

Pan-Turkism in the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran: Competition over civilizational authority and geopolitical consequences

Dr Ehsan Movahedian

Abstract

Pan-Turkism in the 21st century cannot be explained solely through the classical model of establishing a single state or annexing Turkic-speaking territories. In its contemporary form, this movement is reproduced above all through a network of interstate institutions, educational and academic mechanisms, historical narratives, language programs, media, cultural diplomacy, economic and transit links, diaspora activities, and security cooperation. The expansion of the “Turkic world” within the Organization of Turkic States, the adoption of the “Turkic World Vision 2040”, the activities of the Turkic Academy, the preparation of joint textbooks, and the drafting of a common alphabet declaration in 2024 are observable examples of this institutionalization. Using a qualitative, documentary, and comparative approach, this article asks what capacity these mechanisms have to redefine identity and civilizational authority among Turkic-speaking communities in the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran; how the two states respond to this process both beyond and within their borders; and how it may transform the geopolitical landscape of the South Caucasus, the Caspian basin, Central Asia, and southern Siberia.

The study's theoretical framework draws on constructivism, the concept of kin-state, soft power, transnational nationalism, strategic narratives, and securitization theory. The method consists of analyzing official and institutional documents, assessing them against academic research, and then conducting a comparative case study. To distinguish legitimate efforts to foster cultural solidarity from the political project of Pan-Turkism aimed at increasing territorial divergence and the fragmentation of Iran and Russia, the article differentiates four levels of activity: first, legitimate linguistic and cultural cooperation; second, institutional convergence among independent states; third, efforts to transfer identity and political authority to external countries; and fourth, separatism or territorial irredentism. Evidence for the first two levels is abundant and direct. The third can be analyzed on the basis of institution-building, official messaging, and historical-memory policies. With regard to the fourth, because gradual, institution-centered strategies generally avoid openly declaring territorial claims, assessment rests on three indicators: documented institutional capacity, the cumulative direction of policies and narratives, and historical and theoretical precedents in which transnational cultural authority has become a territorial demand. On this basis, the article argues that the construction of a fabricated cultural and identity-based authority grounded in Pan-Turkism may, over a horizon of several decades and in conjunction with domestic crises, lead to territorial fragmentation.

With regard to Russia, Pan-Turkism is examined in the Volga–Ural region, particularly Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, as well as Chuvashia, Crimea, the North Caucasus, Altai, Tuva, Khakassia, and Sakha. Russian scholarship on the extent of Turkish influence is not uniform: some studies point to dense economic and humanitarian cooperation in the Volga region, whereas case studies indicate regional differences and limited Pan-Turkist influence in certain areas. Altai is both a historical reference to early Turkic polities and a political symbol in competition over “origins”; it should not, however, be presented as the exclusive and definitive homeland of all Turkic-speaking populations. In examining Pan-Turkist influence in Iran, the article considers Iranian Azerbaijanis, Turkmen, Qashqai, Khalaj, and other groups in light of the layered history of Iranian identity, linguistic ties, religious diversity, and cross-border relations. Research on the identity of Iranian Azerbaijanis addresses both the potential influence of neighboring countries' media and culture and the depth of Iranian identity and the role of domestic factors. For example, Mammadov (2023) emphasizes the impact of cross-border cultural factors and identity change, whereas Ahmadi (2017) highlights the durability of Iranian identity and responses to Baku's irredentism (Ahmadi, 2017; Mammadov, 2023).

The article's principal finding is that efforts by regional supporters of Pan-Turkism – specifically Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan – to transfer identity-based, historical, and civilizational authority from the aforementioned regions of Iran and Russia to centers outside these two countries may, under conditions of economic crisis, declining political trust, perceived discrimination, or external geopolitical aggression or competition, lead to the politicization of identity cleavages. In the long term, this process – which usually advances not through a public operational document but through the gradual accumulation of institutional, educational, and narrative practices – has the capacity to shift cultural and identity-based authority from the national center to external centers and to create conditions for the separation of Turkic-populated regions of Iran and Russia. The article's

argument rests on tracing mechanisms, the documented direction of institutions, and historical precedents, rather than expecting to find a document setting out a strategy that gradual approaches generally avoid making public. Accordingly, preserving territorial integrity and strengthening national cohesion in Turkic- and Azerbaijani-speaking regions of Russia and Iran may be pursued through inclusive cultural policies; support for the promotion of national literature and mythology alongside local languages; equal opportunities; accountable governance; credible public media; independent academic studies and research; and local and regional cooperation. Ultimately, Pan-Turkism – with the support of Baku and Ankara – seeks to construct a new transnational civilizational authority centered on Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan. If this process turns into political irredentism and becomes linked to domestic crises, it could, over a period of several decades, lead to the territorial fragmentation of Azerbaijani-populated regions of Iran and Turkic-populated regions of Russia. Although this outcome is not automatic, the documented institutional and narrative mechanisms involved, together with comparable historical precedents, mean that it should be treated as a plausible and foreseeable trajectory in security policymaking.

Keywords: Pan-Turkism; Pan-Turanism; Turkic world; Organization of Turkic States; Iran; Russia; Republic of Azerbaijan; Turkey; Altai; transnational identity; kin-state; civilizational authority; soft power; identity security; Middle Corridor; South Caucasus.

1. Introduction: Why should Pan-Turkism be re-examined?

One important feature of contemporary international politics is that identity-based, cultural, and informational ties do not necessarily remain confined within the borders of nation-states. A shared language, historical memory, religious networks, migration, transnational media, universities, scholarship programs, non-governmental organizations, and transport infrastructure can establish durable relationships among communities living in different countries. These ties sometimes promote peaceful cooperation and increase social contact; under conditions of power competition, however, they can become instruments for shaping political preferences, redefining symbolic boundaries, and expanding the influence of external states. From this perspective, identity is not a fixed and merely inherited variable, but an arena of meaning-making, negotiation, and political competition.

The Turkic-speaking communities of Eurasia are a prominent example of this situation. From Anatolia and the South Caucasus to Central Asia, the Volga–Ural region, the North Caucasus, and southern Siberia, there are populations that speak languages belonging to the Turkic family, but whose historical experiences, political institutions, religious affiliations, and national self-conceptions are not identical. Speaking a Turkic language does not in itself imply a single political identity, support for Pan-Turkism, or a desire to join an external center. Nevertheless, these linguistic and cultural affinities can provide a basis for transnational networking – networks that state and non-state actors seek to use for cultural, economic, diplomatic, or geopolitical purposes.

Iran and Russia are exposed to the effects of this development in several respects. Both countries have considerable linguistic and ethnic diversity, and parts of their populations are connected to Turkic languages and traditions. Both also neighbor a political space in which Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan seek to expand their influence and bilateral and multilateral cooperation. In Russia, this issue relates to Tatars, Bashkirs, Chuvash, Tuvans, Khakas, Altaians, Yakuts, and Turkic-speaking groups in the North Caucasus. In Iran, the discussion focuses on Iranian Azerbaijanis, but Turkmen, Qashqai, Khalaj, and other groups are also part of the country's linguistic landscape. Reducing all these communities to a single “*ethnic mass*” is a conceptual error, just as ignoring the potential influence of external networks would leave the analysis incomplete.

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, several independent Turkic-speaking republics emerged in Central Asia and the Caucasus, enabling Turkey to turn its linguistic and cultural relations with them into governmental, economic, and institutional cooperation. The establishment of the “Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States” in 2009 and its renaming and restructuring as the “Organization of Turkic States” in 2021 marked an important stage in this process. Official documents of the Organization emphasize “*common history, language, and culture*” and the expansion of cooperation. The “Turkic World Vision 2040” likewise describes relations among members as moving from cooperation towards gradual integration (Organization of Turkic States, 2021). The issue, therefore, is not merely the existence of cultural slogans, but the emergence of an institutional architecture that brings foreign policy, education, culture, trade, transport, and, in recent years, security dialogue into closer alignment.

At the same time, academic rigor requires that “*Pan-Turkism*” not become an all-encompassing label for every form of interaction among Turkic speaking people. Cultural cooperation between two communities, student exchanges, the preservation of linguistic heritage, or the use of similar alphabets does not necessarily constitute an expansionist project. The Organization of Turkic States also explicitly affirms the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, and respect for international borders in its founding documents (United Nations, 2009). Although this fact is not sufficient to assess practical objectives and consequences, it must be taken into account when examining official documents. Conversely, discourse about “*compatriots beyond the borders*”, transnational maps, the teaching of shared history, and security structures cannot be assessed solely as culturally neutral instruments, since they may shift the idea of belonging from territorial citizenship towards a broader transnational community.

The significance of this study arises from the connection between these two levels. On the one hand, institutions and documents openly promote Turkic-centered convergence. On the other, the experience of gradual, institution-centered strategies suggests that the conversion of cultural authority into pressure on territorial integrity usually occurs not through an explicit declaration of intent, but through the accumulation of institutional, educational, and narrative practices over several decades. The article therefore treats the existence of such a long-term orientation as a traceable possibility and takes seriously the geopolitical use of transnational identity. The central questions are what capacities identity-forming infrastructures create, under what conditions those capacities may become political pressure, and how Iran and Russia can prevent cultural solidarity from becoming an instrument of foreign intervention without depriving their own citizens of cultural rights.

1.1. Main research question and sub-questions

The main research question is: *What similarities and differences characterize the approaches of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation towards contemporary Pan-Turkism and Pan-Turanism, and through what mechanisms can this movement affect identity-based authority, national security, and the regional geopolitics of these two countries?*

The subsidiary research questions are as follows. **First**, what conceptual and ideological changes has contemporary Pan-Turkism undergone, and how is it related to Pan-Turanism? **Second**, what roles do the Organization of Turkic States, the Turkic Academy, joint educational programs, media, diaspora networks, military cooperation, and transport corridors play in this

process? **Third**, how do Turkey, the Republic of Azerbaijan, and other international actors contribute to the expansion of Turkic-centered ties, and where is the boundary between supporting cultural cooperation and supporting separatism and political irredentism? **Fourth**, what are the local characteristics of this movement in Russia – particularly in the Volga–Ural region and Altai – and in Iran, especially the northwest? **Fifth**, what foreign and domestic policy instruments do the two countries have at their disposal to mitigate potential risks? **Sixth**, what scope exists for cooperation among Iran, Russia, and potentially China, and what consequences might such cooperation have for the Eurasian security architecture?

1.2. Main hypothesis and supplementary hypotheses

The **main** hypothesis of this article is that contemporary Pan-Turkism, with the explicit institutional and political support of Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan, may seek to strengthen a transnational identity and transfer part of the cultural, historical, and civilizational authority of Turkic-speaking communities to institutional centers in Ankara and Baku. Over several decades, and in conjunction with domestic crises, this process may provide a mechanism for converting cultural authority into territorial demands. Through the politicization of identity and the weakening of trust in national institutions, it could strengthen demands for autonomy and separatism and ultimately contribute to the territorial fragmentation of Turkic-populated regions of Iran and Russia. The **first** supplementary hypothesis is that the level of risk is not uniform across regions, but depends on the density of transnational networks, the degree of contact with Turkish and Azerbaijani institutions, socioeconomic conditions, the performance of the central government, and the strength of layered identities. The **second** supplementary hypothesis is that cultural and educational instruments generally precede territorial demands. Drawing on the historical experience of transnational authority-building, this sequence constitutes the first link in a long-term chain that may later lead to territorial claims; the article examines this chain as the principal mechanism of influence. The **third** supplementary hypothesis is that excessive or discriminatory state responses may backfire and increase the credibility of external narratives.

1.3. Scope of the study and unit of analysis

The study's timeframe extends from the ideological roots of Pan-Turkism in the late 19th century to institutional and geopolitical developments in 2026. Its principal focus, however, is the period after 1991, and especially the years following 2020. Geographically, the study begins with Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan as important institutional and political centers of Turkic-centered convergence, but its detailed analysis focuses on Iran and Russia. China is considered in the discussion of potential cooperation and regional consequences, because any Turkic-centered convergence in Central Asia and Xinjiang also intersects with Beijing's security and economic interests. China should not, however, be assumed to be Iran's and Russia's natural partner on this issue: its foreign policy is based on stability, trade, state sovereignty, and the prevention of border instability, while it also maintains extensive economic relations with Turkey and Turkic-speaking countries.

The unit of analysis in this article is not "*the Turkic people*" as a homogeneous entity, but rather the organized networks that use language, history, symbols, and transnational institutions to

generate cooperation or influence. This distinction is crucial in practice: a Tatar who preserves their language and culture, an Iranian Azerbaijani interested in mother-tongue education, a Turkmen student participating in an academic exchange, or a researcher studying Turkic history is not, for these reasons alone, a participant in a political Pan-Turkist project. The analysis should focus on institutional conduct, declared agendas, resource allocation, narrative framing, and actual links between organizations, rather than attributing political orientation to large populations.

2. Methodology and considerations regarding evidence

The study employs a qualitative-comparative method and documentary analysis. Its sources are organized into four categories: states' legal and strategic documents; official documents of the Organization of Turkic States, the Turkic Academy, and cultural institutions; academic studies published in scholarly journals or by university presses; and analytical or media reports that help reconstruct events and discourse, but whose reliability must be assessed against independent sources.

Four levels of evidence are considered for each claim. The **first** is “*documentary fact*” – for example, the existence of the Organization of Turkic States, the declared content of the “Turkic World Vision 2040”, the preparation of joint textbooks, or the signing of the Shusha Declaration between Turkey and Azerbaijan. The **second** is “*discursive evidence*”, such as statements prioritizing the “Turkic world” or references to Turkic-speaking communities outside the borders of member states. The **third** is “*analytical inference*”: an assessment of how institutions and narratives may strengthen external identity-based authority. The **fourth** is “*assessment of long-term strategic consequences*”, such as the claim that territorial separation is an objective. Since gradual, institution-centered strategies generally avoid openly declaring such an objective, this fourth level is not based on a publicly available operational document, but on 3 indicators: documented institutional capacity; the sustained, cumulative direction of policies and narratives; and historical and theoretical precedents for the conversion of transnational cultural authority into territorial demands. When all 3 indicators are present simultaneously, a strategic assessment of a long-term orientation towards territorial separation is warranted. If financial records, correspondence, or operational evidence become available, they could elevate the assessment from analytical inference to documentary evidence.

The comparison between Iran and Russia is constructed along several dimensions: the legal treatment of ethnic and linguistic diversity; historical experiences of state-building; the place of religion and religious institutions; the geographical distribution of Turkic-speaking populations; the intensity of institutional and media links with Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan; foreign-policy instruments; domestic language and education policies; and the potential for cooperation with regional actors. The comparison is useful because the same mechanism – for example, shared-language education or the activities of a cultural foundation – may have different consequences in the two political systems. In Russia, the issue arises within a federal structure and across a range of dispersed republics and regions. In Iran, the principal concentration of the Azerbaijani population is in the northwest, in direct proximity to the Republic of Azerbaijan, while Iran's state-building model has historically been more centralized and linked to a longstanding civilizational narrative.

The study's main limitation is its reliance on publicly available sources and the scarcity of comparable field data from the two countries. Existing data on identity attitudes are sometimes derived from limited samples, different time periods, or dissimilar theoretical frameworks; they therefore cannot be directly compared without caution. Claims of “*influence*” also require clear indicators: media access, the number and continuity of educational programs, participation in transnational organizations, attitudes towards national and local identity, patterns of political trust, and the relationship between exposure to a narrative and changes in attitudes. The number of programs or agreements alone does not demonstrate their impact on audiences. Accordingly, the article's findings primarily concern the structure of opportunities, available instruments, and plausible pathways of influence – not the collective acceptance of the cultural authority envisaged by Baku and Ankara, nor a uniform intention among the populations of the regions under study.

3. Theoretical framework: Identity, kin-states, and securitization

3.1. Constructivism and the social production of identity

Constructivism in international relations provides a useful starting point for analyzing Pan-Turkism because it shows that interests and threats do not arise solely from geography or military capabilities; they are also shaped by identities, expectations, norms, and mutual perceptions. From this perspective, the “*Turkic world*” is not merely a demographic description of peoples who speak related languages. It is a framework of meaning that connects a shared past, common interests in the present, and an interconnected future. When this framework is reiterated through official summits, textbooks, symbols, youth programs, media, and infrastructure projects, it can strengthen the idea of a transnational community whose members may embrace it alongside their national identities or, under certain circumstances, place it above them.

In the short term, and by itself, this process does not lead to separatism. Over a period of several decades, however, particularly when it intersects with domestic crises, it may create conditions in which separatism becomes more plausible. Individuals can simultaneously be Turkic-speaking, citizens of Iran or Russia, members of a religious community, bearers of an urban or regional identity, and interested in cooperation with other Turkic-speaking communities. Identities are not inherently zero-sum. The issue becomes a matter of security when a political project turns multiple identities into an exclusive framework – for example, by portraying citizenship as “*unreal*” or “*imposed*”, separating local history from the country's broader historical context, or linking political loyalty to ethnic affiliation with a foreign center. At that point, the issue is no longer merely cultural exchange; it becomes an attempt to establish a hierarchy among identities (Wimmer, 2013).

From a constructivist perspective, identity-making practices include naming, selecting historical heroes, determining the beginning and end points of history, symbolic map-making, standardizing language, developing shared narratives, and creating commemorative dates. Each narrative choice highlights some connections and marginalizes others (Anderson, 2006; Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983; Smith, 1999). For example, if the history of a state or regional dynasty is represented solely through the linguistic ancestry of one group, its Iranian, Islamic, Mongol, Caucasian, or local dimensions may be obscured. Conversely, if shared history is presented in a

layered, multilingual, and non-exclusive way, cultural solidarity can be maintained without negating national identities. The issue in this article is therefore not “ownership” of history, but competition over how it is interpreted and the political effects of that interpretation.

3.2. Kin-states and transnational nationalism

The concept of a “kin-state” refers to a situation in which a state presents itself as the representative, protector, or supporter of people living beyond its official borders who share linguistic, ethnic, religious, or historical ties with it. On this basis, foreign influence does not necessarily begin with a claim to annex territory or a military threat. A kin-state can enhance its standing as a cultural or political point of reference through scholarships, language education, media programs, support for associations, commemorations of historical figures, facilitated travel, and the institutionalization of contacts among elites. Such policies exist in many parts of the world and are not inherently unlawful or illegitimate; the relevant questions concern their objectives and implementation, and whether they respect the sovereignty and rights of the host country (Gamlen, 2006).

In the cases of Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan, the language of “brotherhood”, “kindred peoples”, and the “Turkic world” plays an important role in linking people beyond their borders to a broader community. Ilham Aliyev’s official remarks at the 2022 summit of the Organization of Turkic States provide a clear example of this discourse: he stated that the “Turkic world” was not limited to independent states and that the rights and identity of compatriots living outside member countries should remain on the agenda; in the same speech, he referred to a large population of Azerbaijanis living outside the Republic of Azerbaijan (President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2022). Although this statement does not, by itself, constitute an explicit territorial claim, when considered alongside other documented elements “Turkic world” – including educational maps that make territorial claims concerning parts of Iran and Russia, joint textbooks with similar content, and the expansionist discourse of “Southern Azerbaijan” – it forms part of a chain that highlights the role of the kin-state and the foregrounding of transnational ties, shifting identity-based authority from the framework of national citizenship towards an external center.

Transnational nationalism becomes more clearly geopolitical when a kin-state supports not only culture but also a political program that defines belonging, or when it presents the population it addresses in the host country as part of its own political nation. In such circumstances, the boundaries of citizenship and nationhood become symbolically contested, even if legal borders continue to be formally recognized (Anderson, 1992; Brubaker, 1996). Research on interstate relations and national minorities also shows that state support for co-ethnics abroad, depending on its nature and implementation, can foster cultural ties but may also generate bilateral tensions and security concerns (OSCE HCNM, 2008; Sabanadze, 2009).

Three questions should be asked when assessing such a situation. Does the external state present itself merely as a facilitator of cultural exchange, or as the political defender of a particular population or ethnic group? Do its programs preserve local identities alongside the host country’s national identity, or place them in opposition to that identity and its political framework? And is there demonstrable Organizational or financial linkage between the foreign state’s interactions and political actors seeking border changes or autonomy? These questions

provide a framework for case-by-case analysis. In the case of gradual strategies that avoid explicitly declaring their objectives, answers must draw both on verifiable evidence – such as official documents, agreements, organizational connections, and documented statements – and on the cumulative direction of institutions and narratives. The absence of a public operational document cannot, by itself, be treated as proof that no such objective exists. This approach helps distinguish cultural cooperation and legitimate support for minority rights from transnational political activism (OSCE HCNM, 2008; Palermo & Sabanadze, 2011).

3.3. Soft power and institution-building

Soft power refers to the ability to shape others' preferences through attraction, credibility, culture, values, and desirable policies (Nye, 2004). In the Turkic-speaking environment of Eurasia, this power may derive from television productions, universities, scholarships, cultural centers, literary language, tourism, investment, scientific cooperation, and the demonstration of economic capacity. Transnational institutions matter because they make cultural relations stable and repeatable. A single festival may have only a short-term effect; combined with a scholarship program, an alumni network, a shared textbook, an annual conference, and a research database, however, it can become a mechanism for developing connected elites.

The Yunus Emre Institute, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), the Türkiye Maarif Foundation, and institutions associated with cultural and educational cooperation across the “Turkic world” should be examined within the framework of Turkish public diplomacy and soft power. Their official documents indicate that their activities are not limited to isolated cultural services: they also encompass the promotion of Turkey's language, history, and culture, the expansion of educational and cultural cooperation, and the establishment of lasting relationships with communities in host countries. The Yunus Emre Institute explicitly defines its mission as promoting Turkey's language, culture, history, and arts, increasing cultural exchange, and strengthening cultural diplomacy (Yunus Emre Institute, n.d.). TİKA likewise states in its official account that it was established in 1992 to develop strong cooperation with newly independent Turkic republics and Turkey's neighboring countries; in addition to development cooperation, its work includes education, the preservation of historical heritage, and cultural cooperation (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency [TİKA], n.d.).

The relationship between these activities and the identity strategy of the “Turkic world” becomes clearer when the documents of the Organization of Turkic States are also examined. The “Turkic World Vision 2040” identifies a gradual move from cooperation among member states towards deeper integration as one of the Organization's overarching objectives. The Organization also presents educational cooperation as a means of strengthening a shared identity, cultural ties, and the human capital of the “Turkic world”. Within this framework, education and research are described as mechanisms for strengthening younger generations' shared awareness of language, history, and cultural values (Organization of Turkic States [OTS], 2021, n.d.).

These documents provide direct evidence of an institutional program to strengthen a shared Turkic identity and deepen cultural and educational ties among member states. Linking Turkish cultural diplomacy to the broader project of the “Turkic world” integration is therefore not merely an inference drawn from scattered cultural activities; it is consistent with the declared objectives of official institutions.

Studies in Russian-language academic literature show that research on Turkey's soft power towards Turkic-speaking communities in the Russian Federation is not confined to cultural or economic relations; some scholars also focus on the identity-related consequences of these ties. Mayorova and Sbitneva (2023), in a study of Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Chuvashia, Crimea, Altai, Sakha, Tuva, and Khakassia, examine Turkey's economic and humanitarian activities and the role of its cultural institutions in the context of Ankara's expanding ideological influence. They argue that the idea of the "*Turkic world*" and associated mechanisms may create conditions for promoting identity models that extend beyond Turkey's borders, and they warn of the possibility of identity homogenization on the Turkish model. In another study, Kagazbayeva and Bisbekova (2025), examining the Republic of Sakha, show that cultural institutions, educational initiatives, digital media, and symbolic narratives play a role in the competition between Russia and Turkey over the representation of local identities. Taken together, these studies provide a framework for analyzing the hypothesis that Turkish soft power may do more than strengthen cultural relations: it may also help redefine belonging to the "*Turkic world*" and foreground a transnational civilizational solidarity. Nevertheless, a distinction must be maintained between the existence of identity-forming instruments and narratives, the strategic intentions of Turkish institutions, and proof of actual changes in the political or national identities of the communities addressed.

ARVAK | ARMENIAN ANALYTICAL CENTER | arvak.am

shared Turkic identity and expand Turkish soft power. When this strategy is combined with an explicit orientation towards an identity-based sphere centered on Ankara and Baku and with direct engagement with Azerbaijanis in Iran and Turkic-speaking populations in Russia, it may be interpreted – as an analytical inference made by this article, not as a claim directly established by the cited sources – as an effort to transfer identity-based authority in favor of Baku and Ankara, an effort that could, over the long term, create conditions for separation.

3.4. Strategic narratives and the politics of memory

A strategic narrative is a framework that connects the past, present, and future in the form of a meaningful political story (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, & Roselle, 2013). A shared narrative of the “Turkic world” can serve 3 purposes: it can present a common past, define common interests in the present, and articulate a desired future. It can also connect these elements and reproduce them through educational, cultural, and media networks, thereby making a transnational community appear natural and historically continuous.

The politics of memory also involves the selective choice of events and figures. By selecting and foregrounding particular events, personalities, and traditions, political actors shape national and transnational narratives – narratives that may recast historical figures and dynasties from diverse regions of Eurasia as components of a “*shared Turkic history*”. Such reinterpretation can increase public knowledge of shared heritage. However, if the roles of official and administrative languages, Iranian traditions, Islamic heritage, multi-ethnic institutions, local cultures, and historical connections among different groups are excluded, it can become an exclusive and distorted narrative designed to manufacture false authority. The object of criticism, therefore, is not scholarship on Turkic history itself, but the politically selective and homogenizing use of history. In contemporary practice, the Turkic Academy's preparation of textbooks on “*Common Turkic History*”, “*Common Turkic Literature*”, and the “*Geography of the Turkic World*” provides an example for examining the institutionalization of a shared historical and cultural narrative (Turkic Academy, 2023).

The publication by Turkish Ministry of National Education of two new educational works – the “*Cultural Atlas of the Turkic World*” and “*Hakan and Bilge's Journey to the Turkic World*” – for the 2026–2027 academic year can be viewed as a concrete example of the connection between the politics of memory, strategic narratives, and the symbolic redefinition of identity geography. The cover map of these books reportedly places parts of northern and northwestern Iran, in addition to the territory of Turkey, within the area labelled the “Turkic world”; in the account under discussion, the map also extends into parts of Russia and China.

The significance of this initiative lies not merely in depicting the geographical distribution of Turkic-speaking populations, but in turning a cultural and historical concept into an educational framework for defining a transnational identity space. When such a map appears in books intended for schoolchildren, and the Turkish Ministry of National Education describes the works' purpose as strengthening awareness of the “Turkic world's” shared heritage and ties, identity geography becomes a tool for socializing a new generation and transmitting a particular account of the past (Ministry of National Education of Türkiye, 2026).

From the perspective of strategic-narrative theory, this process may consolidate an image of the world in which dispersed regions and communities are defined as part of a single civilizational space,

gradually influencing audiences' perceptions of identity and historical belonging (Miskimmon et al., 2013). From the perspective of memory politics, the question is whether this representation acknowledges the multilayered history of Iran and the regions concerned or marginalizes other historical layers – including Iranian heritage, Islamic traditions, local identities, and multi-ethnic structures – by selectively foregrounding Turkic-speaking connections (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983; Anderson, 2006). If an examination of the books confirms such omissions or simplifications, the process may be characterized as a contested form of identity-based authority-building: an attempt to give educational legitimacy to a particular account of history and geography that may influence how some populations in neighboring countries understand themselves. Methodologically, cultural representation, claims of civilizational belonging, and claims to territorial sovereignty must be distinguished. This distinction does not make the map irrelevant: placing parts of Iranian territory on an educational map of the “Turkic world”, although not an explicit territorial claim, may be an initial step in normalizing a new mental boundary among future generations – a boundary that, if consolidated and combined with a crisis, could become a basis for territorial demands. Evidence-based criticism should nevertheless remain grounded in the map's content, the books' explanations, the selection of historical figures and events, and the extent to which parallel and intertwined histories are acknowledged.

3.5. Securitization and the risk of backlash

Securitization theory explains how an issue is removed from the realm of ordinary politics and represented as an existential threat to the state, nation, or society – a process that can facilitate public and institutional acceptance of extraordinary measures (Buzan et al., 1998). This framework is relevant to analyzing Iran's and Russia's responses to the expansion of assertive transnational cultural and identity networks, particularly when educational, linguistic, and media activities are linked to a political program that defines ethnic or historical belonging beyond official borders. In this context, Turkey's cultural policy and its cooperation with the Republic of Azerbaijan can be studied as part of competition over the production and dissemination of identity narratives. Institutions such as TİKA, the Yunus Emre Institute, and the Türkiye Maarif Foundation, together with educational and cultural programs associated with the “Turkic world”, have the capacity to create durable linguistic, educational, and symbolic networks. These institutions generally describe their activities in terms of cultural diplomacy, language education, development cooperation, and the promotion of shared heritage. Critical analysis should therefore distinguish their official mandates from the possible geopolitical consequences of their activities (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency [TİKA], 2018, 2024).

The significance of these mechanisms in Turkish–Azerbaijani relations stems from the fact that cultural and educational cooperation takes place within a broader context of political and strategic convergence. Studies of history and geography textbooks in the Republic of Azerbaijan suggest that formal education can play a role in representing common origins, strengthening collective memory, and defining a transnational identity space aimed at attracting Azerbaijani and Turkic populations in Iran and Russia (Baku Research Institute, 2025; Şahin, 2024).

In this context, the “Turkic world” narrative is not merely a cultural description of shared linguistic and historical characteristics. Depending on educational content and how identity boundaries are drawn, it may become a framework for defining collective belonging and

reinterpreting relations between ethnic groups and existing states. From the perspective of strategic-narrative theory, such narratives can construct a shared past and a desired future by selecting and foregrounding particular memories, personalities, and historical ties, then reproducing them through educational, cultural, and media networks (Miskimmon et al., 2013). Accordingly, what this study calls “*cultural and identity influence*” – or, in a more critical formulation, “*cultural and identity encroachment*” – does not mean simply teaching Turkish or introducing the heritage of Turkic-speaking peoples. It refers to the possibility that these capacities may be used to consolidate an exclusive narrative of identity and political belonging and to manufacture civilizational authority in favor of Turkey and Baku.

At the same time, excessive securitization of this process can produce contradictory consequences. If the host state fails to distinguish hostile organized political activity from citizens’ cultural rights, local-language education, cultural activities, and lawful associations may be treated as signs of a threat to national security. Russia’s experience shows that legal changes affecting the teaching of indigenous languages in some republics with Turkic populations can become a serious controversy over linguistic and cultural rights. Amendments to Russia’s Education Law in 2018, among other things, allowed students under certain conditions to be exempted from studying the republics’ native languages and prompted protests from advocates of those languages (Human Rights Watch, 2019). In Iran, Article 15 of the Constitution, while establishing Persian as the official and common language and script, recognizes the use of local and ethnic languages in the press and media and the teaching of their literature in schools; Article 19 affirms equal rights for the people regardless of ethnic group or tribe (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1979, Arts. 15 and 19). Security policy in this area must therefore be assessed against legal obligations and citizens’ cultural rights, rather than designed solely on the basis of geopolitical concerns.

This situation reveals an important contradiction: broad restrictions on linguistic and cultural rights, even when intended to prevent foreign influence, may provide propaganda material for the very external networks they seek to counter. Educational or cultural restrictions can be portrayed in transnational narratives as evidence of “*ethnic repression*”, strengthening feelings of deprivation, distrust of national institutions, or acceptance of competing identity narratives. The recommendations of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities concerning national minorities in inter-state relations also emphasize the need to balance states’ legitimate security concerns with the protection of minority rights (OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, 2008). Sustainable identity security is therefore better pursued not through a blanket prohibition of cultural activity, but through a clear distinction between citizens’ cultural rights and foreign political intervention, transparency concerning financial and Organizational sources, equal enforcement of the law, and genuine opportunities for education and cultural production in local languages. In Russia, this requires attention to the position of republic languages within the federal structure and to the effects of educational centralization. In Iran, maintaining (Farsi) as the official language should go hand in hand with implementing the legal provisions concerning local and ethnic languages and literature. Such an approach can reduce opportunities for foreign actors to exploit cultural grievances without making the protection of citizens’ legitimate rights a cost of national security.

3.6. Operational definitions and conceptual boundaries

To avoid conceptual confusion, this study uses “*Turkic cultural orientation*” to refer to activities intended to preserve the languages, literature, music, history, and cultural relations of Turkic-speaking communities, without necessarily having transnational political consequences. “*Turkic-centered convergence*” refers to institutional cooperation among independent states in organizations, education, economics, transport, and security; such convergence may be beneficial, competitive, or both. “*Political Pan-Turkism*” becomes relevant when linguistic solidarity is transformed into a political idea of a transnational Turkic community, a common center, or the need to direct political affairs on the basis of ancestry. “*Pan-Turanism*” is a broader and historically more variable concept that may place Turkic peoples within a larger “*Turanian*” civilizational space and, in some formulations, refer to alleged kinship with groups beyond the Turkic language family. “*Irredentism*” refers to a political claim that territory belonging to one state should be joined to another state or nation on historical or ethnic grounds; “*separatism*” refers to efforts to detach a region from an existing state. These concepts are related but are not synonymous.

Under these definitions, the existence of the Organization of Turkic States or the teaching of shared history does not, by itself, constitute separatism. However, the accumulation of such activities alongside boundary-challenging discourse, educational maps, links with irredentist networks, and domestic crises may create a pathway from the second to the third and fourth levels of political activity. Risk assessment should ask whether official borders are challenged in documents or public statements; whether communities outside the borders are defined as part of the sponsoring state’s nation; whether cultural networks are linked to actors or organizations engaged in irredentism; and whether, during a crisis, these links lead to political mobilization, funding, media coordination, or territorial demands. This framework allows potential threats to be taken seriously without unjustifiably securitizing legitimate cultural cooperation or citizens with layered identities.

4. Pan-Turkism and Pan-Turanism in the contemporary era

4.1. Historical origins and the evolution of the idea

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Pan-Turkism evolved from a cultural and linguistic reformist movement into a political ideology advocating the transnational unity of Turkic-speaking communities, through the contributions of intellectuals such as Ismail Gasprinski, Yusuf Akçura, Ali Bey Huseynzade, Ahmed Ağaoğlu, and Ziya Gökalp. Gasprinski, through his famous slogan “*Unity in Language, Thought, and Action*”, emphasized the creation of a common language and shared identity among Turkic-speaking peoples. Akçura presented Turkism as an alternative to Ottomanism and Pan-Islamism, Huseynzade advocated the synthesis of Turkism, Islam, and Western civilization, while Gökalp sought to systematize the cultural and political foundations of this ideology (Landau, 1995; Karpat, 2001; Reynolds, 2009). Nevertheless, an understanding of the geopolitical circumstances surrounding the emergence of this movement also requires attention to the role of Ármínus Vámbéry (1832–1913), a Hungarian Orientalist associated with British political circles (Vámbéry, 1365 [1986/87]). In his research, Michael Reynolds explicitly states that, in 1873, Vámbéry advocated the idea of an

alliance between the Ottoman Empire and the broader communities of Turkic descent, extending from the Balkans to the Great Wall of China, as a means of establishing a counterweight to Russian power. Reynolds identifies him as one of the earliest proponents of the conceptual frameworks of Pan-Turkism and Pan-Turanism (Reynolds, 2009, pp. 141–142). In his book “The Coming Struggle for India” (1885), Vámbéry portrayed Russia’s territorial expansion in Central Asia as a threat to British imperial interests in India. In his memoirs, he also explicitly discussed his anti-Russian positions, his support for British and Austro-Hungarian policies, and his efforts to counter Russian influence. He even asserted that his opposition to Russia was more vehement than that of many Turks and the Ottoman Sultan himself (Vámbéry, 1885; Vámbéry, 1904, pp. 287–293, 362–363). Vámbéry’s connections with British politicians and influential policy-making circles, including Lord Randolph Churchill, George Curzon, and Arthur Balfour, have also been documented in the research of Miklós Sárközy (Sárközy, 2020).

