasında Dostluk ve İşbirliği İle İlgili Anlaşma" ile beraber başlamıştır. Bağımsızlığının ilk iki yılı içinde iki kardeş Cumhuriyetin 29 protokol ve anlaşma imzalaması ilişkinin hızlı başlamasına neden olmuştur. Ancak bu hızlı başlangıcı Kırgızistan devlet başkanının, 1997'de Ermenistan'ı ziyaret edip 1915 olaylarını soykırım olarak tanımasıyla duraklamıştır. 2000'ler itibarıyla durağan geçen ilişkiler 2010'larda yeniden hız kazanmıştır. Kırgızistan'daki iç çatışma sonucunda 2011'de ülkeyi ilk ziyaret eden devlet başkanının Recep Tayyip Erdoğan olması iki devlet arasındaki buzları eritmiştir. 2016 yılına kadar iki devlet müşterek olarak çeşitli uluslararası Türk kuruluşlarının kurulmasında liderlik etmişlerdir. Ancak 2016 yılında Fetullahçı Terör Örgütü'nün Türkiye'de hain bir askeri darbe teşebbüsünde bulunması ve Kırgızistan'ın FETÖ hassasiyetine saygı duymaması sonucunda ilişkiler kısa dönemli olarak, 2017'deki iktidar değişikliğine kadar yeniden bozulmuştur.

Ekonomik ilişkiler de siyasi ilişkilere paralel ilerlemektedir. Bağımsızlığının ilk yıllarında Türkiye, Kırgızistan'a Eximbank üzerinden krediler açarak, serbest piyasa ekonomisine geçmesi için çeşitli yardımlarda bulunmuştur. Türkiye, teknik bilgi ve sanayileşme deneyimleriyle Kırgızistan ile işbirlikleri yapmıştır. 2000'lerdeki siyasi kopma ekonomik ilişkiye de yansımış ve 2010'lara kadar ekonomik işbirlikleri durağan geçmiştir. Bilhassa 2017'den itibaren ikili ekonomik verilerde düzenli bir artış gözlemlenmektedir. 2020 pandemisi tüm dünyada olduğu gibi Türkiye ve Kırgızistan'ı da olumsuz yönde etkilese de 2021 yılında büyük bir sıçrayış olduğu gözükmemektedir. Görüldüğü üzere siyasi ilişkiler iki devlet arasındaki ekonomik ilişkileri doğrudan etkilemektedir.

İki kardeş cumhuriyet arasında askeri/güvenlik alanındaki ilk anlaşma 1993 yılında imzalanan "Kırgız Cumhuriyeti Hükümetleri ile Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Hükümeti Arasında Askerî Eğitimde İşbirliği Anlaşması"dır. Kırgızistan, Kolektif Güvenlik Anlaşması Örgütü çerçevesinde güvenlik sorunlarını Rusya ile çözmesi bağlamında Türkiye'nin bu devletlerle askeri ilişkileri diğer alanlardaki kadar gelişmemiştir.

Ancak  zellikle 2010'lerden itibaren askeri iliřkilerde de g zle g r l r bir artıř s z konusudur. T rkiye her yıl d zenli olarak Kırgızistan Silahlı Kuvvetlerine gerekli desteęi iletmektedir. İkilili askeri iliřkilerde  nemli hususlardan biri Kırgızistan'ın Tacikistan ile m cadelesinde T rkiye tarafından aldığı destek ve İHA/SİHA'lardır.

İnřacı teoriye g re ikili iliřkilerin en  nemli ayaklarından birini k lt rel iliřkiler oluřturmaktadır. Zira k lt r, kimlikleri meydana getiren en  nemli bileřenlerden biridir. Bu baęlamda iki devlet arasındaki k lt rel iliřkiler 4 ana temelden incelenmiřtir: (a) Eęitim/dil araları; (b) Kurumsal aralar; (c) İletiřim araları; (d) Din. İki devlet arasındaki en  nemli k lt rel k pr  T rkiye tarafından verilen B y k  ęrenci Projesi ile Kırgızistan'dan  ęrencilerin T rkiye'ye gelmesi ve T rkiye'nin iřtirakiyle Biřkek'te kurulan Manas  niversitesi oluřturmaktadır. Ayrıca T rkiye T rkesini  ęreten TT MER ve T rkiye'nin Kırgızistan'da kurduęu eřitli okullar da olduka  nem arz etmektedir. T RKPA, T RKSOY, TİKA ve YTB gibi, T rkiye'nin Kırgızistan'la eřitli kurumsal iletiřim kurumları da iki devleti ve iki halkı birbirine yakınlılařtırmaktadır. Ayrıca Kırgızistan'da T rk k lt r n n  zellikle de genler arasında tanınması iin  nemli araların bařında T rk Dizileri gelmektedir.