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“Our Elder Brother”: Analysis of the Image of Turkey as the Leader of the Turkic Community in Political Discourse in Kyrgyzstan

„Nasz starszy brat” – analiza wizerunku Turcji jako lidera wspólnoty tureckiej w dyskursie politycznym w Kirgistanie

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This article examines Turkey's role in Central Asia, focusing on political discourse in Kyrgyzstan. By analyzing texts authored by the Kyrgyz political elite (2001–2014), it reconstructs the image of Turkey. The country is portrayed as a natural partner and leader of the Turkic-speaking community, fostering a sense of brotherhood among Turkic-speaking nations. This discourse also connects Turkey with a broader Turkic identity. Despite its reduced involvement since 2005, Turkey has remained a significant and trusted force in Kyrgyzstan's elite discourse, challenging the traditional dynamics of international relations in the region.

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Artykuł porusza zagadnienie roli Turcji i jej obrazu w Azji Centralnej, koncentrując się na dyskursie politycznym w Kirgistanie poprzez analizę tekstów kirgiskich elit politycznych z lat 2001–2014. Turcja przedstawiana jest jako naturalny partner i lider wspólnoty państw turkijskojęzycznych, wspierający poczucie braterstwa wśród narodów turkijskojęzycznych. Debata ta łączy również Turcję z szerszą tożsamością turecką. Pomimo zmniejszonego zaangażowania po 2005 r. Ankarą pozostaje znaczącą i zaufaną siłą dla przedstawicieli elit Kirgistanu, stanowiąc wyzwanie dla tradycyjnej dynamiki stosunków międzynarodowych w regionie.

Introduction*

International relations in Central Asia have been the subject of numerous studies, primarily focusing on external perspectives that emphasize cooperation and rivalry among great powers in the region. This article, developed as part of research on public discourse in Kyrgyzstan, aims to analyze one image of one of the powers involved in the Central Asian region – Republic of Turkey.

The study was conducted through discourse analysis. Discourse can be understood in two ways. The first pertains to a specific stream of texts that share a commonality, such as an author or a theme. However, the more accurate approach – used in this article – is one where discourse is understood more abstractly, as structures that exist beyond the acts of speech themselves. With the help of language, we create certain images of reality – as Tim Rapley wrote, “language is a constructive factor, constructing social life. By writing and speaking in a certain way, we produce certain worlds.”¹ In this article, I focus on analyzing political discourse, which is a type of public discourse. Marek Czyżewski with his co-authors are defining political discourse as “statements made by individuals belonging to the power elite, related to the political roles and functions they perform.”² Teun van Dijk argues that political discourse must: have a political context of origin, such as time and place; address political topics (it cannot, for example, have a form of a conversation among politicians about private matters); aim to reach a broader audience; be expressed by the author in their official capacity (such as a president, a prime minister, or a member of parliament); and be part of a broadly understood political process.³ Analyzed texts meet all these criteria and can be regarded as political discourse.

* This work was conducted as part of the research project titled “International Rivalry in Public Discourse in Kyrgyz Republic (2001–2014)”, funded by the Polish National Science Centre (project number 2015/19/N/HS5/00028).

- 1 T. Rapley, *Analiza konwersacji, dyskursu i dokumentów*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2010, p. 23.
- 2 *Rytualny chaos. Studium dyskursu publicznego*, red. M. Czyżewski, S. Kowalski, A. Piotrowski, Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warszawa 2010, p. 23.
- 3 T. A. van Dijk, *What is Political Discourse Analysis?*, “Belgian Journal of Linguistics” 1997, vol. 11, issue 1, p. 19–21.

The research material consisted of nearly 500 speeches, statements, interviews, and other types of texts published from 2001 to 2014, in Russian, in the newspaper “Slovo Kyrgyzstana”, which is the official press outlet of the Kyrgyzstani government. The authors of these texts were members of the highest political elite – primarily the presidents of the Kyrgyz Republic: Askar Akayev (1991–2005), Kurmanbek Bakiyev (2005–2010), Roza Otunbayeva (2010–2011), and Almazbek Atambayev (2011–2017), however also texts authored by other individuals responsible for foreign policy, such as ministers, ambassadors, and political advisors, have been included, even though quotes regarding Turkey as the leader of the Turkic community appeared in 19 of those texts. Analysis of the research material was based on coding, derived from grounded theory. Through this method, I was able to reconstruct images of the Russian Federation, China, the United States, and Turkey. This article presents the image of Turkey as the leader of the community of Turkic-speaking countries.