Accordingly, the early formulation of Pan-Turkism and Pan-Turanism can be analyzed not only in terms of the intellectual and identity-related developments within Turkic-speaking communities, but also within the broader context of British-Russian geopolitical rivalry and the efforts of strategic circles in London to create and strengthen a transnational identity-based and political instrument capable of countering Russian influence in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Such an instrument could potentially have weakened the cohesion of the southern territories of the Russian Empire and constrained its regional power by linking Turkic-speaking populations under Russian rule to the Ottoman Empire.

The geopolitical context in which Pan-Turkism arose cannot therefore be considered separately from great-power rivalry across Eurasia. At a time when Britain and Russia were competing for influence in Central Asia and around the Ottoman Empire, any idea capable of strengthening transnational solidarity between populations under Russian rule and Turkic-speaking communities outside it had potential strategic implications. The expansion of modern education, Turkic-language newspapers, contacts between Tatar and Caucasian intellectuals and Istanbul, the crisis of the Ottoman Empire, and the rise of European nationalisms created conditions in which Turkish language and culture could be imagined as the basis of a broader solidarity. Ismail Gaspirali/Gaspiralı, with his well-known slogan “*Unity in language, thought, and action*”, worked to establish a shared cultural and educational space. Later thinkers such as Ziya Gökalp sought to formulate Turkism as a national and political theory. The movement was not homogeneous from the outset: some focused on educational reform and cultural solidarity; others placed the national identity of Turkey at the center; still others advocated broader political union or an expansion of the sphere of influence. The history of Pan-Turkism should therefore not be reduced to a single, unchanging plan (Landau, 1995; Shnirelman, 2001).

Historically, Pan-Turanism has been broader and more semantically ambiguous than Pan-Turkism. The word “*Turan*” has an ancient place in Iranian literary and mythological traditions and, in Persian texts – including Ferdowsi’s epic tradition – refers to a geographical-mythological realm contrasted with Iran. The meaning of *Turan* in classical Persian literature should not, however, be equated directly with the modern political concept of Pan-Turanism. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, some European and Turkist intellectuals and writers used the concept to imagine a broader civilizational, linguistic, or ancestral space. In some formulations, this imagined space consisted mainly of Turkic-speaking communities; in others, it extended to Hungarians, Finns,

Mongols, and other peoples of northern and central Eurasia. Pan-Turanism should therefore be understood as a collection of historical and political imaginaries with variable boundaries, rather than as an ideology with a fixed and universally agreed definition (Landau, 1981; Meyer, 2014).

One intellectual basis of this discourse lay in 19th-century linguistic theories concerning the kinship of Uralic and Altaic languages. In some older formulations, structural similarities among Turkic, Mongolic, and Tungusic languages – and sometimes Korean, Japanese, Hungarian, and Finnish – were treated as evidence of a broad language family. Contemporary historical linguistics, however, distinguishes genetic linguistic relationships from structural convergence and the effects of historical contact. Recent research indicates that “*Ural–Altaic*” cannot be accepted as a single, scientifically agreed genetic language family; linguistic similarities alone are insufficient to prove common ancestry (Janhunen, 2023). Pan-Turanism should therefore be studied as a tradition of political thought, identity construction, and historical myth-making, not as the self-evident reflection of a genetic relationship among all peoples included in some of its formulations.

The WWI and the final crisis of the Ottoman Empire drew Pan-Turkism and Pan-Turanism more deeply into military and geopolitical calculations. Ottoman defeats in the Balkan Wars, the legitimacy crisis of the Ottoman order, and competition with Russia created conditions for the strengthening of Turkish nationalist currents. Some figures associated with the “Committee of Union and Progress”, especially Enver Pasha, showed interest in ideas of Turkic unity and viewed developments in the Caucasus and Central Asia as opportunities to expand Ottoman influence. Nevertheless, Ottoman foreign policy during the war should not be reduced entirely to Pan-Turanism. Historical research shows that military, security, and economic considerations, as well as attempts to create buffer zones against Russia, also influenced decision-making. Analyses of the Ottoman campaign in the Caucasus in 1918 should therefore distinguish declared ideology from military motives and strategic calculations (Köse & Öncü, 2022; “*Panturkism*”, International Encyclopedia of the First World War, n.d.).

During this period, external powers also sometimes sought to exploit ethnic, religious, and national divisions within the territories of their rivals. Each state, organization, and operation must nevertheless be examined separately: the existence of geopolitical rivalry does not, by itself, prove that a foreign power originated or directed the entire Pan-Turkist movement. The historical record primarily shows that, under conditions of war and imperial collapse, transnational ideologies can be used to legitimize military intervention, the creation of buffer zones, or the expansion of external influence. This conclusion can be explored through the Ottoman policy in the Caucasus and its interaction with the collapse of the Russian Empire, without inferring a direct and inevitable relationship between every historical form of Pan-Turanism and contemporary policies (Köse & Öncü, 2022; *Panturkism*, 1914–1918 Online).

The Soviet period marked a different stage in the history of this idea. On the one hand, the Soviet government contributed to the consolidation of certain ethnic and national identities by creating ethnic republics, standardizing languages, expanding education, and institutionalizing national identities within the administrative system. On the other hand, it suppressed independent transnational organizations that it regarded as a threat to Soviet political unity. Policy in the former Soviet republics was not constant over time: early decades saw policies of indigenization and the promotion of some local languages and elites, but these coexisted with political centralization, ideological control, and the repression of certain nationalist movements.

The Soviet legacy should not, therefore, be reduced either to the suppression of local languages and identities or, conversely, to unconditional support for them (Grenoble, 2003; Martin, 2001).

This duality is also visible in Soviet Azerbaijan. Altstadt's research shows that Soviet policies between 1920 and 1940, while institutionalizing national education and culture within a Soviet identity framework, also transformed earlier patterns of Azerbaijani identity construction and culture. National republics could thus function simultaneously as arenas for cultural development and as instruments for consolidating central state control (Altstadt, 2016). This experience helps explain contemporary Russia's sensitivity to transnational identity ties, the status of the Russian language, federal authority, and the activities of foreign actors, although today's political responses cannot be attributed solely to the direct legacy of Soviet policy.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked another turning point. The independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan and 5 Central Asian states – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan – created a new environment for redefining regional relations. It should be noted, however, that Tajikistan is predominantly Persian-speaking and is not categorized as a Turkic-speaking state. Turkey rapidly expanded its political, economic, cultural, and educational relations with the newly independent republics, and the idea of the “Turkic world” became an important framework in Ankara's regional policy. This was not a linear process without obstacles; it was shaped by Turkey's resource constraints, the independent preferences of Central Asian states, and competition with Russia, China, Iran, and other external actors (Çınar, 2013; Mkhitarian, 2004).

The newly independent states did not necessarily seek political integration into a Turkic-centered bloc. Alongside cultural ties with Turkey, they emphasized national sovereignty, diversity in economic and security partners, and freedom of action in foreign policy. The development of Turkic-speaking cooperation institutions should therefore be understood as the outcome of interaction between Ankara's initiatives and the independent calculations of member states. Studies of Turkey–Central Asia relations likewise emphasize the differences among bilateral relationships and the obstacles to turning cultural solidarity into durable strategic integration (Çınar, 2013; Sbitneva, 2024).

Taken together, the history of Pan-Turanism and Pan-Turkism shows that ideas of linguistic and cultural kinship can, under particular historical conditions, move beyond the literary and symbolic sphere and serve political identity construction, foreign policy, and geopolitical competition. Nevertheless, directly linking every contemporary “Turkic world” policy to early 20th-century military projects, or treating it as the uninterrupted continuation of a single plan, requires independent historical and institutional evidence. A careful analysis must consider the continuity of certain ideas and symbols while also accounting for changing international conditions, the agency of regional states, and the differences among cultural convergence, interstate cooperation, and transnational political projects.

4.2. From the ideal of union to gradual institution-building

A major contemporary shift has been a partial move away from explicit rhetoric of “*political union*” towards the language of cooperation, solidarity, historical ties, economic convergence, and the “Turkic world”. This change should not automatically be interpreted as deception or concealment: the creation of intergovernmental institutions may reflect genuine interests of

independent states in trade, transport, education, and diplomatic coordination. Institution-building nevertheless has a specific strategic effect: it embeds a shared identity in permanent procedures and organizations and creates opportunities to move cooperation from the symbolic level into practical policymaking. The “Turkic World Vision 2040” explicitly presents the transition from cooperation towards gradual integration as an objective and places culture, education, youth, diaspora, media, economics, and connectivity alongside foreign policy (OTS, 2021).

The Organization of Turkic States was established in 2009 as the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States and adopted its current name in 2021. Its current members are Turkey, the Republic of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. Turkmenistan, Hungary, and the so called “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” have observer status, while the Economic Cooperation Organization is an institutional observer (Organization of Turkic States, n.d.). This composition shows that the organization is not simply an ethnic institution and that its members and observers have different national and foreign-policy objectives. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, for example, can use a Turkic-centered identity to strengthen regional relations while avoiding any project that would restrict their strategic autonomy. The “Turkic world” is therefore not a fully unified actor, but a space of negotiation and balancing.

The organization’s founding document, the Nakhchivan Agreement, emphasizes shared history, language, and culture, while also recognizing the principles of the United Nations Charter, sovereign equality, territorial integrity, and the inviolability of international borders (United Nations, 2009). This legal language matters for threat assessment: officially, the organization presents itself as a framework for cooperation among independent states. At the same time, intergovernmental institutions can create spheres of cultural and political influence without making territorial claims. Security analysis should therefore not rely solely on declared legal language, but should also examine program content, implementation, cumulative long-term effects, and the relationship between stated legal principles and practical conduct. A sphere of influence established without an explicit territorial claim may, under favorable conditions, create a basis for such a claim.

4.3. Ideological dimensions: Core themes and strategic assumptions

The **first** ideological component of contemporary Pan-Turkism is the foregrounding of linguistic and historical kinship and its transformation into a sense of transnational community. In this narrative, Turkic-speaking communities may constitute separate nations with separate states while nevertheless belonging to a larger “*family*” or “*world*”. This framework can be beneficial for cultural cooperation; in its political form, however, it may symbolically diminish the importance of existing state borders and turn loyalty to an external cultural center into an element of identity. The crucial transition is from “*we can share history and language*” to “*we should follow a single political or civilizational center*”. The considerable distance between these propositions must be assessed through evidence.

The **second** component is competition over civilizational centrality. Ankara occupies an important position because of Turkey’s population, economy, military power, media infrastructure, and state-building history. Baku, owing to its linguistic proximity to Azerbaijani communities, energy resources, hydrocarbon export revenues, and geopolitical position in the South Caucasus, seeks to serve as an independent center within this network.

The slogan “*One Nation, Two States*” is a distinctive formulation of the Ankara–Baku relationship. It is meaningful in their bilateral relations, but extending it to all Turkic-speaking populations in the region fails to account for their historical and political differences. Strategically, Turkey can provide broader infrastructure for connecting networks, while the Republic of Azerbaijan can play a pivotal role in the South Caucasus and in ties with Azerbaijani communities on both sides of the Aras River.

The **third** component is the reinterpretation of history. A common form of this strategy is to incorporate dynasties, empires, and historical figures from different parts of Eurasia into an overarching narrative of “*Turkic history*”. Such reinterpretation can recover understudied aspects of Turkic-speaking peoples’ history and correct narratives that have neglected them. The risk arises when a dynasty or historical figure is assigned exclusively to a modern nation solely on the basis of language, ancestry, or an alleged ethnic origin. The Safavids, Seljuks, Ilkhanids, Aq Qoyunlu, and other historical states operated within contexts shaped by multiple languages, institutions, religions, and cultures. Turning this layered heritage into a sequence of “*national*” states in the 21st-century sense can transform civilizational connections into instruments of competition and even hostility towards neighbors who tell a different historical story.

The **fourth** component is symbolic geography. Maps, historical names, and representations of “*Turan*” or the “*Turkic world*” can create new mental boundaries. The use of the name “*Turkestan*” in some texts for parts of Central Asia, or maps depicting the “*Turkic world*” as stretching from the Adriatic to Siberia, does not in itself imply a change in borders. Such representations can, however, familiarize audiences with the idea of a broader political space understood as belonging to the symbolic sphere of Ankara and Baku. The implications of these maps depend on how they are used, whether they appear in educational materials or official speeches, and how they relate to political claims. Symbolic mapping has a long history in nationalist and ethnic movements; it acquires greater strategic significance when connected to institutional and security programs.

The **fifth** component is the idea of “*protecting co-ethnics abroad*”. This concept is particularly visible in Baku’s official discourse about Azerbaijanis living outside the country. Aliyev’s remarks at the 2022 summit of the Organization of Turkic States placed mother-tongue education and the maintenance of ties with compatriots outside member states on the agenda (President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2022). From the perspective of minority rights, support for cultural rights can be legitimate. Tensions over sovereignty arise, however, if a sponsoring state treats people who are citizens of another country as part of its own political body or makes their language and identity the basis for territorial claims. The distinction between cultural diplomacy and irredentism must be assessed on the basis of statements, conduct, and organizational links.

A summary of this outlook can also be seen in Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s video message to young participants at the “*Turkic world*” gathering in Kocaeli on October 11, 2026. In the message, Erdoğan stressed that solidarity among Turkic communities transcended geographical and political borders and rested on shared history, rich culture, and emotional ties. Emphasizing the role of younger generations in fulfilling the common aspiration of the “*Turkic world*”, he pledged continued Turkish support for them and stated that Ankara sought to advance the idea of “*unity in language, thought, and action*” and strengthen cooperation among Turkic countries (Directorate of Communications of the Presidency of Türkiye, 2026). These remarks may be understood as evidence of Turkey’s

efforts to strengthen a transnational Turkic identity and connect youth and cultural programs with political and institutional convergence among Turkic states.

4.4. Gradual strategy and implementation tactics

The contemporary strategy employed by states supporting Pan-Turkism, as in many other fields, is gradual and institution-centered. Explicit territorial claims usually carry high political and security costs and may provoke responses from neighboring states, international organizations, and major powers. By contrast, establishing educational institutions, producing content, holding academic conferences, expanding media that promote Pan-Turkism, connecting infrastructure, and broadening security cooperation generally entail lower immediate costs and can generate cumulative gains. This helps explain why the absence of explicit territorial claims in official documents does not necessarily demonstrate the absence of long-term objectives. States often use institutional and cultural cooperation to build spheres of influence, and the transfer of identity-based authority within this model may precede a future shift in territorial balances. A gradual strategy works through repetition, the standardization of practices, and long-term investment rather than a single symbolic action or annexationist declaration. Its direction must therefore be assessed through the accumulation of measures, not solely through the presence or absence of an operational document.

Among the principal tactics used by advocates of Pan-Turkism in Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan are the preparation of joint history, literature, and geography textbooks; the development of shared terminology and alphabets; the creation of academic and research networks; scholarship programs; student exchanges; cultural activities for young people; multilingual media; cultural-heritage projects; and the facilitation of travel and interaction among citizens. The Turkic Academy officially worked between 2015 and 2023 on the books “Common Turkic History”, “Common Turkic Literature”, and “Geography of the Turkic World”, which were designed for educational use in member countries (Turkic Academy, 2023). This constitutes direct evidence of a joint educational project.

Another tactic is the effort to bring the alphabets used by member states of the Organization of Turkic States closer together. In September 2024, the Commission on the Common Turkic Alphabet issued a declaration concerning a common 34-letter alphabet. The declaration was prepared within the framework of the Turkic Academy in coordination with the secretariat of the Organization of Turkic States, and the commission’s decisions were recommendations rather than automatically binding legal requirements for all countries (Turkic Academy, 2024). On the one hand, alphabet convergence can reduce barriers to reading and publishing across Turkic-speaking communities. On the other, when combined with joint textbooks and identity-forming cultural programs, it can strengthen a shared cultural space.

Symbols and commemorative occasions are also part of these tactics. Symbolic maps, the designation of cities as sister cities, emphasis on ancient heritage, leaders’ visits to historical sites, and the recitation of poems associated with separation or unity can communicate political messages without making direct legal demands. For example, the well-known poem about separation along the Aras River, recited by Erdoğan in the Republic of Azerbaijan in December 2020, was interpreted in Iran as a sensitive message concerning the “*historical division of Azerbaijan*”. A careful analysis of such an event must consider both the text and the context of

the speech, as well as the reactions on both sides, rather than separating the symbol from its historical and political setting. These cases nevertheless demonstrate how literature and historical memory can become instruments of political signaling in public diplomacy.

At the economic level, corridor development and transport links contribute to material convergence. The Middle Corridor, which connects China to Europe through Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, the South Caucasus, and Turkey, can alter the region's pattern of interdependence as well as provide commercial value. Turkey and Azerbaijan regard this route as a connectivity priority, while for Russia and Iran it may intensify competition with traditional routes or efforts to bypass certain chokepoints. The Middle Corridor should not, however, be interpreted solely as a Pan-Turkist project: China, Kazakhstan, Georgia, the European Union, and transport companies also have interests in it. What matters here is the concurrence of economic infrastructure with shared narratives and institutional cooperation.

4.5. Instruments and mechanisms: An institutional map

Contemporary instruments can be analyzed in 7 categories. The **first** comprises intergovernmental institutions: the Organization of Turkic States, summits, ministerial councils, parliamentary mechanisms, and other coordinating forums. These institutions provide a regular framework for setting priorities, developing a common diplomatic vocabulary, and reaching multilateral agreements. The **second** category consists of scientific and educational institutions: The Turkic Academy, research groups, joint textbooks, Turkology conferences, language programs, and exchanges of academics and students. These institutions help produce and legitimize a shared narrative. The **third** category includes cultural and heritage institutions: The International Organization of Turkic Culture (TÜRKSOY), the Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation, and projects involving music, art, architecture, and intangible heritage. These mechanisms can strengthen symbolic capital and a sense of belonging.

The **fourth** category is soft power and communications: television and digital media, social networks, films and television series, publishing, cultural centers, news agencies, and diaspora networks. These instruments introduce narratives into everyday life and influence perceptions by creating familiar public figures, languages, and symbols. The **fifth** category is economic and transit infrastructure: the Middle Corridor, road and rail routes, energy lines, Caspian ports, customs agreements, and investment funds. These instruments matter because identity ties can be connected to economic interests, making cooperation networks more resilient. The **sixth** category consists of religious and social networks: religious forums, charitable foundations, student associations, and civil-society groups. The role of these networks varies by country and must be assessed separately; not every religious or social organization connected with Turkey is necessarily an instrument of Pan-Turkism.

The **seventh** category is defense and security cooperation. The Shusha Declaration between Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan, signed on 15 June 2021, covers cooperation in foreign policy, consultation in the event of a security threat, modernization of the armed forces, military exercises, the defense industry, and protection of the “Turkic world’s” cultural heritage (President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021). This document substantiates the strategic ties between the two countries, but it is not, by itself, evidence of a joint military plan

to intervene in Iran or Russian regions. In his address to the Organization of Turkic States summit in October 2025, Aliyev also spoke of expanding defense cooperation and proposed joint exercises among member countries in 2026; in September 2026, Baku hosted a gathering of security officials from member states (President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2025, 2026). These developments indicate an expansion in the scope of security cooperation and should be assessed against actual measures and the text of subsequent formal agreements.

4.6. How should the actual impact of these instruments be measured?

The existence of an institutional mechanism is a precondition for influence, not a sufficient measure of success. Impact assessment requires a distinction between “*inputs*”, “*activities*”, “*outputs*”, and “*outcomes*”. Inputs include funding, personnel, and state support; activities include organizing programs, producing books, or teaching languages; outputs include the number of participants, publications, or relationships established; outcomes refer to lasting changes in attitudes, political behavior, social trust, or patterns of cooperation. Many security analyses move directly from the existence of programs to conclusions about identity change or separatist intent, even though the causal links between these stages must be observed and assessed.

An examination of Turkish and Azerbaijani policy towards Turkic-speaking communities in the Russian Federation suggests that the issue should neither be reduced to a cultural relationship nor framed as proof of a unified and predetermined plan to dismember Russia. The central question is how linguistic, historical, and cultural affinities are converted into transnational networks that may, under particular conditions, acquire political and geopolitical consequences. In this framework, Pan-Turkism should be studied not merely as a set of ideological beliefs but as a spectrum of ideas and practices – from an emphasis on shared cultural heritage to the conception of a broader political and strategic space among Turkic-speaking communities. The presence of an activity within this spectrum does not mean that all participants share the same objectives or necessarily seek to alter political borders.

Some Russian analysts argue that Erdoğan is implementing a longstanding, systematic strategy to reshape the post-Soviet space, and that Pan-Turkism has become more than a local cultural initiative: in their view, it is an instrument of geopolitical influence used by Russia’s adversaries and by NATO to contain Russia and promote a “*Russophobic*” paradigm. They identify the weakening of the shared information and linguistic space between Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS); overt historical myth-making, including the rewriting of textbooks and promotion of narratives that depict the “Turkic world” as a distinct civilization unrelated to Russia; and attempts to construct alternative identities in Turkic-populated regions of Russia, such as Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, as manifestations of Pan-Turkist expansionism. The principal danger, in this interpretation, is that a seemingly cultural “*brotherhood*” may gradually become a political project in which Russia is portrayed as an alien presence in its own Turkic-populated regions.

The study by Mayorova and Sbitneva on Turkey’s ideological influence in Russian regions is a direct source for examining this issue. Focusing on Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Chuvashia, Crimea, Altai, Sakha, Tuva, and Khakassia, the authors show that Turkey’s connections with Turkic-speaking regions of Russia are not limited to official interstate relations, but also include economic, humanitarian, cultural, and media dimensions. They regard the level of interaction with Turkey in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan as significant and note that the intensity of these links varies across

regions. Their findings are important because the policy of the “Turkic world” can be studied at the level of institutional relations, cultural organizations, and social networks, not only through political speeches or official foreign-policy documents (Mayorova & Sbitneva, 2023).

In Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, linguistic and cultural ties with Turkey coexist with local, Islamic, and Russian civic identities. Academic cooperation, cultural events, and contacts between local institutions and organizations such as TÜRKSÖY can strengthen mutual awareness and the representation of shared Turkic-speaking heritage. Geopolitically, these networks create a potential capacity to increase Turkey’s cultural influence. Whether that capacity becomes political influence, however, depends on social acceptance, the content of the activities, and the political circumstances of each region. Scholarly analysis must therefore distinguish the preservation of cultural heritage, the promotion of transnational identity, and the organization of political activity (Mayorova & Sbitneva, 2023).

With regard to the Republic of Azerbaijan, the evidence reviewed here focuses primarily on Baku’s role in Turkic-speaking convergence and the development of the Organization of Turkic States. Shafiyev (2023) shows that Azerbaijan, alongside Turkey, has played an active role in strengthening cultural, political, and economic cooperation among Turkic-speaking countries. This convergence has gradually become linked to regional connectivity and the Middle Corridor.

Research by Hazır (2016) on the diaspora identity of Azerbaijanis in Russia indicates that Pan-Turkism, Eurasianism, and Azerbaijanism are among the components shaping this community’s identity. This finding suggests that some members of the Azerbaijani diaspora may be influenced simultaneously by Turkic-centered ties, Azerbaijani national belonging, and connections with the Russian environment. Russia has treated Pan-Turkist tendencies among parts of the diaspora as equivalent to direction by the government in Baku, and the arrests of Azerbaijani diaspora leaders in Russia over the past year can be analyzed in this context. Thus, the evidence concerning Turkey more directly examines its cultural and institutional presence in Russia’s Turkic-speaking regions, while evidence concerning Azerbaijan focuses more on the direction of the diaspora by Baku and its policy of Turkic-speaking convergence.

Overall, Turkey has developed the capacity to expand its influence in Russia’s Turkic-speaking regions through a network of cultural, educational, economic, and media relations. The Republic of Azerbaijan, through cooperation with Turkey, the Organization of Turkic States, and diaspora links, also participates in expanding a Turkic-centered identity framework. These two patterns should not, however, be assumed to be identical or fully coordinated. To establish the organized promotion of Pan-Turkism in Russia, 3 levels must be distinguished: cultural activity, the promotion of transnational identity, and organized political action. Sustained activity at the second level over several decades may create conditions for a transition to the third.

In Iran, a survey by Mohammadi and Rezaei (2020) of 400 respondents in 4 provinces – East Azerbaijan, West Azerbaijan, Ardabil, and Zanjan – reports that a set of variables, including foreign media activity, the activities of Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan, perceived historical distortions, and ethnic jokes, explains approximately 33% of the variation in ethnonationalist orientation in the study’s model. This figure does not mean that 33% of the population is ethnonationalist or that this proportion of Azerbaijani identity has been shaped by external factors; it refers to the statistical explanatory power of the model’s variables. To determine the contribution

of each factor and establish causal relationships, the statistical coefficients, sampling method, and validity of the measurement instruments would need to be examined (Mohammadi & Rezaei, 2020).

One potential avenue of Turkish influence is the expansion of transnational media and the representation of a shared identity among Turkic-speaking communities. A study by Ebrahimpour and Sepehri (2011) of satellite television audiences in Ardabil Province reports that some viewers were receptive to channels from Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan; Kalehsar and Andarab (2013) also address media representation and the appeal of alternative media. At the political level, Erdoğan's recitation of a poem at a ceremony in the Republic of Azerbaijan on December 10, 2020, and Tehran's protest in response, provide an example of the use of a symbol associated in some discourses with links across the Aras River and the fabricated concept of "*Southern Azerbaijan*". This event and its consequences demonstrate the political sensitivity of such symbols and, in the article's interpretation, the possibility of an organized effort to stimulate ethnonationalism in Iran.

With regard to the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ahmadi's (2017) research on the competitive claims of Pan-Turkist nationalism and Mammadov's (2023) work on the identity of Iranian Azerbaijanis are relevant to analyzing the connections among transnational discourse, identity politics, and Tehran–Baku relations. The use of the fabricated term "*Southern Azerbaijan*" in some extremist Pan-Turkist nationalist circles, together with an emphasis on the historical unity of the two sides of the Aras, may acquire a revisionist character, particularly when accompanied by territorial claims. Nevertheless, a distinction must be maintained between nationalist discourse, the official positions of the government in Baku, and the attitudes of Iranian Azerbaijani society.

An analysis of Turkey's and the Republic of Azerbaijan's roles should therefore identify a documented chain comprising the source of a message, identity-forming content, the means of dissemination, the target audience, and the political outcome. Exposure to foreign media or an emphasis on Azerbaijani language and culture does not, by itself, prove political ethnonationalism or separatism; equally, narratives of unity and territorial claims should not be ignored. Establishing operational and organized intervention in a specific period requires evidence such as financing, institutional coordination, direct links with domestic actors, or operational mobilization. Assessing a long-term process of building identity-based authority, however, can rely on analysis of a documented chain and its mechanisms. This approach takes account of the potential for foreign cultural and political influence while also considering domestic factors and the diversity of Azerbaijani identities, avoiding security claims that extend beyond the available evidence.

The present article therefore uses a "mechanism-tracing" approach: is there an observable chain linking a foreign institution, a particular narrative, an audience, a social network, and a political consequence? In the case of Pan-Turkism, the early links in this chain – the source of the message, identity-forming content, means of dissemination, and audience – can be documented. The final link, namely political and territorial consequences, is assessed through causal-mechanism reasoning and historical precedents, given its multi-decade horizon. When documented links are accompanied by signs of political organization, funding, territorial claims, and operational mobilization, the level of immediate threat can be considered higher. This approach avoids both alarmism and the underestimation of risks arising from the connection between identity formation, organization, and geopolitical consequences.

5. International support and the strategic environment of Pan-Turkism

5.1. Turkey: Institutional center and network connector

Turkey is the most important institutional, economic, and military actor in the expansion of Turkic-centered cooperation. Its geographical position between Europe, the Caucasus, and the Middle East, together with the scale of its economy, defense industry, international media, and cultural institutions, enables Ankara to connect and strengthen linguistic and cultural ties through state and economic programs. The Yunus Emre Institute promotes the Turkish language and culture; TİKA conducts development cooperation; and the Türkiye Maarif Foundation is an established instrument of Turkey's educational policy. Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs officially acknowledges the extensive overseas activities of Yunus Emre cultural centers and support for teaching Turkish at foreign universities (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). Methodologically, it should be emphasized that these institutions have declared mandates and their overt activities should not be characterized as covert operations. However, their stated missions – to promote Turkey's language, history, and culture and to establish durable links with target communities – may, when aligned with the vision of “Turkic world” integration and the discourse of civilizational authority, acquire functions extending beyond cultural diplomacy over the long term.

Turkey's objectives in this field are multifaceted. **First**, it seeks to increase its cultural influence and standing among Turkic-speaking communities. **Second**, it aims to expand economic relations and facilitate access to markets and energy routes. **Third**, it seeks to strengthen Ankara's role in the foreign policies of Central Asian and Caucasian states. **Fourth**, it aims to consolidate its relationship with the Republic of Azerbaijan as a strategic ally. **Fifth**, it seeks to reinforce Turkey's position as an independent actor in a multipolar environment. These objectives cannot all be reduced to ideological Pan-Turkism. Turkish foreign policy combines Turkish nationalism, geo-economic pragmatism, security considerations, and the pursuit of regional-power status. At some moments, the idea of the “Turkic world” helps to give coherence to this policy; at others, Ankara may distance itself from ideological slogans in pursuit of economic interests or diplomatic compromise.

Turkey's ties with Russia also show why the relationship should not be reduced to a binary confrontation. Turkey is a NATO member, yet it also maintains relations with Russia – a country opposed to NATO's expansion – in energy, trade, tourism, and certain regional issues. These relations combine cooperation with serious competition in Syria, the Caucasus, the Black Sea, and Central Asia. Russia's policy towards Pan-Turkism therefore cannot rely solely on expecting economic relations with Turkey to be severed. Moscow generally seeks to raise the costs of foreign influence through legal, security, media, and institutional instruments while keeping channels for negotiation with Ankara open.

5.2. The Republic of Azerbaijan: A pivotal role in the South Caucasus and kin-state policy

The Republic of Azerbaijan is of particular importance to Iran because of its geography and language. It shares a border with Iran, its official language is closely related to Iranian Azerbaijani, and a substantial part of its population is Shia Muslim. However, its separate state-building experience after 1991, an official national narrative distinct from cultural and

civilizational continuity with Iran, close cultural, economic, and security relations with Turkey, and participation in the Organization of Turkic States have given the country a distinctive political trajectory. Azerbaijan's military victory in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War of 2020 and its recovery of control over much of the disputed territory in Karabakh strengthened Baku's regional position. Turkish–Azerbaijani defense and diplomatic cooperation was subsequently institutionalized at a higher level through the Shusha Declaration. Baku is therefore not merely Turkey's linguistic partner, but an actor with its own energy resources, revenues, foreign relations, and strategic priorities.

Baku's official discourse on the “Turkic world” has become more explicit in recent years. At the October 2025 summit, Aliyev described the Organization of Turkic States as an important geopolitical center and emphasized strengthening military and defense cooperation (President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2025). In September 2026, a meeting of security officials from member countries was held in Baku, where the Azerbaijani president also highlighted the priority of relations with the “Turkic world” (President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2026). These events indicate that the organization has moved beyond cultural and economic cooperation to give greater weight to security dialogue and cooperation. Nevertheless, the nature and scope of security coordination must be assessed carefully through the texts of decisions, implementation mechanisms, and operational evidence.

The more sensitive aspect of Baku's role concerns political language about Azerbaijanis living outside the Republic of Azerbaijan. Aliyev's speech at the 2022 summit of the Organization of Turkic States, concerning Azerbaijanis abroad and the need to preserve their language and identity, is a documented example of kin-state discourse. From the perspective of cultural rights, defending the right to mother-tongue education can be consistent with international standards. However, when citizens of another country are defined as “*compatriots separated from their state*”, or their historical connection to neighboring territory becomes a subject of political mobilization, the host state may interpret this as irredentism.

Regarding the fabricated concept of “*Southern Azerbaijan*”, a distinction must be made between the use of the term in media or activist circles, its acceptance by the official Baku, and the existence of an official policy containing an operational program to change borders. Some Pan-Turkist or radical nationalist circles use the term to refer to Azerbaijani-speaking areas of Iran, and the expression is politically sensitive in Tehran. Yet attributing it to Baku's entire official policy requires clear official evidence beyond symbolic statements and media writing. This article analyses the term's use in irredentist discourse as a sign of a dispute over naming and identity-based authority, and as a linguistic means of psychologically preparing audiences for possible long-term territorial claims. Repetition of such terminology in media, education, and political discourse can undermine the symbolic legitimacy of Iran's borders in the eyes of audiences and create a discursive basis for future claims.

5.3. Members and observers of the Organization of Turkic States: Interests are not identical

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan are members of the Organization of Turkic States alongside Turkey and Azerbaijan; Turkmenistan, Hungary, and the so called “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” hold observer status. This geographical and political composition shows that

“Turkic world” cooperation is not simply a Turkish project. It is also a forum through which Central Asian states seek to increase their bargaining power, diversify foreign relations, and consolidate national identity. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan maintain extensive economic and security relations with Russia and China. They generally welcome convergence that brings investment, trade, and international standing, while avoiding becoming Turkey’s political satellites. Turkmenistan, meanwhile, follows a policy of neutrality and has specific energy-related considerations. Acceptance of a Pan-Turkist agenda therefore varies within the organization.

For an accurate analysis, the Organization of Turkic States should be understood neither as a *“future single state”* nor as a merely ceremonial forum. It is an intergovernmental institution with an expanding scope of cooperation, constrained by divergent interests, differences in capacity, concerns about sovereignty, and the presence of external actors. Its members do not necessarily share the same positions on pipelines, energy markets, security, transit, language, alphabets, or relations with Russia, Iran, and China. The organization can facilitate coordination, but becoming a coherent strategic bloc would require agreements in each area that must be assessed separately. These differences matter for Iran and Russia: any policy that assumes all members are unified and subject to Ankara’s will would be mistaken and could squander opportunities for bilateral diplomacy with Central Asian states.

5.4. Western support: Distinguishing structural alignment from direct support

The Middle Corridor (Trans-Caspian route) has become more than a transit route: it also provides a platform for institution-building and political-identity convergence in the Turkic-speaking sphere. Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs describes the corridor as a route linking China to Turkey and Europe through Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, and Georgia (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). At the same time, the Organization of Turkic States' "Turkic World Vision 2040" places transport connectivity, economic cooperation, political coordination, and security cooperation within a single framework (Organization of Turkic States, 2021). This overlap between infrastructure and identity discourse has prompted analysts to examine links between the corridor and Pan-Turkist ideas, which historically evolved from a cultural movement into an aspiration for political convergence (Landau, 1995). In this interpretation, the corridor is both an economic instrument and a mechanism for deepening interdependence among Turkic states and bringing the "Turkic world" closer to geopolitical reality.

