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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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28.04.2025

As the EU courts Central Asia, Türkiye's strategic depth faces new challenges

The EU's pivot to Central Asia for energy and resources is redrawing regional alignments – with Türkiye increasingly sidelined in its traditional sphere of influence.

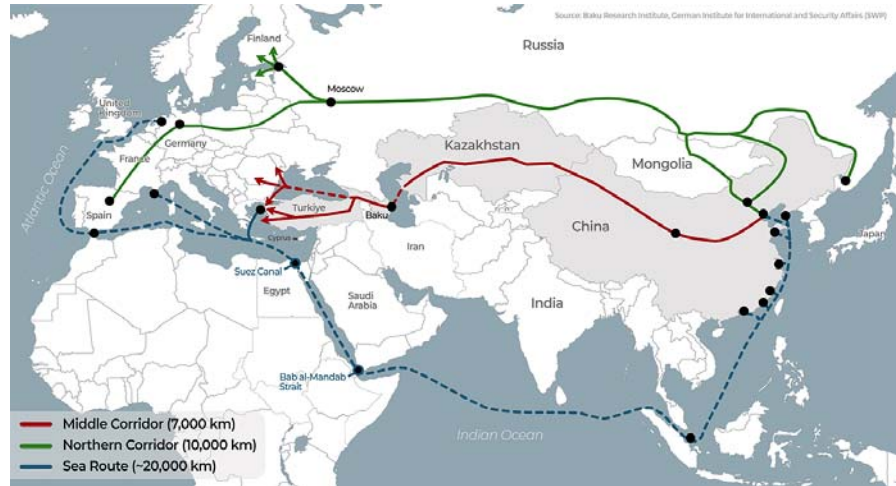
As we leave the first quarter of the 21st century behind, the global balance of power – including the western alliance long considered solid since World War II – is being reshaped. New partnerships are emerging, and old geopolitical equations are shifting. In this dynamic environment, the Turkic republics of Central Asia, situated in the heart of Eurasia, are gaining strategic importance for the European Union (EU), which has deprived itself of cheap energy from Russia and feels increasingly abandoned by the Trump administration in the United States. With their abundant energy and raw material resources, as well as their strategic position along critical trade routes, the Central Asian states have become attractive partners for both regional and global powers seeking to reestablish geopolitical equilibrium.

Backstory of EU-Central Asia relations

Europe made few moves to strengthen relations with the Turkic republics of Central Asia in the post-Cold War era, when the dominance of a unipolar world seemed assured. However, Josep Borrell, Vice-President of the European Commission, remarked last year that “Central Asia was a little bit in the [middle of nowhere](#) – and now, you are in the middle of everything. You are the cornerstone between Europe and Asia,” signaling a shift in EU policy toward the region.

Following the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war, the EU began to focus more closely on Central Asia within its broader ‘strategic balance’ framework. The Central Asian states – historically within the Russian and Chinese spheres of influence, yet also culturally linked to

Turkiye – drew renewed interest from Brussels due to their rich energy resources and critical raw materials. Reflecting this, the Uzbek city of Samarkand hosted the [first-ever EU summit in Central Asia](#) in early April, with delegates from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan joining Uzbekistan as the host.



Map of the Middle Corridor route

The summit's main agenda centered on Europe's pivot toward Central Asian energy sources – natural gas, oil, and renewables – to replace Russian supplies, and the development of alternative transit routes such as the "Middle Corridor," which would link Central Asia to Europe via the Caucasus, the Black Sea, and Türkiye, instead of through Russian territory. As part of this initiative, the EU discussed supporting energy infrastructure investments in Central Asia under its 'Global Gateway' strategy, seen as an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and pledged 12 billion euros in investment. Highlighting the urgency, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced at an energy security summit in London on 24 April that the EU would soon unveil a roadmap aimed at ending energy imports from Russia by 2027. Although Russia and China appeared to be the primary targets at the Samarkand summit, the final declaration also hinted at sidelining Türkiye's role in the region, placing it in a similar category to those two powers.

Bilateral diplomacy of the Turkic countries with the Greek Cypriot state: Symbolic or strategic?

At the EU–Central Asia summit, the final declaration included references to UN Security Council Resolutions 541 and 550, adopted in 1983 and 1984 following applications by the Greek Cypriot Administration after the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) declared independence. Resolution 541 deemed the TRNC's declaration legally invalid,

affirming that the Republic of Cyprus established in 1960 still exists. Resolution 550 condemned the secessionist move and urged UN member states not to recognize the TRNC. It also reaffirmed earlier resolutions 365 and 367, which condemned Türkiye's 1974 Cyprus Peace Operation and called for the withdrawal of Turkish troops from the island.

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan – members of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) – along with Turkmenistan (an observer member like the TRNC) and Tajikistan, all signed the summit's [final declaration](#). By endorsing it, they effectively recognized the UN resolutions against the TRNC and signaled that they would not recognize the TRNC in the future, also implicitly criticizing Türkiye's continued military presence on the island. This move reflects a growing strategic rift, highlighted by the recent strengthening of diplomatic ties between the Central Asian states and the EU-member Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus.