Brotherhood in discourse

Kyrgyzstan is deeply connected with the countries of the post-Soviet area through strong cultural ties, but the same can be said for Turkey and Turkic-speaking countries – this community constitutes an important reference point for the republic.⁴ The image of this community with Turkey as the default leader and authority is an important part of the discourse about Turkey itself. On the one hand, a sense of connection with Turks presents Turkey as a natural partner – as Ambassador Amanbek Karypkulov said: “it is widely known that the Kyrgyz and Turkish peoples are connected by centuries-old traditions of friendship, culture, and language.”⁵ On the other hand, this sense of brotherhood extends to the other states whose titular population belongs to the same language

4 The Turkic states include Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Other Turkic peoples include, among others, the Bashkirs, Yakuts, and Khakas (residing in the Russian Federation), as well as the Uyghurs (primarily in China), Gagauz (Moldova), and Karakalpaks (Uzbekistan). The languages they speak belong to the Turkic language family, which in turn is part of the Altaic language family.

5 *Родство и дружба, пронесенные через века. Интервью с Чрезвычайным и Полномочным Послом Кыргызстана в Турции* [Kinship and Friendship Enduring

group – and Turkey plays a central role here. As Sapar Isakov stated: “relations between the Kyrgyz and Turkish peoples have always been brotherly. This can also be seen in Turkey’s relations with other Turkic-speaking countries.”⁶ The ethnic dimension of this community has been emphasized since the fall of the USSR. In 1995, at the initiative of Uzbek President Islam Karimov, the project “Turkestan – Our Common Home” was launched, aiming to emphasize the cultural and economic aspects, defining the community of these states through the prism of ethnicity rather than religion. As Elena Kuzmina aptly wrote, the emphasis on ethnic community and alignment with secular Turkey was perceived by Central Asian leaders as an alternative to Iran and its foreign policy based on Islam.⁷ In Kyrgyz discourse, emphasis on the issue of the Turkic community was strongly emphasized during the presidency of Kurmanbek Bakiyev. He said:

It was our destiny to be brotherly states. The unity of history, culture, and language has forever connected our states and peoples, becoming not only the most important economic artery but also the path of friendship and mutual understanding⁸

and:

The secret of why Kyrgyzstan and Turkey quickly found a common language is simple: it lies in the unity of our history and cultural community. Although history sometimes scatters close, kindred nations across different countries and continents, the similarity of languages, cultures, and national characters is still evident.⁹

through the Ages. An Interview with the Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan to Turkey’], “Слово Кыргызстана”, 3 X 2002.

- 6 *He в кильвате и не в тени*, [‘Neither in Water nor in Shadow’], “Слово Кыргызстана”, 27 I 2012.
- 7 Е. М. Кузьмина, *Геополитика Центральной Азии*, Москва 2007.
- 8 Speech by the President of the Kyrgyz Republic Kurmanbek Bakiyev, at the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey and the Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey, 5 IX 2006: К. С. Бакиев, *Впереди у нас ясный путь*, Бишкек 2007, p. 255–257.
- 9 An interview with the President of the Kyrgyz Republic Kurmanbek Bakiyev, also published in the Turkish-language newspaper “Zaman”: *У Турции многому можно поучиться* [‘There’s Much to Learn from Turkey’], “Слово Кыргызстана”, 26 V 2009.