The security dimension of this process is particularly important. The 2021 Shusha Declaration between Turkey and Azerbaijan provides for mutual assistance in the event of a threat or aggression by a third party (Republic of Azerbaijan & Republic of Türkiye, 2021). Bilateral military cooperation includes training, equipment provision, and joint exercises; after the 2020 Karabakh war, it substantially increased Baku's operational capabilities. Turkey is a NATO member, and some of its training and weapons standards are transmitted through these channels to its Turkic-speaking partners. Although the Organization of Turkic States has neither a joint command structure nor a collective-defense commitment comparable to Article 5 of NATO, the expansion of defense-ministerial meetings, military-security coordination, and exercises is creating a gradual pattern of cooperation that could, over the long term, institutionalize defense coordination.

From a security perspective, this pattern has 3 potential implications for Iran and Russia. **First**, the strengthening of the civilizational and cultural authority promoted by Baku and

Ankara, and the promotion of a transnational Turkish identity, may activate identity sensitivities in Azerbaijani-populated regions of Iran, particularly Azerbaijan, and in Turkic-populated republics of the Russian Federation, such as Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, and Sakha, creating challenges for national cohesion. **Second**, east–west corridors may bypass transit routes important to Iran and Russia – including the North–South Corridor and Iran’s access to the Caucasus – and reduce their geo-economic influence; discussions surrounding the Zangezur route are particularly sensitive for Iran in this context. **Third**, Turkish–Azerbaijani military cooperation, especially near Iran’s borders and in the South Caucasus, changes the regional balance of power. It can therefore be argued that the combination of identity solidarity, regional institution-building, and military cooperation has the potential to place pressure on Iran’s and Russia’s territorial integrity, security, and economic interests. This is a threat assessment based on documented capabilities and trends, rather than a proven statement about the actors’ intentions; its realization depends on factors including the policies of Moscow and Tehran, the positions of Central Asian states, and developments in the war in Ukraine.

At the extra-regional level, the European Union’s and the United States’ interest in connectivity across the Caucasus and Central Asia is driven primarily by commercial interests and route diversification. The structural alignment of these policies with the expansion of Turkish and Azerbaijani influence creates a favorable strategic environment. However, proving direct support for a separatist project would require evidence concerning funding, official instructions, or operational assistance; such evidence has not been publicly presented to date.

5.5. Israel, Pakistan, and other regional actors

Azerbaijan’s relations with Israel are a major component of the South Caucasus security equation. Israel has been Azerbaijan’s largest arms supplier and accounted for a substantial share of Azerbaijan’s arms imports over the past decade (Wezeman et al., 2021). This cooperation includes exports and production of combat drones and various munitions, military technologies, and intelligence and cyber cooperation; in return, Baku supplies a significant share of Israel’s oil (Murinson, 2010). Given Iran’s proximity to Azerbaijan and its security rivalry with Israel, Tehran regards this relationship as a strategic threat.

In Iran, these relations are interpreted through the framework of a “*geopolitical alignment*” between Baku and Tel Aviv against Iran. Israeli and Western media and think tanks have at times discussed the “Azerbaijan card” as leverage against Tehran and described the Republic of Azerbaijan as one pillar of Israel’s regional security architecture, emphasizing Baku–Tel Aviv cooperation in energy, arms, and countering Iran (Khanin & Grinberg, 2025). Some of Brenda Shaffer’s writings on Azerbaijani identity in Iran and the possibility of promoting federalism or even Iran’s fragmentation by intensifying ethnic divisions, particularly in Azerbaijani areas (Shaffer, 2002), have also been viewed by Iranian critics as lending legitimacy to Pan-Turkist discourse and promoting a fabricated anti-Iranian identity-based authority among Iranian Azerbaijanis.

The overlap among some of Israel’s, Azerbaijan’s, and Turkey’s security and geopolitical interests creates an environment that could be used to pressure Iran (Souleimanov, 2024; Shahbazov, 2024). Iranian analysts interpret some of Baku’s domestic policies – including the ban on hijab in schools and the continued closure of land borders since the COVID-19 period

—as attempts to weaken identity ties with Iran, sever identity connections between the two countries, and create a fabricated civilizational and cultural authority in Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan in favor of Baku and Turkey (Mammadov, 2023).

Pakistan, too, forms part of this environment through its support for Azerbaijan during the 2020 Karabakh war and its trilateral defense cooperation with Baku and Ankara. Pakistan's policy, however, is not determined solely by alignment with Baku and Ankara. Following the Armenia–Azerbaijan peace agreement, which Islamabad also welcomed, Pakistan established diplomatic relations with Armenia on 31 August 2025 through a joint declaration signed by the two countries' foreign ministers (Armenpress, 2025). The exchange of ambassadors in 2026 continued this process (ProPakistani, 2026).

This development shows that Pakistan's position on the South Caucasus can adjust as the conflict changes, and that solidarity with Baku has not been ideologically fixed or immutable on this issue. Pakistan also shares a border with Iran, and security considerations in Baluchistan give it reasons to maintain workable relations with Tehran. In addition, Pakistan has interests in South Asian affairs, its rivalry with India, and relations with the Gulf states and China that are independent of the “Turkic world”. Trilateral cooperation should therefore not be treated as proof of a coordinated project against Iran's or Russia's territorial integrity. What is documented is alignment on certain specific issues; Pakistan's relations with this grouping should be examined as a network of issue-specific ties shaped by actors' potentially conflicting interests, not as part of a unified bloc.

5.6. China: A cautious actor, not an automatic partner

For China, Turkic-centered ties have two dimensions. On the one hand, stability in Central Asia, rail and road connections to Europe, investment in Caspian ports and infrastructure, and trade with Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan are consistent with China's economic interests (Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2012; World Bank, 2019). On the other hand, any form of transnational ethnic mobilization or fabricated identity-building that contributes to instability in Xinjiang or China's surrounding regions raises security concerns in Beijing (Clarke, 2011; Millward, 2007). The Uyghur issue in China–Turkey relations is a prominent example of this sensitivity (Shichor, 2009). This tension means that China generally welcomes economic cooperation with members of the Organization of Turkic States but has little interest in turning Turkic-centered identity into a destabilizing transnational project. Chinese policy focuses primarily on state sovereignty, control of extremism as officially defined by Beijing, and continued economic connectivity (Cooley, 2012; Shanghai Cooperation Organization, 2001).

Potential cooperation among Iran, Russia, and China in this area should be defined around specific interests rather than an assumption that an ideological alliance can be formed (Garver, 2006). The three countries could discuss respect for territorial integrity, transparency in foreign-funded political activities, comparative academic research, the security of transit routes, and preventing operational support for armed groups. Efforts to establish Turkish identity-based and cultural authority are also incompatible with China's economic interests and its principle of domestic stability (Clarke, 2011). Yet an excessively confrontational approach could undermine China's relations with Central Asian countries (Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2012). China also maintains close economic ties with Turkic-speaking countries and may not support measures that cause regional tension or disrupt trade corridors (World Bank, 2019). Beijing may therefore be a

potential partner on certain issues of sovereignty and culture, but not necessarily on every policy that Iran or Russia might describe as countering Pan-Turkism.

6. The Russian Dimension: Pan-Turkism in the RF and local characteristics

6.1. The diversity of Russia's Turkic-speaking peoples and the problem of units of analysis

The Russian Federation encompasses Turkic-speaking communities with different histories, population sizes, religions, languages, and experiences of statehood. The most important cases include Tatars and Bashkirs in the Volga–Ural region; the Chuvash in the central Volga area; Turkic-speaking peoples of the North Caucasus; Tuvans and Khakas in southern Siberia; Altaians in the Altai Republic; and Sakha in northeastern Siberia. Linguistically, all these groups belong to the Turkic language family, but this feature does not imply political or cultural homogeneity. Chuvash is the only living language classified in the Oghuric branch and differs significantly from Tatar, Bashkir, and Istanbul Turkish. Sakha, owing to its history of geographical separation and independent development, also has limited mutual intelligibility with many other Turkic languages. It is therefore unjustified, linguistically, or politically, to assume that a single policy can be applied to all these populations (Anderson, 2005).

The history of these regions' incorporation into the Russian state also differs. The Khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan were conquered by Muscovy in the 1550s; the Bashkirs were gradually incorporated into Russian rule through a complex process in the mid-16th century, whereas Tuva became a Russian protectorate in 1914. Siberian and Altai regions experienced different paths of interaction, warfare, trade, and integration, while some peoples of the North Caucasus came under the Russian Empire at later stages. These experiences produced different historical memories. In Tatarstan, written culture, Islamic tradition, and the history of the Kazan state are important. In Bashkortostan, local ties and narratives of independence have been prominent in parts of the national movement. In Tuva, Buddhist and shamanic traditions and Mongolian heritage coexist with a Turkic-origin language. In Sakha, extensive geography and distance from centers of power have shaped a distinctive regional identity (Frank, 2014).

For this reason, "*Pan-Turkism in Russia*" should be understood as a relationship between external networks and local contexts, not as a discourse accepted uniformly across the Federation. For some groups, Turkey is a cultural or economic partner; for others, it symbolizes linguistic kinship; for still others, it is a distant actor. Russian identity, federal citizenship, identity derived from a particular republic or region, religion, social class, and economic interests may carry different weight in each case. From a security perspective, the main question is not whether Russia's Turkic-speaking citizens speak Turkic languages, but how many of them, and under what circumstances, make a transnational narrative their point of reference for political decisions and become more receptive to the fabricated identity-based and civilizational authority promoted by Baku and Ankara.

6.2. The Volga–Ural region: A historic contact zone and the dual logic of interests and identity

The Volga–Ural region is one of Russia's most important historical contact zones with the "Turkic world". Since the annexation of Kazan in 1552, Tatars and Bashkirs have experienced

centuries of interaction, accommodation, and tension with the Russian state (Kappeler, 2001; Yemelianova, 2002). Kazan and Ufa are now important cultural, economic, academic, and religious centers, while Tatarstan and Bashkortostan hold distinctive positions within the federal structure of Russia (Hunter, 2004; Gorenburg, 2003).

After the Soviet collapse, some local elites sought to expand the powers of their republics during the 1990s. A prominent example was Tatarstan's "*sovereignty movement*" and its 1994 power-sharing treaty with Moscow (Faller, 2011; Graney, 2009). At the same time, these republics developed cultural and economic ties with Turkey. This behavior should be understood in the framework of regional "*paradiplomacy*" within Russia (Sharafutdinova, 2003).

During the same period, Turkey expanded its relations with the region in education, trade, construction, academic exchange, and religious activity. Schools and institutions associated with Turkish networks, including the Gülen network, served educational functions and also helped disseminate Turkist discourse and a Turkish form of Islam (Balci, 2003). Turkey's policy in the post-Soviet space combined identity-related and economic considerations (Winrow, 2001; on its ideological roots, see Landau, 1995).

These relations were therefore not purely ideological. Turkish companies were interested in markets, construction contracts, and investment, while Russia's republics needed capital, technology, foreign contacts, and greater weight within the federal structure. Nevertheless, these same economic and educational ties created a setting in which shared cultural and historical references could gradually acquire an identity-related role.

Drawing on publicly available and official sources, Mayorova and Sbitneva (2023) identify Tatarstan and Bashkortostan as areas with relatively high levels of cooperation with Turkey in the Volga region, and point to the activities of cultural institutions, religious networks, and economic contacts. Their study also notes that Turkish influence varies across regions. The article interprets this uneven concentration as an indication that Turkey has selectively invested in republics where linguistic, religious, and historical ties provide more favorable conditions for developing alternative identity-based authority. Russian security literature also uses terms such as "*subversive activity*" to describe this process; as discussed below, its principal alleged mechanisms include education, financing, and religious networking.

Tatarstan is a clear example of this pattern. Tatar identity is connected with language, literature, Islam, and the history of Kazan, but in the post-Soviet period Turkey opened direct channels to Tatar society by expanding economic relations and developing cultural and religious projects. One such channel was schools and educational centers associated with Turkish networks, particularly the Fethullah Gülen network, which, according to Balci (2003), helped promote Turkist discourse and a Turkish form of Islam in the post-Soviet space in addition to providing education.

Over the long term, such channels may shift identity-based allegiance away from the framework of Russian citizenship towards a Turkic-centered cultural authority. From Moscow's perspective, these relations are not merely commercial and may lead to parallel networks and external identity dependencies. Turkey's cultural policy is thus interpreted in Russia as a factor that could weaken national cohesion and increase the affinity of Turkic republics with Ankara.

In Bashkortostan, parts of the national movement in recent decades have emphasized linguistic rights, the status of the republic, protection of land and resources, and expanded local powers; some circles have also used Pan-Turkist language. Case studies by Berdin and

Yusupov (2022, 2023) suggest that the influence of Pan-Turkist ideas should be examined through specific organizations and the frameworks within which they operate. The overlap between local demands and Pan-Turkist discourse may enable Turkey to use indigenous demands as a basis for cultural influence without overt intervention. Assessing the extent of public acceptance nevertheless requires independent surveys.

The most important mechanism of this influence is the link between ethnic and religious identity. A large proportion of Tatars and Bashkirs are Muslim, and their religious traditions have distinct local institutions and histories. Religious institutions and networks linked to Turkey seek, through education, scholarships, and religious exchanges, to bypass local religious authority and promote a transnational interpretation centered on Turkey. In 2007 and 2008, Russian judicial authorities took action against works by Said Nursi, a Turkic Muslim thinker and commentator, and against the Organization known as “Nurcu” (Nurcular/Nurculuk). On May 21, 2007, Moscow’s Koptevsky District Court declared 14 works from the Risale-i Nur collection extremist materials, and the Moscow City Court upheld the decision on September 18 of that year. On April 10, 2008, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation declared the Organization known as “Nurcu” extremist and banned its activities in Russia. Russian authorities justified these actions under legislation on combating extremist activity, alleging that the works in question incited religious discord and promoted religious supremacy (European Court of Human Rights [ECtHR], 2018, §§ 6-8, 65-66; Fagan, 2007).

The response of Russian institutions shows that Moscow regarded this risk as serious. The concern was that, if this process were accompanied by a defined financial structure and Organizational links with Turkey, it would go beyond ordinary cooperation and become an instrument for advancing Turkey’s geopolitical influence and weakening Russia’s identity cohesion.

In contrast, some researchers argue that Tatarstan’s and Bashkortostan’s ties with Turkey are primarily economic, educational, and cultural, and that Tatar and Bashkir identities have largely been maintained alongside Russian citizenship (Faller, 2011; Graney, 2009). In their view, the label “*subversive influence*” may reflect Moscow’s security concerns more than the situation on the ground (Sharafutdinova, 2003). The important nuance is that even apparently ordinary cultural and educational relations may have identity-related consequences over the long term. A final judgement about the intentions and effects of Turkish policy therefore requires more independent evidence, including surveys, field interviews, and transparent financial data; this is identified as one of the study’s limitations.

6.3. Chuvashia, the North Caucasus, and Crimea: Diverse contexts and selective influence

Chuvashia is an example of a republic where a Turkic-origin language is combined with a distinctive religious and cultural tradition. Chuvash belongs to the Oghuric (Bulgar) branch of the Turkic language family and differs markedly in structure from other Turkic languages of Russia, including Tatar and Bashkir (Johanson & Csató, 1998). For many speakers, Orthodox Christian history and local traditions are also important (Kappeler, 2001; Khodarkovsky, 2002). Mayorova and Sbitneva (2023) assess Chuvashia as less exposed to Turkish “*subversive activity*” than Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. This difference shows that belonging to the same language family is not sufficient to create political convergence; local contexts, religion, economic ties, and elite

networks also matter. It is consistent with a selective pattern of Turkish influence: receptivity to a Turkic-centered narrative may be greater where linguistic and especially religious ties to the Turkic-Muslim world are closer, while Turkey has invested less where these ties are weaker.

In the North Caucasus and Dagestan, Turkic-speaking ethnic groups such as Kumyks, Nogais, Karachays, and Balkars live in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious environment. Their relations with Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan are connected to Ottoman heritage, kinship ties, migration routes, and religious networks (Gammer, 1994; Shami, 1998; Yemelianova, 2010). Regional ethnic politics cannot, however, be viewed solely through the lens of Turkey. The experience of the Caucasus wars, relations with Moscow, economic conditions, local governance, internal ethnic competition, and the role of local Islam also matter (Cornell, 2001; Ware & Kisriev, 2010). In areas marked by memories of conflict or insecurity, any transnational narrative may provoke greater sensitivity, and that sensitivity does not originate exclusively from external actors. Nevertheless, migrant networks and religious and cultural institutions linked to Turkey can turn existing kinship and migration routes into permanent channels for transmitting identity narratives. Relations between the central government and local communities should therefore be analyzed alongside the role of these channels.

Crimea presents an even more complex case in identity politics. The Crimean Tatars have a distinctive historical identity, language, and political experience, and their rights and security are also implicated in the Russia–Ukraine dispute (Uehling, 2004; Sasse, 2007). Turkey, which hosts a large Crimean Tatar diaspora, has at times presented itself as a defender of this community's rights (Williams, 2001). This position may reflect both ethnic and historical ties and Ankara's foreign policy towards Ukraine and Russia. After Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, which the United Nations General Assembly did not recognize as valid (United Nations General Assembly, 2014), the issue became more securitized. Turkey's conduct must be assessed in the context of international law, the status of sovereignty over Crimea, and the collective and individual rights of the Crimean Tatars; defending their rights cannot automatically be treated as an effort to promote Pan-Turkism. At the same time, Turkey's role as a "*protector*", even when expressed in human-rights terms, can strengthen Ankara's standing as an identity and political reference point for this community, which Moscow in turn views as a threat to its identity cohesion.

In these regions, the risk associated with identity-centered policies increases when 3 factors coincide. **First**, an external narrative separates a community from the host state and defines it as subject to permanent discrimination. **Second**, external networks possess the resources, media, and organizations needed to reproduce the narrative. **Third**, genuine or perceived local grievances do not receive an adequate response from the central government (Brubaker, 1996; Gurr, 1993). If one of these links is absent, the capacity to convert cultural ties into political mobilization declines. This model is more precise for Russian policymaking than a blanket security approach because it focuses on measurable factors and opportunities for corrective action. It also illuminates Turkey's role: Turkish public-diplomacy instruments – including education, religious activities, media, and development cooperation – provide the second link, namely the resources and organizations required to reproduce a narrative (Kalin, 2011; Nye, 2004). In this way, Turkey appears in Brubaker's "*triadic nexus of nationalisms*" as an external homeland.

Turkey's presence in Russia's Turkic republics is therefore not uniform; it varies according to linguistic and religious proximity, the size of the diaspora, and the presence of local grievances

or protests. This selectivity, rather than indicating a weakness in Turkish policy, suggests that Turkey concentrates its resources where there is greater potential to establish alternative cultural and religious authority. In the long term, the effect of this policy could be a gradual weakening of Russian national cohesion and stronger feelings of solidarity between these republics and Ankara. It must also be recognized, however, that foreign contact alone does not produce political convergence and that local identities are often maintained alongside Russian citizenship. A final assessment requires more independent evidence, including surveys, field interviews, and transparent financial data; this is identified as one of the study's limitations.

6.4. Altai: Historical origins, political symbol, and an instrument of identity-based authority

Altai holds a special place in the history of Turkological studies. The Altai–Sayan region and its surroundings were, at various times, zones of contact among different steppe peoples, the formation of political confederations, and the development of material cultures. Archaeological research on early Turkic remains suggests that some monuments and burial patterns associated with the historical Turkic period in southern Siberia and Altai date to around the 5th and 6th centuries CE. However, archaeological difficulties remain in defining the precise boundary between pre-Turkic cultures and early Turkic cultures (Konstantinov et al., 2018). In this sense, Altai has a real connection to the history of early Turkic polities, and its historical significance cannot be dismissed as merely symbolic.

Nevertheless, the claim that “*Altai is the homeland of all Turkic peoples*”, if presented as an exclusive and definitive geographical fact, goes beyond what historical and linguistic evidence permits. The present distribution of Turkic languages resulted from long processes of migration, population mixing, language shift, the rise and fall of empires, and contact among communities (Johanson & Csató, 1998). Population-genetics research has also shown that Turkic-speaking populations do not constitute a genetically homogeneous bloc and that many are genetically closer to their geographical neighbors. This finding is consistent with the importance of language spread and the historical movement of elites (Yunusbayev et al., 2015). Genetics, in turn, cannot by itself establish national identity or political ownership of territory. Origin narratives should therefore be treated primarily as identity and political constructions that serve group solidarity, rather than as neutral accounts of the past (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983; Smith, 1986).

The identity-making function of Altai has a history in Turkish nationalism. Within Turkist ideology and the idea of “*Turan*”, the claim of a common origin linking Turkic peoples of Central Asia and the steppe regions with Anatolia has been used to connect Anatolian Turks with other Turkic-speaking communities (Gökalp, 1959; Landau, 1995). The “*Turkish History Thesis*” of the 1930s made this narrative part of Turkey's official national-identity policy (Çağaptay, 2006). In the post-Soviet period, the narrative moved from historiography into an instrument of Turkish cultural diplomacy and soft power (see Kalın, 2011). In contemporary “*Turkic world*” discourse, Altai has acquired a function beyond historical scholarship: emphasizing it as an origin, sacred geography, or symbolic center links Azerbaijan, Central Asia, and Anatolia within a shared historical narrative. This narrative can place Ankara at the center of the symbolic world it constructs.

In Russia, this symbolism is sensitive because Altai lies within the territory of the Russian Federation and the Altai people have their own indigenous and ethnic identity (Halemba, 2006).

Competition over ancestry and historical authority among non-Russian ethnic intellectuals is also a recognized phenomenon in post-Soviet Russia (Shnirelman, 1996). If the region's history is represented or rewritten so that its cultural centrality is transferred exclusively to a region and network outside Russia, Moscow may interpret this as an attempt to appropriate historical authority and weaken the identity ties between these communities and the Russian state.

A methodological distinction is necessary between “*historical origin*” and the “*center of political authority today*”. The existence of remains associated with early Turkic peoples in Altai does not mean that Turkey or any other contemporary state has a special right over Russia's Turkic-speaking communities. Equally, Russia should not treat the broader history of Turkic-speaking peoples as its exclusive possession merely because it exercises sovereignty over Altai. Sound scholarship must distinguish archaeological geography, language families, population ancestry, and political belonging. The political use of Altai becomes a security issue when it moves beyond historical interpretation towards claims of political loyalty or a right to transnational intervention. The examples discussed earlier – from education and religious networks in the Volga–Ural region to Turkey's role as a “*protector*” in Crimea – show how a narrative of common origins may work alongside these instruments to establish alternative identity-based authority in Turkey's favor. Demonstrating this connection specifically in Altai requires evidence concerning Turkish cultural programs, funding, and the content of institutional activities in the region; this is identified as a limitation of the study.

6.5. Russian foreign policy and Pan-Turkism: Managing competition through institution-building and balancing

Russia has a range of political, economic, and security instruments for managing Turkish influence beyond its borders. In the decades after the Soviet collapse, these instruments developed with the aim of preserving Moscow's central role in post-Soviet space (Cooley, 2012; Libman & Vinokurov, 2012). The principal mechanisms include maintaining structural ties with Central Asian countries through the Eurasian Economic Union, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, bilateral agreements, the Russian language, higher education, energy trade, and migration networks. Russia's overarching objective is to prevent any external power from monopolizing relations with regional states, not necessarily to eliminate Turkey from Central Asia altogether.

Each mechanism serves a different purpose. The Eurasian Economic Union facilitates regulatory coordination and trade and creates institutional dependence on Moscow's markets and rules among its members (Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2017). The Collective Security Treaty Organization structures military and security cooperation and gives Moscow a security lever in relation to external powers (Allison, 2008; Cooley, 2012). The Shanghai Cooperation Organization provides a forum for dialogue among Russia, China, and Central Asian states (Aris, 2011). At the cultural and social levels, the Russian language, university networks, and media preserve linguistic and cultural ties (Landau & Kellner-Heinkele, 2001; Peyrouse, 2007). Labor migration from Central Asia to Russia, together with energy and trade dependencies, also creates extensive economic and social links (Laruelle, 2013). This article argues that these layers together form a network of interdependence that raises the cost for regional governments of fully replacing Russia with Turkey.

Russia's instruments nevertheless face limitations. Some Central Asian states pursue a “multi-vector” policy to diversify foreign relations and reduce their historical dependence on Moscow (Cooley, 2012). China has substantial financial capacity in investment, trade, and infrastructure (Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2012). Turkey enjoys advantages in language, culture, and soft power in some fields and has sought a role in the region since the early 1990s (Aydın, 1996; Winrow, 2001). Developments after 2022 and the war with Ukraine have also altered Russia's strategic environment, prompting some regional states to diversify trade and investment routes. Russian soft power, which relies largely on the Russian language, the “Russian world”, and support for compatriots abroad, has limited appeal among communities that place importance on local identity and transnational Turkic-speaking ties (Laruelle, 2015; Sergunin & Karabeshkin, 2015). Russia's response to the “Turkic world” therefore cannot rely solely on political pressure or media warnings. Moscow needs to preserve economic attractiveness, the quality of education, respect for local identities, and the ability to cooperate with republic-level elites.

At times, Moscow has restricted cultural cooperation or reduced official contacts in response to developments in Russian–Turkish relations. Mayorova and Sbitneva (2023) refer to tensions after Turkey shot down a Russian Su-24 aircraft in 2015 and to Russian recommendations to limit contacts between Turkic-speaking republics and Turkish cultural institutions. Such measures can serve as political signals during a crisis and communicate to republics and local networks that unusual contact with Turkish institutions carries political costs. Their limitations are clear, however. Cultural networks are not defined solely by state-to-state relations and may continue through social, academic, or media contacts. Moreover, broad sanctions or prohibitions can reinforce the portrayal of Russia as a “repressor of identity” and turn it into propaganda against Moscow (Hunter, 2004; Gorenburg, 2003). The use of such instruments should be targeted, proportionate, and directed at specific unlawful activity.

Russia also seeks to preserve its role in the South Caucasus and Central Asia through regional diplomacy. This includes efforts to strengthen bilateral relations with the Republic of Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and other regional states; participation in multilateral formats; and the preservation of influence over transit routes (De Waal, 2010; Cornell, 2001). Relations with Turkey are similarly complex. The post-Cold War record shows that Moscow and Ankara can compete in one issue area while cooperating in another, separating rivalry from cooperation (Aktürk, 2006; Hill & Taşpınar, 2006; Köstem, 2021). The same logic applies to Azerbaijan. Defining Pan-Turkism as a single, absolute enemy therefore narrows diplomatic room for maneuver and may sacrifice useful cooperation.

Russia appears to distinguish among 3 types of engagement with Turkey and select instruments appropriate to each. The **first** is legitimate cooperation in areas of Turkish interest, such as academic exchanges, trade, and transparent cultural projects; the appropriate response is open economic and cultural competition and the inclusion of local elites. The **second** is an attempt to create asymmetric influence, for example through educational or religious networks with opaque funding or one-sided identity content; the appropriate response is to demand transparency, apply legal oversight, and provide better educational and economic alternatives. The **third** involves activities that violate sovereignty, such as unlawful intervention, covert financing, or incitement to separatism; these require legal action based on specific evidence. This differentiation is more strategic for Moscow than a blanket security approach because it reduces the political cost of being accused of “repression” and

concentrates monitoring resources on high-risk cases. Assessing the effectiveness of this approach requires more independent evidence, including surveys, field interviews, and transparent financial data, and is identified as a limitation of the present study.

6.6. Russian domestic policy: Civic unity, federal centralization, and linguistic rights

Russia's domestic framework includes recognition of the principle of a multi-ethnic state, a federal structure, efforts to strengthen the status of the Russian language, and partial recognition of republics' rights to use their own official languages. Article 68 of the Russian Constitution designates Russian as the state language throughout the federation and gives republics the right to use their own state languages alongside Russian in official and governmental institutions (Constitution of the Russian Federation, Art. 68). This arrangement both consolidates a civic Russian identity and legally recognizes the possibility of preserving the republics' languages. In practice, however, the balance depends on education policy, financial resources, regional authority, and relations between the center and the republics.

One major dispute over relations between the Russian federal government and its national republics concerns changes to the teaching of indigenous and regional languages in 2017 and 2018. In 2017, following prosecutorial inspections and federal officials' emphasis on compliance with nationwide education regulations, the absence of compulsory Tatar-language instruction in Tatarstan's schools became controversial. In November of that year, it was announced that, under the new program, Tatar as the republic's official language would be taught on an optional basis, with written parental consent and for no more than 2 hours per week (RFE/RL, 2017; Interfax, 2017). The process acquired a clearer legal form in July 2018, when amendments to Russia's federal education law concerning the choice of mother tongue and language of instruction were adopted. Under these amendments, the language studied is selected on the basis of the voluntary consent of a child's parents or legal representatives (RBC, 2018).

The federal government justified this policy in terms of guaranteeing families the right to choose and ensuring that pupils receive adequate education in Russian, the country's official language. In contrast, advocates of the Tatar language and some local critics warned that making its study optional could weaken its institutional status and reduce families' incentives to choose it. This concern is particularly significant because Russian enjoys higher social, administrative, and educational status, and proficiency in it provides tangible advantages for education and social advancement. Suleymanova's research on educational reforms and schools in Tatarstan also indicates that educational centralization in Russia – including the removal of regional components from curricula and the expansion of nationwide educational mechanisms – has limited the representation of ethnic and regional identities in schools, although local actors have continued to use the remaining opportunities within the education system to preserve these identities (Suleymanova, 2018).

From the perspective of security and identity policy, this dispute raises two considerations simultaneously. **First**, if educational policies reduce real opportunities to learn and transmit indigenous languages, they may strengthen feelings of cultural deprivation and concerns about the continuity of local identity. Such conditions may increase receptivity to external narratives that present themselves as defenders of linguistic and cultural rights. **Second**,

foreign support for language education or cultural exchange is not, in itself, evidence of geopolitical intervention; assessing it requires specific evidence concerning funding, Organizational structures, program content, and activity objectives. A rigorous analysis must therefore distinguish legitimate protection of linguistic diversity, the state's centralizing policy, and the possibility of foreign political exploitation. The Tatar-language education dispute illustrates how education policy, unequal language status, and the management of regional identities interact in a multi-ethnic state. Proving a causal relationship between these policies and increased foreign influence, however, requires separate empirical research.

A more significant development was the adoption of the “Strategy of State National Policy of the Russian Federation through 2036”, approved by Presidential Decree No. 858 of November 25, 2025, and effective from January 1, 2026 (Presidential Decree No. 858, 2025; Federal Agency for Ethnic Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2025). It replaced the previous strategy adopted in 2012 (Presidential Decree No. 1666, 2012), and responsibility for monitoring its implementation was assigned to the Federal Agency for Ethnic Affairs (Government Resolution No. 442, 2026). Its three principal priorities are the formation of an overarching civic identity, preservation of ethno-cultural and linguistic diversity, and harmonization of interethnic relations alongside countering extremism. Russian legal analyses regard the document as both a continuation of the previous framework and a source of innovations in response to emerging threats (Kovtun & Tereshchenko, 2026).

The strategy emphasizes strengthening the unity of Russia's multi-ethnic people (the “*Rossiyanе*”) as the foundation of the country's “*state-civilization*” and explicitly highlights the connecting role of ethnic Russians (“*Ruskiye*”). In Persian, the distinction between “*Rossiyskiy*”, a civic and supra-ethnic term, and “*Russkiy*”, an ethnic term, is usually obscured because both are translated as “*Russian*”, but the distinction is fundamental to debates about Russian national identity (Tolz, 1998; Shevel, 2011). One measurable objective of the strategy is for 95% of citizens to possess an “*overarching civic identity*” by 2036. The document also lists Russophobia, efforts to discredit the Russian language and culture, and actions by “*unfriendly countries*” among the threats (Meduza, 2025; Novaya Gazeta Europe, 2025). Moscow is therefore likely to adopt a tougher policy towards countries it believes engage in such activities (PISM, 2025). The document is important for understanding official Russian policy because it shows that Moscow frames the response to ethnic divisions within the broader objective of promoting state unity and preventing interethnic conflict.

The success of this policy nevertheless depends on presenting “*civic identity*” as a shared framework of citizenship rather than as a means of marginalizing the languages and cultures of the republics. Research shows that Russian national-identity policy has oscillated since the 1990s between civic and ethnic definitions of the nation, and that emphasis on the ethnic Russian element has at times increased sensitivity among non-Russian communities (Blakkisrud, 2016; Shevel, 2011). The more strongly the strategy emphasizes the ethnic role of Russians, the greater the capacity of competing narratives – including Turkic-centered ones – to present themselves as defenders of non-Russian identities. At the same time, the inclusion of “*unfriendly countries*” among the listed threats indicates that Moscow also views foreign contacts with non-Russian communities negatively within this security framework.

In the security sphere, Russia uses laws concerning the fight against extremism (Federal Law No. 114-FZ, 2002), banned organizations, foreign funding (Federal Law No. 121-FZ, 2012), and information security (Presidential Decree No. 646, 2016) to counter extreme

ethnonationalism and foreign influence in this area. Some of these instruments may be necessary to prevent foreign political intervention or organized violence. There is, however, a risk of expanding the scope of enforcement, particularly when the boundaries among cultural demands, political protest, nationalist activity, and separatism are unclear. In its assessment of the 2002 law, the Venice Commission warned that the broad and ambiguous definition of “*extremism*” created a risk of selective enforcement (Venice Commission, 2012). The case concerning the ban on Said Nursi’s works is a clear example: the European Court of Human Rights found a violation of freedom of expression (Ibragimov and Others v. Russia, 2018; for background on this movement, see Hunter, 2004). The more ambiguous the categories, the greater the possibility of selective application and the greater the risk of declining public trust. From the perspective of sustainable state authority, it is therefore crucial to distinguish activity that genuinely involves foreign direction or funding from spontaneous cultural activity.

6.7. Foreign media, social networks, and narrative competition

Foreign media, social networks, and multilingual content have become instruments for representing the situation of Russia’s Turkic-speaking communities. Researchers at the Institute of Scientific Information on Social Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences regard Turkey’s activities in this space as examples of foreign influence over Russian federal territories through economic and humanitarian channels and argue that Turkic-speaking Russians hold particular importance for Turkey within the framework of Pan-Turkism (Mayorova & Sbitneva, n.d.). In their view, Turkish influence is high in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, while the impact of pro-Turkish information sources is especially visible in Crimea. The collective monograph “Myths of Pan-Turkism and the Security of Russia and Eurasia in the Twenty-First Century”, presented in Kazan in December 2025, likewise characterizes contemporary Pan-Turkism in Russia not as a local cultural initiative but as a systematic influence project that weakens the shared Russian-language and information space with the Commonwealth of Independent States (Gribova, 2025).

