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“Soft Power” and Ethnic Identity Factors in Türkiye-Kazakhstan Integration

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Abstract

The study explores the role of soft power and ethnic identity in strengthening Türkiye- Kazakhstan- integration, emphasising their shared heritage as a basis for modern cooperation within the Organisation of Turkic States. The study aims to analyse the current stage of integration of the Republic of Türkiye and the Republic of Kazakhstan within the framework of international organisations, national institutions and government programmes that unite Turkic-speaking peoples. The study used qualitative methods to analyse historical and cultural ties, documents and cases of international institutions, as well as quantitative methods, including statistical analysis of economic indicators and comparative analysis of integration strategies. The study results showed that the integration of Kazakhstan and Türkiye is actively promoted through international organisations such as TURKSOY and the Organisation of Turkic States, which promote cultural and economic cooperation. An analysis of soft power in the policies of both countries has confirmed its significant role in strengthening mutual understanding and promoting common cultural and historical values. Economic cooperation between the two countries, although progressing, faces geographical and logistical constraints that affect the level of mutual trade. Despite the challenges, cultural and educational initiatives, such as the activities of the Turkish Academy and Ahmet Yasavi University, contribute to strengthening integration processes. The prospective significance of the study lies in the use of the data to improve the strategies of cultural and economic integration of Turkic-speaking countries, contributing to the strengthening of regional cooperation and mutual understanding.

Keywords: Turkic World; Integration; Academic Mobility; Turkic-Speaking Countries; Strategic Partnership; Alphabet Harmonisation; Cultural Exchange; Türkiye; Kazakhstan

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Introduction

The concept of “soft power”, developed and introduced into the public discourse by Nye Jr. (1990), suggests that it will be easier for a state to achieve its goals in world politics if other states are also interested in this or agree to a situation that ensures such results. Soft power occurs when one state encourages other states to pursue the same thing, rather than ordering it through brutal and commanding force. The phenomenon of ethnic identity is a feeling of closeness of different ethnic groups to a particular language group, and in the context of the topic under consideration—to the Turkic language group. This is expressed in standard cultural, historical, religious, and other features. Based on ethnic identity, the governments of states can develop cooperation in the political, trade, economic, and humanitarian spheres in the most qualitative and effective way due to the awareness of common or similar values.

Radically different development vectors characterised the period of modern history for Kazakhstan and Türkiye. The Ottoman Empire existed for centuries in what is now the modern Turkish state. Its Turkic rulers, as was customary in the Middle Ages and in modern times, used brute force to expand their influence and ability to control most of the land and sea routes from Asia to Europe. It was one of the most powerful states in the world, existing for more than six centuries, from the late 13th century to the early 20th century. Osman I founded it, which later grew from a small beylik in Anatolia to a vast empire that covered parts of Europe, Asia, and Africa. The empire controlled key trade routes between East and West and played an essential role in the political, economic, and cultural history of the world. The Ottoman sultans combined military power with a developed administrative system, and the state itself was multinational and multi-religious (Kongyratbay et al., 2015). After the First World War ended, the Ottoman Empire collapsed, and the Republic of Turkey was proclaimed instead. On the territory of the modern Kazakh state at the turn of the Middle Ages and modern times, there was

a Kazakh Khanate, whose population consisted of representatives of the Turkic-speaking peoples of the Central Asian region (Kongyratbay, 2021a; 2021b). The Kazakh Khanate was a powerful state that emerged in the mid-15th century on the vast steppes of Central Asia in the territory of present-day Kazakhstan. It was founded by Janibek and Kerey Khans, who led a group of nomadic tribes in search of political and cultural autonomy from other regional powers. The population of the Khanate was primarily composed of Turkic-speaking peoples who shared a common language, traditions, and nomadic way of life. Over time, the Kazakh Khanate became a significant political and military force in the region, playing a key role in shaping the cultural and historical identity of the Kazakh people. Its legacy continues to influence the national consciousness of modern Kazakhstan. However, later, the government of the Russian Empire made regular attempts to expand its influence on the south, which threatened the existence of the original Kazakh people (Spytska, 2023a).

Since the 1990s, there have been gradual improvements in the cultural, political, and economic integration of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Turkey, and the rise in recent years of this process to a qualitatively new level within the framework of the Organisation of Turkic States (2024). After the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the authorities of the Republic of Turkey developed a policy of soft power towards independent Kazakhstan to improve bilateral relations in the fields of culture, economy, and public diplomacy (Ahuja and Pandit, 2020; Spytska, 2023b). Organisations striving to preserve, strengthen, and spread the influence of the culture of the Turkic peoples play a significant role in the relations between the two states.

As of today, cooperation between the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Kazakhstan is strategically important for each of the parties. The heads of state note that Türkiye and Kazakhstan are fraternal peoples with a common

history, language, religion, and culture, and for Kassym Zhomart Tokayev (2022), the Turkish land feels like a second home. On the one hand, given the geographical remoteness of Türkiye and Kazakhstan, the integration of these states may not be as effective as, for example, with the People's Republic of China (PRC). On the other hand, cultural, religious, and linguistic proximity can contribute to building an additional, distinctive Turkic force on the world stage, which, in the context of globalisation and Türkiye's active approach to the development of soft power policy, will create an effective and mutually beneficial partnership in Western and Central Asia (Khamzaeva et al., 2020; Turemuratov et al., 2024).