Politicians highlighted historical ties that date back far into the past. After his visit to Turkey in 2002, Askar Akayev said:

However, what particularly moved me was the visit to the base of Kyrgyz warriors in the ancient city of Iznik. Ten centuries ago, after traveling over a thousand kilometers through foreign lands, Kyrgyz steppe knights joined the Turkish warriors who had arrived at that time in the battle for the fortress of Iznik.¹⁰

Roza Otunbayeva also strongly emphasized the common origin:

Our ancestors lived in the Ala-Too mountains, from where they set off to Turkish land, and we believe that there is no difference between our countries and our peoples. The land you live on is the land of our roots, our origin.¹¹

President Atambayev, during his visit to Turkey, spoke about the common Turkish identity, thanks to which Kyrgyz and Turks share the same values and approach to life, based on honor and a sense of personal dignity: “[...] we are Turks, and we will never become slaves. For it has always been better for a Turk to die standing than to live as a slave on his knees.”¹² It should be emphasized that President Atambayev used the term *Turks* collectively for all Turkic-speaking ethnic groups, which further underscores their closeness. President Bakiyev, on the other hand, added that the cultural relations between the two countries had “reached the level of strategic partnership”¹³ – the use of such terminology regarding spiritual and material heritage indicates the enormous importance attached to this aspect.

10 A lecture by the President of the Kyrgyz Republic Askar Akayev at a joint session of both chambers of the Jogorku Kenesh: *Кыргызстан в изменившемся мире* [‘Kyrgyzstan in a Changing World’], “Слово Кыргызстана”, 8 v 2002.

11 *Обращение Президента РК Р. Отунбаевой ш День пожилых людей* [‘Speech by the President of the Kyrgyz Republic Roza Otunbayeva at the International Day of Older People’], “Слово Кыргызстана”, 5 X 2010.

12 *История дала нам еще один шанс. Итоги официального визита Президента А. Атамбаева в Турецкую Республику* [‘History Has Given Us Another Chance – Speech by the President of the Kyrgyz Republic A. Atambayev during an Official Visit to Turkey’], “Слово Кыргызстана”, 17 I 2012.

13 Speech by the President of the Kyrgyz Republic Kurmanbek Bakiyev at the 9th Summit of Turkic-speaking states in Azerbaijan: *Пророчество великого Атаюрка* [‘The Prophecy of the Great Atatürk’], “Слово Кыргызстана”, 6 X 2009.

Brotherhood based on the Turkic community is not limited to Turkey alone, but extends to other countries as well – as can be inferred from President Atambayev's dramatic statement about the tragic events of 2010. Regarding the ethnic riots in Osh, a city located in southwestern Kyrgyzstan, where clashes and purges occurred (mostly targeting the Uzbek minority living there), he said: "[...] two fraternal nations clashed, when Kyrgyz and Uzbeks killed each other, when a Turk killed a Turk, a brother killed a brother, a Muslim shed the blood of a Muslim."¹⁴ Based on this statement, it can be concluded that the issue of religion is also an element of the described community, but it is not decisive – the emphasis is on ethnic and historical community.

Somewhat in opposition to the concept of *Russkiy mir*, where the post-Soviet area is an area of common culture and history, with the Russian language as the *lingua franca*, the idea of the Turkic-speaking world is being created – where there is no need to learn a foreign language for communication, because the languages of this family are supposed to be similar enough that mutual understanding is possible. President Bakiyev said:

The Kyrgyz language, like all other Turkic languages, is capable of serving as a means of communication with the entire Turkic-speaking world, which numbers over 100 million inhabitants, because the Turkic ethnic group extends from the vast Altai Mountains to the Mediterranean Sea. With the help of the Kyrgyz language, each of you can communicate with the Tatars and Uzbeks, Kazakhs and Altaians, Azeris and Turkmen.¹⁵

Although this statement is somewhat exaggerated – indeed, these languages have a similar grammatical structure, but the vocabulary varies more or less depending on the country – this statement valorizes the Kyrgyz language itself and strengthens the sense of unity by building a vision of a Eurasian community.

14 *История дала...*

15 *Кыргызский язык – символ единства нашего государства. Речь Президента РК К. Бакиева на торжествах посвященных 20-летию принятия Закона "О государственном языке"* ["The Kyrgyz Language – Symbol of Unity in Our State – Speech by the President of the Kyrgyz Republic Kurmanbek Bakiyev at the Ceremony Commemorating the 20th Anniversary of the Adoption of the State Language Law"], "Слово Кыргызстана", 25 IX 2009.