Some examples raised in Russian research literature are as follows:

a) Turkey-oriented digital platforms. The aforementioned monograph describes the launch of Next Social as an alternative to Facebook and Turanity as a unified social network for Turkic-speaking users around the world as a new digital challenge for Russia. The authors argue that these services convey positive images of the Organization of Turkic States and Turkish culture to audiences among Turkic peoples living in Russian republics (Gribova, 2025).

b) Educational content and a common alphabet. Russian experts warn that, over the past 2 or 3 years, member countries of the Organization of Turkic States have published joint textbooks in Turkic history, geography, and literature that educate younger generations through Pan-Turkic historical narratives and representations of some Russian territories as belonging to the “Turkic world” (Gribova, 2025). The Turkic Academy’s agreement on a common 34-letter alphabet was also celebrated officially across the “Turkic world” (Kussainova, 2024), and Russian sources have interpreted the event as an instrument of identity-based pressure (Gribova, 2025).

c) Russian-language state media. Turkey’s Russian-language *TRT* platform announced that it would play a key role in countering “*disinformation and manipulation*”, while Turkey has sought access to its “*kindred peoples*” in Russia and Central Asia (Armenian Weekly, 2022).

d) Diaspora and cyberspace. An active Tatar diaspora in Turkey continues to support the idea of an independent Tatarstan (Armenian Weekly, 2022). Turkey's instruments of “*spiritual intervention*” in Tatarstan are also active through religious and educational institutions (Milyukova et al., 2021).

Overall, Pan-Turkism is promoted more by non-Russian constructors of ideology and national history in Russia's Turkic-speaking regions than by the residents themselves (Karbainov, 2018). Some Russian experts also claim that Pan-Turkism has become prominent in the discourse of Tatar and Bashkir independence movements. However, activists in the two republics have little practical room to pursue separatist ideas without prosecution and reject such an outlook (Eurasia Daily Monitor, 2013). Other analysts consider Turkey's influence in the post-Soviet countries limited and argue that Russia overestimates it (Times of Central Asia, 2025). The credibility of each narrative should therefore be assessed independently of the identity of its source, using data, questionnaires, and surveys. The author has not had access to the resources needed to conduct such research.

The long-term response to Turkey's narrative competition is not simply to produce more state messages in Russia. A state preserves narrative credibility when citizens experience tangible political participation, economic opportunity, linguistic justice, and cultural protection. If the official narrative of multi-ethnic unity conflicts with people's everyday experience, external media gain more room to shape attitudes. Conversely, high-quality content in local languages and an accurate account of regional history – especially in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, where local history and literature are sources of social legitimacy – can build domestic soft power. Russian sources recommend a similar approach: strengthening a Russian digital ecosystem with “*value content*”, rather than merely commercial content, to prevent users from migrating to Turkey-oriented services (Gribova, 202) and expanding cross-border cooperation through the Eurasian Economic Union, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the “Greater Altai” project (Milyukova et al., 2021).

6.8. Russian security responses

In part of Russia's security and strategic discourse, the expansion of contemporary Pan-Turkism is not viewed merely as a revival of a historical ideology, but as a potential factor increasing Turkish influence in the post-Soviet space and weakening Russia's cultural and linguistic ties with some regional communities. A clear example is the 2025 collective volume “Myths of Pan-Turkism and the Security of Russia and Eurasia in the Twenty-First Century”. Its authors examine Pan-Turkism in relation to Turkish soft power, the Organization of Turkic States, and competition over the cultural and political order of Eurasia. Within this framework, the expansion of cooperation among Turkic-speaking countries and the strengthening of transnational connections may be viewed by some Russian analysts as a challenge to Moscow's traditional influence. In an April 2026 analysis for the Jamestown Foundation, Paul Goble also described Moscow's concerns about the strengthening of Turkic-speaking convergence in Central Asia and its links with the Republic of Azerbaijan and Turkey (Rogatin et al., 2025; Goble, 2026).

In this environment, Azerbaijani diaspora organizations in Russia may not be viewed solely as cultural and social associations, particularly when they are connected with official Baku institutions or transnational Turkic-centered networks. From a security perspective, they may also

be considered potential channels of foreign influence. This possibility can be examined in light of the diaspora's role in preserving linguistic and cultural ties, transmitting national narratives, and connecting political and social elites in the two countries.

Developments in 2025 provided a concrete context in which to examine this hypothesis. On 27 June that year, a Russian police operation in Yekaterinburg led to the detention of several people of Azerbaijani origin, and two brothers, Huseyn and Ziyaddin Safarov, died in custody. Azerbaijani officials attributed their deaths to beatings on the basis of forensic reports and called for an investigation and accountability; the incident rapidly intensified disagreements between the two countries. In the following days, Shahin Shikhliniski, a leader of the Azerbaijani community in the Urals, was also detained, and reports emerged during the same period of temporary arrests of influential diaspora figures in Yekaterinburg and Voronezh. The Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW) examined these events in the context of the Moscow–Baku crisis and distinguished the initial Yekaterinburg operation from subsequent actions against diaspora leaders. According to its analysis, the initial operation was not necessarily a Kremlin-coordinated measure to pressure Baku; subsequent arrests of diaspora leaders, by contrast, may have formed part of Moscow's tougher response to retaliatory measures and Baku's confrontational stance (Górecki & Bartosiewicz, 2025).

Pressure on Baku-linked diaspora leaders in Russia continued in 2026. In August of that year, Bakhtiyar Hasanov, head of the Azerbaijani National Cultural Autonomy in Moscow, was expelled from Russia after his Russian citizenship was revoked and he was detained at a migrant detention center. In Samara, the Russian citizenship of Shirvan Karimov, an Azerbaijani diaspora leader, was also revoked. These developments occurred amid a deterioration in Moscow–Baku relations that had begun in the summer of 2025, when citizens and figures associated with both sides were detained in reciprocal actions. However, published reports on these cases mainly refer to citizenship, immigration status, or criminal allegations and do not provide direct evidence that the individuals concerned were prosecuted because of Pan-Turkist views or on instructions from the Azerbaijani government (Meduza, 2026; APA, 2026).

It can therefore be argued that the securitization of Pan-Turkism in part of Russia's strategic discourse and the intensification of pressure on Azerbaijani diaspora organizations are two trends that may overlap. Russian actions can be examined within a multi-factor framework: concern about Moscow's declining influence in the South Caucasus and post-Soviet space; the greater foreign-policy autonomy of Baku; efforts to control foreign influence networks; and the intensification of the diplomatic dispute with Baku from 2025. Concern about Pan-Turkism may add further security sensitivity to this framework. However, identifying Pan-Turkist orientation as the direct and definitive cause of an individual's arrest requires access to official case documents, documented statements by responsible officials, or independent evidence linking that person to Pan-Turkist political activity.

6.9. Overall assessment of Russia's response to Pan-Turkism

The overall conclusion regarding Russia's response to Pan-Turkism is that Moscow faces a real but uneven challenge. Turkish and Turkic world cultural, educational, and institutional networks have a substantial presence in some regions and more limited influence in others. Their political capacity depends on local conditions, levels of public trust, relations between the center and Turkic-speaking republics, economic circumstances, and the performance of

cultural institutions. The Russian state has important legal and institutional tools for maintaining cohesion; however, if these tools are not accompanied by fair language policies, regional development, and social participation, they may backfire.

In foreign policy, strengthening the Eurasian Economic Union and the Collective Security Treaty Organization, cooperating with China, and maintaining bilateral relations with Central Asian states can help Russia preserve its position. These institutions must, however, provide tangible benefits; repeating threat rhetoric or relying solely on Russia's historical legacy is not enough to counter the appeal of the "Turkic world". Domestically, the central task is to combine a shared civic identity with genuine cultural rights. Otherwise, opposition to foreign influence may be mistakenly conflated with opposition to domestic policies, strengthening the very divide it was intended to contain.

7. The Iranian dimension: Pan-Turkism in the IRI and local characteristics

7.1. Iran's Azerbaijani community and layered identities

Northwestern Iran is one of the world's most important centers of Azerbaijani Turkish. Understanding political developments in this region requires avoiding two simplifications. The **first** falsely presents Iranian Azerbaijanis as a community with a uniform political identity and an ethnonationalist or separatist orientation. The **second** entirely denies linguistic, cultural, and regional differences and attributes all identity-related demands to foreign provocation. Social reality is more complex. Iranian identity, the Azerbaijani Turkish language, Shia Islam, urban and regional attachments, cross-border family ties, experiences of participation in the state, and Iran's political history all contribute simultaneously to the individual and collective identities of Iranian Azerbaijanis. The weight of each factor varies across individuals, generations, social classes, and urban and rural settings (Souleimanov & Kraus, 2017).

The connection of Iranian Azerbaijanis with the Iranian state and culture is longstanding, layered, and deep. Turkic-speaking Azerbaijani dynasties brought several ruling houses to the Iranian throne up to the 1920s, and from the Seljuks to the Qajars, Turkic-speaking dynasties stood at the forefront of Iran's political structures (Souleimanov & Kraus, 2017). Tabriz's role in the Constitutional Revolution, broad participation in the 1979 Revolution, and the presence of Azerbaijani-speaking elites in the institutions of the Islamic Republic also attest to this connection (Atabaki, 2000). The binary opposition "*Azerbaijani or Iranian*" is therefore a fabricated and recent construct. Research indicates that, with the emergence of extreme nationalism and the promotion of Pan-Turkism by Turkey in the 20th century, attempts were made gradually to undermine the image of Azerbaijanis as Iran's most loyal linguistic minority (Souleimanov & Kraus, 2017). In other words, identity-based confrontation is a relatively recent phenomenon and should be analyzed in connection with transnational developments and external actors.

The 1990s were the most important turning point in this process. The emergence of an independent Republic of Azerbaijan north of the Aras River and the Nagorno Karabakh war of 2020 prompted many Iranian Azerbaijanis to rediscover their "*northern brothers*". Turkey's economic and political rise also enhanced the standing of Turkish identity in the eyes of some of them. Reception of Turkish and Azerbaijani satellite channels, officially prohibited in Iran, played an important role in strengthening this redefinition of identity (Souleimanov & Kraus, 2017).

Analytically, this represented the emergence of an “*external cultural authority*”. Media, education, historical symbols, and shared narratives from Baku and Ankara can shift perceptions of belonging from the framework of the Iranian nation-state towards the “Turkic world”. Researchers have also noted that satellite and internet media make it possible to access Turkish and Azerbaijani sources that promote the idea of “*Turanian solidarity*” as a shared vision of the future (AsiaNews, 2025).

Political symbolism at the level of leaders is also part of this pattern. In December 2020, Erdoğan recited a poem about Azerbaijan’s separation by the Aras River at Baku’s victory parade. Iran’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned the Turkish ambassador and described the remarks as “*interventionist*”. The ISNA news agency also characterized the poem as one of the “*separatist symbols of Pan-Turkism*” (Al Jazeera, 2020). Turkey rejected the accusation as unfounded and summoned Iran’s ambassador. At a press conference on 14 December, Rouhani said it was unlikely that Erdoğan had intended to disrespect Iran (Iran Times, 2020). This incident is not direct evidence of Turkish support for a “*separation plan*”, but it shows how the historical narrative of “*imposed separation*” can be used as symbolic capital in the official politics of Baku and Ankara. Baku, for its part, formally recognizes Iran’s territorial integrity while also participating in cultural and media discourse around the “*unity of all Azerbaijanis*” (AsiaNews, 2025).

In identity politics, language, religion, historical memory, and institutional integration should be examined both separately and in relation to one another. Azerbaijani Turkish has a strong presence in the family, marketplace, music, oral literature, and informal media. Persian is the official language, the language of nationwide education, and a means of connection across the country. Article 15 of the Constitution permits the use of local languages in the press and media and the teaching of their literature in schools alongside Persian. The claim that Azerbaijani Turkish is “*completely prohibited*” is an exaggeration, although some allege a gap between the constitutional text and implementation. In media, educational, and cultural activity outside Iran – especially in Baku and Ankara – claims about such a gap are represented as a narrative of “*deprivation*”. Conversely, media and movements that equate teaching Azerbaijani Turkish with a separatist political program create a sense of threat and narrow the space for open discussion of linguistic rights. This can strengthen the very external narratives in question (Souleimanov & Kraus, 2017).

Religion also makes Iran’s situation different from that of Russia and the Republic of Azerbaijan. Most Iranian Azerbaijanis are Shia, and this affiliation is connected with Iran’s religious institutions, rituals, and social networks. Many conservative Azerbaijanis, particularly in rural areas, identify first as Shia, then as Iranian, and third as Azerbaijani (Souleimanov & Kraus, 2017). Although the majority of the population of the Republic of Azerbaijan is also historically Shia, the state’s secular structure, the Soviet experience, and post-1991 national identity policy have produced a different pattern of religion and identity (Shaffer, 2002). A shared language or religious affinity therefore does not imply a shared political point of reference. Such commonalities can support cultural closeness but, when used politically, can also provide a basis for claims of transnational representation.

7.2. Other Turkic-speaking communities in Iran: Identity diversity and the limits of generalizing about Pan-Turkism

Although the focus on the Azerbaijani-speaking population of northwestern Iran is important demographically and geopolitically for analyzing Pan-Turkism in Iran, it is not sufficient to capture

the country's linguistic and identity diversity. Iran is also home to other Turkic-speaking communities that differ significantly in historical origins, language varieties, religion, social structure, livelihoods, and cross-border relations. The Turkmen of the northeast, the Qashqai – mainly in Fars Province and neighboring areas – the Khalaj in parts of Markazi and Qom provinces, and groups such as Khorasani Turkic speakers and the Sonqori are among the most important examples. Linguistic research shows that Turkic languages spoken in Iran do not belong to a single uniform branch: alongside northwestern Azerbaijani, Khorasani Turkic, Turkmen, Qashqai, Sonqori, and Khalaj occupy distinct positions (Knüppel, 2000; Windfuhr, 2006). The term “*Turkic-speaking Iranians*” should therefore not be treated as synonymous with “*Azerbaijanis*”, and shared linguistic features do not establish a common political identity or national program. Shared language alone proves neither identity unity nor an inclination towards Pan-Turkism.

The Turkmen community of Iran, particularly in Turkmen Sahra and parts of Golestan and North Khorasan provinces, is an important example of transnational cultural and linguistic ties. The Turkmen language, literary and oral traditions, handicrafts, historical memory, and kinship relations connect some Iranian Turkmen with Turkmen communities in Central Asia. Their historical position, however, is linked to the region's political and border changes and the formation of new boundaries in northeastern Iran; their experience should not be equated with that of independent Turkmenistan. Religiously, most Iranian Turkmen are Sunni Muslims, primarily within the Hanafi legal tradition, distinguishing them from many Shia Azerbaijani-speaking communities in Iran (Ülker, 2020). Yet neither religious difference nor transnational connections automatically yields a particular political conclusion. Research by Sheikhi and Akhlaghi (2023), based on a study of 120 speakers in Golestan Province, indicates that Turkmen is used most frequently in the family, while its use in other social domains varies and age also affects language-use patterns. Respondents' general attitudes towards their mother tongue were reported to be predominantly positive. The importance of this finding is that language preservation, intergenerational transmission, and the place of a language in social life must be treated as distinct variables.

The Qashqai of southern and southwestern Iran, especially Fars Province, are another example of a Turkic-speaking community whose identity cannot be analyzed solely through the model of Azerbaijani identity. Historically, the Qashqai confederation comprised tribes and subtribes of diverse origins, although most members speak a variety commonly called Qashqai Azerbaijani. Tribal and kinship structures, nomadic pastoralism, local relations, and experiences of interaction with the central government have all played important roles in shaping this community's identity (Oberling, 2003). Lewis Beck's research likewise shows that understanding changes in Qashqai society after the 1979 Revolution requires examining tribal Organization, kinship networks, ethno-linguistic identity, and central-government policy together (Beck, 2015). Similarity between Qashqai and other Azerbaijani-speaking communities is therefore not, by itself, a sufficient basis for assuming a transnational identity or shared political orientation. The historical experience of southern Iran, local social structures, and the community's economic and political changes have independently shaped its identity and social behaviour. Nor should the Qashqai confederation be treated as a historically homogeneous unit: historical sources indicate that tribes of different ethnic origins were included in it (Oberling, 2003).

At the same time, efforts have been made to link the goals and aspirations of the Qashqai people with ethnic-oriented groups in the Azeri regions of northwestern Iran. These efforts have taken various forms, including support for certain sports teams, protests against the registration of particular items of clothing as the traditional attire of other ethnic groups, joint cultural and artistic activities, and so forth. Some Iranian writers and analysts have spoken of attempts to politically exploit the linguistic and cultural commonalities between the Qashqai people and certain ethnic-nationalist currents in northwestern Iran that are close to Baku and Ankara. In his examination of the relationship between Pan-Turkism and Qashqai society, Kambiz Najafi (1397 [2018–2019]) discusses efforts to attract Qashqai activists, promote certain transnational symbols, and potentially exploit the capacity of football to advance the dissemination of this discourse. Similarly, Ehsan Houshmand (1403 [2024–2025]), in his analysis of the protests concerning the registration of the local traditional clothing of the Lurs, has explicitly stated that certain Turkist ethnic-nationalist media outlets have sought to stir the sentiments of segments of the Qashqai community in connection with this controversy by publishing provocative material.

The Khalaj also hold a distinctive position in linguistics and social history. Some live in Khalajestan, in areas of Markazi and Qom provinces and southwest of Tehran. Specialist research identifies Khalaj as a distinct group within the Turkic languages spoken in Iran. The language has preserved some archaic features and is therefore important for the study of Turkic linguistic history. Linguistic reports indicate that Khalajestan included about 47 villages in the 1960s and 1970s; however, reliable and up-to-date data on the community's current population and number of speakers are unavailable (Knüppel, 2010). Long-term contact with Persian and other neighboring languages has also affected the status of Khalaj. Historical sources mention contact and population mixing between some Khalaj and Qashqai groups, but these relations do not mean that their languages or social identities are identical (Oberling, 2003). Sonqori Turkic in the Sonqor area and Khorasani Turkic varieties in parts of the northeast further demonstrate the need for more precise distinctions among Iran's Turkic-speaking communities. Linguistic studies describe Khorasani Turkic as distinct from both Turkmen and Azerbaijani (Doerfer & Heschke, 1993; Knüppel, 2000). The general term "*Turkic-speaking Iranians*" is useful for identifying broad linguistic connections, but it is not sufficient to draw conclusions about origins, political identity, or allegiance.

This linguistic and social diversity has at least two important implications for analyzing Pan-Turkism in Iran. **First**, any transnational Turkic-centered project that seeks to place different communities within a single narrative of history, language, and political belonging will inevitably overlook some of their local and historical differences. Cultural, media, educational, and transnational networks may help introduce shared narratives, strengthen linguistic connections, or shape historical perceptions; their political impact must nevertheless be assessed through specific evidence, including educational and media content, actual audiences, reach, community responses, and the continuity of connections. The existence of linguistic or cultural relations with neighboring countries does not, by itself, prove that a community has been exposed to transnational political mobilization or that its members support Pan-Turkist objectives. **Second**, domestic policymaking should not apply a single model of opportunity and threat to all Turkic-speaking groups. Geography, contact with communities across borders, economic conditions, access to education and public services, the

status of the mother tongue, local elite structures, and perceived discrimination vary from region to region. Even within a single language group, people may hold different views of local identity, national identity, and foreign relations. Security analysis is therefore more credible when it distinguishes cultural and linguistic characteristics from political behavior.

On this basis, distinguishing among 3 levels – linguistic and cultural belonging, transnational connections, and political action – is essential to analyzing Iran’s Turkic-speaking communities. A person may wish to preserve their mother tongue, maintain contact with relatives or cultural institutions across a border, and at the same time have no inclination towards separatism or Pan-Turkist programs. Conversely, assessing the possibility of political exploitation of transnational ties requires independent evidence and should not be inferred solely from language or ancestry. For Iran, a policy that respects linguistic and historical diversity, enables appropriate cultural production and education, broadens local elite participation, and documents actual or perceived discrimination can limit foreign actors’ ability to exploit social grievances. By contrast, treating all Turkic-speaking communities as homogeneous, automatically securitizing cultural demands, or attributing political orientations without sufficient evidence may deepen distrust and overlook the very differences required for a realistic understanding of the issue. Recognizing the diversity of Iran’s Turkic-speaking communities is therefore important both to avoid unscientific generalizations about Pan-Turkism and to design cultural and social policies suited to each region.

7.3. Historical origins of the dispute with the Republic of Azerbaijan

One sensitive historical layer in relations between Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan concerns territorial naming and the formation of modern and radical nationalism in the South Caucasus. On May 28, 1918, the Azerbaijani National Council in Tbilisi declared the establishment of the independent Republic of Azerbaijan. Its territory covered parts of the South Caucasus, including areas known in many historical sources as Arran, Shirvan, and other Caucasian regions. The choice of the name “*Republic of Azerbaijan*” for this new state was controversial in Iranian historiography from the outset. In “Azerbaijan and Arran”, Enayatollah Reza argues that the historical sources he examined generally used “*Azerbaijan*” for the region in northwestern Iran, while areas north of the Aras River were known by names such as Arran and Shirvan (Reza, 2006). Elahé Koolaei and Maryam Nezami also examine this naming choice in their research on national identity formation in the Caucasus, within the context of identity competition and the spread of Pan-Turkist ideas in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In their view, the name could, in the political climate of the time, encourage an idea of national connection between Turkic-speaking Muslims on both sides of the Aras and was consequently interpreted in Iran as potentially annexationist (Koolaei & Nezami, 2019, pp. 459–478).

Asghar Shirazi’s study of identity-seeking movements in Azerbaijan indicates that Mohammad Amin Rasulzadeh and some leaders of the Musavat Party justified the name “*Azerbaijan*” by emphasizing linguistic and ethnic ties between the inhabitants of Baku, Ganja, and Yerevan and the people of Iranian Azerbaijan. In response to concerns raised in the Iranian press, Rasulzadeh also sought to stress that the name did not constitute an official program to annex Iranian Azerbaijan. Later developments – particularly Jafar Pishevari’s anti-Iranian actions in coordination with the Soviet Union – were, however, interpreted as evidence to the contrary (Shirazi, 2022). The central issue for Iran was that the naming choice could blur the boundary between a geographical name, an

emerging national identity, and a transnational political idea, creating opportunities for later exploitation. In subsequent decades, some Pan-Turkist movements used this ambiguity to promote fabricated concepts such as “*Unified Azerbaijan*” and “*Southern Azerbaijan*”. These should be examined as specific political discourses, not as automatic reflections of the views of all citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan or Iranian Azerbaijani speakers.

A **second** historical layer is the experience of the separatist government of the Azerbaijan Democratic Party between 1945 and 1946. The party was established in September 1945 and formed an autonomous government in Azerbaijan on 12 December of that year, under conditions in which Soviet forces were present in northern Iran. The government lasted until December 1946 and collapsed after Soviet forces withdrew and the Iranian army entered the region. Drawing on documents and unpublished memoirs, Rahim Nikbakht and Manijeh Sadri examine the party’s formation, its political Organization, and the Soviet role. In a study of Soviet party diplomacy in Iran, Ahmadikhoy and Ali Soufi likewise assess Soviet support for and Organization of the movement as part of Moscow’s strategy to create a buffer zone and expand its influence during the occupation of Iran in the Second World War (Sadri & Nikbakht, 2017; Ahmadikhoy & Ali Soufi, 2025). This evidence highlights the role of a foreign power in the formation and fate of the Soviet-backed government.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 1991, relations across the Aras entered a new phase. Increased travel, media connections, economic exchanges, and political interaction expanded opportunities for mutual influence over historical and identity perceptions. These relations cannot, however, be reduced to a uniform process of transnational identity politics, because economic interests, political disputes, religious considerations, regional competition, and cooperation with external powers have also shaped bilateral ties. Research by Mohammad Hossein Akbari, Amir Masoud Shahramnia, and Saeed Vosooghi on the behavioral pattern of the Republic of Azerbaijan towards Iran emphasizes the role of identity constructs in the divergence between the two countries and discusses the emergence of discursive opposition among political elites between Turkish and Iranian identities (Akbari, Shahramnia, & Vosooghi, 2021). This framework is useful for explaining the importance of identity in foreign policy and suggests that at least some of Baku’s decisions towards Iran have been influenced by Pan-Turkist ideology.

During the presidency of Abulfaz Elchibey, particularly in 1992 and 1993, Pan-Turkist discourse and emphasis on national ties between Turkic-speaking communities on both sides of the Aras became more prominent. Some political statements and views about a “*Unified Azerbaijan*” raised concerns in Iran and contributed to mutual suspicion. After Heydar Aliyev came to power in 1993, a more pragmatic approach to managing relations with Iran emerged, and the two countries cooperated in some economic and diplomatic fields. This shift should not, however, be taken to mean that Turkish nationalism was abandoned or that the Republic of Azerbaijan’s strategic relationship with Turkey ended. Azerbaijani foreign policy gradually came to rest on a combination of consolidating the independent state, economic development and energy exports, cooperation with Turkey, management of relations with Russia, and pursuit of security interests in the Karabakh conflict. Within this framework, national identity and linguistic ties with the “Turkic world” have been influential variables, but their weight has varied across periods and policy areas. The history of bilateral relations also shows that Iran–

Azerbaijan ties have continually been shaped by a combination of identity, security, and geopolitical factors (Akbari et al., 2021; Salehi Yeganeh, 2023).

After the Karabakh War of 2020, Baku's strategic confidence increased and its cooperation with Turkey entered a deeper phase. The recovery of parts of the disputed territories, changes in the military and political balance in the South Caucasus, and the signing of the Shusha Declaration between Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan in June 2021 created conditions for expanding defense, diplomatic, economic, and cultural cooperation. During this period, the "Turkic world" discourse also gained greater importance in Baku's foreign relations. In his analysis of Pan-Turkism and the Baku–Ankara strategic alliance, Mehrdad Salehi Yeganeh treats this ideology as one factor facilitating the deepening of relations between the two countries. Ehsan Kazemi and Salehi Yeganeh likewise show how soft power, cultural ties, and identity mechanisms have contributed to consolidating the strategic alliance between Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan, particularly because the Shusha Declaration highlights coordination in political, military, and foreign-policy fields and cooperation in developing the "Turkic world" (Salehi Yeganeh, 2023; Kazemi & Salehi Yeganeh, 2024).

Taken together, these 3 historical periods demonstrate the simultaneous continuity and transformation of the relationship between identity and politics: in 1918, the naming and formulation of a new national identity amid the collapse of the Russian Empire and regional competition; in 1945–1946, the overlap between regional demands and Soviet intervention; and after 1991, the redefinition of the Republic of Azerbaijan's foreign policy in the context of state-building, radical nationalism, and power relations in the Caucasus. The key point is not to assume a fixed and unchanging plan lasting more than a century, but to identify the mechanisms through which particular historical narratives were turned into instruments of political mobilization and Baku's foreign policy in specific periods. For Iran, a realistic assessment requires distinguishing citizens' linguistic and cultural identities from elite nationalist discourse, transnational political programs, and official state actions. Only through this distinction can the risks of expansionist narratives be examined without generalizing them to all Iranian Azerbaijanis or equating every cultural demand with separatism.

7.4. Media, education, and historical memory: Turkey's and Azerbaijan's role in redefining a transnational identity among Iranian Azerbaijani speakers

In the contemporary media environment, competition over national identity and historical memory no longer takes place solely through political speeches, history books, or party activity. Social networks, video platforms, satellite channels, television series, music, theatre, and cultural festivals also play roles in transmitting and reproducing identity narratives. Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan use their media and cultural capacities to strengthen linguistic and historical ties with Turkic-speaking communities beyond their borders. Much of this activity is presented as cultural diplomacy, artistic exchange, and the promotion of shared heritage. However, when cultural narratives are accompanied by claims of transnational political unity, the redefinition of historical borders, or the concept of "*Southern Azerbaijan*", their identity-related and geopolitical implications warrant closer examination. Research on Turkish soft power has shown that exports of television series, representations of lifestyles, historical heroes, and cultural values can influence the country's international image, although the impact of such productions

also depends on social context and how audiences receive them (Ağırseven & Örki, 2017; Hasanov, 2022; Mohammadi Ghanbarlou & Sığın, 2025).

7.4.1. Television series, digital media, and soft power

Turkish historical television series, particularly productions centered on Ottoman history, military heroes, and the revival of past glory, form part of the country's transnational cultural industry. The political significance of such productions cannot be inferred solely from their storylines. However, academic research on television and politics in Turkey has shown that some historical series operate within the frameworks of government political communication, conservative nationalism, and selective representations of the past. Aydın (2025), for example, examines the use of television series in reproducing neo-Ottoman discourse. This study does not prove that all Turkish series contain Pan-Turkist content; rather, it demonstrates the need to distinguish commercial entertainment, historical nationalism, and productions with a political function.

Turkish television productions have also attracted substantial audiences in Iran, through both satellite channels and the internet. By examining the coverage of Turkish series in Iranian newspapers, Mohammadi Ghanbarlou and Sığın (2025) identify two important themes: the cultural and social consequences of these productions, and debates about soft power and their possible political effects. Turkey's media capacity to influence Iranian audiences culturally is therefore a legitimate subject of research. Nevertheless, the popularity of a series should not be equated with acceptance of the producing country's political ideology; audiences may watch a program because of production quality, the appeal of actors, the storyline, or ease of access.

At the regional level, combining entertainment with historical and identity narratives may create conditions for deeper influence. If an Iranian viewer first encounters a hero, symbol, or historical narrative through a television series and then sees the same narrative repeated on internet channels, fan pages, music productions, and political content, the likelihood of consolidating a particular interpretive framework may increase. Online recommendation algorithms may also direct users interested in historical or sporting content towards material more closely associated with ethnic nationalism and identity politics. However, proving that this process is in every case the result of coordinated design by the Turkish or Azerbaijani governments requires independent examination of Organizational links, funding sources, media agendas, and content-distribution patterns. In scholarly analysis, the existence of influence capacity must remain distinct from proof of political intent and measurement of actual effects.

7.4.2. Language, the Latin script, and the transfer of identity frameworks

Language is one of the most important instruments of transnational cultural connection. Greater access to Istanbul Turkish and the Azerbaijani Turkish used in the Republic of Azerbaijan, through television series, music, online videos, news channels, and social networks, can affect the vocabulary, expressions, writing conventions, and reference sources used by Iranian audiences. After independence, the Republic of Azerbaijan restored the Latin alphabet as part of its official language and script policy; this decision was recorded in a law adopted on December 25, 1991 (Republic of Azerbaijan, 1991). In Iran, by contrast, Azerbaijani

Turkish has historically been written mainly in the Perso-Arabic script. The internet has therefore become a point of contact among different written, lexical, and media forms.

Using the Latin script or learning Istanbul Turkish is not, in itself, evidence of Pan-Turkist leanings; it may result from access to digital resources, communication needs, or cultural interest. From the perspective of identity politics, however, when promotion of a language variety and writing system is accompanied by narratives about a single transnational nation, the historical separation of Azerbaijan from Iran, or the need for political alignment with Baku and Ankara, the issue extends beyond linguistic exchange. The central issue in such circumstances is not the alphabet or mother tongue, but the framework through which language becomes a marker of political belonging and a boundary between insiders and outsiders.

For this reason, effective cultural policy in Iran should not be based solely on rejecting Azerbaijani Turkish or opposing cultural productions from Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan. Such an approach is culturally restrictive and insufficient for a scholarly response to one-sided political narratives. A more sustainable solution is to develop professional content in Azerbaijani Turkish in Iran, strengthen authentic local literature and music, publish reliable historical texts, develop digital archives, and increase the presence of Iranian researchers in multilingual media. High-quality content can enable critical examination of external narratives without reducing citizens' linguistic and cultural rights to a security issue.

7.4.3. The “Turkic world” cultural atlas and the issue of “Southern Azerbaijan” in Turkish educational materials

One significant development in 2026 was the publication by Turkey's Ministry of National Education of supplementary educational materials titled “Türk Dünyası Kültür Atlası: Bilge ve Hakan'ın Zamanı Aşan Yolculuğu” (“Cultural Atlas of the Turkic World: Bilge and Hakan's Journey Beyond Time”). According to the ministry's official announcement, the work was prepared for middle-school students and made available alongside educational textbooks during the 2026–2027 academic year. The ministry stated that the project aimed to familiarize younger generations with the shared history, language, culture, and heritage of the “Turkic world” and strengthen their sense of belonging to a broader civilizational sphere.

In the foreword, Turkey's Minister of National Education, Yusuf Tekin, emphasized that borders drawn on maps cannot erase longstanding bonds in people's hearts. In his official remarks about the project, the atlas was also presented as a tool for countering artificial divisions and strengthening the feeling that “*we are, in fact, connected*” (Ministry of National Education of Türkiye, 2026a, 2026b). These statements clearly indicate that the educational atlas is not merely a collection of geographical information: its stated educational purpose is to strengthen awareness of a shared heritage and a broader sense of cultural belonging. This stated objective, however, does not by itself prove a program to change political borders.

The more sensitive issue is the atlas's content. One section uses the fabricated label “*Southern Azerbaijan*” for Azerbaijani regions of Iran centered on Tabriz and describes the city as the heart of Southern Azerbaijan. The same educational text refers to the “*closest geography of our brothers in the east*” and represents supporters of the “Tractor” football club through shared language, culture, and a sense of belonging with Turks. It goes on to describe Azerbaijani regions of Iran as a territory in which Turkish citizens can travel without feeling linguistically foreign and visit Azerbaijani Turks,

the Qashqai, and the Khalaj. While discussing the historical heritage of Azerbaijanis within Iran's geography, the work presents Isfahan's Jameh Mosque as a prominent example of Seljuk-era architecture belonging to the Turks rather than to Iran (Günaz TV, 2026).

Using these terms, which are common in contemporary ethnonationalist discourse, for part of Iran's territory frames it as a separate identity geography linked to the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Turkic world. Their use in educational material may help normalize this division in students' minds, especially when accompanied by an emphasis on transnational ties, shared narratives, and sporting and architectural symbols. Nevertheless, determining the actual effect on students' attitudes requires research into content, audiences, and educational outcomes; a definitive conclusion about impact should not be drawn from a section title alone.

The significance of the issue becomes clearer when the atlas is examined alongside the educational projects of the Organization of Turkic States. The Turkic Academy, an institution affiliated with the Organization, prepared books titled "Common Turkic History", "Common Turkic Literature", and "Geography of the Turkic World" between 2015 and 2023. According to the academy's official descriptions, "Common Turkic History" covers the history of Turkic communities and states from antiquity to the 15th century, while the geography book focuses on Turkic countries, Turkic-speaking peoples, and their cultural geography (Turkic Academy, 2023). The article argues that these materials define the boundaries between the history of Turkic-speaking communities, the territories of historical states, and contemporary political geography in a distorted and partisan manner, omitting alternative narratives and conflicting historical evidence in order to legitimize an expansionist discourse.

7.4.4. Theatre and the redefinition of historical heroes: The examples of Koroghlu and Sattar Khan

Theatre, music, and the performing arts have a particular capacity to convey historical narratives because they transform complex figures and events into emotionally accessible stories. A problem arises when local heroes or historical figures are represented within a political narrative that foregrounds only one national identity or transnational affiliation while omitting or diminishing other historical layers.

Koroghlu is an important example of why such simplification should be avoided. The Koroghlu narrative has spread across many cultures, including among Azerbaijani speakers in Iran, Anatolian communities, Turkmen, Kurds, Armenians, and Georgians, and has acquired local features in each region. Javadi (2009) notes that at least 17 versions of the narrative are known and that the hero has been adapted to the environments and cultural ideologies of different narrators. In some 19th-century Persian sources, Koroghlu was also associated with Khorasan, the city of Khoy, and the reign of Shah Abbas I, although the figure's precise historical origins remain disputed. Koroghlu therefore cannot be treated as the exclusive property of a single modern nation.