Avcu's (2023) study explores the current state of relations between Türkiye and Kazakhstan. It focuses on their historical and cultural roots as a basis for strategic partnership. This analysis is expanded by Turalin et al. (2023), who examine the language policies of both governments as a key factor in uniting the Turkic-speaking peoples. The role of education in fostering cultural cooperation between Kazakhstan and Türkiye is further explored by Turalin (2022), wherein it investigates the exchange of research projects, scientific conferences, and educational initiatives after the collapse of the USSR. The concept of soft power in Türkiye's educational initiatives is also explored by Egamberdiyev and Turgunbayev (2022), who highlight Türkiye's Great Student Project, Mevlana, and various scholarships as instruments of influence.

Regarding contemporary cooperation, Zotov et al. (2021) and Dang-Pham et al. (2022) focus on the digitalisation efforts among Turkic states, detailing the various programmes, doctrines, and agreements that aim to create a unified information space. These initiatives include joint projects in telecommunications, digital infrastructure, and e-governance, which seek to enhance communication and cooperation across borders. By fostering shared technological platforms and systems, the Turkic states are working towards a more integrated digital landscape, which not only supports the exchange of information but also boosts

economic collaboration and regional stability (Oldak, 2023). Iembekova (2023) further underscores the significance of these collaborative efforts, emphasising that the integration of Turkic countries goes beyond digitalisation and encompasses a range of areas such as education, politics, and economic cooperation. She notes that strengthening ties between these nations contributes to peaceful international relations and promotes economic growth by fostering regional trade agreements, investment opportunities, and the harmonisation of standards in sectors like digital technology and energy.

Based on the above, it is important to analyse the current integration stage of the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Kazakhstan within the framework of international organisations, national institutions, and state programmes uniting the Turkic peoples. The concept of soft power in the foreign policy doctrines of states contributes most qualitatively to deepening cooperation and strengthening mutual understanding with neighbouring, historically and culturally close states and regions.

The structure of the study covers all the key stages of academic analysis. The introduction substantiates the relevance of the topic of integration of Kazakhstan and Türkiye, which is based on a common historical, cultural and linguistic basis. The methodology combines qualitative and quantitative approaches: documents, political statements, activities of educational and cultural institutions, as well as foreign trade statistics and soft power ratings are studied. The analysis shows that Türkiye maintains a consistently high position in the soft power ranking, while Kazakhstan shows less stability, which is partly explained by the expansion of the sample of countries under study.

The discussion emphasises the importance of Türkiye's soft power, as well as the strategic prospects laid down in the program document Turkic World Vision - 2040. Challenges are identified, including weak economic integration and problems of academic mobility. The conclusions summarise that cultural and

educational integration are the most developed areas, while economic cooperation needs to be strengthened. Further research could focus on assessing the implementation of strategic goals and the introduction of a standard Turkic alphabet.

Materials and Methods

This study's methodological framework is based on a comprehensive analysis of integration processes between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Turkey. The research employs both qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine the cultural, educational, and economic interactions between the two nations, focusing on their historical, linguistic, and strategic ties. Primary and secondary data sources were utilised to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings.

The qualitative aspect of the study included a detailed review of historical and cultural connections, such as the shared heritage of Turkic tribes and the Turkic language group, which form the foundation of the bilateral relationship. Key documents, speeches by political leaders, and policies were examined to understand the 'soft power' mechanisms employed by both states. The analysis also included case studies of institutions like the International Kazakh-Turkish University, the Yunus Emre Institute, and the Turkic Academy, which facilitate educational and cultural integration. Quantitative methods involved using statistical tools to assess economic cooperation, focusing on trade turnover, import and export dynamics between Kazakhstan and Türkiye. Data from official sources, such as the Bureau of National Statistics and the Global Soft Power Index, were analysed to understand trends and disparities in economic integration. The data also provided insights into the influence of geographic factors and trade priorities on bilateral relations.

Comparative analyses were conducted to evaluate the integration strategies of Kazakhstan and Türkiye in the broader context of Turkic-speaking nations. This included a review of the roles played by international organisations like TURKSOY and the Organisation of Turkic States

in fostering regional cooperation. Special attention was given to soft power policies, such as cultural diplomacy initiatives, which were analysed through examples from China and Japan to draw parallels and identify best practices. The study employed thematic content analysis to categorise and interpret qualitative data, while statistical analysis was used to evaluate trade and economic indicators. The integration of these methods allowed for a multidimensional understanding of the integration processes and the identification of key factors influencing their success or limitations.

By combining these approaches, the research provides a holistic view of the integration between Kazakhstan and Türkiye, highlighting the achievements and challenges in cultural, educational, and economic cooperation. This methodological approach ensures that the findings are robust, comprehensive, and relevant for understanding the dynamics of regional integration in the context of the Turkic world.