Being connected by a community of blood also means an obligation to help, and Turkey, as the leader of this community, strives to fulfill this duty. President Atambayev summed up that “the Kyrgyz people always feel fraternal support from Turkey.”¹⁶ President Bakiyev pointed out the comprehensive assistance from Turkey after the fall of the USSR, which was supposed to provide support precisely on an ethnic basis:

Indeed, as soon as the Turkic-speaking states broke away from the Soviet Union and gained independence, Turkey was one of the first to recognize these fraternal countries and supported them with initial loans. At that time, young states like ours experienced an economic downturn caused by the collapse of the once-mighty Soviet Union, and this fraternal assistance was much needed.¹⁷

Currently, Turkey also supports Kyrgyzstan, but in mutual relations it has not always been the side offering assistance – presidents referred to ancient history in this regard. President Akayev recalled during his visit to Turkey:

We wanted to pay tribute to the ashes of our ancestors, who a thousand years ago were the vanguard of the Turkic peoples, who showed heroism by conquering the city of Iznik. This city was considered an impregnable fortress in the Byzantine Empire. However, it was captured by Kyrgyz warriors.¹⁸

President Atambayev continued his discourse as follows: “In ancient times, our nations always helped each other,”¹⁹ while during his visit to Iznik, he said: “May the memory of our ancestors who perished here together, laying the foundations for today’s great Turkey, help us in this! May Allah help us in this! I wish happiness and prosperity to the brotherly Turkish

16 Note from the official visit of Prime Minister Almazbek Atambayev to Turkey: *Исторический шаг в развитии кыргызско-турецких отношений* [A Historic Step in the Development of Kyrgyz-Turkish Relations], “Слово Кыргызстана”, 29 IV 2011.

17 *У Турции многому...*

18 President of the Kyrgyz Republic Askar Akayev on the visit to Turkey: *Программа есть. Будем работать* [The Program Exists. We Will Work], “Слово Кыргызстана”, 28 II 2002.

19 *История дала...*

nation!"²⁰ Both Kyrgyzstani presidents have visited there, because Iznik is a very important place for shared memory. Every year, representatives of the Kyrgyz diaspora honor the memory of the Kyrgyz warriors who fell in the battles to capture the city – then known as Nicaea – in the 11th century. The ceremonies take place at the Kirgizlar Mausoleum, which was built in their honor. Attendees include not only representatives of the Kyrgyz embassy but also Turkish officials – for example, in 2022, the Deputy Mayor of Iznik, Halil Çakır, was present. This place serves to build a shared heritage and physically connects two geographically distant countries. This distance means that the next significant interaction between the two ethnic groups took place hundreds of years later. In his speech during his visit to Turkey at the beginning of 2012, President Atambayev referred to the period after World War I, when Turkey had to deal with the consequences of siding with the Central Powers:

The Entente decided to leave only six provinces out of the 81 that constituted Turkey at that time, and when enemy forces had already captured Izmir and other present-day Turkish territories, the Turkic peoples from Central Asia, including the Kyrgyz, came to the aid of their brethren. The Turks from Central Asia collected and transferred, through the Soviet government, 10 million in gold to help the Turkish army. Today, that would be billions of dollars. But together, we saved Turkey!²¹

Turkic community – institutionalization of success

Turkey and the other Turkic states did not stop at merely declaring their unity – they also began the process of institutionalizing it. During the presidency of Askar Akayev, the discourse was focused on Turkey itself, as deeper institutional frameworks for broader cooperation had not yet been established. However, even then, the elements that were later emphasized were already being mentioned. In 2003,

²⁰ Ibidem.

²¹ Ibidem. President Atambayev made a mistake in his statement – during the period he refers to, what existed was the Ottoman Empire, which had not 81 provinces (like present-day Turkey) but only several vilayets.