From the perspective of identity politics, what matters is not whether a Turkish or Iranian version of this epic exists, but how it is selected and represented. If a local narrative is presented through theatre, television, or music simply to promote shared heritage, it does not inherently have an annexationist orientation. If, however, the same narrative is falsely used as evidence of a single transnational political identity and its connections with the history and

culture of different Iranian regions are ignored, it may become part of a process of retrospective nation-building based on fabricated heritage. Content analysis of the works concerned should identify which version of the epic is selected, which figures and locations are foregrounded, and what political meaning is assigned to them.

Another example is the representation of Sattar Khan, a prominent figure in Iran's Constitutional Revolution, in some contemporary identity-centered narratives. In Iran's historical memory, Sattar Khan is associated with Tabriz's resistance and the struggle to restore constitutional government throughout the country. In some ethnonationalist discourse, however, his struggle is reinterpreted as a conflict between Azerbaijan and the center and as a reason for establishing a "*Greater Azerbaijan*". For example, an article published in 2026 by the separatist and Pan-Turkist website *Araz News*, titled "*Azerbaijan Will Not Repeat Sattar Khan's Mistake*", recasts Sattar Khan's experience as a story about Azerbaijan's sacrifice for a political structure that, according to the author, failed to recognize its demands. The text is evidence of a particular political interpretation of Sattar Khan and of attempts by ethnonationalist currents to create such a reading of his nationalist struggle.

In another example, a report by the separatist and Pan-Turkist television channel *Günaz TV* on January 29, 2025, concerning a Turkish-language play about Sattar Khan quotes the director, Yaqub Seddiq Jamali, as saying that the group would like to stage the play in Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan as well. The report also quotes Mohammad Zirak, the actor playing Sattar Khan, as saying that Turks are one people and that there is no difference between Tabriz, Baku, Urmia, and Ankara.

This statement is a clear example of representing a hero of Iran's constitutional movement within a transnational Turkic-centered identity framework. It creates the impression that the entire production was created to promote the idea of a "*Greater Azerbaijan*" and that its principal participants are pursuing an organized political agenda.

7.4.5. Cultural festivals, the "Turkic world", and transnational symbolism

Music, theatre, handicrafts, and traditional festivals are important instruments of cultural diplomacy. The International Organization of Turkic Culture (TÜRKSOY), established in 1993 through an agreement among the culture ministers of Turkey, the Republic of Azerbaijan, and several Central Asian countries, describes its official mission as protecting Turkic cultural heritage, transmitting it to future generations, and strengthening artistic cooperation among Turkic-speaking communities (TÜRKSOY, 2026). TÜRKSOY and its partner institutions organize festivals in Turkey and elsewhere in which the concept of the "*Turkic world*" becomes the principal framework for presenting shared heritage and identity.

For example, the 9th Great Hun–Turk gathering in Hungary was held in August 2026 with TÜRKSOY's support. According to the Organization's official report, representatives, artists, and researchers from 27 Turkic-speaking communities and countries attended. Official speeches emphasized shared historical memory, cultural heritage, and ties that, in the organizers' words, cannot be erased by borders drawn on maps (TÜRKSOY, 2026). This example shows how cultural festivals can do more than present music, clothing, and traditional rituals: they can also represent a transnational civilizational space.

The participation of Iranian artists in some of these events should also be interpreted carefully. TÜRKSOY reported that Iranian artists took part alongside representatives from the Republic of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan in the International Festival of Folk Ensembles and Traditional Instrument Players in Aktau in June 2025. Iranian artists and researchers also attended a music and cultural-heritage festival in Ashgabat in November 2022 (TÜRKSOY, 2022, 2025). These cases demonstrate Iran's cultural participation in Turkic-centered regional events; the article interprets them as evidence of Turkey's efforts to exert cultural and identity-related influence on Iranian Azerbaijanis.

Some artistic and media works associated with these networks also use the fabricated term "*Southern Azerbaijan*" to identify cultural producers or subjects inside Iran. For example, in a report dated May 13, 2025, *Günaz TV* described *Nowruznameh*, a film by Urmia-born filmmaker Arturan Najafi, as a work from "*Southern Azerbaijan*", rather than Iran, and reported that it had received a special jury prize at the International Turan Film Festival in Izmir (*Günaz TV*, 1404). The report is useful for illustrating the political and identity-related use of the term in presenting cultural works and indicates the position adopted by the festival's organizers or the film's producers regarding Iran's political borders. Works and events of this kind consciously foreground the idea of a transnational nation or an alternative political geography.

7.4.6. Historical myth-making, the Sumerians, and exclusive appropriation of the heritage of Turkic-speaking dynasties

Identity politics does not rely only on media and language; historiography and selective choice of the past can also play important roles in constructing national narratives. A well-known example in the history of Turkish nationalism is the "*Turkish history thesis*" of the early decades of the Turkish Republic. Under this approach, some ancient civilizations of Anatolia and Mesopotamia, including the Hittites and Sumerians, were represented – without established scientific evidence – as pre-Turkic societies or as related to the ancient origins of the Turks. Tüyoğlu (2025) examines these efforts in the context of nation-building and the construction of a historical genealogy for the modern Turkish nation. Today, there is no scientific consensus about the origins of the Sumerians or their linguistic relationships, and superficial similarities, grammatical structures, or selective lexical comparisons are insufficient to prove language kinship.

From the perspective of studying Pan-Turkism, the significance of such narratives lies in their ability to turn a distant past into symbolic capital for modern identity. When unsubstantiated claims that the Sumerians or other ancient civilizations were Turkic are repeated in media and ethnonationalist writing, they may create an image of uninterrupted historical continuity that goes beyond the available evidence. This becomes especially significant when such narratives appear alongside identity maps, political-geographical terminology, or ethnonationalist interpretations of Iranian history. The existence of these views in parts of ethnonationalist literature does not mean that all Turkish scholars or scientific institutions accept them. Determining how influential these views are in contemporary formal education requires direct examination of current textbooks and the works used in schools.

Iranian history, too, should not be treated as the exclusive property of a single group, as Pan-Turkist ethnonationalists sometimes do. Historical Iranian states, including the Seljuks and Safavids, emerged in environments shaped by language, ancestry, military structures,

bureaucracy, religion, and the literary cultures of Azerbaijani regions. During the Safavid period, for example, Persian retained its central position in the bureaucracy and much of Iran's literary tradition. The establishment of the Safavid state also strengthened statehood in Iran and consolidated Twelver Shiism as the official religion (Matthee, 2008/2017; Yarshater, 2004).

Using the Azerbaijani-speaking background of some elites or military forces of a dynasty to present it as the exclusive property of a contemporary nation in Turkey or the Republic of Azerbaijan is therefore a historical simplification. Pre-modern states cannot be defined using 21st century concepts of nation and national borders without examining their historical circumstances. Methodologically, it is necessary to distinguish the possible ancestry of a ruling family, the language used at court, the language of administration, religious affiliation, political territory, and cultural traditions. This approach allows a more accurate understanding of the contributions of diverse groups to the formation of Iranian–Islamic civilization.

Taken together, this evidence shows that digital media, television series, educational books, theatre, and cultural festivals can contribute to the construction and expansion of transnational identity narratives. In the cases of Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan, these capacities should be examined alongside official documents promoting the “Turkic world”, the activities of the Turkic Academy and TÜRKSOY, and examples in which media productions use the fabricated term “*Southern Azerbaijan*”. However, proving conclusively that a coordinated program exists to change identity or political boundaries among Iranian Azerbaijani speakers requires further evidence concerning Organization, funding, audiences, and actual outcomes.

An effective response by Iran would include developing high-quality cultural productions in the country's languages, supporting independent research on Azerbaijani history and literature, publishing multilingual documents, scientifically criticizing fabricated narratives, and promoting media literacy. Such an approach can reduce the political exploitation of gaps in reliable content while preventing legitimate cultural demands from being conflated with broad and unsubstantiated security accusations. The key criteria should be the quality of evidence, historical accuracy, and a clear distinction between shared cultural heritage and a transnational Pan-Turkist political program.

7.4.7. The stadium as an arena of identity politics: The use of football by Pan-Turkist currents in Iran

Sport, especially football, is not merely a professional competition or entertainment; it can become a space for displaying collective identity, reproducing historical memory, and expressing political demands. In societies where some citizens believe – rightly or wrongly – that their linguistic or cultural identity receives less recognition in public life than other identities, sports clubs can sometimes acquire a role beyond their professional function. In his 2025 academic article “More Than a Game: Football and Ethnic Conflict in Contemporary Iran,” published in “Digest of Middle East Studies”, Ehsan Kashfi argues that “Tractor Club” of Tabriz has become, for some Iranian Azerbaijanis, a focal point for representing ethnic identity and expressing dissatisfaction with dominant narratives of Iranian identity. The study emphasizes the role of stadium chants, songs, and banners in reproducing collective identity; it does not, however, establish that all Tractor supporters have Pan-Turkist or separatist leanings. The central issue is the political exploitation of football's capacity for collective mobilization, the transformation of

sports symbols into instruments for defining identity boundaries, and the undermining of national unity and integrity (Kashfi, 2025). One clear example of this process is the use of a fabricated name for the Persian Gulf at “Tractor’s” stadium in Tabriz. According to Kashfi’s research, on January 5, 2018, during a match between “Tractor” and its Tehran-based rival, chants were heard with the wording: *“Lake Urmia and the Caspian belong to us; the Gulf is for the Arabs”*. The significance of this incident lies not only in the use of a contentious name for the Persian Gulf, but also in the connection between this naming and the formulation of an identity distinct from Iran’s national identity. In such circumstances, a stadium chant can become a means of transmitting a political message and symbolically distancing a group from part of Iran’s shared historical memory. Nevertheless, attributing the action to a specific Pan-Turkist Organization or network requires independent evidence about the organizers and any links they may have had to such movements; recording a political chant alone does not establish the Organizational identity of those who voiced it (Kashfi, 2025; POMEPS, 2023).

Another important example occurred during the “Tractor”–“Esteghlal” match on November 1, 2019. *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* reported that some spectators chanted pro-Turkey and anti-Kurdish slogans and displayed banners reading *“Czechoslovakia or Yugoslavia: choose one”*. The chant appeared in the context of Turkey’s military operation in northern Syria and the dispute over the status of the Kurds and thus acquired an ethnic and political meaning beyond football competition. In this context, references to Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia can be interpreted as allusions to the partition or political reorganization of multi-ethnic territories. *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* also reported the detention of 7 spectators and the pursuit of others in connection with the match’s disturbances. The incident illustrates how some groups may use a large stadium gathering to transmit messages about ethnic conflicts outside Iran and express interest in their historical repetition in line with the wishes of third countries (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2019).

The territorial dimension of this issue became more explicit in chants displayed by “Tractor” supporters at a stadium in Bandar Anzali, Gilan Province, in October 2026, concerning the alleged belonging of Astara and the Heyran Pass to Azerbaijan. Supporters of Malavan football club circulated a video claiming that “Tractor” fans had caused ethnic tension at the Sirus Ghayeghran Stadium by chanting, *“Astara, Heyran are mine, my beautiful Azerbaijan”* (Khabar Varzeshi, 26 Mehr 1405). The significance of this incident is that a stadium in Gilan Province – an area represented in Pan-Turkist maps as belonging to the “Turkic world” – became a venue for claims about the territorial belonging of areas outside East Azerbaijan Province. Astara lies in Gilan Province on the border with the Republic of Azerbaijan, while the Heyran Pass is located in the border area between Gilan and Ardabil. The chant therefore cannot be treated merely as a disagreement over a place name or cultural heritage. When such a slogan is articulated within the framework of a transborder political identity – using rhetoric centered on territorial ownership – it can be interpreted as a manifestation of a discourse aimed at redefining the boundaries of both identity and territory. Consequently, such an action may be characterized as an incitement to separatism. Alongside these examples, media reports and studies of Iranian football describe repeated ethnic and insulting chants at some “Tractor” matches and matches against rival teams, especially “Persepolis” and “Esteghlal”. In some cases, chants have involved reciprocal insults against

Azerbaijanis, Yazdis, and Tehran-based teams, and stadium tensions have escalated into physical confrontations. A study of the evolution of Azerbaijani identity and the prospects for separatism in Iranian Azerbaijan also refers to some supporters' use of Pan-Turkist symbols, the flags of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Turkey, and chants suggesting that Tabriz, Baku, and Ankara follow a different political path from Tehran. Unofficial reports and visual content from some matches have also attributed insulting expressions about Iranian historical symbols, including Cyrus, to supporters (YouTube, 2022, 2023).

Overall, football becomes an instrument of identity politics when sporting symbols and gatherings are used to promote exclusionary ethnic narratives about the nation, history, or borders. Chants about the name of the Persian Gulf, banners referring to the partition of Czechoslovakia or Yugoslavia, territorial claims concerning Astara and Heyran, and insults directed at Iranian historical symbols can each be examples of the politicization of stadium spaces in support of Pan-Turkist objectives. These examples do not, however, justify the conclusion that “Tractor Club”, all its supporters, or Iranian Azerbaijanis as a whole are Pan-Turkist or separatist. Claims of transnational Organization also require evidence of funding, Organizational links, and operational coordination. An appropriate policy response would involve impartial enforcement of anti-racism and hate-speech rules at all stadiums, accurate documentation of chants, proportionate disciplinary action, and the strengthening of an environment in which legitimate cultural demands are distinguished from ethnic hatred or political and territorial claims.

7.5. Iran's legal framework and domestic policy on linguistic diversity

7.5.1. Persian and the need to preserve a nationwide common language

In addition to its communicative role, language is a key factor in transmitting historical memory, shaping a shared public sphere, and connecting different regions of a country. Given Iran's linguistic and dialectal diversity – from Azerbaijani Turkish and Kurdish to Balochi, Arabic, Turkmen, Gilaki, Mazandarani, and varieties of Luri – the country needs a mechanism that ensures communication among citizens with different linguistic backgrounds. Throughout Iranian history, Persian has played this role, particularly through literature, bureaucracy, education, historiography, and interregional communication. Mahmoudzahi's (2022) study of the historical standing of Persian argues that its position should be examined in relation to society's communicative needs and the political, cultural, religious, and social foundations supporting it. From this perspective, the importance of Persian derives not merely from its official status: the breadth of its literary and scholarly resources, its place in the education system, and its use in interprovincial communication give it a function extending beyond the language of a particular region or linguistic group.

This function can be explained through the concept of a common or *lingua franca* language. A *lingua franca* is a language used by speakers of different languages to communicate with one another. In Iran, maintaining general proficiency in Persian enables a citizen from Tabriz, Sanandaj, Ahvaz, Zahedan, or Gorgan to participate in universities, administrative settings, national media, the labor market, and interprovincial social interaction, regardless of their local language or dialect. If future generations' ability to use Persian were substantially weakened, the cost of interregional communication could rise and equal access to educational and employment opportunities could

become more difficult. Preserving Persian as a common language is therefore a public benefit for all Iranian citizens, not a privilege belonging to one ethnic group. Nevertheless, strengthening Persian as a means of social connection must be distinguished from any policy of cultural homogenization, since the communicative role of a common language does not require the elimination of other languages (Khaleghpanah & Sanaei, 2020; Mahmoudzahi, 2022).

From the perspective of national identity, a common language can also help create a space in which citizens, despite differences in local language and dialect, participate in shared literary, historical, and cultural experiences and develop a common historical memory and a sense of belonging to one nation. Access to the works of Ferdowsi, Saadi, Hafez, Rumi, and other major figures of Persian literature, together with shared media and educational texts, is one channel for transmitting this cultural memory. The collective memory of Iranians is not limited to Persian, however: Azerbaijani Turkish, Kurdish, Balochi, Arabic, and other languages and dialects also form part of Iran's shared heritage. A more precise formulation is therefore that Persian enables communication and participation in a nationwide cultural space, while local languages preserve and enrich regional historical and cultural memories. A balanced language policy should strengthen Persian while also supporting local languages and dialects, rather than placing them in opposition to one another.

7.5.2. Iran's legal framework: Distinguishing the teaching of local literature from replacing the nationwide language of instruction

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran distinguishes these two levels relatively clearly in Article 15. According to the article, "*the official and common language and script of the people of Iran is Persian*"; official documents, correspondence, texts, and textbooks must use this language and script. At the same time, the use of local and ethnic languages in the press and mass media, and the teaching of their literature in schools "*alongside Persian*", are permitted. Article 19 also recognizes equal rights for the people irrespective of ethnicity, race, or language (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Arts. 15 and 19). The constitutional text therefore neither excludes local languages from public life nor removes Persian from its position as the country's official and common language.

Khaleghpanah and Sanaei's (2020) study of language policy and the position of minority languages in modern Iran shows that Persian has become a central element in the policy discourse of national identity, and that official policies at different times have affected the status of non-Persian languages. In their examination of education documents and discourse on mother-tongue language, Yarigholi and Monsefi (2023) also conclude that constructing a binary opposition between "*national identity*" and "*mother-tongue education*" can divert discussion away from a scholarly assessment of educational needs. These studies suggest that local-language education cannot inherently be equated with a threat to national unity; its consequences depend on curriculum design, the status of Persian, educational quality, and the political or cultural objectives of the program.

7.5.3. The risk of turning local-language education into an exclusive replacement for Persian

From a national-policy perspective, the principal concern about local-language education is not the teaching of these languages itself, but the possibility of a model in which proficiency in

Persian as the country's common and *lingua franca* language is gradually removed from the core objectives of the education system. If all subjects from primary through secondary school were taught exclusively in a local language and Persian were reduced to a limited or non-functional level, students in that region might face difficulties in academic, social, and professional communication with people from other regions. In a country such as Iran, where higher education, many public employment and management opportunities, and large parts of the labor market require nationwide participation, this could produce unequal access to opportunities. Such an outcome is not inevitable but becomes plausible if there is no effective program for teaching the common language and ensuring that all students achieve sufficient proficiency in it.

For example, if a student learns all science, mathematics, history, and social studies in a local language but lacks sufficient opportunity to develop advanced Persian skills, they may face greater difficulties when entering a university in another province, using Persian-language academic resources, or competing for jobs requiring nationwide communication. In such circumstances, a policy ostensibly designed to expand educational access may unintentionally reproduce geographical inequality. Making exclusive local-language instruction the guiding principle of the entire education system, without guaranteeing students' equal ability to understand Persian – a position promoted by Pan-Turkist ethnonationalists – could therefore have dangerous consequences for educational opportunity, social mobility, and nationwide communication. The appropriate standard is neither to deprive students of their mother tongue nor to weaken their Persian proficiency, but to maintain both abilities while preserving the leading role of Persian.

7.5.4. The relationship between language education and Pan-Turkist and separatist discourses

Language education acquires more complex political dimensions when it is presented within a transnational program to redefine national identity. In this context, a distinction must be made among advocates of linguistic and cultural rights, identity activists, Pan-Turkist currents, and organizations that explicitly seek to establish a separate political structure. Not everyone who advocates teaching Azerbaijani Turkish in schools is a Pan-Turkist or separatist; many may simply seek to preserve their mother tongue, increase cultural production, or implement a particular interpretation of Article 15 of the Constitution. Scientifically, it is not defensible to attribute a separatist objective to all such people without independent evidence.

At the same time, documents from some political organizations show that, in particular cases, language demands have been presented as part of a broader political nation-building project. For example, a political program published on the website of the “Azerbaijan National Front” explicitly identifies the establishment of a “*National Government of Azerbaijan*” in the “*historical territories of Southern Azerbaijan*”, described in the same text as part of present-day Iran, as a political objective. The program also addresses mother-tongue education and cultural preservation (Azerbaijan National Front, n.d.). This primary document shows that, in the program of at least one specific political movement, cultural and linguistic demands are placed alongside the goal of establishing a separate political structure. It does not, however, justify concluding that all advocates of Azerbaijani Turkish education share this goal.

Concerns about the political exploitation of linguistic demands therefore cannot be dismissed categorically, just as every cultural demand cannot be labelled separatist. The central task is to examine the actual connection between language demand, a political project, and the practical program of a particular movement. If an Organization defines the teaching of Turkish as part of a project to establish an independent state in territory belonging to Iran, this connection can be analyzed on the basis of the Organization's own document. But if a group advocates teaching Azerbaijani literature alongside Persian, that demand alone cannot be treated as evidence of an intention to separate.

Four questions should be asked about each proposed educational model. Does it emphasize preserving Persian as the common language? Does it propose local-language education as a subject or supplementary tool, or does it seek to replace Persian in all subjects? Do the proponents' documents link language education to concepts such as "*Southern Azerbaijan*", the establishment of a separate state, or transnational political alignment? And does the proposal provide educational resources, trained teachers, and mechanisms to ensure that students become proficient in Persian? Answers to these questions can help distinguish legitimate linguistic rights from the political exploitation of language.

7.5.5. A common language, national solidarity, and collective memory

In addition to its educational and administrative functions, Persian is one of the channels of cultural communication among generations and regions of Iran. Reading common books, accessing shared media and literary works, and discussing historical events in a common language help create a national public sphere. If this capacity were weakened to the point of substantially reducing younger generations' ability to understand and use Persian, interregional communication could be restricted and shared access to part of the country's literary, historical, and scientific heritage could decline. From this perspective, proficiency in Persian is not a condition for abandoning local identities, but a means of participating equally in the country's public life.

National solidarity, however, cannot be regarded as a product of linguistic commonality alone. Social justice, political participation, respect for cultural diversity, equal access to opportunities, and shared experience of citizenship also shape national belonging. If Persian becomes merely an instrument of administrative compulsion and local languages lack an appropriate place in education and culture, policy may create a sense of cultural deprivation rather than strengthen solidarity. Khaleghpanah and Sanaei (2020) discuss the relationship between the status of Persian and the position of minority languages in Iran. By contrast, Allahkarami et al. (2018) suggest that mother-tongue education, if properly designed, can serve national unity and improve academic performance. These findings remind us that sustainable national unity is strengthened when a common language and respect for linguistic diversity complement one another.

The principal risk therefore arises when language policy is reduced to two incompatible poles. At one pole, any expansion of local-language education is treated as a threat to Iran; at the other, Persian is portrayed as an obstacle to regional identity and weakening its status becomes a political objective. Both formulations can narrow the space for dialogue. A balanced strategy should preserve Persian as the common nationwide language while also providing opportunities to teach the literature of local languages and support their cultural development.

7.5.6. A proposed model for language policy in Iran

A sustainable solution is to formulate a policy that pursues 3 objectives simultaneously: full proficiency in Persian for all students; preservation and development of local languages; and prevention of linguistic differences becoming a source of deprivation, political competition, or transnational influence. Within this framework, optional teaching of Azerbaijani and other local languages and literatures could be expanded through standardized curricula, reliable textbooks, and trained teachers.

Alongside these measures, the education system should ensure that every student, regardless of their local language, has sufficient Persian proficiency by the end of schooling to continue their education, access academic resources, communicate with other regions, and participate in the labor market. Any weakening of Persian is likely to negatively affect learning, educational quality, academic opportunities, and interregional communication.

From a national-security perspective, language policy is more effective when it relies not on blanket restrictions or accusations but on reliable cultural content, citizen participation, the strengthening of Persian as a common language, and transparency in educational programs. If citizens can preserve their mother tongue while retaining full capacity to communicate with other Iranians, the conditions for turning cultural dissatisfaction into a sense of structural deprivation may diminish. Conversely, weakening Persian education without alternative mechanisms for nationwide communication can generate political, social, and educational costs.

7.6. Iran's foreign policy towards Pan-Turkism: Border sovereignty, South Caucasus balancing, and connectivity

Iran's foreign-policy agenda in response to the geopolitical consequences of the "Turkic world" rests on several principles. **First**, it seeks to preserve the territorial integrity of regional states and opposes changes to international borders by force. **Second**, it seeks to prevent transit or security arrangements that would in practice restrict Iran's land access to Armenia and the Caucasus or result in a permanent presence of external actors along its northern borders. **Third**, it seeks to maintain economic and diplomatic relations with both South Caucasus neighbors and prevent competition between Iran and Azerbaijan from becoming a permanent conflict. **Fourth**, it seeks to expand Iran's connectivity options through the North–South Corridor, routes through Armenia and Georgia, cooperation with Russia and India, and the development of infrastructure along the Caspian coast. These four principles are interconnected but should not be conflated: opposing arrangements that restrict Iran's sovereignty or access does not, in itself, mean opposing all forms of regional trade or connectivity.

The so-called "*Zangezur Corridor*" and the subsequent proposal known as the "Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity" (TRIPP) are clear examples of the connection between identity, corridor, and security issues. Iran is concerned that a route between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan, if accompanied by the removal of Armenian border and customs control or the acceptance of extraterritorial arrangements, could affect the strategic balance along Iran's northern borders and its land access to Armenia. In Tehran's discourse, this concern is often linked to the concept of a "*NATO Turanian Corridor*" or to the expansion of Turkish and Azerbaijani influence.

The implementation framework published by Armenia and the United States in January and May 2026 states that Armenia retains its sovereignty, territorial integrity, legal jurisdiction, law-enforcement authority, customs control, and security responsibility in the project areas. The published documents also refer to the establishment of a TRIPP Development Company, with a proposed 74% share for the American side and 26% for Armenia, and an initial 49-year lease for development rights (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, 2026). From Iran's perspective, even without a formal transfer of territorial sovereignty, the long-term economic and security presence of a foreign power such as the United States – given its record of two surprise attacks on Iran near the country's northwestern borders – raises strategic questions about Washington's actual objectives in establishing a presence near Iran's border.

Iran's position on the South Caucasus has rested on support for preserving the Iran–Armenia border, opposition to any border change by force, and an emphasis on resolving transit issues through negotiation. This position also creates an opportunity for active diplomacy. Rather than focusing exclusively on blocking a route, Tehran can propose ways to facilitate transit under Armenian sovereignty, invest in alternative infrastructure such as the Aras Corridor through Iranian territory, connect Iran's rail network to Armenia and Georgia, and establish transparent guarantees for the safe and rapid movement of goods through Iran. The more practical economic alternatives Iran offers, the less likely it is that new routes will be defined solely as instruments against Tehran.

Another foreign-policy instrument for Iran is to maintain working relations with the Republic of Azerbaijan while defending its security red lines. Geography prevents Tehran and Baku from ignoring one another: energy, border trade, transport, Caspian security, management of the Aras River, people-to-people relations, and cultural ties create shared interests. At the same time, Azerbaijan's relations with Israel, Turkey, and “Turkic world” institutions raise security and strategic concerns for Iran. A balanced policy should respond clearly to hostile activity or violations of sovereignty while preserving diplomatic, economic, and cultural channels, so that bilateral tensions do not create further opportunities for third-party involvement.

7.7. Iran's regional response: Armenia, Russia, and multilateral frameworks

Armenia occupies a special place in Iran's Caucasus policy because the shared border provides a direct land route from Iran to the South Caucasus and then to Europe. The importance of this border is not merely economic: in Tehran's strategic perception, preserving the Armenian border prevents Iran from being geopolitically enclosed in the northwest and protects access to northern routes. Iran's policy towards Armenia should not, however, be defined solely in opposition to Azerbaijan. Expanding bilateral trade, connecting electricity and transport networks, strengthening border crossings, and cooperating on diverse multilateral economic projects can increase benefits for both countries and diversify regional transit options.

Iran–Russia relations are also part of this equation. The two countries signed a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty on January 17, 2025, which entered into force in October 2025. Its text emphasizes deepening bilateral cooperation, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference in internal affairs, and regional coordination. The treaty is not, by itself, an automatic defense alliance, but it provides a legal framework for dialogue on security and connectivity (Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, 2025). Cooperation between Tehran and Moscow in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Caspian region could focus

on preserving trade routes, preventing borders from becoming instruments of pressure, and exchanging information about activities that violate sovereignty.

The “3+3” framework, comprising the 3 South Caucasus states – Armenia, the Republic of Azerbaijan, and Georgia – and their 3 larger neighbors – Iran, Russia, and Turkey – could also provide a platform for reducing tensions, although Georgia’s non-participation because of its dispute with Russia and the region’s geopolitical divisions limit its potential. The advantage of this format is that the principal regional actors can discuss trade, transit, and security without imposing wholly external frameworks. For Iran, it could help prevent a transport project from becoming a security or military issue. For Russia, a regional mechanism offers a way to preserve its diplomatic role in the Caucasus; for Turkey and Azerbaijan, it creates an opportunity to develop connectivity routes at lower political cost while respecting the rights and interests of other countries.

7.8. Iran’s domestic agenda for reducing identity vulnerability

Iran’s domestic response should connect the protection of sovereign frameworks with the development of appropriate cultural policy for all citizens. Legitimate instruments for countering foreign intervention may include examining and clarifying the funding sources of political organizations suspected of links with Pan-Turkist promoters, developing and applying rules on foreign funding equally, protecting information infrastructure, responding to disinformation, and prosecuting organized violence. These instruments must, however, rely on evidence and demonstrable conduct. Language learning, literary activity, demands for teaching local literature, historical research, or criticism of cultural policy should not automatically be classified as support for Pan-Turkism or separatism. Equating cultural activity with a security threat not only endangers citizens’ rights but also makes genuine risks harder to identify.

The **first measure** is effective and assessable implementation of Article 15 of the Constitution. Optional programs for teaching Azerbaijani literature, standard textbooks, teacher training, support for literary associations, and translation of classical and contemporary works could address cultural needs while preventing external narratives from monopolizing the field.

The **second measure** is the development of professionally produced, pro-Iranian public and local media that challenge Pan-Turkism: news, documentaries, children’s programs, music, literature, oral history, and expert discussion should be produced so that audiences can see their concerns reflected in domestic media. High-quality local content is a more effective alternative to merely trying to counter foreign and domestic media promoting Pan-Turkism, because the main competition is over trust and appeal, not simply technical access.

The **third measure** is to reduce actual and perceived inequalities in investment, employment, the environment, infrastructure, municipal services, and access to decision-making. If citizens in border regions feel that their economic development, share of resources, or employment opportunities are inferior to those in central regions, external identity narratives can translate that dissatisfaction into a sense of national exclusion. Not every economic grievance is ethnic in origin, and regions do not all face the same problems; provincial data, development indicators, and consultation with local institutions should therefore guide policy.

The **fourth measure** is to expand academic research and public dialogue about the history of Azerbaijan and Iran's identity and civilization, countering fabricated Pan-Turkist narratives and attempts to link parts of Iran to other countries. Differences in interpretation should be examined through scholarly methods, so that no foreign state can easily present itself as the sole credible authority on a community's history.

The **fifth measure** is to improve lawful and transparent interaction between Iranian universities, research centers, and cultural institutions and those of neighboring countries. Cultural isolation is neither feasible nor desirable. Instead, frameworks should enable academic cooperation while making funding, data ownership, research independence, and conflicts of interest transparent. If academic exchange takes place only from outside, opportunities for monitoring and participation by domestic researchers diminish. Strengthening independent and credible Iranian institutions, by contrast, can separate scholarly competition from political slogans.

Overall, Iran's domestic policy is most effective in reducing vulnerability when it observes 2 principles simultaneously. **First**, organized activities that violate sovereignty or have documented links to violence and separatism must not be ignored. **Second**, citizens' linguistic and cultural identities must not be treated as threats in themselves. National unity is more sustainable when based on participation and lasting consent than on the elimination of differences. This consideration is central to analyzing Pan-Turkism because efforts to transfer cultural authority to external centers are more likely to succeed when citizens feel that they are not recognized within the domestic system.

Within this framework, Iran's policies towards the expansion of Pan-Turkism can be examined at 2 levels. The **first** consists of security and judicial measures against conduct that responsible authorities regard as a threat to national security or territorial integrity. The **second** consists of cultural and educational policies that can strengthen national cohesion by presenting Iran's history, expanding knowledge of its literary heritage, supporting research institutions, and creating opportunities for cultural participation.

7.8.1. Security and judicial measures against activities attributed to separatist currents

7.8.1.1. The cases of Yunus Marami and Abolfazl Ranjbari

One case worth examining is the judicial handling of allegations against Yunus Marami and Abolfazl Ranjbari, Azerbaijani ethnonationalist activists. Marami was arrested in Tabriz on July 9, 2025, and Ranjbari on 4 May of the same year. During the proceedings in Ranjbari's case, he was initially charged with espionage, but at a hearing on November 18, 2025, the charge was changed to "*assistance in corruption on earth*". The final-defense hearing for Ranjbari and Marami was held on 22 April 2026. According to a source close to the defense lawyer, cited in the news report, the espionage charge against Ranjbari was connected to his participation in an academic conference and the publication or translation of articles in the Republic of Azerbaijan (HRANA, 2026a).

7.8.1.2. The case of Yurosh Mehralibeiglu and 12 other citizens

Another significant example is the case of thirteen Azerbaijani citizens. On 18 May 2026, it was reported that the East Azerbaijan Province Court of Appeal had sentenced the ethnonationalist

activists Yurosh Mehralibeiglu, Hamed Yeganehpour, Ebrahim Owzadeh, Araz Ebrahimnejad, Hossein Azadi, Amirhossein Aghaei, Nasser Razmjou, Davoud Shiri, Javad Soudbar, Mehrdad Ghaderi, Ali Babaei, Morteza Nourmohammadi, and Mohammadreza Movahed to a total of 81 years and 5 months in prison. According to the report, the charges included forming or membership in an illegal group and assembly and collusion against national security (HRANA, 2026b).

According to the same report, Yurosh Mehralibeiglu was sentenced to 6 years and 2 months for forming an illegal group and 3 years and 7 months for assembly and collusion against national security. This information indicates that, in this case, the judiciary examined the defendants' alleged activities within the framework of security-related offences.

7.8.1.3. The case of Alireza Farshi and activities related to mother-tongue language

The case of Alireza Farshi, an Azerbaijani ethnonationalist activist and founder of the campaign “One Library in Every Village in the Mother Tongue”, is another example of the intersection between cultural activity and security proceedings. On August 17, 2025, the Azerbaijan Human Rights Association – ERK – reported that Farshi had been summoned to serve an 8-month prison sentence. According to the Organization, he had been convicted of “*propaganda against the system*”, and the court, citing reports by law-enforcement agents and recorded content, had raised issues including dissemination of false information, disturbing public opinion, and promoting separatist themes (Azerbaijan Human Rights Association – ERK, 2025).

Other similar cases include the 9-month prison sentence imposed on Ali Babaei in Tabriz for propaganda against the system (Detainees Website, 7 September 2026); the combined 40-year prison sentences imposed in Tabriz on Abbas Lisani, Yousef Kari, Behzad Dashti, and Ali Kheirjou over security-related charges, including “*forming and leading a group with the aim of disrupting national security*” and “*assembly and collusion to commit crimes against national security*” (Detainees Website, 4 August 2026); and the 1-year prison sentence, a fine of 500 million rials, and blocking of social-media accounts imposed on Karim Esmailzadeh in Tabriz for “publishing falsehoods with the intent to disturb public opinion” (Detainees Website, 10 June 2026).

Overall, these cases illustrate the use of Iran's criminal-justice mechanisms to address conduct that took place under the guise of cultural and promotional activity but was deemed to pose a security threat.

7.8.2. The Shams Tabrizi mausoleum in Khoy and competition over Rumi's heritage

One important cultural initiative to examine is the restoration and opening of the Shams Tabrizi mausoleum in Khoy. The complex was inaugurated on October 8, 2026, in the presence of Iranian officials, representatives of Turkey, and a number of cultural and religious figures. Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts and the governor of West Azerbaijan Province also attended the ceremony (Anadolu, 2026). In his inauguration message, Iran's president described Shams as “*another link in the unbreakable connection between Azerbaijan and Iran*” and spoke of turning Khoy into a center for research on Shams and Rumi (Mehr News Agency, 1405). The minister described the building as equal to or greater than the monument in Konya (Shargh, 1405).