Results

One of the most popular methods of cultural diplomacy, as part of a soft power policy, is the creation of international organisations, educational centres, and cultural heritage centres, and the development and popularisation of ethnic characteristics, the purpose of which is to familiarise, promote, and instil a love for specific distinctive components of the state. A landmark example of the application of the concept of soft power in the modern world is the cultural and educational centres of the People's Republic of China, created and functioning to promote language and culture abroad—the Confucius Institutes. For the government of the Republic of Turkey, the development of soft power tools in the early 2000s also became important in promoting its interests and culture worldwide (Altunışık, 2022). More importantly, Türkiye's appeal lay in the state's experience of combining moderate Islamism with democracy. Such a model of public administration was positively perceived in the Muslim-majority states, and the internal and

foreign policy of the government of the Republic of Turkey at the beginning of the 21st Century promoted this model as an effective way to combat Islamist and radical groups, especially after the events of 11 September 2001. In recent years, Kazakhstan has paid considerable attention to developing the creative economy (Galymzhan et al., 2020). First, this was facilitated by a diverse and inclusive society in large Kazakh cities, promoting their films, shows, music, and other media products abroad, and public access to high-speed Internet (Akbarova, 2024). Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Roman Vasilenko, noted that to build a national brand, the government of Kazakhstan is focused on the transition to renewable energy sources by 2060, funding for

scientific research is gradually increasing, and grants and scholarship programmes are being introduced (Brand Finance, 2023).

Mutual integration in all possible spheres depends on the effectiveness of cooperation between each of the subjects of international activity. However, the experience of implementing a soft power mechanism and understanding strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats also play an important role. Based on the above, Türkiye is the leader in applying cultural diplomacy mechanisms for high-quality and effective integration between the Turkic peoples (Table 1).

Table 1: Dynamics of Türkiye’s and Kazakhstan’s Positions in the Global Soft Power Index (2020-2024)					
Country	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Türkiye	30	27	22	23	25
Kazakhstan	58	75	88	79	80
Source: Compiled by the Authors Based on the Global Soft Power Index, 2024					

The government of the Republic of Turkey pays considerable attention to the development of cultural diplomacy to spread both its culture throughout the world and the culture of the Turkic peoples within the framework of international organisations. According to the Global Soft Power Index 2024, Türkiye's soft power has remained consistently high over the past four years and is approaching countries such as Finland, Austria, and New Zealand in terms of influence. In 2024, Türkiye was ranked 25th, while Finland was 24th, Austria was 26th, and New Zealand was 27th in the overall ranking. At the same time, the leading positions are held by the United States and the United Kingdom, which took the first (78.8 points out of 100) and second (71.8 points) places, respectively. Russia is ranked 16th, Israel is 32nd, and Ukraine is 44th. Thus, Türkiye demonstrates a stable level of soft power, which brings it closer to the group of countries with a positive international reputation, while the positions of some other states have declined under the influence of geopolitical and security factors. The apparent decline in Kazakhstan’s soft power ranking in

2021 is primarily due to the expansion of the number of countries included in the Global Soft Power Index that year. Thus, in 2020, the state of Kazakhstan ranked in the last five of the sample of 60 countries, and in 2021 and 2024, the sample increased to 105 and 193 countries, respectively (Global Soft Power Index, 2024). Based on this, high-quality and effective cooperation at the international level for the integration of Türkiye and Kazakhstan largely depends on cultural diplomacy, which is conducted by the Turkish government.

In 1992, in Turkestan, as a result of an agreement between Kazakhstan and Türkiye, the International Kazakh-Turkish University was founded to train highly qualified personnel from all Turkic-speaking states. The university's role has important ideological, cultural, and spiritual significance for the integration and education of young people from more than 17 countries of the world, especially in the context of globalisation. The university management is appointed jointly by the authorised government bodies of Türkiye and Kazakhstan. Today, the

university has more than 10 thousand students studying Kazakh, Turkish, and other languages. In addition, youth student organisations operate in the university. Thus, within the framework of the Turkish World Youth Club, events are held with representatives of different nationalities, including Turkic, to preserve their countries' holidays and traditions and familiarise representatives of other nationalities with Turkic culture. Notably, students from Turkey are required to study the Kazakh language and, at the same time, receive a scholarship from the Republic of Kazakhstan. The university has a Scientific Research Institute of Turkology. The institute's activities are related to conducting comparative studies of the Turkic peoples' general culture, language, history, and literature. Work is also being carried out systematically studying religion, folklore, medieval Turkic writings, and archaeological finds.

The study of the Turkish language in Kazakhstan, along with the study of the Kazakh language in Türkiye, are important aspects of strengthening cooperation and deep integration of the two states. The Yunus Emre Institute, founded in 2007, is engaged in cultural diplomacy in the field of studying the Turkish language, history, culture, and art abroad. The opening of the Yunus Emre Cultural Centre in Kazakhstan took place in March 2010 in Astana, both with the aim of objectively and comprehensively forming an idea of Türkiye and in order to acquaint Turks with the culture, traditions, and language of the people of Kazakhstan ("Kazakhstan is a great...", 2011). Students, artists, high-ranking government officials, and even press representatives show great interest in learning the Turkish language. During the pandemic, many people wishing to learn Turkish did not have the opportunity to visit the capital of Kazakhstan, and the branch of the Yunus Emre Institute located there, as a result of which online events were organised under the guidance of the most experienced teachers. More than 8 thousand people from all over Kazakhstan were enrolled in the courses (Intensive Interest in Turkish..., 2021). In addition, all courses conducted offline were

transferred to a digital environment, and an online platform for learning the Turkish language and culture was launched for people living in regions without cultural centres. In addition to the Yunus Emre Institute, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency is engaged in popularising the Turkish language in Kazakhstan. Thus, in 2023, another Turkish language class was opened at the Gumilyov Eurasian National University (TİKA Opened a Turkish..., 2023). The organisation's coordinator stated that Turkish language classes in Kazakhstan are necessary to bring students of Türkiye and Kazakhstan as close as possible.