Ambassador Karypkulov stated: "Brotherly Turkey, with which we share strong traditions of friendship, a common culture, and language, is one of the priority countries in Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy."²² The discourse on shared origins was maintained in later periods as well. Bakiyev, referring to President Abdullah Gül's visit to Kyrgyzstan, called it "a meeting of two blood brothers under a common roof."²³ Even earlier, one could find signals in the discourse that the sense of Turkic unity would encompass not only Kyrgyzstan and Turkey. During his speech at the International Congress "The Place and Role of Turkic Civilization among the Civilizations of the World", President Akayev used the term *bridge between the East and the West*.²⁴ This was a term often used by him to describe Kyrgyzstan itself, but here he referred to a broader community that neighbored Europe on the one side and Asian cultures (primarily China) on the other. By using this expression, he clearly distinguished the cultural sphere of Turkic-speaking nations from other cultural circles. The idea of strengthening this notion began to be realized right after the fall of the USSR. Since 1992 summits of Turkic-speaking states have been organized with representatives from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan – the Turkic-speaking countries that could finally conduct their own foreign policies. However, it was only at the 2009²⁵ summit that agreements were made to actually institutionalize cooperation, and the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States (also known as the Turkic Council) was established at the following summit in 2010. It was in 2009 that President Bakiyev delivered his

22 Interview with the Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan to Turkey, Amanbek Karypkulov: *Основания для беспокойства нет* [No Reason for Concern], "Слово Кыргызстана", 23 IV 2003.

23 *У Турции многому...*

24 *Мост между западом и востоком. Выступление Президента РК А. Акаева на международном конгрессе "Место и роль тюркской цивилизации среди цивилизации мира"* [The Bridge between West and East. Speech by President of the Kyrgyz Republic Askar Akayev at the International Congress "The Place and Role of Turkic Civilization among Civilizations of the World"], "Слово Кыргызстана", 5 X 2004.

25 *Organization of Turkic States (OTS). International Organization Profile*, "Ministry of Foreign Affairs" [online, accessed: 10 XI 2022]: <<https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turk-konsevi-en.en.mfa>>.

speech (tellingly titled "The Prophecy of the Great Atatürk"), where he emphasized that "the interparliamentary contacts between our countries have shown a consistent trend towards further deepening and improvement, characterized by friendship, openness, and mutual understanding." He also outlined the broader context of cooperation: "[...] today's discussions highlight the need for further strengthening of mutually beneficial cooperation in the context of globalization and dynamically changing priorities." In his opinion, cultural community contributes to a better mutual understanding, making it easier to establish relationships: "[...] the similarity of Turkic states leads to a greater degree of cooperation both bilaterally and multilaterally." He envisioned a new role for this community in a broader perspective: "[...] the Turkic world should play a significant role in international politics." He was highly optimistic about the idea of the new initiative: "[...] it is gratifying to know that we share a common cultural and spiritual heritage, a great potential of opportunities, and prospects for cooperation." President Bakiyev saw in it a factor that would contribute to increasing the stability of the participating states and addressed the practical dimensions of the cooperation, which was established "to help combat transnational threats such as terrorism, religious extremism, and drug trafficking". In the same speech, the President also raised the issue of Afghanistan: "Today, we cannot overlook the situation in Afghanistan as one of the most pressing issues of concern to the international community in general, and to our states in particular, due to its special significance for the geographical proximity of the Turkic-speaking countries."²⁶

After the establishment of the Turkic Council, cooperation continued to evolve, with subsequent initiatives expanding into new areas. Within the framework of the Turkic Council, several sectoral organizations and initiatives operate: TÜRKSOY (International Organization of Turkic Culture), TURKPA (Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic-Speaking Countries), Turkish Business Council, International Turkic Academy (based in Astana), Turkish Cultural Heritage Fund, and Turkish Chamber of Commerce and Industry (TCCI). As seen, three main directions are being developed within these organizations: political dialogue, cultural and educational cooperation, and economic cooperation. The dynamic development of these