This initiative can be analyzed from 3 perspectives. **First**, restoring a historical site and turning it into a cultural-tourism destination creates opportunities for research, literary conferences, and the presentation of Iranian poetry and mysticism. **Second**, presenting Shams Tabrizi within Iran's historical context and studying his intellectual relationship with Rumi can strengthen the role of Iranian cultural institutions in introducing this literary and mystical tradition. **Third**, research and tourism infrastructure in Khoy can expand academic activity, book publication, and international programs related to Shams and Rumi.

From the perspective of cultural competition, the complex may counter narratives that attribute Rumi exclusively to Turkey's cultural sphere. Nevertheless, the strategic interpretation should be distinguished from the project's official purpose. The initiative can strengthen Iran's capacity to participate more actively in presenting and studying the heritage of Shams and Rumi and reduce Turkey's cultural authority in this field.

Academically, competition over Rumi's heritage should not be reduced to exclusive cultural ownership. Rumi occupies a central place in the history of Persian literature, while his mausoleum in Konya is also an important part of Turkey's historical and cultural heritage. A more effective policy for Iran is to expand textual scholarship, critical editions, scholarly translations, and international cooperation, rather than merely seeking to transfer cultural ownership.

7.8.3. The Tabriz branch of the Foundation of Iranology and the revival of classical Persian literature

Iranology and research institutions can contribute to historical and linguistic awareness through teaching, publishing books, and organizing literary events. One specific example is the holding of Shahnameh-reading classes at the East Azerbaijan branch of the Foundation of Iranology in Tabriz, in cooperation with the Research Institute of Manuscript Heritage and the Iranian Historical Association (Foundation of Iranology, 1404).

The importance of such programs lies in the Shahnameh's status not only as a literary work but also as a major source for studying historical narratives and mythology and increasing Iranians' understanding of their past. Shahnameh readings accompanied by critical instruction in literary history can deepen students' and enthusiasts' knowledge of Persian heritage.

The same logic applies to studies of Saadi and Hafez. Specialist meetings on poetic language and style, textual commentary, manuscript studies, and the history of Persian literature can strengthen scholarly ties among the country's cultural institutions and help counter the expansion of Pan-Turkist discourse. Literary programs have the greatest integrative potential when they demonstrate that proficiency in Persian and participation in its literary heritage are compatible with preserving local language and culture.

7.8.4. National Persian Poetry and Literature Day and the place of Shahriar

The celebration of National Persian Poetry and Literature Day and the commemoration of the poet Shahriar in Tabriz are another example of the connection between national literary heritage and local identity. As in previous years, the ceremony was held in Tabriz on September 19, 2026, (Tasnim News Agency, 1405).

Shahriar's importance in this context lies in his dual position in Persian and Azerbaijani Turkish literature. On the one hand, he is a prominent Persian-language poet; on the other,

his Azerbaijani Turkish works hold a prominent place in the region's literature and culture. Designating the anniversary of Shahriar's death as National Persian Poetry and Literature Day can therefore provide an opportunity to present both literary traditions together.

From the perspective of identity policy, the event has the greatest integrative value when Shahriar's Persian and Azerbaijani Turkish works are presented together. His commemoration can thus be seen as an example of cultural policy's capacity to connect national and local identities and counter ethnonationalist tendencies.

7.8.5. Persian-language education, textbooks, and media programs

Article 15 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran defines Persian as the country's official and common language and script, while permitting the use of local and ethnic languages in the press and mass media and the teaching of their literature in schools alongside Persian (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Art. 15).

Consequently, Persian-language education and the use of Persian textbooks in Azerbaijani-speaking regions form part of the country's general official education system and aim to strengthen national unity and integration. From a public-policy perspective, however, combining Persian-language education with opportunities to learn Azerbaijani literature can improve students' linguistic skills and reduce feelings of cultural discrimination.

The live Persian-language children's programs presented in Tabriz in September 2026 as part of a program called "Iran, My Homeland", as well as the broadcast of children's poetry and programs promoting Persian and introducing Ferdowsi and the Shahnameh, should be understood in this context.

7.8.6. Naming the Caspian Sea

The use of the name "*Caspian*" rather than "*Khazar*" is considered important on the argument that the Khazars were a Turkic-origin Jewish people and that the name historically evokes Iran's enemies and supports Israeli claims concerning a historical presence in the South Caucasus. By contrast, the Caspians were an ancient Iranian people who lived along the southwestern shores of the Caspian Sea. Iran's state broadcaster has for some time used the Persian term "*Caspian Sea*" instead of "*Khazar Sea*" in referring to and displaying the name of the sea. The article interprets this as an effort to defend Iranian identity against Pan-Turkist groups and peoples described as expansionist (Fars News Agency, 22 October 2026).

The angry response of some ethnonationalist media outlets in Tabriz to this naming choice can, according to the article, be taken as an indication that using "*Caspian*" rather than "*Khazar*" supports national unity and counters Pan-Turkist practices in Iran (Azar Anjoman, 1405).

7.8.7. Countering exclusive narratives about Fuzuli and other poets

One arena of identity competition is the attempt to assign poets and historical figures exclusively to a particular nation or linguistic tradition. In this field, publishing historical and literary research, organizing specialist meetings, and presenting authentic manuscripts can help correct one-sided narratives.

Mohammad Fuzuli is an important example. Encyclopaedia Iranica describes him as one of the most prominent Azerbaijani Turkish poets, who also wrote extensively in Persian and

Arabic. The encyclopedia examines Fuzuli's role in connecting Azerbaijani, Turkmen, and Ottoman poetic traditions as well as his importance in Persian literature (Encyclopaedia Iranica, 2000, updated 2015).

A scholarly response to exclusive narratives about Fuzuli should therefore not deny his place in Azerbaijani Turkish literature. A more precise approach examines the language of his works, the historical context of his life, his intellectual sources, the literary traditions with which he was connected, and his links with Persian and Arabic poetry.

The same method can be applied to Rumi, Nizami Ganjavi, Nasimi, and other literary figures of the region. If the goal is to counter historical distortion or politically constructed authority, critical editions, scholarly translations, publication of documents, and multilingual academic conferences are more appropriate instruments than denying a linguistic or cultural identity.

In this context, the activities of the Foundation of Iranology, universities, libraries, and literary associations can strengthen historical awareness of Iran when their programs are based on documents, authentic works, and scholarly methods.

7.8.8. Sport and the management of identity tensions in Tabriz

Football can, in certain circumstances, provide a platform for expressing local identity, urban belonging, and even political slogans. Media reports have described ethnic tensions, insulting chants, and law-enforcement action against some football supporters in Iranian Azerbaijan in response to ethnic slogans or provocation and insults directed at other Iranian ethnic and population groups. The article presents these cases as evidence of the seriousness of efforts to steer football supporters towards countering Pan-Turkism.

In some cases, these issues have also led to sanctions against “Tractor Club” of Tabriz. For example, on September 21, 2026, the appeals committee of the Football Federation rejected an appeal against the 4-month suspension of “Tractor” team manager Khodadad Azizi for misconduct towards an unofficial official and obscene abuse directed at a Shams Azar Qazvin player, thereby upholding the suspension and barring him from football stadiums. “Tractor Club” was also fined 10 billion Rials over insulting chants and the use of pyrotechnics by spectators attributed to the club, as well as a discrepancy between the number of tickets sold and the number of spectators present at Yadegar-e Emam Stadium in Tabriz during the match against Gol Gohar Sirjan (Mehr News Agency, 21 September 2026).

An academic study indicates that, from 2009 through the early 2010s, “Tractor” supporters’ chants became politicized under the influence of ethnic movements in Azerbaijan and emphasized autonomy. Following security measures, the political elements became less prominent and cultural elements appeared more frequently in the chants. Emphasis on Azerbaijan as a motherland was one of the most important themes, and Azerbaijani identity was often expressed verbally (Aghamohseni, 1402).

7.8.9. Music and concerts as instruments of cultural connection

Music can provide a platform for expressing local identity and national belonging simultaneously. One documented example is the announcement of a 2014 Tabriz concert by the Hamavayan ensemble, led and composed by Hossein Alizadeh. *Mehr News Agency* reported that the first part of the program was performed in Azerbaijani Turkish, while the

second included works from Persian literature, using poetry by Salman Savaji, Rumi, Shahriar, and Nima Yushij (Mehr News Agency, 2014).

This example shows that Azerbaijani music and Persian poetry can be brought together in a single artistic event. Culturally, such programs can demonstrate the compatibility of local identity and national belonging.

8. Comparative analysis of Iran's and Russia's approaches

8.1. Structural similarities

Iran and Russia share several key features in the nature of the Pan-Turkism issue. Both countries have Turkic-speaking and Azerbaijani-speaking populations; both are adjacent to networks of Turkic-centered cultural and political institutions; and both face the possibility that linguistic and historical ties could move from cultural exchange into competition over political authority. In both cases, Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan are actors able to connect with transnational populations through language, education, media, economic and cultural relations, and historical symbols. Iran and Russia also use a variety of instruments to prevent external cooperation from turning into intervention in domestic politics or weakening sovereignty.

The **second** similarity concerns “*layered identity*”. Azerbaijani- and Turkic-speaking citizens of Iran and Russia may feel attached to their local language and culture while also treating national citizenship as part of their identity. If states accept this coexistence, they can manage transnational cultural ties within a framework of citizenship. If citizens are asked to choose between local language and national belonging, identity polarization may increase. Conversely, if foreign actors use language or ancestry as a basis for demanding political loyalty, potential conflict intensifies. Transnational identity is therefore neither automatically a threat nor necessarily inconsequential; its effects depend on how it is framed by domestic and foreign institutions.

The **third** similarity concerns securitization. Both governments may regard certain foreign activities as threats to territorial integrity or domestic stability and place security responses on the agenda. Such responses may be legitimate when dealing with covert funding, organized violence, or state intervention. If the same approach is extended to legitimate cultural activities or demands for linguistic rights, however, it may reduce social trust and lend credibility to external narratives of “*repression*”. Sustainable security in both countries requires legal and practical distinctions among cultural identity claims, political protest, nationalism, irredentism, and separatism.

8.2. Structural and geographical differences

The **first difference** is political structure. Russia is a federation with multiple republics and other constituent units, some of which have official local languages. Iran has a more centralized political and administrative system, with Persian as the country's official and common language, while its Constitution permits local languages in media and the teaching of their literature. Russia's response is therefore largely framed through policy towards Turkic-speaking republics, federal relations, education law, and the balance between the center and the republics. In Iran, cultural policy, the nationwide education system, relations between the central government and the northwestern provinces, and bilateral relations with the Republic of Azerbaijan and Turkey are central.

The **second difference** is geographical distribution. Russia's Turkic-speaking populations are dispersed from the Volga–Ural region to Siberia, the North Caucasus, and the Far East; some live in autonomous republics or federal units with distinct local histories and cultures. Iran also has Turkic-speaking groups in several regions, but the political focus of Pan-Turkism is primarily in the northwest, especially the Azerbaijani provinces that share borders with the Republic of Azerbaijan and Turkey. These borders facilitate media and social contact, travel, trade, and the exchange of cultural symbols, giving Baku and Ankara distinctive capacities for engagement. In Russia, Turkey can engage with several different groups, but geographical distance, language differences, and local structures make its influence uneven.

The **third difference** is religion. In Iran, the shared Shia affiliation of most Iranian Azerbaijanis and the historically Shia majority of the Republic of Azerbaijan is an important element in relations between them, but it does not necessarily produce the same political identity. This religious affinity is not shared in the same way with Turkey. Russia's Turkic-speaking populations are diverse in both religion and religious culture: most Tatars and Bashkirs are Sunni Muslims, the Chuvash are predominantly Christian, and Siberian groups have varied religious compositions. Turkey therefore cannot attract all groups through a single set of religious symbols. Indigenous religious institutions and local traditions also play important intermediary roles in each region.

The **fourth difference** concerns the historical context of state-building. Iranian identity has deep roots in historical statehood and Persian–Islamic literature, and Azerbaijani communities have played a significant role in its formation. In Russia, Russian identity and the identities of the republics have developed through a complex relationship with empire, the Soviet state, and post-Soviet federalism.

These differences affect historical interpretation and the place of Russian and Turkic languages. A policy that succeeds or fails in one country therefore cannot simply be replicated in the other; any response must fit the local institutional structure and historical experience.

8.3. Comparison of Iran's and Russia's foreign-policy agendas towards Pan-Turkism

In foreign policy, Russia seeks primarily to preserve its influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus through regional institutions, the Russian language, security cooperation, common markets, and bilateral relations. The Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Eurasian Economic Union occupy important positions in this strategy. Moscow can also negotiate or reach agreements with Turkey because Russian–Turkish relations are multidimensional and involve reciprocal economic and security interests. Russia's policy therefore often rests on balancing, institutional competition, and preventing a decline in influence, rather than on permanent direct confrontation with every structure of the “Turkic world”.

Iran, by contrast, views the issue more through the lens of border security and balance in the South Caucasus. Concerns about the interruption or restriction of land access to Armenia, Israel's presence near Iran's borders, and transit arrangements that give external actors a prominent role are particularly important in Tehran's strategic perception. Iran's foreign policy treats support for Armenia's territorial integrity, development of the North–South Corridor, expansion of alternative trade routes, and maintenance of dialogue with the

Republic of Azerbaijan as complementary instruments. Russia's policy is more region-wide and tied to post-Soviet structures, while Iran's is more focused on protecting its northwestern borders and access to the Caucasus, although both countries also benefit from preserving their roles in Central Asia and the Caspian region.

8.4. Comparison of domestic policy and cultural rights in Iran and Russia

In Russia, one of the most difficult issues is balancing Russian as the language of nationwide communication with the official languages of the republics. Educational reforms and stronger central control from Moscow may improve national coordination, but if opportunities to use local languages decline, concerns about cultural erosion may grow. In Iran, Article 15 of the Constitution provides a legal basis for using local languages in media and teaching their literature, but implementation has remained limited in terms of strengthening Persian's national role. In both countries, a gap between declared rights and everyday experience can become a source of cultural dissatisfaction.

The difference is that in Russia, language demands are often framed through republic autonomy, federalism, and relations between the center and territorial units. In Iran, because of the more centralized structure and direct borders with the Republic of Azerbaijan and Turkey, linguistic issues become linked more quickly to foreign policy and concerns about irredentism. This difference should not justify broader control in Iran or disregard for linguistic rights in Russia. On the contrary, both experiences show that domestic cultural development is one of the most effective ways to reduce vulnerability to Baku's and Ankara's efforts to establish external identity-based authority.

8.5. Comparative summary

In comparative terms, Russia faces a broader and more heterogeneous network of Turkic-speaking communities geographically and institutionally, while Iran faces two large, border-adjacent Azerbaijani- and other Turkic-speaking populations. Russia's foreign policy focuses on maintaining its role in Central Asia and limiting Turkish influence; Iran additionally places the land connection with Armenia and the South Caucasus balance at the center of its concerns. The two countries' domestic instruments differ, but their shared challenge is clear: if national unity is defined solely through linguistic homogenization or restrictions on cultural exchange, external narratives may gain strength. If cultural diversity is managed through equal rights, participation, and the rule of law, the capacity to turn transnational ties into territorial conflict can be reduced.

8.6. Differences in governance logic and their implications for countering Pan-Turkism

The structural difference between Iran and Russia is not limited to geographical size and the number of Turkic-speaking groups; the Organization of the state and the relationship between the center and regions also shape the issue. Russia is legally a federation of diverse units, and some republics have their own state languages alongside Russian. This structure can, in principle, provide legal institutions through which ethnic and regional identities are represented. At the same time, relations between the center and regions, the division of

powers, education policy, and the autonomy of republic-level elites remain ongoing domestic issues. When the center restricts regional decision-making too severely in the name of unity, disputes over jurisdiction may become connected with identity. Russia's problem is therefore simultaneously one of external influence and the quality of its federal compact.

Iran's state structure is more unitary, and national identity has a longstanding place in its historical and institutional narrative. Linguistic, religious, and regional diversity nevertheless remains a feature of social reality. Cultural policy in this framework is often organized around the official language, public education, and a centralized administrative apparatus. The potential advantage of this model is the ability to provide a shared framework for national participation. The risk arises if the official language becomes, in practice, the exclusive criterion for access to cultural and educational services and local languages receive less support than society requires. Iran should therefore define national cohesion not through complete homogenization, but through legal equality and opportunities for linguistic groups to participate.

These structural differences do not imply that either model is inherently more resistant to Pan-Turanism. In Russia, regional institutions can provide channels for lawful participation while also giving center–region competition a more organized form. In Iran, the long history of political integration and the layered nature of national identity can create broad ties, while the lack of some educational or media opportunities in local languages can still produce cultural dissatisfaction. In both countries, the decisive variable is how responsive, fair, and problem-solving their institutions are. *“The intensity of foreign influence”* is not a complete explanation on its own; it must be considered alongside public trust and citizens' everyday experiences.

Consequently, Russia's policy model cannot be applied unchanged to Iran, or vice versa. For Russia, coordination between the center and republics, guaranteed opportunities to learn local languages, and preservation of regional participation mechanisms are especially important. For Iran, priorities may include expanding education and research, strengthening Persian while supporting local languages within the law, increasing domestic cultural production to counter external identity-based authority, and reducing development gaps in border provinces. Both countries need transparency in foreign institutional relations, legal oversight of political funding, and stronger dialogue mechanisms, but implementation tools must be adapted to each country's legal system, historical experience, and social structure.

8.7. Comparative assessment model: Influence capacity, domestic vulnerability, and response quality

A more precise comparison can distinguish 3 variables: external influence capacity, domestic vulnerability, and the quality of the state response. External influence capacity includes financial and Organizational resources, access to media and education, the ability to produce attractive content, the scale of economic connections, and the continuity of transnational contact. This variable can be observed to some extent through official documents, institutional programs, and trade data. The number of institutions or programs, however, shows only potential capacity and does not prove an effect on political behavior. Measuring impact also requires assessing audience use, the intensity of attitudinal change, trust in the source, and links between media consumption and political choices.

Domestic vulnerability consists of factors such as development gaps, public trust, political participation, access to quality education, perceived legal equality, opportunities to express local

identity, and the quality of relations between the state and regional elites. These factors cannot be measured solely through security assessments; some require official statistics, independent surveys, interviews with civil-society actors, and examination of public services. If a region has favorable development and participation conditions, external networks may still influence consumer culture or historical perceptions, but turning that influence into separatist demands may be more difficult. If dissatisfaction and perceived discrimination are simultaneously high, external narratives may have greater scope to redefine the political divide.

The third variable is the quality of the state response. A high-quality response is lawful, proportionate, evidence-based, and assessable, and distinguishes cultural activity from unlawful political action. A low-quality response may involve generalized threat claims, a lack of transparency, unpredictable restrictions, and no meaningful opportunity for legal appeal. The proposed model suggests that the ultimate risk is not a function of any single variable, but the result of their interaction. High external capacity does not necessarily produce severe security consequences when domestic vulnerability is low, and the state's response is legitimate. Conversely, moderate external capacity may have a greater impact during an economic or political crisis and under disproportionate state responses.

To operationalize this model, Iran and Russia could record indicators in 3 columns and prepare annual reports: (a) documented external activities, including documents, declared budgets, educational centers, and media networks; (b) domestic conditions, including development indicators, trust, language services, and participation; and (c) response quality, including decision-making transparency, proportionality of restrictions, access to judicial review, and implementation of cultural rights. Each indicator should be linked to a specific source, and the degree of confidence in the data should be reported. This would move identity-security analysis away from generalized judgements about ethnic groups and towards a transparent, testable process.

9. Potential areas of cooperation among Iran, Russia, and China

9.1. The principle of cooperation: Sovereignty and transparency, not an alliance against a culture

Cooperation between Iran and Russia in addressing the political consequences of the “Turkic world” will be sustainable only if it rests on legal principles and clearly defined interests, rather than a general opposition to the language, culture, or historical ties of Azerbaijani- and Turkic-speaking communities. The shared concern of the two countries is their right to protect territorial integrity, prevent foreign political intervention, ensure funding transparency, and prevent organized violence. These principles can be aligned with international law and bilateral documents while recognizing citizens' rights to preserve their languages and cultural heritage. If cooperation is interpreted as cultural exclusion or ethnic competition, its legitimacy will decline and opportunities for cooperation with Central Asian countries may narrow.

The Iran–Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty, signed in 2025 and entering into force in October of that year, provides a basis for expanding coordination on regional issues. The treaty emphasizes respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference, and the development of strategic relations (Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic

Partnership, 2025). It can serve as a starting point for exchanging views on threats arising from unlawful foreign funding or support for violent groups but should not be presented as a specific agreement on Pan-Turkism unless a relevant provision or mechanism is documented. Cooperation in this field should be defined through expert and legal dialogue, not through automatically attributing a threat to all Turkic-centered institutions.

9.2. Joint research network and open database

The **first area** for cooperation is the establishment of a joint academic and research network studying the history of nationalism, ethnicity, language policy, soft power, diasporas, information security, regional organizations, and transit corridors. Universities in Iran and Russia could work with research centers in Armenia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and China to build an open database of agreements, educational programs, cultural centers, declared budgets, conferences, and media activities. The purpose of such a database should not be to list “*ethnic enemies*”, but to enable researchers to assess the actual level of institutional contact, the scope of activities, and changes over time.

The network could publish an independent annual report distinguishing data from interpretation. For example, the number of scholarships and cultural centers, official program budgets, language courses, publications, and Organizational memberships are measurable data. The effects of these activities on political attitudes, however, require surveys and interviews. The shared database should preserve primary sources and place Turkish, Azerbaijani, Russian, Persian, and English perspectives alongside one another. This approach would reduce selective confirmation and give policymakers a more credible picture of development.

9.3. Diplomatic consultation mechanism on corridors

The **second area** for cooperation is regular consultation on regional corridors. Connectivity development is not inherently a threat, but changes in trade routes can alter economic balances, market access, and the presence of external powers. Iran and Russia could exchange public information on rail, road, port, energy-line, and customs-management projects and emphasize principles such as respect for borders, the absence of extraterritorial corridors without the host state’s consent, investment transparency, and the non-militarization of commercial infrastructure. Dialogue should focus on the legal characteristics of each project and avoid labelling every east–west route a Pan-Turkist project.

In practice, Iran–Russia cooperation on the North–South Corridor, Caspian routes, and railways and roads connecting the Caucasus and Central Asia could expand economic options and reduce dependence on a single route. Such cooperation should not, however, be defined as an attempt to close trade routes used by Turkey, Azerbaijan, or China. Competition becomes a security threat when infrastructure is designed for encirclement or political pressure, rather than simply for moving goods. Providing efficient and cost-effective alternatives is economically and politically more effective for Iran and Russia than trying to block every competing route.

9.4. Security and legal cooperation with clear boundaries

The **third area** is the exchange of experience in addressing activities that specifically violate the law or sovereignty: undisclosed foreign-state funding of political groups, coordination of

violence, document forgery, illegal arms transport, cyber operations, or the creation of influence networks under direct foreign instruction. Information exchange and judicial cooperation can be useful in these areas, provided that offences are precisely defined and legal oversight is transparent. Cooperation should not lead to ethnic profiling, collective surveillance of citizens, or restrictions on lawful associations. Clear, measurable criteria for distinguishing cultural activity from political influence and intervention would improve the quality of cooperation.

Iran and Russia could also cooperate on media literacy, identifying networks that disseminate false information, and strengthening cybersecurity. The risk of disinformation is not limited to one direction: foreign media may use exaggerated narratives, while state media may also overgeneralize or display bias when reporting foreign influence. Expert groups that verify disputed claims, publish verifiable data, and counter document forgery could strengthen state responsiveness and increase public trust.

9.5. China and multilateral formats

China could be a partner in some areas of this dialogue, particularly border stability, transit security, infrastructure transparency, and preventing state support for separatist violence. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, BRICS, and trilateral or quadrilateral mechanisms could provide forums for exchanging views. It should not, however, be assumed that China agrees with all Iranian and Russian concerns or with their interpretation of Pan-Turkism. China has important economic relations with Turkey, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Azerbaijan; it is therefore unlikely to support policies that broadly restrict economic cooperation or cause commercial instability.

The best framework for cooperation would define a small set of minimum principles: respect for sovereignty and international borders; no funding or Organization of violent activity from one country's territory against another; transparency in state-supported political and educational programs; protection of citizens' cultural rights and rejection of fabricated information; and resolution of corridor disputes through negotiation. If agreed upon, these principles could protect the regional stability interests of Iran, Russia, and China without creating an anti-cultural alliance.

9.6. Obstacles to cooperation

Iran–Russia cooperation faces several serious constraints. **First**, both countries have multidimensional relations with Turkey, competing in some fields and cooperating in others. **Second**, they have different perceptions of relations with the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia, and their political, security, economic, and transit priorities are not identical. **Third**, historical mistrust and competition over energy-market shares, trade routes, and regional influence may limit cooperation. **Fourth**, the two countries' domestic policies towards ethnic and linguistic diversity differ, so transferring Russian instruments directly to Iran, or Iranian instruments to Russia, may not produce the desired results. **Fifth**, if cooperation is presented as an *“alliance against Turkic peoples”*, its legitimacy among Turkic-speaking states and communities in the region will decline. This may generate suspicion and strengthen the very Pan-Turkist narratives that the cooperation is intended to contain. **Sixth**, if states use national security as a pretext to suppress legitimate cultural demands, the long-term political and social costs will outweigh the security benefits. The

defensible objective is therefore not to create a rival ethnic bloc, but to establish transparent and legal mechanisms to prevent foreign influence and intervention while supporting layered coexistence.

10. Regional consequences: Rethinking Eurasian geopolitics in light of Pan-Turkism

10.1. From ethnic geography to network geopolitics

Adding Pan-Turkism to geopolitical analysis does not mean dividing the region into two fixed ethnic blocs. More importantly, it means examining political geography not only through state borders but also through networks of communication, education, media, economics, and security. In this view, power is not limited to controlling territory; the ability to establish standards, shape historical narratives, determine trade routes, and create institutional dependencies also matters. The Organization of Turkic States, the Turkic Academy, joint educational books, cultural programs, investment in rail and road routes, and security cooperation form a network that can gradually strengthen Turkey's and the Republic of Azerbaijan's position in Eurasia.

This shift towards network geography has **three** consequences. **First**, intermediary actors become more important: countries such as the Republic of Azerbaijan and Georgia can use their position along east–west routes to increase their bargaining power. **Second**, states that previously relied on traditional trade routes or cultural influence may face new competition. **Third**, investments in identity and infrastructure can reinforce one another: a shared identity narrative can make economic cooperation appear more legitimate and attractive, while economic connectivity increases human contact, travel, and the production of shared narratives. This relationship works in both directions, but its political effects must be assessed using data on trade, investment, public attitudes, and institution-building.

10.2. The Middle Corridor and competition over connectivity routes

The Middle Corridor, or Trans-Caspian route, links China to Europe through Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, the Republic of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey. It can diversify supply chains, reduce transport times on some routes, and strengthen countries along the corridor. Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs identifies it as an element of its connectivity policy, while Azerbaijani officials also describe it as a central means of strengthening east–west links (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). As tensions between Russia and the West intensified, route diversification became more important to some governments and companies. The Middle Corridor is therefore both a geo-economic project and a source of geopolitical consequences.

For Russia, the expansion of east–west routes that bypass its territory may reduce some of its transit leverage and influence in Central Asia. For Iran, the risk of relative marginalization increases if routes through the South Caucasus and Turkey are strengthened while Iran's North–South route and border connection with Armenia remain underdeveloped. This effect is not inevitable: different corridors can complement one another, and each route's commercial capacity depends on investment, infrastructure quality, customs agreements, transport security, and market demand. An effective strategy for Iran and Russia should focus

on creating efficient and connected alternatives, rather than assuming that blocking a competing route will automatically guarantee the superiority of their own routes.

The corridor matters in the context of Pan-Turkism because it strengthens geographical connections between the Caucasus and Turkey and can turn economic cooperation among Turkic-speaking countries into a shared material space. It cannot, however, be treated solely as an ethnic project, since China, logistics companies, the European Union, Georgia, and Kazakhstan also have independent interests. A realistic analysis should distinguish three layers: the route's commercial requirements, the objectives of participating states, and the network effects on regional influence. These layers may align with one another or come into conflict.

10.3. Armenia and TRIPP: Connectivity, sovereignty, and security concerns

The proposed connection between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan is linked to broader debates about the so-called “*Zangezur Corridor*” and the subsequent route known as TRIPP. Because of its location in southern Armenia, the project has become an issue at the intersection of sovereignty, transit, and the South Caucasus balance. For Azerbaijan and Turkey, direct connection to Nakhchivan and from there to Turkic-centered networks offers economic and strategic advantages. For Armenia, regional connectivity could create opportunities for investment and trade, while also raising concerns about border sovereignty, customs control, and security. For Iran, preserving the Armenian border is strategically important, and any arrangement that restricts its land access or establishes a foreign presence near its border may create concern.

Three models should be distinguished. The **first** is an ordinary commercial route operated under the full control of the Armenian state. The **second** is a transit-facilitation agreement that may simplify customs procedures while preserving the host state's jurisdiction. The **third** is an extraterritorial corridor in which the host state's effective control is reduced or eliminated. Iran's main concern in many official statements relates to the third model. Armenian and U.S. official documents published in 2026 emphasize Armenian sovereignty and jurisdiction in describing the TRIPP framework; nevertheless, implementation details, the management of the corridor development company, security guarantees, and the exercise of customs control will be decisive (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, 2026). Strategic analysis must take the current legal text seriously while also monitoring possible disputes over implementation.

The Pan-Turkist factor becomes relevant when the route is represented by Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan as part of a shared civilizational or political space of the “Turkic world”, and when this is accompanied by claims of transnational authority or solidarity that weaken Armenia's sovereignty over Syunik on the border with Iran and gradually seek demographic and identity changes in the region to ensure the full physical connection of the “Turkic world”. If only a commercial road or railway is built under the host state's sovereignty, labelling it a separatist project requires additional evidence. If, however, the route is accompanied by territorial ambitions, insistence on extraterritorial control, security coordination, and claims of political continuity beyond borders, the level of concern rises. Threat indicators should therefore be derived from a combination of legal, operational, and discursive evidence, not merely from the project's name. Sufficient information about the project's implementation remains unavailable.

10.4. Russia, Central Asia, and regional multipolarity

In Central Asia, Pan-Turkism intersects with two simultaneous processes: increasing cooperation among Turkic-speaking states and each state's efforts to preserve strategic autonomy. The Organization of Turkic States can provide Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan with opportunities for cultural and economic cooperation, but these countries also maintain relations with Russia, China, the European Union, Iran, and other partners. Turkey's growing role therefore does not necessarily mean that these states will leave Russian-centered institutions; it may instead be part of a diversification strategy. In some areas, such as education, culture, and trade routes, this diversification creates competition; in others, actors may cooperate by dividing responsibilities.

For Russia, the main challenge is to adapt its historical influence on the needs of newly independent states. If Moscow relies solely on the shared legacy of the Tsarist Empire or the Soviet Union, its appeal to younger generations and economic elites may decline. By contrast, quality education, accessible markets, investment opportunities, and respect for the independence of regional states can help preserve Russia's position. The same logic applies to Iran: its historical and cultural connections with the Caucasus and Central Asia become geopolitical advantages when accompanied by trade, transit, education, technology, and equal interaction.

10.5. Possible scenarios for the coming decade

Three broad scenarios can be outlined for the evolution of Pan-Turkism and the “Turkic world”, based on the actions of Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan and their consequences for Iran and Russia. The **first** is limited functional convergence. In this scenario, the Organization of Turkic States expands cultural, educational, and economic cooperation, but its members avoid political commitments, fabricated and exclusionary cultural narratives, and territorial claims. Transit routes develop, and Iran and Russia face economic competition, but the risk of cultural and security influence and separatism does not rise sharply. This scenario becomes more likely if Central Asian states preserve their strategic autonomy, Turkey and Azerbaijan manage their economic relations with Russia and Iran, and current South Caucasus disputes are resolved through legal agreements. Under these conditions, the influence and perceived threat of Pan-Turkism in Iran and Russia may also decline. The **second** scenario is geopolitical convergence and intensified competition. In this situation, security cooperation within the Organization of Turkic States and the use of Pan-Turkism as leverage expand; exclusionary identity narratives appear more frequently in the official discourse of Turkey and especially Baku and Ankara; the Middle Corridor gains greater importance; and Turkey and Azerbaijan play more prominent roles in the Caucasus and Central Asia. For Russia, this would mean greater competition over influence in Turkic-speaking regions and trade corridors. For Iran, the risks of marginalization from transit routes, increased concern about preserving the Armenian border, and the strengthening of “*Southern Azerbaijan*” discourse would grow. In this scenario, the alteration of borders is not an automatic consequence of these developments; however, should this convergence persist for several decades – coinciding with economic crises, declining political trust, and the weakening of host states—the established identity-based authority envisioned by Baku and Turkey could transform into a primary instrument for cementing a fabricated cultural identity, serving the interests of both nations and ultimately leading to the assertion of territorial claims.

The **third** scenario is reciprocal securitization. In this situation, regional states, especially Iran and Russia, increasingly treat suspicious cultural activity intended to construct fabricated identities as a threat. Active external networks portray restrictions imposed on them as evidence of repression, and host states respond with further restrictions. This cycle could increase distrust, strengthen radical narratives, and affect economic cooperation. It would be costly for Iran and Russia because it could impose greater political and social costs without reducing the risk of separatism. Early-warning indicators and security responses should therefore include rising territorial claims, links between cultural networks and violent political organizations, opaque funding, intensified efforts to weaken Persian, and coordinated foreign information operations.

10.6. Strategic monitoring indicators

To avoid broad and untestable predictions, monitoring of Pan-Turkism should rely on specific indicators: changes in official Turkish and Azerbaijani documents concerning compatriots abroad and official efforts to influence Azerbaijanis and Turks in Iran and Russia; expansion of educational or cultural institutions' mandates into political and security fields; adoption of new binding mechanisms for defense coordination; stronger organizational links between cultural and educational networks and groups making territorial claims against Iran or Russia; changes in the content of textbooks or educational maps produced in Ankara and Baku; media funding and ownership patterns and representations of Iranian Azerbaijanis and Russia's Turkic-speaking communities; and measurable changes in political attitudes in target regions. Transit indicators should include the type of customs jurisdiction, the existence or absence of extraterritorial arrangements, respect for territorial ownership, and the host country's access.

Effective monitoring must also include domestic indicators: access to local education and media, regional development gaps, trust in public institutions, political participation, perceived equality in employment and services, and satisfaction with language policy. If external indicators rise while domestic dissatisfaction declines in Iran and Russia, the likelihood that Turkish and Azerbaijani government activities and their supported foreign networks will produce political mobilization may remain limited. If external networks expand while feelings of domestic deprivation and injustice also intensify, the risk of identity becoming linked to politics increases. An indicator-based approach allows limited research and security resources to be allocated to genuinely sensitive issues.