Uzbekistan, a member of the OTS, opened its first embassy in the Republic of Cyprus in December 2024. The foreign minister of Kazakhstan, another OTS member, visited the Republic of Cyprus in October 2023, marking the first direct diplomatic exchange between the two countries. The Republic of Cyprus later opened its first embassy in Astana, Kazakhstan, in October 2024, and Kazakhstan also reciprocated by opening its embassy in Nicosia in February 2025.

Kazakh diplomat Nikolay Zhumakanov, who was appointed as ambassador, presented his letter of credence to Greek Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides and stated that “Kazakhstan resolutely supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Cyprus within its internationally recognized borders.” On the other hand, Greek Cypriot leader Nikos Christodoulides described Kazakhstan's appointment of an ambassador to the Republic of Cyprus as a “groundbreaking development.” He said that Türkiye had been “occupying Cyprus for 50 years” and that Cyprus was grateful for Kazakhstan's “unwavering support for the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of the Republic of Cyprus.” The statements made by the Kazakh diplomat, particularly during the accreditation ceremony, were met with intense criticism from the TRNC, highlighting Kazakhstan's distance from Türkiye and the TRNC's stance on the Cyprus issue.

As an OTS observer member, Turkmenistan opened its embassy in the Republic of Cyprus on 31 March. During the accreditation ceremony, the Greek Cypriot president also told the newly appointed ambassador that “the Turkish army has kept his country under occupation for half a century.”

From all these developments, it is understood that the EU countries, which are suffering from an energy and raw material crisis due to the embargo on Russia after the Ukraine war, have started a new initiative towards the region to revive their dwindling economy with Central Asian resources. Greece and the Republic of Cyprus, two brotherly EU member states that seek to use this initiative in line with their interests, have developed a policy to use the EU's Central Asian expansion as leverage to weaken Turkiye's influence in the region.

Tongue-tied Turkish diplomacy

What is more surprising is the silence of the Turkish Foreign Ministry. The ministry made no formal or informal statement regarding the Turkic states elevating their diplomatic relations with the Greek Cypriot Administration, nor about the four OTS members supporting the Greek Cypriot thesis on the Cyprus issue at the EU–Central Asia summit. This silence has raised questions about Turkiye's ability to exert influence within the OTS, an organization built over years on cultural and commercial ties, and whether there might be a closed-door agreement between Turkiye and the EU on this issue.

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, after nearly a month of silence, gave a reproachful response to a journalist's question on 24 April. Fidan said it is understandable for Turkic states to open embassies in the Republic of Cyprus, adding: "However, there are also areas where we see that the EU is trying to exploit this mutual interest." He continued: "Certain individuals trying to create a rift between us based on this latest development are asking us to discuss this issue openly in public. We prefer not to discuss family matters in public as a principle."

Fidan's remarks emphasizing 'family matters' have not soothed the Turkish public. Is Turkiye's leverage over the Central Asian Turkic states weaker than the €12 billion investment incentive offered by the EU? Or does this lack of reaction suggest that Turkiye is making concessions to the EU in preparation for the upcoming Cyprus peace treaty negotiations? Another possibility being raised is whether, within the framework of the EU-backed 'Middle Corridor' project, there is a preference for transporting resources to Europe via Georgia's Black Sea ports rather than through Turkiye's land route – and whether concessions are being made to influence that outcome. While Turkiye's diplomatic initiatives have made the 'Middle Corridor' project effective for years, it is still possible to bypass Turkiye by using Georgia's ports on the Black Sea. As long as the Turkish Foreign Ministry remains silent on these developments, similar questions and concerns will continue to be raised.

'Blue Homeland's trial with global diplomacy

The EU–Central Asia summit and recent diplomatic moves in Cyprus are closely tied to Türkiye’s Cyprus policy and, by extension, to its ‘Blue Homeland’ doctrine. Türkiye’s efforts to legitimize its rights in the Eastern Mediterranean on international platforms are deeply connected to the unresolved Cyprus issue. Safeguarding its position in Cyprus is essential for Türkiye to maintain influence in the Eastern Mediterranean, given the island’s strategic role as a natural base between West Asia and Europe. Although the ‘Blue Homeland’ doctrine was first outlined by a naval officer, it is now being contested in the realm of global diplomacy. The steps taken by Central Asian countries in Cyprus, aligned with EU interests, reveal that the battle over the Eastern Mediterranean is not merely regional but has taken on a global dimension.

These developments cast doubt on Türkiye’s regional influence, narrowing Ankara’s strategic depth in the Mediterranean and strengthening the Greece–Cyprus alliance. As a result, the growing Central Asia–Cyprus alignment poses a new challenge to Türkiye’s ‘Blue Homeland’ doctrine, both at sea and in diplomatic arenas. Furthermore, the Erdogan administration’s actual commitment to the ‘Blue Homeland’ vision – beyond the Libya dossier – appears increasingly questionable.

APR 27, 2025