new initiatives occurred during the presidency of Roza Otunbayeva. She emphasized the intensification of cooperation within the organization: “We want to work more effectively and are entering a new stage of development of our relations. We have created new institutional frameworks – the Secretariat of the Turkic Council and working bodies.” This organization aimed for broad international recognition: “I hope that [the Council], as a permanent mechanism with a broad mandate, will become an observer at the UN” – said Otunbayeva.²⁷ Interestingly, within the political component, it was decided to organize observation missions during elections. Western countries led in the implementation of democratic principles and acted as authorities – organizations such as the OSCE specialized in observation missions. Simultaneously, organizations under the auspices of Russia and China (CSTO and SCO) also began sending their missions. Turkic-speaking countries thus formed cooperation in this area as well – observers were set to participate in the presidential elections in Kyrgyzstan in 2011, as mentioned by Otunbayeva: “Observers from our organization, the Assembly of Turkic Parliaments, will participate [in elections]. We are waiting for them.”²⁸ Her use of the phrase *our organization* in this context is extremely interesting – Kyrgyzstan is a member of the Assembly just like the CIS, SCO, and OSCE, yet in her statement, only the Turkic organization is so close that cooperation within the Council was supposed to go beyond classical frameworks – it was supposed to have tangible effects for the citizens of the participating countries and lay the foundations for lasting cultural unity:

This includes publishing a school textbook on Turkic history; having it listed as UNESCO World Heritage; creating a joint Turkic-themed television channel; producing joint films about our history; and promoting literature about Turkic culture. I have no doubt that these tasks will be realized at next year’s meeting in Bishkek.²⁹

27 Speech by President of the Kyrgyz Republic Roza Otunbayeva at the first meeting of the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States: *Евразия – регион солидарности и сотрудничества* [Eurasia – Region of Solidarity and Cooperation], “Слово Кыргызстана”, 25 X 2011.

28 Ibidem.

29 Ibidem.

A shared vision of history (through the school textbook or films) and building a sense of community through media such as television and books, show very ambitious assumptions and plans – the sense of community is to concern not only the elites but entire societies that are to share the same cultural codes. President Atambayev spoke about the same twice: “[...] we attach great importance to the idea of strengthening the unity of Turkic-speaking states, preserving the historical heritage of the Turkic nations.”³⁰

The process of socialization, supported by governmental authorities, incorporates a Turkic component, and the brotherhood of nations should not only be a political declaration but also have a daily, practical dimension. President Otunbayeva stated: “We are united by a common past, a unique spiritual and historical heritage. But our unity does not end there. We share a common goal – we want to move forward together, together build our future.”³¹ This revitalization of cooperation aimed to integrate Turkic nations in cultural, humanitarian, and economic collaboration – as Atambayev stated.³² Among the tools to achieve these goals were cultural events: “We will celebrate Kyrgyzstan Days in Turkey, followed by Turkish Culture Days in Kyrgyzstan,”³³ as well as Turkish educational policy. Ankara has been actively involved in this field since the 1990s, as outlined by Ambassador Amanbek Karypkulov:

In Kyrgyzstan, two Kyrgyz-Turkish universities and several Kyrgyz-Turkish high schools have been established and are operational, where Kyrgyz and Turkish students, as well as citizens of many CIS countries and the world, study. Currently, over 1,000 Kyrgyz students are studying

30 A note from the meeting between the President of the Kyrgyz Republic Almazbek Atambayev and the Secretary General of the Turkic Speaking States Summit Halil Akıncı: *Значимые события тюркоязычного мира* [Important Events in the Turkic-Speaking World], “Слово Кыргызстана”, 15 VI 2012.

31 Ibidem.

32 Note from the meeting between President of the Kyrgyz Republic Almazbek Atambayev and the Secretary-General of the Turkic Council Halil Akıncı: *Возрождает тюркское сотрудничество* [Turkic Cooperation Revitalizes], “Слово Кыргызстана”, 15 XI 2013.

33 *У Турции многому...*

at various universities in Turkey, with the Turkish government providing scholarships and substantial moral and material support.³⁴

In a subsequent press interview less than a year later, he further explained:

An important element of bilateral cooperation in the cultural and humanitarian sphere is the training of young professionals for Kyrgyzstan at Turkish higher education institutions such as the Middle East Technical University, the Bosphorus University, and the Technical University in Istanbul. Currently, about 1,400 of our students are studying there.³⁵