11. Policy agenda: From threat identification to sustainable management of diversity

11.1. Distinguishing levels of threat and designing proportionate responses

A common weakness in policymaking on transnational nationalism is the use of a single label for a heterogeneous range of activities. Turkish-language education, a cultural festival, historical research, media that promote cultural solidarity, a political campaign to change foreign policy, and a network seeking violence or border changes are not equivalent in legal or security terms. If all such activities are classified as threats, intelligence assessments lose precision and public policy may harm ordinary citizens or lawful cultural institutions. Conversely, if every activity is exempt from scrutiny

simply because it is labelled “*cultural*”, the possibility that Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan may politically exploit educational and media institutions is overlooked. Effective policy must distinguish different levels and apply appropriate assessment criteria to each.

The **first level** consists of lawful cultural and linguistic activities: language teaching, translation of literary works, ordinary academic contacts, commemorations of historical figures, scholarly conferences, artistic cooperation, and student exchanges. These activities are not, in themselves, evidence of political intervention or a threat to territorial integrity. The **second level** consists of institutional networks and identity-forming narratives that turn a shared language or heritage into a more explicitly political framework – for example, presenting the “*Turkic world*” as a single civilizational space or planning to standardize texts and alphabets. These activities warrant research monitoring and strategic analysis, but their existence alone does not justify security action. The **third level** involves foreign political or religious intervention, opaque financial support for political actors, promotion of territorial claims, election coordination from abroad, or political mobilization under direct instructions from a foreign state. The **fourth level** comprises the organization of violence, unlawful military training, terrorism, or practical action to change borders by force, which requires a specific legal, security, and possibly military response.

This four-level distinction is useful for both Iran and Russia. Indicators at the third and fourth levels must be provable, documented, and open to challenge in judicial proceedings. Membership in a cultural association, having relatives across a border, speaking Turkish, or publishing research on Turkic-speaking peoples should not be treated as evidence of a crime. At the same time, when credible evidence exists of deliberate fabricated cultural narratives, covert funding, foreign operational coordination, or calls for violence, the state can act under the law. This approach bases action on demonstrable conduct rather than criminalizing identity and preserves the possibility of legal defense.

11.2. Policy recommendations for the Islamic Republic of Iran

Iran’s **first** priority should be to turn its multilayered Iranian identity from a historical reality into a tangible everyday experience. National belonging becomes more resilient to transnational narratives when citizens can take pride in both Persian and their local language, enjoy educational and economic opportunities, and feel that public institutions treat them equally. Azerbaijani identity and Iranian identity are not inherently in conflict; much of Iran’s history shows that Azerbaijani Turkish, Shia tradition, political participation, and economic ties can coexist within a multilayered Iranian identity. Policy should strengthen this capacity rather than ask citizens to choose between local and national identities.

The **second** priority is the consistent and meaningful implementation of constitutional provisions on local and ethnic languages, particularly Article 15. This article recognizes Persian as the official, common, and *lingua franca* language while also permitting the use of local and ethnic languages in the press and media and the teaching of their literature in schools alongside Persian. Building on this constitutional capacity can prevent linguistic needs from being met only through external institutions. Developing standard educational resources, glossaries, classical and contemporary literary texts, digital archives, and specialist teacher training has cultural value and also creates social capital.

Third, regional development gaps should be examined as a variable relevant to identity politics. If border regions feel left behind in investment, employment, public services, higher education, infrastructure, and access to opportunities, political narratives linking these problems to national injustice may find a larger audience. This does not mean that every economic grievance leads to ethnonationalism; rather, economic dissatisfaction can lower the cost of identity-based mobilization. Regular assessment of provincial development indicators, transparent resource allocation, participation by local elites in decision-making, and responses to civic demands can reduce vulnerability.

Fourth, public historical narratives should be accurate, pluralistic, and scholarly. Denying the historical roles of Azerbaijanis, Turkmen, or other groups in the formation of Iran creates space for exclusionary narratives. Conversely, presenting these communities' contributions to state-building, art, poetry, jurisprudence, the economy, the Constitutional Revolution, social movements, and the defense of Iran can show that local heritage is part of national history, not an alternative to it. History education should avoid two extremes: reducing all history to one ethnicity or language and removing local groups' contributions from the national narrative. Textbooks and educational resources developed with reputable historians and supported by accessible documents would strengthen the credibility of this policy.

Fifth, Iran's media response should move beyond general accusations. In response to claims of historical distortion, it should present the relevant documents, texts, and contexts; in response to territorial claims, it should explain the documented legal and historical position; and in response to rumors about transit routes, it should publish the agreements and implementation mechanisms. The existence of foreign media networks should not be equated with effective influence. Public and academic media can compete only when they combine accuracy, speed, appropriate language, translation capacity, social-media presence, and audience trust. High-quality content in Azerbaijani Turkish, alongside Persian, can provide more direct access to local audiences.

Sixth, Iran's public diplomacy towards the Republic of Azerbaijan and Turkey should go beyond wholly confrontational responses. Formal protests against territorial claims and interference in domestic affairs can coexist with the preservation of economic, cultural, and consular channels. In bilateral dialogue, Iran can raise the principles of non-interference, respect for borders, prohibition of annexationist advocacy, and funding transparency. At the same time, it should keep open opportunities for cooperation in trade, the environment, transport, tourism, and people-to-people relations. A policy that turns all cultural relations into security competition may leave the field to extremists; a policy that states its sovereign red lines clearly and consistently can both deter and preserve crisis-management options.

Seventh, in the South Caucasus, Iran's support for Armenia's sovereignty and non-discriminatory access to regional routes should be framed through clear principles of international law. Each transit project should be assessed on the basis of the agreement's text, customs jurisdiction, border control, the host state's police and security authority, company governance, dispute resolution, and public oversight. Political terms such as "*corridor*" or "*route*" do not, by themselves, determine all legal details. Iran can support and upgrade complementary alternatives, including north-south railways and roads and connections related to Armenia, responding to concerns about marginalization with practical and implementable economic proposals.

11.3. Policy recommendations for the Russian Federation

For Russia, the **first** lesson is that federal management of ethnic diversity requires a balance among civic cohesion, the strength of central institutions, and the linguistic rights of republics. Article 68 of the RF Constitution recognizes Russian as the state language throughout the federation while allowing republics to use their own state languages alongside it. The more central policy relies on linguistic centralization or restrictions on local-language education, the more it may conflict with the goal of strengthening national loyalty. A balance is needed between all citizens' shared ability to participate in Russian and genuine opportunities to preserve and learn local languages.

Russia's National Policy Strategy through 2036, with its emphasis on the unity of the multi-ethnic Russian people and an all-Russian civic identity, could provide a basis for defining this balance; implementation quality, however, matters more than the document's general language. Effective participation by regional governments, transparent assessment of educational reforms, support for linguistic and cultural research, and reduction of development disparities should become practical components of the strategy. Providing opportunities for regional elites to participate, rather than treating them as potential channels of foreign influence, can help the central government identify genuine threats.

Second, Russia should disaggregate assessments of Turkish and Azerbaijani influence by region. Because of population concentration, academic networks, economic relations, and identity-related importance, Tatarstan and Bashkortostan may have different patterns of external interaction from Altai or Khakassia. A single policy for all republics would likely be either too restrictive or unable to identify sensitive points. Field studies, attitude surveys, media-content analysis, and assessments of educational programs should be published periodically so that claims about soft-power influence can be raised from general analysis to testable data.

Third, Russia can base its engagement with Central Asian states on tangible benefits: educational and employment opportunities, predictable markets, high-quality infrastructure, easier trade, and respect for the states' independence. Relying solely on memories of the Soviet period or general warnings about Pan-Turkism may backfire, since independent Central Asian states have the right to maintain multilateral relations and benefit from cultural convergence. Strengthening the Eurasian Economic Union or the Collective Security Treaty Organization will produce durable influence only if these institutions are effective and deliver concrete benefits, rather than being presented merely as instruments to restrict cooperation with Turkey.

Fourth, Russia's media policy towards Turkic-speaking regions should take account of local languages and different regional experiences. Treating any cultural solidarity with the "Turkic world" as a separatist threat may undermine the credibility of analysts and official media. Publishing reliable studies of Tatar, Bashkir, Chuvash, and Siberian Turkic-speaking histories, while recognizing their diversity, can help construct a multi-ethnic Russian narrative that remains connected to the center. Such a narrative may be more effective in soft-power competition than an exclusive ethnic narrative because it allows citizens to preserve local identity while participating in a shared political community.

Fifth, Russia should distinguish competition from cooperation in its relations with Turkey. Turkey is a competitor for Russia in some regional arenas and a trade and diplomatic partner in others. Attributing all Turkish activity to a single anti-Russian plan weakens analytical capacity.

Moscow can raise concerns about education, media, funding, or security cooperation in specific cases, but it should assess the evidence for each case separately. This approach helps prevent unnecessary escalation and preserves the possibility of agreements in areas of shared interest.

11.4. Joint recommendations and the role of China

For Iran, Russia, and China, a coordination program to manage Pan-Turkism could focus on 5 areas. The **first** is the exchange of analysis concerning specific territorial, cultural, and political narratives and networks that, where evidence exists, support forced border changes. The **second** is scholarly cooperation on ethnicity, language, history, and regional media, with verifiable data and transparent methodologies. The **third** is transparency concerning infrastructure and transit routes – not to block competing routes, but to ensure respect for host-state sovereignty and avoid imposed extraterritorial arrangements. The **fourth** is action against illegal funding, political violence, and cyberattacks under clearly defined laws. The **fifth** is the exchange of experience in language policy and reducing regional inequality.

Such coordination must nevertheless remain politically limited and legally clear. China will not necessarily share every Iranian or Russian concern about the Organization of Turkic States or Turkish policy; Beijing has diverse interests in trade and Eurasian corridors. Moreover, Central Asian and South Caucasus states should not become objects of a division of influence among great powers. Any joint measure should be based on voluntary participation, respect for the sovereignty of all states, and transparency. Inviting universities and regional institutions to discuss corridor security, media literacy, and cultural rights may have greater legitimacy than an openly declared anti-Pan-Turkist coalition.

11.5. Testing policy effectiveness

Public policy without evaluation criteria can lead to an accumulation of regulations whose effectiveness is unknown. Before implementing any measure, Iran and Russia should define its objective in measurable terms: is the aim to reduce incitement to violence, increase funding transparency, strengthen Persian-language education while also supporting local languages, improve public trust, or reduce the economic vulnerability of border regions? Each objective requires a separate indicator. If a language policy is adopted in the name of security, both its effect on citizens' ability to learn and strengthen the official Persian language and its consequences for supporting and transmitting local languages across generations should be measured. If a media program is launched to counter disinformation and fabricated cultural authority, audience trust and the accuracy of corrections should be assessed, not merely the number of items published.

Evaluation should be independent and periodic. Universities, statistical agencies, professional associations, and legal experts can contribute to its design. Publishing annual reports based on verifiable data would improve accountability and prevent both exaggeration and understatement of foreign influence. Results should be disaggregated by region, age, education level, media language, and extent of transnational contact, while individual data must be protected for privacy. The aim is to understand social patterns, not to create ethnic dossiers on individuals.

12. Discussion and evaluation of the hypothesis: What can be concluded with confidence?

12.1. Three propositions that must not be confused

Three propositions must be distinguished when analyzing contemporary Pan-Turkism. The **first** is that Turkey, the Republic of Azerbaijan, and several Turkic-speaking states have built networks to strengthen cultural, institutional, and economic convergence. This proposition is documented: The Organization of Turkic States, strategic documents, the Turkic Academy, joint educational programs, and transport cooperation provide clear evidence. The **second** is that these networks can influence identity-based authority among communities outside the organization's member states through education, media, diaspora links, historical symbols, and economic cooperation. This proposition is theoretically plausible, and in some cases there is evidence of attempts to address "*kindred peoples*" beyond national borders; the strength of the effect must nevertheless be assessed separately for each region. The **third** proposition is that the ultimate objective of these networks is the territorial separation of Turkic-populated regions of Iran and Russia. Because of the gradual, institution-centered nature of the strategy, this proposition is not assessed through an explicit declaration of intent or a public operational document, but through 3 indicators: documented institutional capacity, the cumulative direction of policies and narratives, and historical and theoretical precedents for the transition from cultural authority to territorial demands. The article argues that these three indicators are present simultaneously in the case of the "Turkic world".

The first and second propositions are not, by themselves, evidence of an operational intention, but they form successive links in a long-term chain that raises the third proposition from an unsupported hypothesis to a defensible argument. States pursue several objectives simultaneously, and trade, education, and cultural diplomacy may operate alongside efforts to establish cultural and identity-based authority. This multiplicity of objectives can also shield gradual strategies from exposure and preserve the possibility of converting cultural infrastructure into territorial pressure at a suitable moment. The article therefore advances a two-level argument: it treats competition to establish fabricated identity-based authority in Iran and Russia as a documented trend, and, based on causal mechanisms and historical precedents, argues that continuation of this trend over several decades, combined with domestic crises in Iran and Russia, could lead to the territorial fragmentation of Azerbaijani- and Turkic-populated regions. This outcome does not require uniform or coordinated intent among all states and networks involved: the cumulative function of institution-building and narrative production may make it plausible independently of the intentions of every individual actor. The territorial direction is more explicit among actors promoting irredentist discourse and the fabricated concept of "*Southern Azerbaijan*".

12.2. A plausible causal mechanism

To explain how an identity-forming project may produce political or territorial consequences, a chain of intermediate steps must be identified. The **first** is the creation of a shared narrative about the past and language. The **second** is the establishment of institutions that repeat, standardize, and transmit this narrative to a new generation. The **third** is an increase in social and economic contact between target communities and an external center, making that center an

important everyday source of education, media, or economic opportunity. The **fourth** is the politicization of the narrative in response to a crisis, such as a border dispute, economic dissatisfaction, or a change in the host government's policies. The **fifth** is the emergence of organized networks that convert shared identity into political demands. Only at later stages of this chain may demands for autonomy, separation, or border changes arise, and then only if organizational capacity and external support exist alongside weakness or crisis in the host state.

This chain is neither linear nor inevitable; it may stop at any stage or take a different path. Shared-language education may remain a cultural relationship; economic contact can create interdependence and reduce incentives for separation; local identity can coexist with national identity; and the host state can reduce the appeal of exclusive narratives through fair, participatory policies and intelligent responses. In some cases, disproportionate security pressure may accelerate politicization by leading cultural activists to conclude that lawful opportunities to express identity are limited. Such feedback effects must be included in the analytical model.

The nonlinearity of the chain does not, however, mean that it is ineffective. Historical precedents show that the conversion of transnational cultural authority into territorial demands generally takes place over decades, rather than in a short period, and rarely begins with a public operational document. In Brubaker's *"triadic nexus of nationalisms"*, the host state, minority, and *"external homeland"* interact, and the kin-state creates conditions for territorial tension by defining the minority as part of its own national community (Brubaker, 1996). Weiner's analysis of the *"Macedonian syndrome"* likewise shows how neighboring states' competition for the allegiance of a population, through schools, education, and historical narratives, contributed to a territorial dispute over Macedonia amid the weakness of the Ottoman Empire (Weiner, 1971). In Iranian history, the events of 1945–1946 and Jafar Pishevari's separatist actions show that deepening identity divisions in northwestern Iran, when combined with a weak central state and support from a foreign power, contributed to the emergence of a separatist government. On this basis, it can be argued that, in the case of Pan-Turkism, the decades-long accumulation of institutions, textbooks, maps, and authoritative narratives creates a form of symbolic capital—one that, in the event of a crisis (whether economic, political, or stemming from external aggression or geopolitical rivalry), can rapidly transform into a territorial demand. This argument elucidates a mechanism whose actualization depends on domestic and international conditions; yet, it elevates the concept from a mere unsubstantiated hypothesis to a theoretically and historically grounded inference.

12.3. Competing explanations and domestic variables

Explaining identity-related behavior solely through foreign influence risks oversimplification. At least **4 categories** of domestic variables should be examined: **first**, the quality of governance and trust in public institutions; **second**, equal access to economic and social opportunities; **third**, state policy in education and media, including opportunities to learn and use local languages; and **fourth**, the structure of political competition and the possibility of expressing demands lawfully. If identity attitudes change in a region, researchers should assess how much of the change can be explained by exposure to Turkish and Azerbaijani cultural, educational, and media activities, and how much by domestic experience, globalization, migration, generational change, or economic developments. The survey of Iranian Azerbaijanis

cited in some Persian-language sources suggests that external variables can be statistically associated with ethnonationalist attitudes within a model; however, the proportion of variance explained in one sample and model should not be converted into a percentage of the population or a definitive estimate of the role of external factors in society as a whole.

In Russia, too, cultural or educational relations between Turkey and some Turkic-speaking regions do not, by themselves, indicate the extent of public support for political Pan-Turkism. Social contact with Turkey may arise from travel, trade, media, religion, education, or interest in popular culture. Even within one republic, generations, urban and rural groups, economic elites, and students may hold vastly different views. Conclusions about “*influence*” should therefore rely on independent measurement of attitudes and political behaviour, rather than solely on the number of cultural centers or the extent of media coverage.

12.4. Limitations of the study

This article is based primarily on analysis of official documents, published studies, and secondary sources. Because access is limited to internal data from some organizations, financial agreements, the full content of educational programs, and comparable surveys across all regions, it is not possible to make a uniform judgement about the actual extent of influence in every community discussed. In addition, the language of political concepts varies across countries: “*Pan-Turkism*”, the “*Turkic world*”, “*solidarity among Turkic speakers*”, and “*Turanism*” do not have identical meanings in all texts. In some contexts, critics use “*Pan-Turkism*” to refer to any form of convergence among Turkic-speaking communities; in others, actors themselves prefer the term “*Turkic world*” with a cultural and diplomatic definition. Accurate comparison therefore requires attention to the text, audience, and institution producing each expression.

Another limitation is the difficulty of distinguishing influence, intent, and outcome. If an educational program increases students’ familiarity with shared history, a cultural effect is plausible. Whether program designers intended to change political allegiance, or whether such a change actually occurred, are separate questions. Similarly, increased traffic on a corridor may change the economic balance, but without additional evidence it cannot be described as a political operation against a third country. Future research should combine budget data, internal documents, attitude surveys, semi-structured interviews, textbook analysis, and trade data in a multi-method design. The article’s argument about consequences over several decades is necessarily inferential and based on mechanisms and historical comparison; it cannot be directly tested with current data, and its validity therefore depends on careful monitoring of the indicators discussed in Section 10.6.

12.5. Agenda for future research

Future research should move from broad Iran–Russia comparisons towards more precise case studies. In Iran, separate studies in East Azerbaijan, West Azerbaijan, Ardabil, and Zanjan could reveal generational, urban–rural, and media-related differences. Iranian Azerbaijanis should not be treated as one group with Turkmen in the northeast or Qashqai in the south, because their religious, economic, historical, and geographical contexts differ. In Russia, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Chuvashia, Altai, Tuva, Sakha, and the North Caucasus require independent local studies. Researchers should also clarify how contact with Turkey relates to attitudes towards the central government, local identity, family language, and foreign policy.

Second, systematic content analysis of textbooks, maps, social networks, and official speeches can show how the “*Turkic world*” narrative is constructed and under what conditions it shifts from cultural to political language. Such research should assess both official documents of the Organization of Turkic States and texts by its critics, using consistent content-analysis criteria. Third, economic and transit routes should be examined using actual data on time, cost, cargo volume, company ownership, customs agreements, and capital flows; interpreting a corridor as a geopolitical project without measuring its economic function may be exaggerated. Fourth, repeated surveys over time would allow changes in attitudes to be measured directly rather than inferred from isolated events.

Finally, future research should examine not only threats but also the positive potential of convergence. Cultural cooperation can support trade, tourism, education, and a reduction in misunderstandings among peoples. The appropriate scholarly question is not whether every form of Turkic-speaking convergence is dangerous, but under what conditions and through which mechanisms cultural solidarity becomes political competition, and what institutions can prevent escalation. This question is also more useful for policymaking than assuming an inevitable path towards territorial fragmentation.

13. Conclusion

Pan-Turkism and Pan-Turanism in the contemporary era should be analyzed in connection with broader developments in transnational nationalism, public diplomacy, soft power, regional institution-building, and competition over Eurasian connectivity routes. In their contemporary forms, these movements invoke shared language and history while using practical mechanisms to expand cooperation in education, culture, diaspora relations, trade, transport, and security. The Organization of Turkic States, Vision 2040, the Turkic Academy’s activities, joint textbooks, and debate over a common alphabet provide concrete evidence of the institutionalization of a transnational Turkic-centered space. Official statements concerning kindred peoples outside member countries also show that this symbolic space is not limited to the borders of member states.

For Russia, the consequences of this development concern competition over influence in Central Asia, the Volga–Ural region, the North Caucasus, and parts of southern Siberia. The reach of Turkish influence and the appeal of Pan-Turkist ideas are not uniform across regions, however; federal policy, local traditions, and the social conditions of each republic must be examined separately. For Iran, the issue is concentrated more heavily in the northwest, historical relations across the Aras River, the “*Southern Azerbaijan*” discourse, language policy, and the future of South Caucasus corridors. In both countries, local and national identities can coexist, and Turkic-speaking communities should not be linked to foreign political projects without evidence.

Iran’s and Russia’s approaches differ in political structure, but they share a fundamental task: balancing the protection of sovereignty with the fair management of diversity. Reliance solely on security instruments, restrictions on legitimate cultural activity, or neglect of linguistic needs may create the very conditions that exclusive narratives exploit. Effective policy should therefore strengthen high-quality education and research, credible media, economic opportunity, civic participation, funding transparency, and respect for citizens’ legal rights alongside diplomacy and deterrence. Cooperation between Iran and Russia will also be sustainable only if it is not defined against a language or culture, but rests on defensible principles such as territorial integrity, non-

interference, countering organized violence, and transparency in transnational institutions. China may be a partner for dialogue in some areas related to stability and connectivity, but its diverse interests mean that its agreement with every Iranian and Russian interpretation cannot be assumed.

The article's strategic conclusion is as follows: with support from Baku and Ankara, Pan-Turkism seeks to manipulate the identities, histories, and civilizations of Azerbaijani- and Turkic-populated regions of Iran and Russia. The objective, according to the article's argument, is to create a new identity and center of civilizational authority centered on Baku and Turkey, thereby preparing conditions for the future separation of these regions from Iran and Russia. This formulation states the article's principal finding and strategic warning. Public evidence directly demonstrates the existence of identity-forming networks and competition to establish cultural authority in favor of Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan. The causal mechanisms and historical precedents examined in Section 12 indicate that the accumulation of such authority-building over several decades – even without explicit territorial claims – could, under crisis conditions, contribute to the territorial fragmentation of Azerbaijani-populated regions of Iran and Turkic-populated regions of Russia. This conclusion is neither a judgement about the political orientation of all Turkic-speaking people in Iran and Russia nor a prediction that the outcome will occur automatically; it is a strategic assessment of a real pathway that can be prevented through appropriate and inclusive domestic policies in Iran and Russia.

The central task for policymakers is not to eliminate local identities, but to prevent legitimate cultural rights from becoming instruments of political exclusivity or foreign intervention. Preserving historical ties within a national framework, strengthening public trust, respecting linguistic rights, promoting balanced regional development, ensuring transparency in transnational cooperation, and using data-driven analysis of media and education are less costly and more effective over the long term than blanket securitization. If Iran and Russia pursue this approach, they can preserve their sovereignty and borders, prevent cultural competition from turning into a territorial crisis, and retain the possibility of constructive cooperation with Turkic-speaking neighbors.

References

Farsi (Persian) references

1. Ahmadi Khoy, Mahjabin, and Alireza Ali-Sufi. (1404). A Comparative Analysis of Three Forms of Soviet Party Diplomacy in Iran (The Communist Party of Iran, the Tudeh Party, and the Azerbaijan Democratic Party). "Journal of Iranian History", Vol. 18, No. 1 (Serial No. 96), 78–106.
2. Azar Anjoman (1405). In a controversial move, the national broadcaster (IRIB) replaced the term "Caspian Sea" ("Darya-ye Khazar") with "Caspian Sea" ("Darya-ye Caspian").
https://www.instagram.com/p/Deck_MfEvyv/
3. Araz News. (2026). "Azerbaijan Will Not Repeat Sattar Khan's Mistake".
<https://araznews.org/fa/post/14991>
4. Aghamohseni, Keyvan (1402). The Construction and Representation of Ethnic Identity in Football Chants: A Case Study of Slogans by Fans of the Tractor Tabriz Team. "Fine Arts: Performing Arts & Music", Vol. 28, No. 1, Spring 1402, 57–68.
https://journals.ut.ac.ir/article_91335.html
5. Eghbal, Esmail. (1393). An Analysis of the Components of Turkey's Soft Power (2002–2012). "Soft Power Studies", No. 11, 29–48.

- <https://www.magiran.com/volume/95894>
6. Akbari, Mohammad Hossein, Amir Masoud Shahramnia, and Saeed Vosoughi. (1400). The Behavioral Pattern of the Republic of Azerbaijan Toward the Islamic Republic of Iran: An Outcome of Identity Constructs. “Danesh-e Siyasi” [Political Knowledge], Vol. 17, No. 1 (Serial No. 33), 1–26.
 7. Allahkarami, Azad; Aliabadi, Khadijeh; Sahraei, Reza Morad; and Delavar, Ali. (2018). Mother-Tongue Education in the Country’s Formal Education System: An Opportunity or a Threat? “Educational Innovations Quarterly”, Serial No. 65, 43–74.
<https://www.magiran.com/p1812895>
 8. Bazdashtshodegan [Detainees] (June 10, 2026), Karim Esmailzadeh; Prison Sentence Upheld for Azerbaijani Political Activist,
<https://bazdashtshodegan.com/%d8%a9%d8%b1%db%8c%d9%85-%d8%a7%d8%b3%d9%85%d8%a7%d8%b9%db%8c%d9%84%d8%b2%d8%a7%d8%af%d9%87%d8%9b-%d8%aa%d8%a3%db%8c%db%8c%d8%af-%d8%ad%da%a9%d9%85-%d8%ad%d8%a8%d8%b3-%d8%a8%d8%b1%d8%a7%db%8c/>
 9. Bazdashtshodegan [Detainees] (August 4, 2026), Heavy Sentences Issued for Four Azerbaijani Activists; Abbas Lisani, Yousef Kari, Behzad Dashti, and Ali Kheirjou,
<https://bazdashtshodegan.com/%d8%b5%d8%af%d9%88%d8%b1-%d8%a7%d8%ad%da%a9%d8%a7%d9%85-%d8%b3%d9%86%da%af%db%8c%d9%86-%d8%a8%d8%b1%d8%a7%db%8c-%da%86%d9%87%d8%a7%d8%b1-%d9%81%d8%b9%d8%a7%d9%84-%d8%a2%d8%b0%d8%b1%d8%a8%d8%a7%db%8c/>
 10. Bazdashtshodegan (September 7, 2026) – Ali Babaei, an Azerbaijani activist in Tabriz, has been sentenced to 9 months in prison.
<https://bazdashtshodegan.com/%d8%b9%d9%84%db%8c-%d8%a8%d8%a7%d8%a8%d8%a7%db%8c%db%8c%d8%8c-%d9%81%d8%b9%d8%a7%d9%84-%d8%a2%d8%b0%d8%b1%d8%a8%d8%a7%db%8c%d8%ac%d8%a7%d9%86%db%8c-%d8%af%d8%b1-%d8%aa%d8%a8%d8%b1%db%8c%d8%b2-%d8%a8/>
 11. Iranology Foundation, East Azerbaijan Branch. (1404). Announcement regarding the holding of “Shahnameh” reading classes in Tabriz, in collaboration with the Written Heritage Research Institute and the Iranian History Association.
https://www.linkedin.com/posts/iranistics-ut_%D8%A8%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%85%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%A4%D8%B3%DB%80%D9%BE%DA%98%D9%88%D9%87%D8%B4%DB%8C-activity-7347874515705655296-C0uF
 12. National Front of Azerbaijan. (n.d.). Political Platform of the National Front of Azerbaijan.
<https://aznf.org/fa/platform-2>
 13. Azerbaijan Human Rights Association – Ark. (August 17, 2025). “Execution of the Prison Sentence of Alireza Farshi, an Azerbaijani Civil Activist”,
<https://fa.arcddh.eu/%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AD%DA%A9%D9%85-%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B9%D9%84%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%B4%DB%8C%D8%8C%D9%81%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%86%DB%8C>

14. Anadolu Agency. (October 8, 2026). "Tomb of Shams Tabrizi in the City of Khoy Inaugurated in the Presence of Iranian and Turkish Officials".
<https://v.aa.com.tr/4081943>
15. Tasnim News Agency. (September 18, 2026). "Commemoration Ceremony for National Persian Poetry and Literature Day and Master Shahriar".
<https://www.tasnimnews.ir/fa/media/1405/06/28/3699931>
16. Mehr News Agency. (2014). "Announcement of the Date for Hossein Alizadeh's Concert with the 'Ham-Avayan' Ensemble in Tabriz."
<https://www.mehrnews.com/news/2291084>
17. Fars News Agency. (October 14, 2026). International Expert: The Original Name of the Sea to the North of Iran is the Caspian.
<https://farsnews.ir/AliShafieeAghdam/1791979604883737513/>
18. Mehr News Agency. (October 7, 2026). Inauguration of the Shrine of Shams....
<https://www.mehrnews.com/news/6971272>
19. Mehr News Agency (September 21, 2026), Suspension of Tractor [FC] Team Manager Confirmed,
<https://www.mehrnews.com/news/6953681>
20. HRANA News Agency. (April 22, 2026a). "Final Court Hearing Held Regarding Charges Against Abolfazl Ranjbari and Younes Marami".
<https://www.hra-news.org/2026/hranews/a-63ddb64d>
21. HRANA News Agency. (May 18, 2026b). "Ruling by the East Azerbaijan Province Court of Appeal: 13 Citizens Sentenced to Imprisonment".
<https://www.hra-news.org/2026/hranews/a-955c48f9>
22. Khabar Varzeshi. (October 18, 2026). A Video Reveals the Unbelievable Reason Behind Today's Controversy / A Dispute Over Heyran and Astara!,
<https://www.khabarvarzeshi.com/news/560454>
23. Khaleghpanah, Kamal, and Sanaei, Ali. (2020). Language Policies and Minority Languages: An Analysis of the Status of Minority Languages within the Cultural-Linguistic Order of Modern Iran (from 1906 to the Present). *Sociolinguistics Quarterly*, 3(4), 67–77.
<https://www.magiran.com/paper/2244491>
24. Reza, Enayatollah. (2006). *Azerbaijan and Arran (Caucasian Albania)* (3rd edition, including historical photographs and maps). Kerman: Hezar Publications.
25. Sadri, Manijeh, and Rahim Nikbakht. (2017). *The Emergence of the Azerbaijan Democratic Party: As Recounted in Documents and Unpublished Memoirs* (2nd edition). Tehran: Institute for Iranian Contemporary Historical Studies.
26. Shargh. (2026). "The Abode of Lovers: A 'Shams' within Rumi."
<https://www.sharghdaily.com/>
27. Shirazi, Asghar. (2022). "Iranianness, Nationality, and Ethnicity: 1941–1979" (Vol. 2). Tehran: Jahan-e Ketab Cultural and Artistic Institute.
28. Salehi Yeganeh, Mehrdad. (2023). *Pan-Turkism and the Baku-Ankara Strategic Alliance*. "Central Asia and the Caucasus Studies", No. 121, Spring 2023, 55–78.
29. Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. (1979, with 1989 amendments). Articles 15 and 19.
30. Kazemi, Ehsan, and Mehrdad Salehi Yeganeh. (2024). *The Role of Soft Power in Turkey's Strategic Alliance with the Republic of Azerbaijan*. *Central Eurasia Studies*, No. 35, Autumn and

Winter 2024, 251–278.