However, in addition to popularising Türkiye in Kazakhstan, an important element of integration is the promotion of Kazakh culture, traditions, and customs in Türkiye. Kazakhstan's Scientific and Applied Centre of Culture and Education operates at the Nigde Omer Halisdemir University in the Turkish city of Nigde. The goals of this centre are to objectively study interstate relations from a historical standpoint, to study Kazakh culture, to support and encourage the development of education at the Department of Modern Turkish Dialects and Literature, and to improve social ties between Turks and Kazakhs. To achieve these goals, national and international meetings are being held within the framework of the Scientific and Applied Centre for Culture and Education of Kazakhstan; cooperation is developing between Nigde Omer Halisdemir University, other Turkish universities, and Kazakh Turks who live in Kazakhstan, academic mobility programmes for graduate students, doctoral students, and teachers between Türkiye and Kazakhstan, films and programmes about the Turkic peoples are broadcast and about Kazakhs in particular, seminars, meetings, congresses and symposiums are organised, and advisory services are provided to people who are interested in studying subjects related to Kazakhstan (Nusubalieva et al., 2023; Poltina, 2024).

Another aspect of strengthening the integration of the Turkic states is the harmonisation of the alphabets of the Turkic peoples. Thus, during the Commission of the Common Alphabet of the

Turkish World meeting, delegates noted that the decision to switch to a standard alphabet is an important area of cooperation between fraternal countries (The first meeting..., 2023). The members of the commission also proposed adding the Kazakh letters Ұ and І to the standard Turkic alphabet. During the 10th Summit of the Organisation of Turkic States (2023), President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, noted that Kazakhstan, Türkiye, and other Turkic states are committed to shared values and fulfil the will of their ancestors in strengthening the partnership of the Turkic peoples. One of the international organisations uniting the Turkic peoples is the Organisation of Turkic States, created through the conclusion of the Nakhchivan Agreement “On the Establishment of the Turkish Speaking States” (2009). Initially, the organisation was called the Turkic Council, and the purpose of the organisation was to promote effective regional and international cooperation in areas of common interests, create favourable conditions for attracting investments, and expand cooperation in the fields of culture, education, sports, and tourism (Polianskyi, 2024).

At the end of 2021, the Organisation of Turkic States members adopted a strategic document that defines the vectors of development of Turkic-speaking countries for the next two decades Turkic World Vision 2040 (2021). According to the document, readiness, sustainability, adaptation, and transformation in a wide range of political, economic, and cultural spheres are key concepts that can establish regional well-being. The integration of the Turkic states has political and strategic values (Ismayilov et al., 2024). Politically, cooperation will help solve regional and global problems member states face. Strategically, new opportunities will open up for the implementation of joint projects and the rapprochement of citizens of the member states. The governments of the Turkic countries announced the integration of existing transit and transport corridors for long-term benefits, improving intraregional communication and ensuring effective integration with the global economy, creating an integrated electric system,

increasing the involvement and integration of Turkic diasporas into social, cultural, political, and economic life in their places of permanent residence, integrating markets between member states, and the creation of an integrated Turkic energy market (Guliyeva, 2023; Kalaganov et al., 2018; Shevchenko, 2023). The programme document Turkic World Vision 2040 (2021) is important for sustainable development and mutual integration in the Turkic states and peoples’ political, cultural, economic, and social life.

The areas covered by cooperation within the Organisation of Turkic States (2024) are political, economic, customs, transport, tourism, information, youth, energy, humanitarian, and even space partnerships. For example, in 2023, the Turkic Academy of Space Explorers programme was organised to raise awareness of Turkic youth in space science. More than 80 students from the organisation’s member states have been trained in astrophysics, observational astronomy, and rocket and space sciences (Kairat et al., 2023). Within the framework of political cooperation, there is a programme for training young diplomats (Ponomarenko & Pysarchuk, 2024). Important stages of training are language courses aimed at basic familiarisation with the languages of the organisation’s member states, highlighting common characteristics in them, and classes on the history of the Turkic peoples. A meeting of the official centres for economic policy research in economic cooperation and integration in the Turkic world was held in Astana in 2023. During this meeting, a promising strengthening of the strategic partnership between the Turkic states was outlined. The members of the Organisation of Turkic States noted that the process of cooperation between the Turkic states is at the highest level, and the member states need to continue to work together and provide information and academic support to further economic integration and strengthen the partnership of the Turkic-speaking countries.

In order to promote the integration of the Turkic peoples in the field of science and education, an international research institute created under

the auspices of the Organisation of Turkic States—the Turkic Academy—operates in Astana. First of all, the academy provides access to various aspects of the Turkic world, such as history, archaeology, literature, linguistics, art, and socio-economic issues. All this contributes to high-quality and effective cooperation, mutual acquaintance with cultures, and scientific exchange. Within the framework of the academy, attention is also paid to the development of secondary education. Thus, books for secondary schools of the member countries—Türkiye, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Azerbaijan, on the common history, geography, and literature of the Turkic world were presented (Textbooks on..., 2023; Nazarova et al., 2024). This project aimed to form an idea of the similarity of the Turkic peoples, strengthen the linguistic and cultural heritage, and develop a sense of common identity and mutual respect in the Turkic world.