It demonstrates the large scale of cooperation, based not on spontaneous processes but strategy and actions by Turkish authorities. However, one of the most interesting and spectacular manifestations of institutionalizing this community is the World Nomad Games. In 2012, at the summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan proposed organizing such an event, which gained support from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkey. The first edition of this event took place in 2014, featuring sports competitions in disciplines originating from nomadic culture, as well as cultural events aimed at showcasing the heritage of nomadic peoples. This event has permanently entered the calendar and serves as an extremely important element of identity. President Bakiyev spoke in 2009: “[...] the disdainful attitude towards nomadic cultures, which was based on evaluating them according to criteria and values of European or Chinese civilizations – what did not conform was considered barbaric.”³⁶ His statement clearly delineated cultural circles that viewed the achievements of nomads with superiority. It appears that descendants of nomads seek to change the domi-

34 *Родство и дружба...*

35 *Основании для беспокойства...*

36 Speech by President of the Kyrgyz Republic Kurmanbek Bakiyev at the presentation of the project “Nomadic Civilization and Culture”: *Кыргызская цивилизация должна обрести свое место и служить будущему страны* [‘The Kyrgyz Civilization Must Find Its Place and Serve the Future of the Country’], “Слово Кыргызстана”, 12 VI 2009.

nant narrative (created by descendants of settled peoples from East and West) and to validate nomadic cultures, which was later institutionalized in the form of the World Nomad Games. President Atambayev stated: "I am convinced that our games will strengthen friendship and mutual understanding between our nations and contribute to further development of our cultural cooperation."³⁷ This initiative had a tangible effect for the republic itself: "[...] it was a milestone for our country on the international stage, immediately putting Kyrgyzstan on the map," and it was a way to build a community: "It would be good if we could host the games of Turkic-speaking states next year, this is our contribution to civilization."³⁸ The Games proved successful – held every two years (in 2014, 2016, and 2018 in Kyrgyzstan by Lake Issyk-kul, in 2022 in Turkey, and in 2024 in Azerbaijan; the 2020 edition was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic), attracting thousands of people not only from the Turkic-speaking world. For them these Games have become not only a statement of their own identity but also a tourist attraction.

The Turkic direction of cooperation represents an important element of the foreign policy of the republic. In 2013, when Kyrgyzstan chaired both the SCO and the CIS, in a press interview President Atambayev was asked about Kyrgyzstan's priorities during its presidency in both organizations. In response, he slightly rebuked the journalist, stating: "We are not chairing two clubs, but three. We also have the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States. This is an important club for us too!"³⁹ Interestingly, this interview was conducted for Russian media, thus reminding the Russian audience there about an integrative initiative outside of post-Soviet dominion was an intriguing move. The portrayal of the Turkic community as distinct from other initiatives and as an example of cohesion was emphasized by both President Bakiyev and President Otunbayeva. Bakiyev expressed

37 Speech by President of the Kyrgyz Republic Almazbek Atambayev at the opening ceremony of the 1st World Nomad Games: *Пусть победят наши единство и дружба* [May Our Unity and Friendship Triumph], "Слово Кыргызстана", 12 IX 2014.

38 Press conference by President of the Kyrgyz Republic A. Atambayev at the Ala-Archa residence: *Кыргызстан – крепка и стабильная страна* [Kyrgyzstan – a Strong and Stable State], "Слово Кыргызстана", 30 XII 2014.

39 Ibidem.

that “Turkic-speaking countries are active participants in the global community and are open to mutually beneficial and fruitful cooperation with all nations, in the interest of peace and progress.”⁴⁰ Similarly, Otunbayeva stated her belief that “relations among Turkic-speaking countries, viewing Eurasia as a region of solidarity and cooperation, could serve as an example for other states in the region.”⁴¹ In the same context, during greetings on Azerbaijan’s Independence Day, she expressed her conviction that “Kyrgyzstan’s future relations with Turkic-speaking brotherly countries in the 21st century and beyond would be based on mutual trust and respect for our countries’ interests.”⁴² The cooperation is feasible also because the involved states are not in conflict: “[...] there are no unresolved issues between Kyrgyzstan and Turkic-speaking countries.”⁴³