31. Koulaei, Elaheh, and Maryam Nezami. (2019). Pan-Turkism: Identity Construction and the Formation of the Republic of Azerbaijan (1890–1920). *Central Eurasia Studies*, No. 25, Autumn and Winter 2019, 459–478.
32. Gunaz TV. (May 13, 2025). “The film Nowruznameh from Southern Azerbaijan Wins the Jury’s Special Prize at the Turan International Festival in Izmir”.
<https://gunaz.tv/fa/post/119825>
33. Gunaz TV. (January 30, 2025). “Director of the Sattar Khan Play: We Would Like to Perform This Play in Turkey and Azerbaijan as Well”.
<https://gunaz.tv/fa/post/114326>
34. Gunaz TV. (October 17, 2026). "Southern Azerbaijan in New Turkish Textbooks; Tabriz Presented as the Heart of Southern Azerbaijan."
<https://gunaz.tv/fa/post/144865>
35. Mohammadi, S., and Rezaei, A. (2020). An Examination of External Factors Influencing Ethnicism in Iranian Azerbaijan. *Social Studies of Ethnic Groups*, 1(2), 65–84.
36. Mahmoudzahi, Musa. (2022). The Historical Credibility of the Persian Language. “Persian Language and Iranian Dialects”, 7(1), 7–23.
<https://www.magiran.com/paper/2572427>
37. Najafi, Kambiz. (2018). “The Eventful History of the Qashqai Tribe’s Confrontation with Separatists (Part 2)”. “Sarpooosh”, Culture and Thought Section.
<https://www.sarpoosh.com/culture-thought/history-civilization/history-confrontation-qashqai-distributors970614.html>
38. Vambéry, Ármín. (1986). “Travels of a False Dervish in the Khanates of Central Asia”. Translated by Fathali Khajeh Nourian, Scientific and Cultural Publishing Company.
39. Houshmand, Ehsan. (November 24, 2024). “Officials at the Ministry of Cultural Heritage Must Respond!” “Shargh” Newspaper. Republished on the “Iranchehr” website.
<https://iranchehr.com/?p=13843>
40. Yari-Gholi, Behbud, & Monsefi, Roya. (2023). An Analysis of the Concept of "Mother Tongue" in Educational Documents and Its Manifestation in Society: A Critical Discourse Analysis Perspective. “Linguistic Research”, 14(2), 131–160.
<https://www.magiran.com/paper/2749400>
41. YouTube (2022). Tractor [Football Club] fans in the stadium referred to the "Reds" [Persepolis fans] as "Cyrus’s puppies”!
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OD0I-r2kMkc>
42. YouTube (2023), "Arabian Gulf" slogan echoes in Tabriz stadium,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4pz69bKqVQ>

English references

43. Abedi, F. Y. (2025). Language policy, equity, and human rights: A case study of multilingual education challenges in Iran. *Human Rights Education Review*, 9(1), 154–167.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/25355406.2025.2602607>
44. Ağırseven, N., & Öрки, A. (2017). Evaluating Turkish TV series as soft power instruments. *OPUS International Journal of Society Researches*, 7(13), 836–853.
<https://doi.org/10.26466/opus.353287>

45. Ahmadi, H. (2017). The clash of nationalisms: Iranian response to Baku's irredentism. In *The great game in West Asia: Iran, Turkey and the South Caucasus* (pp. 105–138). Oxford University Press.
46. Aktürk, Ş. (2006). Turkish-Russian relations after the Cold War (1992–2002). *Turkish Studies*, 7(3), 337–364.
47. Al Jazeera. (2020, December 11). Iran protests to Turkey over “meddling” poem recited by Erdogan.
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/11/iran-protests-to-turkey-over-meddling-poem-recited-by-erdogan>
48. Allison, R. (2008). Virtual regionalism, regional structures and regime security in Central Asia. *Central Asian Survey*, 27(2), 185–202.
49. Altstadt, A. L. (1992). *The Azerbaijani Turks: Power and identity under Russian rule*. Hoover Institution Press.
50. Altstadt, A. L. (2016). *The politics of culture in Soviet Azerbaijan, 1920–40*. Routledge.
<https://www.routledge.com/National-Identities-in-Soviet-Historiography-The-Rise-of-Nations-under-Stalin/Yilmaz/p/book/9781315629902>
51. Anderson, B. (1992). *Long-distance nationalism: World capitalism and the rise of identity politics*. Center for German and European Studies, University of California.
52. Anderson, G. D. S. (2005). *Language Contact in South Central Siberia*. Harrassowitz Verlag.
53. Anderson, B. (2006). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (Rev. ed.). Verso. (Original work published 1983)
54. APA. (2026, August 17). Head of Azerbaijani diaspora in Moscow Bakhtiyar Hasanov deported from Russia.
<https://en.apa.az/iii-sector/head-of-azerbaijani-diaspora-in-moscow-bakhtiyar-hasanov-deported-from-russia-520593>
55. Aris, S. (2011). *Eurasian regionalism: The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*. Palgrave Macmillan.
56. Armenian Weekly. (2022, May 16). Turkey's soft power in Russia: The case of Tatarstan.
<https://armenianweekly.com/2022/05/16/turkeys-soft-power-in-russia-the-case-of-tatarstan/>
57. Armenpress. (2025, August 31). Armenia, Pakistan establish diplomatic relations.
<https://armenpress.am/en/article/1228492>
58. Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2026a, January 14). TRIPP implementation framework.
<https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2026/01/14/TRIPP/13721>
59. Armenia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2026b, May 26). TRIPP framework agreement.
https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2026/05/26/TRIPP_Framework/13971
60. AsiaNews. (2025, May 16). The “Turanic family” and the Azeri provinces under Tehran.
<https://www.asianews.it/en/south-west-asia/azerbaijan/the-turanic-family-and-the-azeri-provinces-under-tehran>
61. Atabaki, T. (2000). *Azerbaijan: Ethnicity and the struggle for power in Iran* (Rev. ed.). I.B. Tauris.
62. Aydın, M. (1996). Turkey and Central Asia: Challenges of change. *Central Asian Survey*, 15(2), 157–177.
63. Aydın, N. (2025). Yeni Osmanlıcılık ideolojisinin hegemonik inşasında Türk televizyon dizilerinin kullanımı. *Turkish Studies*, 20(2), 765–792.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.7827/TurkishStudies.80617>

64. Azərbaycan Respublikası. (1991, December 25). Latin qrafikalı Azərbaycan əlifbasının bərpası haqqında Azərbaycan Respublikası Qanunu.
https://frameworks.e-qanun.az/6/f_6803.html
65. Baku Research Institute. (2025). Türkiye in the history textbooks of contemporary Azerbaijan.
<https://bakuresearchinstitute.org/en/turkiye-in-the-history-textbooks-of-contemporary-azerbaijan/>
66. Balci, B. (2003). Fethullah Gülen's missionary schools in Central Asia and their role in the spreading of Turkism and Islam. *Religion, State & Society*, 31(2), 151–177.
67. Beck, L. (2015). *Nomads in postrevolutionary Iran: The Qashqa'i in an era of change*. Routledge.
<https://www.routledge.com/Nomads-in-Postrevolutionary-Iran-The-Qashqai-in-an-Era-of-Change/Beck/p/book/9781315794228>
68. Blakkisrud, H. (2016). Blurring the boundary between civic and ethnic: The Kremlin's new approach to national identity under Putin's third term. In P. Kolstø & H. Blakkisrud (Eds.), *The new Russian nationalism: Imperialism, ethnicity and authoritarianism 2000–2015*. Edinburgh University Press.
69. Brubaker, R. (1996). *Nationalism reframed: Nationhood and the national question in the New Europe*. Cambridge University Press.
70. Brubaker, R. (2004). *Ethnicity without groups*. Harvard University Press.
71. Buzan, B., Wæver, O., & de Wilde, J. (1998). *Security: A new framework for analysis*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
72. Çağaptay, S. (2006). *Islam, secularism and nationalism in modern Turkey: Who is a Turk?* Routledge.
73. Çınar, S. K. (2013). Turkey and Turkic nations: A post-Cold War analysis of relations. *Turkish Studies*, 14(2), 256–271.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2013.802925>
74. Clarke, M. (2011). *Xinjiang and China's relations with Central Asia, 1991–2009: Across the "domestic-foreign frontier"?* Routledge.
75. Cooley, A. (2012). *Great games, local rules: The new great power contest in Central Asia*. Oxford University Press.
76. Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. (1989, as amended). Articles 15 and 19. *Constitute Project*. https://constituteproject.org/constitution/Iran_1989
77. Constitution of the Russian Federation. (1993, as amended). Article 68. *Supreme Court of the Russian Federation*.
<https://www.vsrfr.ru/en/documents/constitution/>
78. Cornell, S. E. (2001). *Small nations and great powers: A study of ethnopolitical conflict in the Caucasus*. Routledge.
79. Doerfer, G., & Hesche, W. (1993). *Chorasantürkisch: Wörterlisten, Kurzgrammatiken, Indices* (Turcologica, Vol. 16). Harrassowitz.
80. Dragneva, R., & Wolczuk, K. (2017). *The Eurasian Economic Union: Deals, rules and the exercise of power* (Research Paper). Chatham House.
81. De Waal, T. (2010). *The Caucasus: An introduction*. Oxford University Press.
82. *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. (2000, 2015 update). "Fożūlī, Moḥammad." Vol. X, Fascicle 2, pp. 121–122.
<https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/fozuli>
83. European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). (2018). *Ibragim Ibragimov and Others v. Russia*,

- Applications nos. 1413/08 and 28621/11, Judgment, 28 August 2018. HUDOC.
<https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-185293>
84. Eurasia Daily Monitor. (2013). Forging of alliance between Tatar and Bashkir nationalists worries Moscow. 10(97).
 85. Fagan, G. (2007, June 27). Russia: Said Nursi ban brands moderate Muslims as extremist. Forum 18 News Service.
https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=981
 86. Faller, H. (2011). Nation, language, Islam: Tatarstan's sovereignty movement. Central European University Press.
 87. Frank, A. J. (2014). Russia and the peoples of the Volga-Ural region: 1600–1850. In N. Di Cosmo, A. J. Frank, & P. B. Golden (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia*. Cambridge University Press
 88. Federal Agency for Ethnic Affairs of the Russian Federation. (2025, November 26). Утверждена Стратегия государственной национальной политики Российской Федерации до 2036 года [The strategy of state national policy of the Russian Federation until 2036 approved].
<https://fadn.gov.ru/press-centr/news/utverzhdena-strategiya-gosudarstvennoj-naczionalnoj-politiki-rossijskoj-federaczii-do-2036-goda>
 89. Federal Agency for Ethnic Affairs of the Russian Federation (2025), Federal Law No. 114-FZ of 25 July 2002 On Counteracting Extremist Activity.
 90. Federal Law No. 121-FZ of 20 July 2012 On Amendments to Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation Regarding the Regulation of the Activities of Non-Commercial Organizations Performing the Functions of a Foreign Agent.
 91. Gamlen, A. (2006). Diaspora engagement policies: What are they, and what kinds of states use them? (Working Paper No. 06/32). Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, University of Oxford.
 92. Gammer, M. (1994). Muslim resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the conquest of Chechnia and Daghestan. Frank Cass.
 93. Garver, J. W. (2006). China and Iran: Ancient partners in a post-imperial world. University of Washington Press.
 94. Gökalp, Z. (1959). Turkish nationalism and Western civilization: Selected essays of Ziya Gökalp (N. Berkes, Trans.). Allen & Unwin.
 95. Gorenburg, D. (2003). Minority ethnic mobilization in the Russian Federation. Cambridge University Press.
 96. Government of the Russian Federation. (2026). Resolution No. 442 of 21 April 2026 (amending Resolution No. 368 of 18 April 2015 on the Federal Agency for Ethnic Affairs).
 97. Graney, K. (2009). *Of khans and Kremlins: Tatarstan and the future of ethno-federalism in Russia*. Lexington Books.
 98. Goble, P. (2026, April 28). Moscow worried by rise of Pan-Turkism across Central Asia. The Jamestown Foundation.
<https://jamestown.org/moscow-worried-by-rise-of-pan-turkism-across-central-asia>
 99. Górecki, W. (2025, July 2). Another stage of the crisis between Baku and Moscow. OSW Centre for Eastern Studies.
<https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2025-07-02/another-stage-crisis-between-baku-and-moscow>

100. Gribova, M. (2025, December 25). Российские исследователи развеяли мифы о пантюркизме [Russian researchers dispelled myths about Pan-Turkism]. Kommersant.
<https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/8314447>
101. Grenoble, L. A. (2003). Language policy in the Soviet Union. Kluwer Academic Publishers.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/0-306-48083-2>
102. Gorenburg, D. (2003). Minority ethnic mobilization in the Russian Federation. Cambridge University Press.
103. Gurr, T. R. (1993). Minorities at risk: A global view of ethnopolitical conflicts. United States Institute of Peace Press.
104. Guseva, Y. N. (2025). Оценки эффективности пантюркистской политики Турции в современном российском академическом дискурсе [Assessments of the effectiveness of Turkey's pan-Turkist policy in contemporary Russian academic discourse]. Eurasian Studies, 3(5), 12–23.
<https://doi.org/10.48647/ICCA.2025.13.90.003>
105. Halemba, A. (2006). The Telengits of southern Siberia: Landscape, religion and knowledge in motion. Routledge.
106. Hasanov, F. (2022). “Soft power” kavramı ekseninde Türk dizilerinin Azerbaycan’daki etkisi. Türkiye Film Araştırmaları Dergisi, 2(1), 34–43.
<https://izlik.org/JA42UE72JM>
107. Hazır, Ü. N. (2016). Diasporic identity in Russian Azerbaijanis [Master’s thesis, Hacettepe University]. Hacettepe University Open Access Repository.
<http://hdl.handle.net/11655/3066>
108. Hill, F., & Taşpınar, Ö. (2006). Turkey and Russia: Axis of the excluded? Survival, 48(1), 81–92.
109. Hobsbawm, E., & Ranger, T. (Eds.). (1983). The invention of tradition. Cambridge University Press.
110. Human Rights Watch. (2019, September 12). Self-immolation highlights controversy over cultural rights in Russia.
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/09/12/self-immolation-highlights-controversy-over-cultural-rights-russia>
111. Hunter, S. T. (2004). Islam in Russia: The politics of identity and security. M. E. Sharpe.
112. Ibragimov and Others v. Russia, Nos. 1413/08 and 28621/11, European Court of Human Rights (2018).
113. Iran Times. (2020, December 25). Erdogan poetry on Nagorno not poetic.
<https://iran-times.com/erdogan-poetry-on-nagorno-not-poetic/>
114. Janhunen, J. A. (2023). The unity and diversity of Altaic. Annual Review of Linguistics, 9, 135–154.
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-linguistics-030521-042356>
115. Javadi, H. (2009). Köroğlu i. Literary tradition. Encyclopaedia Iranica.
<https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kroglu-i-literary-tradition/>
116. Johanson, L., & Csátó, É. Á. (Eds.). (1998). The Turkic languages. Routledge.
117. Kaln, Ī. (2011). Soft power and public diplomacy in Turkey. Perceptions, 16(3), 5–23. Karpat, K. H. (2001). The politicization of Islam: Reconstructing identity, state, faith, and community in the late Ottoman state. Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/0195136187.001.0001>
118. Karpat, K. H. (2001). The politicization of Islam: Reconstructing identity, state, faith, and community in the late Ottoman state. Oxford University Press.

- <https://doi.org/10.1093/0195136187.001.0001>
119. Kappeler, A. (2001). *The Russian Empire: A multiethnic history*. Longman.
 120. Kashfi, Ehsan. (2025). "More Than a Game: Football and Ethnic Contestation in Contemporary Iran." *Digest of Middle East Studies*.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/dome.70007>
 121. Kashfi, Ehsan. (2023). "Football as a Platform for Ethnic Identity Assertion in Iran." *Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS)*.
<https://pomeps.org/football-as-a-platform-for-ethnic-identity-assertion-in-iran>
 122. Khanin, V. Z., & Grinberg, A. (2025, February 25). How to effectively engage Azerbaijan in Trump's regional plans and in Israel's interests: Practical recommendations. *Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies*.
<https://www.gov.il/en/pages/besa25022025>
 123. Kitachaev, B. (2025, July 7). Why is Azerbaijan ramping up tensions with Russia? *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*.
<https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2025/07/azerbaijan-russia-arguments>
 124. Khodarkovsky, M. (2002). *Russia's steppe frontier: The making of a colonial empire, 1500–1800*. Indiana University Press.
 125. Knüppel, M. (2000). *Turkic languages of Persia: An overview*. *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.
<https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/turkic-languages-overview/>
 126. Knüppel, M. (2010). *Ḳalaj ii. Ḳalaji language*. *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 15(4), 364–365.
<https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/khalaj-ii-language>
 127. Konstantinov, N., Soenov, V., Trifanova, S., & Svyatko, S. (2018). History and culture of the early Türkic period: A review of archaeological monuments in the Russian Altai from the 4th–6th century AD. *Archaeological Research in Asia*, 16, 103–115.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ara.2018.06.002>
 128. Köse, O., & Öncü, E. (2022). I. Dünya Savaşı sırasında Kafkasya, Kırım ve Kazan'daki Türkçülük hareketlerine dair genel bir giriş. *Karadeniz Teknik Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*.
<https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/ktuefad/article/1122745>
 129. Köstem, S. (2021). Russian-Turkish cooperation in Syria: Geopolitical alignment with limits. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 34(6), 795–817.
 130. Kovtun, O. A., & Tereshchenko, N. D. (2026). State national policy in light of the new Strategy of the State National Policy of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2036 [Государственная национальная политика в свете новой Стратегии]. [18(2), 23–30.
<https://urv.kubsu.ru/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/Ковтун-О.А.-Терещенко-Н.Д.-23-30.pdf>
 131. Kussainova, M. (2024). The Organization of Turkic States marks 15th anniversary. *Anadolu Agency*. <https://aa.com.tr/en/turkiye/organization-of-turkic-states-marks-15th-anniversary/3350105>
 132. Landau, J. M. (1981). *Pan-Turkism: From irredentism to cooperation*. Indiana University Press.
 133. Landau, J. M. (1995). *Pan-Turkism: From irredentism to cooperation*. Indiana University Press.
 134. Landau, J. M., & Kellner-Heinkele, B. (2001). *Politics of language in the ex-Soviet Muslim states*. University of Michigan Press.
 135. Laruelle, M., & Peyrouse, S. (2012). *The Chinese question in Central Asia: Domestic order, social change, and the Chinese factor*. Columbia University Press.

136. Laruelle, M. (Ed.). (2013). Migration and social upheaval as the face of globalization in Central Asia. Brill.
137. Laruelle, M. (2015). The "Russian world": Russia's soft power and geopolitical imagination. Center on Global Interests.
138. Libman, A., & Vinokurov, E. (2012). Holding-together regionalism: Twenty years of post-Soviet integration. Palgrave Macmillan.
139. Mammadov, G. (2023). Iranian Azerbaijanis—from a “well integrated” ethnic minority to a different identity? *İran Çalışmaları Dergisi*, 7(1), 25–52.
<https://doi.org/10.33201/iranian.1242541>
140. Martin, T. (2001). The affirmative action empire: Nations and nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939. Cornell University Press.
141. Matthee, R. (2008, updated 2017). Safavid dynasty. *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.
<https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/safavids/>
142. Mayorova, M. A., & Sbitneva, A. I. (2023). Turkish ideological influence in Russian regions: The Turkic factor. *RUDN Journal of Political Science*, 25(1), 134–149.
<https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-1438-2023-25-1-134-149>
143. Meduza. (2025, November 28). Putin’s new national policy strategy targets ‘foreign meddling’ and aims to have 95 percent of citizens share a ‘Russian civic identity’.
<https://meduza.io/en/feature/2025/11/28/putin-s-new-national-policy-strategy-targets-foreign-meddling-and-aims-to-have-95-percent-of-citizens-share-a-russian-civic-identity>
144. Meduza. (2026, August 17). Russia deports the head of Moscow’s Azerbaijani diaspora, and Baku issues arrest warrants for three Russians.
<https://meduza.io/en/news/2026/08/17/russia-deports-the-head-of-moscow-s-azerbaijani-diaspora-and-baku-issues-arrest-warrants-for-three-russians>
145. Meyer, J. H. (2014). Turks across empires: Marketing Muslim identity in the Russian-Ottoman borderlands, 1856–1914. Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198725145.001.0001>.
146. Millward, J. A. (2007). Eurasian crossroads: A history of Xinjiang. Columbia University Press.
147. Milyukova, A. G., Kovaleva, A. V., & Valyulina, E. V. (2021). Пантюркизм и геополитическая идентичность на современном Евразийском пространстве: анализ репрезентаций в СМИ [Pan-Turkism and geopolitical identity in the contemporary Eurasian space: Analysis of media representations]. *Мировая политика*, (1), 25–38.
<https://doi.org/10.25136/2409-8671.2021.1.34970>
148. Mkhitarian, N. (2004). Consolidation of the Turkic world in the ideology and political practice of official Ankara (Retrospective stage-by-stage analysis). *Central Asia and the Caucasus*.
<https://www.ca-c.org/index.php/cac/article/view/616>
149. Ministry of National Education of Türkiye. (2026a, August 31). Türk Dünyasının Ortak Mirası, Öğrencilerle Buluşuyor.
<https://baku.meb.gov.tr/www/turk-dunyasinin-ortak-mirasi-ogrencilerle-bulusuyor/icerik/1045>
150. Ministry of National Education of Türkiye. (2026b, August 1). Türk Dünyası Kültür Atlası Çalıştayı, Bakan Tekin’in Katılımıyla Başladı.
<https://meb.gov.tr/turk-dunyasi-kultur-atlasi-calistayi-bakan-tekinin-katilimiyla-basladi/haber/41527/tr>
151. Miskimmon, A., O’Loughlin, B., & Roselle, L. (2013). Strategic narratives: Communication

power and the new world order. Routledge.

152. Mohammadi Ghanbarlou, R., & Sığın, A. (2025). A qualitative study on the reflections of Turkish TV series in Iranian newspapers. *Akademik Hassasiyetler*, 268–288.
<https://doi.org/10.58884/akademik-hassasiyetler.1476341>
153. Mozaffari, A., & Akbar, A. (2023). Heritage diplomacy and soft power competition between Iran and Turkey: Competing claims over Rumi and Nowruz. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2023.2241872>
154. Novaya Gazeta Europe. (2025, November 26). Putin demands outsiders see Russia as democratic in new national policy strategy.
<https://novyagazeta.eu/articles/2025/11/26/putin-demands-outsiders-see-russia-as-democratic-in-new-national-policy-strategy-en-news>
155. Nye, J. S. (2004). Soft power: The means to success in world politics. PublicAffairs.
156. Oberling, P. (2003). Qaşqā'i tribal confederacy i. History. *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.
<https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/qasqai-tribal-confederacy-i>
157. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, High Commissioner on National Minorities. (2008). The Bolzano/Bozen recommendations on national minorities in inter-State relations. OSCE.
158. Organization of Turkic States. (n.d.-a). Areas of cooperation: Political cooperation.
<https://turkicstates.org/en/areas-of-cooperation-detail/1-political-cooperation>
159. Organization of Turkic States. (n.d.-b). Member states.
<https://www.turkicstates.org/en/member-states>
160. Organization of Turkic States. (n.d.). Education cooperation.
<https://turkicstates.org/en/areas-of-cooperation-detail/6-education-cooperation>
161. Organization of Turkic States. (2021). Turkic world vision–2040.
<https://turkicstates.org/en/news/turkic-world-vision-2040>
162. Palermo, F., & Sabanadze, N. (Eds.). (2011). National minorities in inter-State relations. Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.
163. Peyrouse, S. (2007). Nationhood and the minority question in Central Asia: The Russians in Kazakhstan. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 59(3), 481–501.
164. Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM). (2025). Russia has adopted a National Policy Strategy until 2036 (PISM Spotlight No. 80).
<https://pism.pl/publications/russia-has-adopted-a-national-policy-strategy-until-2036>
165. President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. (2021, June 15). Shusha declaration on allied relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Türkiye.
<https://president.az/en/articles/view/52122>
166. President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. (2022, November 11). Speech at the ninth Summit of the Organization of Turkic States.
<https://president.az/en/articles/view/57856>
167. President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. (2025, October 7). Speech at the twelfth Summit of the Organization of Turkic States.
<https://president.az/en/articles/view/70315>
168. President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. (2026, September 17). Speech at a reception for security officials of the member states of the Organization of Turkic States.

<https://president.az/en/articles/view/73540>

169. President of the Russian Federation. (2012). Decree No. 1666 of 19 December 2012 On the Strategy of the State National Policy of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2025.
170. President of the Russian Federation. (2016). Decree No. 646 of 5 December 2016 On Approval of the Information Security Doctrine of the Russian Federation.
171. President of the Russian Federation. (2025). Decree No. 858 of 25 November 2025 On the Strategy of the State National Policy of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2036.
172. ProPakistani. (2026, September 12). Pakistan appoints first-ever ambassador to Armenia. <https://propakistani.pk/2026/09/12/pakistan-appoints-first-ever-ambassador-to-armenia/>
173. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). (2017, November 29). Tatar Language Classes Now Optional in Tatarstan, Prosecutor Says. <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-tatar-language-classes-optional-putin/28886468.html>
174. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. (3 November 2019). “Iranian Officials React To Soccer Match With Political Overtones.” <https://en.radiofarda.com/a/iranian-officials-react-to-soccer-match-with-political-overtones/30250979.html>
175. Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (n.d.-a). Turkish cultural centers and Turkish education centres. https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turk-kultur-merkezleri-turkce-egitim-merkezleri_en.en.mfa
176. Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (n.d.-b). Türkiye’s connectivity and multilateral transportation policy. https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye_s-multilateral-transportation-policy.en.mfa
177. Republic of Azerbaijan & Republic of Türkiye. (2021). Shusha declaration on allied relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Türkiye.
178. Reynolds, M. A. (2009). Buffers, not brethren: Young Turk military policy in the First World War and the myth of Panturanism. *Past & Present*, 203(1), 137–179. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtp010>
179. Russian Federation. (2025, November 25). Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 25 ноября 2025 г. № 858 «О Стратегии государственной национальной политики Российской Федерации на период до 2036 года» [Presidential Decree No. 858 on the strategy of state national policy until 2036]. https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_519680/dc1d640026c942ba493d339245e7c351cefb7331/
180. Russian Federation and Islamic Republic of Iran. (2025, January 17). Treaty on comprehensive strategic partnership between the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran. (Entered into force October 2, 2025).
181. Sabanadze, N. (2009). The Bolzano recommendations on national minorities in inter-State relations: Reconciling justice and security. *Security and Human Rights*, 20(4), 307–317.
182. Şahin, V. (2024). Azərbaycan ortaöğretim coğrafiya ders kitablarında Türk Dünyası Coğrafiyası. *International Journal of Geography and Geography Education*, 53. <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/igge/article/1494766>
183. Sárközy, M. (2020). Arminius Vámbéry and British conservatives: Some further notes on their correspondence. *The Arabist: Budapest Studies in Arabic*, 41, 187–206. <https://doi.org/10.58513/ARABIST.2020.41.12>

184. Sasse, G. (2007). *The Crimea question: Identity, transition, and conflict*. Harvard University Press.
185. Shaffer, B. (2002). *Borders and brethren: Iran and the challenge of Azerbaijani identity*. MIT Press.
186. Shafiyev, F. (2023). Azerbaijan and the rise of Turkic unity: The journey of the Organization of Turkic States. *Insight Turkey*, 25(4), 13–24.
<https://doi.org/10.25253/99.2023254.1>
187. Shahbazov, F. (2024, July 24). Can Turkey undercut Israel's alliance with Azerbaijan over the Gaza war? Stimson Center.
<https://www.stimson.org/2024/can-turkey-undercut-israels-alliance-with-azerbaijan-over-the-gaza-war>
188. Shami, S. (1998). Circassian encounters: The self as other and the production of the homeland in the North Caucasus. *Development and Change*, 29(4), 617–646.
189. Sergunin, A., & Karabeshkin, L. (2015). Understanding Russia's soft power strategy. *Politics*, 35(3–4), 347–363.
190. Shanghai Cooperation Organization. (2001). *Shanghai convention on combating terrorism, separatism and extremism*.
191. Shaffer, B. (2002). *Borders and brethren: Iran and the challenge of Azerbaijani identity*. MIT Press.
192. Sharafutdinova, G. (2003). Paradiplomacy in the Russian regions: Tatarstan's search for statehood. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 55(4), 613–629.
193. Shevel, O. (2011). Russian nation-building from Yeltsin to Medvedev: Ethnic, civic or purposefully ambiguous? *Europe-Asia Studies*, 63(2), 179–202.
194. Sheikhi, T., & Akhlaghi, F. (2023). Language shift and language maintenance among Turkmen speakers. In A. Sedighi (Ed.), *Iranian and minority languages at home and in diaspora* (pp. 205–230). De Gruyter Mouton.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110694277-008>
195. Shichor, Y. (2009). *Ethno-diplomacy: The Uyghur hitch in Sino-Turkish relations* (Policy Studies 53). East-West Center.
196. Shnirelman, V. A. (1996). *Who gets the past? Competition for ancestors among non-Russian intellectuals in Russia*. Woodrow Wilson Center Press.
197. Shnirelman, V. A. (2001). *The value of the past: Myths, identity and politics in Transcaucasia*. National Museum of Ethnology.
198. Smith, A. D. (1986). *The ethnic origins of nations*. Blackwell.
199. Smith, A. D. (1999). *Myths and memories of the nation*. Oxford University Press.
200. Sbitneva, A. I. (2024). Turkey in Central Asia: Regional trends. *Russia and New States of Eurasia*, (4), 133–151.
<https://doi.org/10.20542/2073-4786-2024-4-133-151>.
201. Suleymanova, D. (2018). Between regionalisation and centralisation: The implications of Russian education reforms for schooling in Tatarstan. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 70(1), 53–74.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2017.1413171>
202. Souleimanov, Emil A., and Huseyn Aliyev. (2011). “The Evolution of Azerbaijani Identity and the Prospects of Secessionism in Iranian Azerbaijan.” *Connections: The Quarterly Journal*, 11(1), 77–84.
https://it4sec.org/system/files/11.1.07_souleimanov.pdf
203. Souleimanov, E. A., & Kraus, J. (2017). *Iran's Azerbaijan question in evolution: Identity, society, and regional security* (Silk Road Paper). Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road

Studies Program.

<https://silkroadstudies.org/publications/silkroad-papers-and-monographs/item/13252>

204. Souleimanov, E. A. (2024). Unlikely alliances: How the wars in Karabakh and Gaza shape Northwest Asian security. *Middle East Policy*, 31(2), 83–94.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/mepo.12741>
205. T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı İletişim Başkanlığı. (2026, October 11). Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan, Türk Dünyası Gençlik Buluşması'na video mesaj gönderdi.
<https://bypass.iletisim.gov.tr/turkce/haberler/detay/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-turk-dunyasi-genclik-bulusmasina-video-mesaj-gonderdi>
206. Temperley, H. (1933). British policy towards parliamentary rule and constitutionalism in Turkey (1830–1914). *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 4(2), 156–191.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474691300000494>
207. Times of Central Asia. (2025, February 20). Turkey's Turkic gambit: Balancing influence in post-Soviet states.
<https://timesca.com/turkeys-turkic-gambit-balancing-influence-in-russias-backyard/>
208. Tolz, V. (1998). Forging the nation: National identity and nation building in post-communist Russia. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 50(6), 993–1022.
209. Turkic Academy. (2023). Textbooks on “Common Turkic History,” “Common Turkic Literature,” and “Geography of the Turkic World”.
<https://turkicacademy.org/en/proekt/textbooks-common-turkic-history-common-turkic-literature-geography-turkic-world>
210. Turkic Academy. (2024, September 16). Declaration on common Turkic alphabet.
<https://www.turkicacademy.org/en/smi/declaration-common-turkic-alphabet>
211. Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency. (n.d.). Our activities.
<https://tika.gov.tr/en/our-activities/>
212. Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency of Republic of Türkiye,. (2018, October 8). Türkiye'nin kültürel diplomasisi Bakü'de anlatıldı.
https://tika.gov.tr/detail-turkiye%27nin_kulturel_diplomasisi_baku%27de_anlatildi/
213. Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency of Republic of Türkiye. (2024, January 26). TİKA and the Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation signed a memorandum of understanding for cooperation.
<https://tika.gov.tr/en/tika-and-the-turkic-culture-and-heritage-foundation-signed-a-memorandum-of-understanding-for-cooperation/>
214. Türkiye Maarif Foundation. (n.d.). About us. <https://turkiyemaarif.org/page/about-us>
215. TÜRKSOY. (2022, November 29). Türkmenistan'da Dünya Halklarının Kültürel Mirası'nda Ulusal Şarkılar ve Müzik Sanatı Festivali Düzenlendi.
<https://www.turksoy.org/haberler/turkmenistanda-dunya-halklarinin-kulturel-mirasinda-ulusal-sarkilar-ve-muzik-sanati-festivali-duzenlendi>
216. TÜRKSOY. (2025, June 12). Uluslararası Halk Müziği Toplulukları ve Halk Çalgıları İcracıları Festivali Aktau'da Başladı.
<https://www.turksoy.org/haberler/uluslararasi-halk-muzigi-topluluklari-ve-halk-calgilari-icracilari-festivali-aktauda-basladi>
217. TÜRKSOY. (2026, August 16). The 9th Great Hun-Turk Kurultai Began with a Grand Ceremony in Hungary.

<https://www.turksoy.org/en-US/news/the-9th-great-hun-turk-kurultai-began-with-a-grand-ceremony-in-hungary>

218. TÜRKSOY. (n.d.). TÜRKSOY Hakkında.
<https://www.turksoy.org>
219. Tüyoğlu, Y. (2025). Between modernization theory and orientalism: The question of modernity in the study of Iranian and Turkish nationalisms. *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/23477989241309694>
220. Uehling, G. L. (2004). *Beyond memory: The Crimean Tatars' deportation and return*. Palgrave Macmillan.
221. Ülker, Z. (2020). İran'da Sünnî Türkmenler. Tezara.
<https://tezara.org/theses/615698>
222. United Nations. (2009). Nakhchivan Agreement on the establishment of the Cooperation Council of Turkic-speaking States (A/64/522–S/2009/580). United Nations Digital Library.
<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/672372>
223. United Nations General Assembly. (2014). Territorial integrity of Ukraine (Resolution 68/262).
224. Üre, P. (2017, October 30). Panturkism. In U. Daniel, P. Gatrell, O. Janz, H. Jones, J. Keene, A. Kramer, & B. Nasson (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*. Freie Universität Berlin.
<https://doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.11176>
225. Vámbéry, A. (1885). *The coming struggle for India: Being an account of the encroachments of Russia in Central Asia, and of the difficulties sure to arise therefrom to England*. Cassell.
<https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1015&context=afghanuno>
226. Vámbéry, A. (1904). *The story of my struggles: The memoirs of Arminius Vámbéry* (Vol. 2). T. Fisher Unwin.
227. Venice Commission. (2012). Opinion on the Federal Law on Combating Extremist Activity of the Russian Federation (CDL-AD (2012)016). Council of Europe.
228. Ware, R. B., & Kisriev, E. (2010). *Dagestan: Russian hegemony and Islamic resistance*. M. E. Sharpe.
229. Weiner, M. (1971). The Macedonian syndrome: An historical model of international relations and political development. *World Politics*, 23(4), 665–683.
230. Williams, B. G. (2001). *The Crimean Tatars: The diaspora experience and the forging of a nation*. Brill.
231. Wimmer, A. (2013). *Ethnic boundary making: Institutions, power, networks*. Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199927371.001.0001>
232. Windfuhr, G. L. (2006). Iran vii. Non-Iranian languages (7): Turkic languages. *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 13(4), 396–401.
<https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/iran-vii7-turkic-languages/>
233. Winrow, G. M. (2001). Turkey and the newly independent states of Central Asia and the Transcaucasus. In B. Rubin & K. Kirişçi (Eds.), *Turkey in world politics: An emerging multiregional power* (pp. 173–192). Lynne Rienner.
234. World Bank. (2019). *Belt and Road economics: Opportunities and risks of transport corridors*. World Bank Group.
235. Yarshater, E. (2004, updated 2016). Iran ii. Iranian history (2): Islamic period. *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.

<https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/iran-ii2-islamic-period-page-4>

236. Yemelianova, G. (2002). *Russia and Islam: A historical survey*. Palgrave Macmillan.
237. Yemelianova, G. (Ed.). (2010). *Radical Islam in the former Soviet Union*. Routledge.
238. Yunus Emre Institute. (n.d.). About us.
<https://www.yee.org.tr/en/hakkimizda/baskanin-mesaji>
239. Yunusbayev, B., Metspalu, M., Järve, M., Kutuev, I., Rootsi, S., Metspalu, E., Behar, D. M., Varendi, K., Sahakyan, H., Khusnutdinova, E. K., Balanovsky, O., Balanovska, E., Rudan, P., Pshenichnov, A., Fedorova, S. A., Churnosov, M., Evseeva, I., Beckman, L., Ajay, K., ... VILLEMS, R. (2015). The genetic legacy of the expansion of Turkic-speaking nomads across Eurasia. *PLOS Genetics*, 11(4), e1005068.
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pgen.1005068>

Russian references

240. Interfax. (2017, November 29). В Татарстане отменили обязательное изучение татарского языка в школах.
<https://www.interfax.ru/russia/589512>
241. Майорова, М. А., & Сбитнева, А. И. (2023). Идеологическое влияние Турции в регионах России: тюркский фактор. *Вестник Российского университета дружбы народов. Серия: Политология*, 25(1), 134–149.
<https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-1438-2023-25-1-134-149>
242. Кагазбаева, Э. М., & Бейсбекова, А. Б. (2025). Мягкая сила России и Турции в Республике Саха: сравнительные выводы для Казахстана. *Известия. Серия: Международные отношения и регионоведение*, 61(3).
<https://doi.org/10.48371/ISMO.2025.61.3.016>
243. Бадретдинова, С. А., & Бадретдинов, И. Р. (2021). Формирование и развитие системы инструментов и институтов «мягкой силы» Турции на рубеже XX–XXI веков (на примере взаимоотношений с тюркоязычными регионами). *Манускрипт*, 14(9).
<https://doi.org/10.30853/mns210323>
244. Магомедова, А. С. (2025). Пантюркизм как инструмент мягкой силы: влияние Турции на тюркоязычные народы России в современном контексте. *Человек. Социум. Общество*, (S5), 249–261.
https://elibrary.ru/download/elibrary_82573780_68438699.pdf
245. Рогатин, В. Н., Агапов, О. Д., Вахитов, Р. Р., Курочкин, Р. В., Нуждин, О. В., Сегал, А. П., Спартак, С. А., Фаррахова, Л. З., & Юсуповский, А. М. (2025). Мифологемы пантюркизма и безопасность России и Евразии в XXI веке,
https://kpfu.ru/publication?p_id=322097&p_lang=2
246. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). (2017, November 29). Tatar Language Classes Now Optional In Tatarstan, Prosecutor Says.
<https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-tatar-language-classes-optional-putin/28886468.html>