The development of the culture of the Turkic peoples is closely linked to the activities of TURKSOY, an international organisation founded in 1993 as a result of agreements between the ministries of the Republic of Turkey, the Republic of Kazakhstan, a number of Central Asian states, and Azerbaijan. In 2025, the Kazakh city of Aktau receives the status of the cultural capital of the Turkic world (Within the framework..., 2024). The Secretary General of the organisation noted that such a choice was not accidental because Aktau is home to many cultural and historical monuments that make up the common cultural heritage of the Turkic peoples. Within the framework of the events scheduled for 2025, it is planned to hold dozens of concerts of classical and folk music, exhibitions of photographs and paintings, and theatre and music festivals that will acquaint the world community with the heritage of the Turkic peoples and strengthen the integration of Kazakhstan, Turkey, and other states of the Central Asian region.

Cultural integration in the field of opera and ballet takes place regularly. Thus, in 2024, the Director General of the State Opera and Ballet Theatre under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey, Tan Sagturk,

and the Director of the Abay Kazakh State Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre, Ainur Kopbasarova, discussed issues of development, joint performances, and staging of folk performances and ballets (Sultan Rayev held..., 2024). The delegates also noted the importance of establishing the Union of Opera and Ballet Theatres of the Turkic peoples in order to continue the integration of peoples. Art exhibitions, documentary film screenings, reconstructions of the life of the Turkic peoples, and acquaintance with literary achievements are also held among the member states of TURKSOY. Thus, a book by Kazakh poet Svetkali Nurzhan was presented in Ankara in the presence of many connoisseurs of literary art from Kazakhstan and Türkiye (Presentation of the book..., 2022). The representative of the Embassy of Kazakhstan in Türkiye Nishankul Karatayeva, noted that in recent years, many literary works have been published in Kazakhstan, and such publications positively contribute to strengthening ties between the countries.

According to the information of the Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the Republic of Turkey, through cooperation between the Eurasian Union of Writers of Turkey and the Union of Writers of Kazakhstan, more than 100 poets and writers from Kazakhstan have been translated from Kazakh into Turkish (Cultural and Humanitarian Cooperation, 2024). In addition, the Turkish education system is extremely attractive for Kazakh applicants. The most popular higher education institutions are universities in Ankara, Eskisehir, Aladdin Keikubat University, and Afyon Kokatepe University. The Republic of Turkey develops and promotes many scholarship programmes for international students from all over the world. One of them is the international scholarship programme Türkiye Bursları. The programme was founded in 2012, and at the initial stage, about 40,000 people applied for a scholarship, and by 2023 there were more than 100,000 people from more than 160 countries who wanted to study at Turkish higher education institutions. In total, in 2023, 262 students from Kazakhstan had the opportunity to study at the most prestigious educational institutions in

Türkiye, including 131 undergraduates, 90 graduates, and 41 doctoral degrees. In his speech, the Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey in Astana, Mustafa Kapudju, noted that youth serves as a bridge between the two countries, and it is very important that after graduation, young people serve their state (262 young people..., 2023).

Based on the above, within the framework of international organisations and at the bilateral

level, there is productive integration between governments, relevant ministries, and other national actors in the fields of culture and education of Türkiye and Kazakhstan. At the same time, the economic component is quite important. Despite the desire and concrete actions of the governments of Kazakhstan and Türkiye in the field of mutual integration, export trade indicators reflect a radically different degree of effectiveness of economic relations (Figure 1).

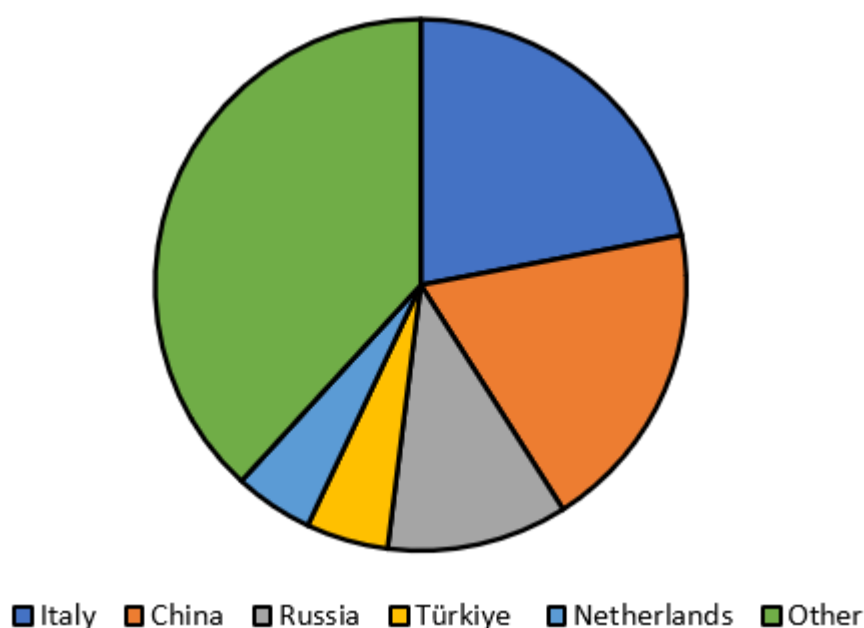


Figure 1: Comparative Characteristics of the Percentage Share of Kazakhstan's Exports to Türkiye and Other Countries

Source: Compiled by the Authors Based on Bureau of National Statistics, 2024

Statistics show that the Republic of Kazakhstan's exports focus more on Italy, China, and the Russian Federation (RF), while export figures with the Republic of Turkey account for only 5% of the state's trade turnover. Import indicators have similar dynamics (Figure 2).