In summary, the discourse regarding the community with Turkey – and later with the entire group of Turkic-speaking states – has been consistently positive throughout the examined period. The literal understanding of brotherhood as ethnic kinship is the primary reason for cooperation – within this group, one feels among their own and can feel at home. It should be emphasized that such perception of community is also present in contemporary Turkey. The official website of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency states that “Turkey and the countries of Central Asia consider themselves as one nation in different states.”⁴⁴

The Turkic-speaking organizations created by the states mentioned earlier function and are regarded as important components of Kyrgyzstan’s foreign policy. The sense of community also translates into foreign policy – quoting President Atambayev: “the historical community and sense of brotherhood among our nations compel us to strengthen partnership and alliance with the Republic of Turkey.”⁴⁵

40 *Пророчество великого...*

41 *Евразия – регион...*

42 *Ibidem.*

43 *Пророчество великого...*

44 *About Us*, “Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency” [online, accessed: 26 I 2022]: <<https://tika.gov.tr/en/institutional/about-us/>>.

45 Note from the meeting of President of the Kyrgyz Republic Almazbek Atambayev with Prime Minister of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: *Водные*

In another speech, he expressed extremely positive words for Turkey, placing it on a pedestal, while also emphasizing the Kyrgyz people's continued loyalty to Turkic ideals:

Turkey is an example for us in building a democratic, strong state. Today, it serves as a guiding star for Turkic peoples. Democratic and economically strong Turkey gives us hope and faith in the future of our nations. The peoples of the Great Turkish Khaganate called themselves "El". Today, only the Kyrgyz have preserved this word – in *Kyrgyz el*.⁴⁶

In Turkic languages, *el* means 'state' and 'nation'. However, President Atambayev is mistaken because this word has remained not only in the Kyrgyz language. It is worth noting that in 2014, Kyrgyzstani politician Felix Kulov proposed changing the name of the country to the Republic of Kyrgyz El, and the official website of the Provisional Government and President Otunbayeva had the internet address <kyrgyz-el.kg> (the site has not been functioning for several years). A similar idea was proposed by Nursultan Nazarbayev in 2014 when he suggested changing the name *Kazakhstan* to *Kazakh Eli*.⁴⁷

Conclusions

While Marlene Laruelle and Sebastien Peyrouse argue that narratives of Turkish cultural community have been marginalized, all pan-Turkic sentiments are interpreted in Central Asia as attempts to undermine state legitimacy and that "the Central Asian leaders received Turkey's policies poorly and were quick to denounce the new Turkish »elder brother«"⁴⁸, in the context of public discourse in Kyrgyzstan, one should

запасы обогатят страну ['Water Reserves Will Enrich the State'], "Слово Кыргызстана", 12 IV 2013.

46 *История дала...*

47 F. Najibullah, "*Stan*" at Its End in Kyrgyzstan?, "Radio Free Europe. Radio Liberty" [online], 18 IX 2014 [accessed: 17 XI 2021]: <<https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-talk-of-dumping-stan/26592668.html>>.

48 M. Laruelle, S. Peyrouse, *Globalizing Central Asia. Geopolitics and the Challenges of Economic Development*, Routledge, New York 2015, p. 75–77.

disagree with such claims. In the analyzed texts, this is an important theme – the idea (even if only postulated) of the Turkish community is alive and shared by the entire mainstream elite (not just limited dissident circles, as claimed by French authors). The fact that the ambitious Turkish plan from the 1990s to build a strong regional position economically was not realized does not mean that its cultural component did not survive. It not only continues to exist but, from the analyzed material, appears to be incredibly strong and institutionalized.

Elena Kuzmina assesses that Turkey's involvement in Central Asia significantly decreased after 2005 – when the so-called Orange Revolution took place in Kyrgyzstan, and protests and the massacre occurred in Andijan, Uzbekistan.⁴⁹ Turkey is said to have withdrawn to avoid complicating its relations with Russia and the US, as it has strategic partnerships with both countries. However, Turkey has remained an important part of the elite discourse, with its members emphasizing trust and a subjectively perceived closeness towards this country. The image of Turkey as the leader of the Turkic community, which escapes traditional international divisions, allows for a discursive challenge to the traditional triad of powers in Central Asia.

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49 E. M. Кузьмина, *Геополитика...*, p. 108.

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