China and the Russian Federation account for the largest share of Kazakhstan's imports (Bekturova et al., 2017; Zhanbulatova et al., 2020). Germany and the USA follow with 5% and 6%, respectively, while imports from Türkiye account for only 4%. Even though Kazakhstan and Türkiye share common cultural, religious, historical, and other common values, the government of Kazakhstan focuses on trade with neighbouring countries. One of the reasons for

this is the geographical location since Türkiye is located in southwestern Asia and is separated from Kazakhstan by the Caspian Sea and a number of Caspian littoral states (Trushaj, 2023). However, Kazakhstan shares a common border with both the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China. The lack of a sufficient number of diversified routes for the delivery of goods towards Europe causes the most significant volumes of mutual trade with neighbouring countries (Bekmuratov et al., 2024; Nurtazina et al., 2018; Rexhepi et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, in public discourse, the heads of state, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, pay considerable attention to the

prospects for developing bilateral strategic partnerships and deepening cultural, humanitarian, energy, trade, and economic ties. During the November 2023 summit of the heads of the Organisation of Turkic States, the President of Kazakhstan noted that in recent years, there has been a record increase in trade turnover between Türkiye and Kazakhstan. The Kazakh side intends to increase this figure to USD 10 billion since Türkiye is strategically important and one of the four trading partners of Kazakhstan (The Head of State..., 2023). Recep

Tayyip Erdogan added that cooperation in the current challenging conditions supports closer interaction between the Turkic world. A year earlier, in 2022, the President of Kazakhstan said that Türkiye was one of the five leading partners of Kazakhstan. However, such a statement by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan does not correlate with the foreign trade economic turnover for 2021-2023 since Türkiye ranks fifth in the export structure and sixth in the import structure (Bureau of National Statistics, 2024).

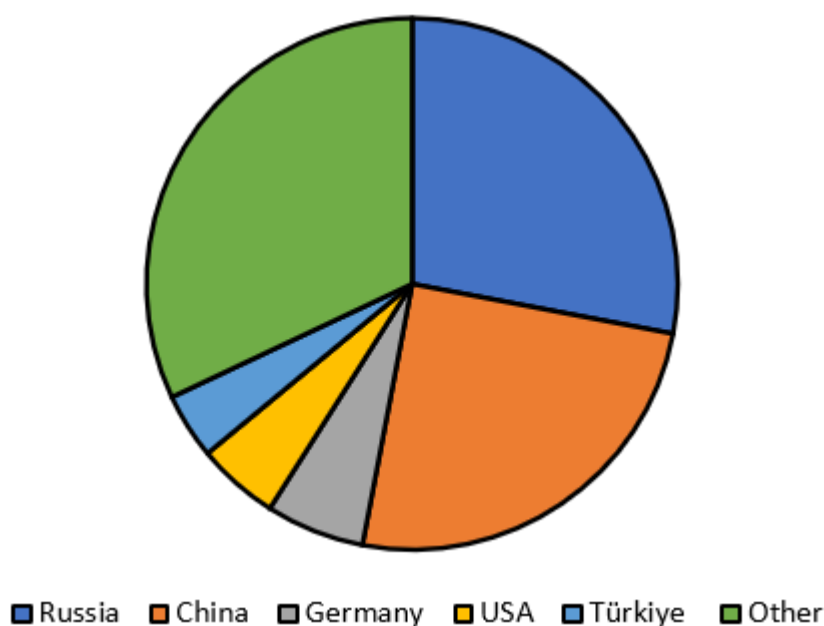


Figure 2: Comparative Characteristics of the Percentage of Kazakhstan's Imports from Türkiye and Other Countries

Source: Compiled by the Authors Based on Bureau of National Statistics, 2024

The integration processes between Türkiye and Kazakhstan reflect the strategic vision of the development of the states, the region, and the Turkic-speaking peoples as a whole. Factors of soft power and ethnic identity play a key role in the development of friendly and result-oriented relationships in key areas. At the same time, based on objective reasons, integration in individual spheres is not characterised by high efficiency.

Discussion

The analysis presented in the study identified the leading international platforms through which states continue deep and comprehensive integration in cultural, economic, political, and social spheres. The soft power factor remains

one of the most important aspects in the integration of the Turkic states, due to the Republic of Turkey's experience in conducting cultural diplomacy and ethnic identity, which further strengthens integration processes. According to Argali (2023), the identity factor determines where the state will be and what foreign policy it will pursue.

In the early 2000s, the government of the Republic of Turkey embarked on the use of soft power methods and the widespread use of aspects of cultural diplomacy in foreign policy (Kononenko, 2024). The Republic of Turkey has consistently ranked among the top 30 most attractive countries in the world over the past five years, according to the Global Soft Power

Index 2024 by the consulting firm Brand Finance. Notably, in 2020, the ranking included only 60 countries, while by 2024, the number of countries assessed increased to 193. Despite the expanded competition, Türkiye not only maintained its position but even improved it, demonstrating a strengthening of its soft power on the global stage. However, Anaz (2022) notes that after 2013, Türkiye's ability to attract an international audience has decreased and continues to decline significantly due to the deterioration of democratic freedoms. However, this statement applies more to Western, deeply democratic societies. In the case of integration processes between Kazakhstan and Türkiye, the study noted progress in building long-term and strategically beneficial relationships, including by signing comprehensive strategic documents and developing interstate relations within international organisations.

The Yunus Emre Institute, founded in 2007, is engaged in integrating Türkiye and Kazakhstan in the language sphere, and it was opened in Kazakhstan in 2010. The institute's main task is to strengthen cultural ties between Turkic-speaking peoples. Expanding knowledge about Kazakhstan's Turkish language and culture strengthens friendly and fraternal relations between Kazakhs and Turks (Kireyeva et al., 2022). In addition to popularising the Turkish world, the institute aims to develop an objective and comprehensive idea about the culture, traditions, and language of the people of Kazakhstan. Analysing Türkiye soft power in the Balkans, Ali (2022) and Avdić-Küsmüş (2022) emphasise that the Yunus Emre Institute and other institutions represent one of the most important segments of cultural influence and the implementation of a culturally oriented foreign policy strategy. The author's statements confirm the idea formulated in the study that the presence of cultural and educational centres has a qualitative effect on effective integration between states.

Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International Kazakh-Turkish University is important in integrating the Turkic world. The university was founded in 1992 during an intergovernmental agreement

between Türkiye and Kazakhstan, and to this day, it represents an important integration resource for the rapprochement of the Turkic states. Its role is to train highly qualified personnel from all Turkic-speaking countries, including Türkiye and Kazakhstan. Studying at the university has an important ideological significance in understanding the Turkic world's identity and uniqueness. As an integration tool, besides teaching, the university promotes the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and culture between Turkic countries (Ramankulov et al., 2015). Exploring the work of the Turkicology Research Centre at Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International Kazakh-Turkish University, Bayram (2022) notes several negative and positive aspects of the integration process of the Turkic world. On the one hand, most of the research is carried out not because of the desire to develop Turkology but only within the framework of the official requirements of the leadership. In addition, there are problems with archiving periodicals. On the other hand, in recent years, greater importance has been attached to the development of Turkology; a Turkological congress is held every two years, and scientific activities continue (Smanova et al., 2024). In their research, Marzhan et al. (2022) emphasise that students who graduated from Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International Kazakh-Turkish University satisfy most of the staffing needs of Turkish companies operating in Almaty and Astana. The authors' statements point to additional aspects of integration processes in the education system and confirm the thesis about the importance of developing the education system to strengthen trade and economic relations between states.

Nigde Omer Halisdemir University in Türkiye and its structural unit, the Scientific and Applied Centre for Culture and Education of Kazakhstan, are another important resource that promotes integration between Türkiye and Kazakhstan through the study of language, culture, religion, and history. A study conducted by Bişkin (2023) highlights the achievements of the Kazakh educational centre at the Turkish University. It helps the Turkish people become better acquainted with Kazakhstan's language policy,

rituals and celebrations, architecture, and natural resources. A promising area of integration of the Turkic states is the transition to a single alphabet of the Turkic countries based on the Latin script (Kolbayev et al., 2024; Lailieva et al., 2024). In this regard, discussions and scientific research in the field of linguistics have been held within the framework of international Turkic organisations in recent years to ensure better mutual understanding between the Turkic peoples and increase linguistic unity. İpek and Güler (2023) note that the transition of the Turkic peoples to the Cyrillic alphabet was associated with the desire of the Soviet government to limit the cultural interaction of the Central Asian region with Western countries. In the historical context, creating a standard Latin alphabet will contribute to the further integration of Kazakhstan and Türkiye.

The strategic document, *Turkic World Vision – 2040* (2021), defines the key areas of cooperation between the Turkic states for the next two decades. The main aspects of the strategy include adaptation and transformation to various global challenges. The document emphasises the role of the development of unified transit and transport corridors, power supply systems, communications, and energy among the Turkic countries. In the future, the provisions of the document may allow for better and more effective promotion of the Turkic identity as an important component of the rich cultural heritage of the region and bring the member states and their populations closer together, implement joint tourism projects, and harmonise cultural, educational, and youth policies. Baki (2022) concluded that the very adoption of such a document is already an important achievement, which allows for making Turkic cooperation a more sustainable process for regional and global governance. This statement confirms the results of the study since the adoption of the *Turkic World Vision—2040* (2021) reflects the vision of the Organisation of Turkic States participants in the development of a promising partnership in the long term.

The Government of the Republic of Turkey has been actively developing scholarship programs

over the past decade, inviting young people from all over the world to study at Turkish higher education institutions (Ernar et al., 2021; Pürhani et al., 2022; Suranchiyeva et al., 2023). Such a government initiative aims to strengthen cultural and educational cooperation, including with Kazakhstan. Each of the parties benefits from such programs since such Turkish initiatives help strengthen the reputation of the state as an attractive place of study for students and scientists, and potentially highly qualified personnel capable of making a significant contribution to the development of their own state are returning to Kazakhstan (Alishli et al., 2024; Khamzina et al., 2020). Aras and Zulkarnian (2019) hold a similar opinion, saying that the scholarship programs of the Republic of Turkey as a tool of soft power help the government to make some progress in popularising and spreading its culture and education to increase attractiveness among the international community. However, in the field of academic mobility, some researchers also point out the problems faced by Turkish higher education institutions (Chumak et al., 2022). Bulut-Sahin and Kondakci (2023) note that although many teachers and academic staff of Turkish educational institutions are satisfied with the signing of many agreements in the field of physical mobility of students, the problem remains of the lack of further cooperation and the possibility of joint research due to the short-term nature of such programs. The paper also insists on the problem of insufficient cost coverage for incoming students, which is most acute for people from low-income countries.

The integration of Kazakhstan, Turkey, and other Turkic-speaking countries is a prerogative in the work of such international organisations as TURKSOY and the Organisation of Turkic States (Nurtazina et al., 2015; Zhetpisbayev et al., 2017). Within the framework of their activities, the member states of the organisations strengthen cooperation in the economic, political, and cultural spheres, develop platforms for general discussions of problems existing in the region, and form mutual understanding between the Turkic peoples. In addition, organisations pay special attention to promoting

and studying Turkic languages and history. Meetings at the highest levels are regularly held to harmonise cooperation in opera, ballet, and painting. Training courses on studying space sciences and conducting diplomatic activities are organised for young people (Apakhayev et al., 2018). Akıllı (2019), studying the communication theory of Karl Deutsch, notes that the activities of TURKSOY and the Organisation of Turkic States in the field of cultural diplomacy instil a sense of community in societies through such operations as trade, tourism, culture, and educational exchanges and that ultimately any problems among the Turkic countries will be solved only within the framework of peaceful and coordinated actions. The most effective integration within the Organisation of Turkic States, according to Kazel (2023), is taking place between Türkiye and Azerbaijan, while such strong integration ties have not yet been formed between other participants. The authors' conclusions indicate a better integration of states with a more favourable geographical location. However, this does not diminish the effectiveness of Türkiye's integration with other states, albeit to a lesser extent.

Mutual trade between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Turkey continues to grow. However, compared with Kazakhstan's main export and import partners, it remains at an extremely low level in 2021-2023 and early 2024. This is evidenced by the statistical data from the Bureau of National Statistics (2024). The Turkish state, ethnically and culturally closely connected with Kazakhstan, occupies a small percentage of Kazakhstan's foreign trade turnover. A.F. Çetinkaya and Demirel (2024) also obtained a similar conclusion, estimating the percentage of Kazakhstan's trade with other Turkic states at 5.3% of exports and 2.8% of imports.

The analysis of the above scientific papers related to the integration processes between Türkiye and Kazakhstan highlighted additional aspects of cooperation among Turkic countries and also emphasised the importance of strategic cooperation to strengthen close ties among Turkic-speaking countries.

Conclusion

The study examined several key integration mechanisms and institutions that have facilitated close and multifaceted cooperation between Kazakhstan and Türkiye since Kazakhstan gained independence. These frameworks have played a central role in promoting integration between the two countries in the cultural, social, and economic spheres. Such cooperation is based on a common history, culture, language and a desire to develop areas of common interest of the Turkic-speaking countries.

It was determined that the government of the Republic of Turkey is interested in the qualitative and effective development of soft power policy. To do this, the indices of the Brand Finance consulting company, which evaluates brands and the soft power of states, were studied. The analysis showed that the Republic of Turkey has been among the thirty most influential and attractive world states over the past five years. Kazakhstan's position shows weak governance and institutional decisions in developing the state's image in the international arena. It was investigated that the Astana branch of the Yunus Emre Institute and the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency were popularising Turkish culture and language in Kazakhstan. Since the pandemic, the educational process at the Yunus Emre Institute has been organised remotely. It is still very popular among Kazakhs interested in learning the Turkish language. The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency is engaged in the opening of Turkish language classes at Kazakh universities, one of which has been operating since 2023 at the Gumilyov Eurasian National University. Turkish scholarship programmes are also popular among Kazakh students.

It is established that the integration of Türkiye and Kazakhstan is connected with the activities of the international organisation TURKSOY, which unites Turkic-speaking countries. The member states of the organisation decided that by 2025, the Kazakh city of Aktau will become the cultural capital of the Turkic world, which would acquaint both the world community and

representatives of the Republic of Turkey with the Turkic and Kazakh cultural heritage through art exhibitions, theatre festivals, folk music concerts, documentary films, acquaintance with literary achievements. It is considered that within the framework of the Organisation of Turkic States, a strategic document was adopted, consolidating the promising partnership of the Turkic states for the next two decades – the Turkic World Vision – 2040. This document's goals and objectives are to maintain regional stability and expand integration processes between the organisation's member states, such as continuing and increasing the number of cultural and educational exchanges between countries and integrating energy, electrical and communication resources. In addition, the governing bodies of the Organisation of Turkic States regularly organise trainings, seminars, and practical exercises for Turkic-speaking youth to strengthen knowledge about the Turkic history, culture, differences and similarities of the languages of the Turkic countries.

Future research on integrating Türkiye and Kazakhstan may focus more on the goals achieved following the adopted Turkic World Vision – 2040 and the consequences of introducing and harmonising the standard Turkic alphabet. In addition, it is helpful to consider the comparative characteristics of integration processes among other ethnic groups and nations with common cultural, linguistic, and historical ties. The limitation of the conducted research is the relatively recent adoption of the strategic document Turkic World Vision – 2040. In addition, discussions continue among the governments and relevant ministries of the Turkic-speaking countries on introducing a standard Turkic alphabet.

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Ethical Approval

We conducted this without human/animal participation. So, we reckon that ethical approval is not required.

Conflict of Interest

The authors confirm that they have no conflicts of interest to disclose. We declare that the article was not prepared using AI-generated text and that the figures deployed in the study were not generated using AI-assisted tools.

Author Contributions

K.B. and E.A.: conceptualisation, methodology, and data curation. A.A. and S.A.: writing-original

draft preparation, visualisation, and investigation. A.A.: supervision, writing-reviewing, and editing. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Informed Consent

The study was conducted without human participation. Informed consent is not required.

Data Availability Statement

The datasets used and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.