

The Search for a Common Alphabet in the Turkic Republics and Obstacles

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ABSTARCT: The Turkish nation, with a current population exceeding 250 million, experienced significant political and geographical fragmentation in the 19th and 20th centuries, particularly in the East-West divide. Warfare, occupation, and cultural absorption all contributed to this fragmentation. Their alphabet changed several times over time, and their language encountered difficulties. As a result, their communication, and ties with one another degraded to the point that they appeared unable to effectively communicate, agree, or collaborate. The existing links between the Turkish World and Turkey were mostly severed during the Soviet era. However, with the fall of the Soviet Union and the subsequent declarations of independence by new Turkic Republics, these links were quickly restored.

Today, Turkish states cooperate closely in various fields, engaging in significant joint projects, particularly through organizations like TIKA (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency). One notable initiative is the quest for a "Common Alphabet," aiming to foster better communication and unity among Turkish-speaking communities.

Keywords: Soviet Union, Turkic Republics, Common Alphabet

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INTRODUCTION

Turkish communities began converting to Islam from the 10th century onwards and continued to do so until the 19th century. For nearly a thousand years, they used the Arabic alphabet, which not only played a role in uniting them culturally but also created a divide between them and non-Muslim communities. This issue has been a subject of interest for Russian Turcologists since the era of Tsarist Russia, and they conducted extensive research on it. In fact, the Arabic alphabet faced criticism, even from Muslim intellectuals who advocated modernity. According to these intellectuals, the Arabic alphabet was seen as a symbol of backwardness and a significant impediment to progress.

In 1920, Soviet Russia initiated a significant change starting from Azerbaijan by abolishing the Arabic alphabet and introducing the Latin alphabet. Subsequently, the regime that followed in Azerbaijan aimed to propagate this change to other Turkish-speaking communities under its control. In 1926, with the support of Moscow, a Turkic Congress was convened in Baku, ultimately leading to the prohibition of Arabic script. Two years later, in 1928, Turkey also underwent a similar alphabet transformation, adopting the Latin alphabet. This development raised concerns for the Russians because it established an alphabet unity among the Turks. However, the Soviets deemed this unification a major mistake and compelled the Turkish communities under their rule to adopt various Cyrillic alphabets, thus disrupting the alphabet unity among them.

In 1991, the world witnessed remarkable developments as the Soviet Union dissolved. The Turkish Republics, in response, declared their independence and embarked on the journey to establish their own sovereign nations. They engaged in comprehensive efforts, particularly in the realms of social, cultural, and economic development. Recognizing the value of learning from Turkey's experiences, an International Symposium on Contemporary Turkish Alphabets was convened under the auspices of Marmara University. As a result of the decisions made during this symposium, many of these newly independent nations abandoned the Cyrillic alphabet and instead adopted the Latin alphabet, aligning themselves with the broader Turkish linguistic community. This shift represented a significant step towards fostering closer ties with Turkey and enhancing their cultural and linguistic connections.

1- Transition from Cyrillic Letters to the Latin Alphabet

The dissolution of the superpower Soviet Union in 1991 marked a critical juncture for the Turkic Republics within its mosaic, including Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, as they declared their independence. This moment called for the establishment of their unique national identities. In this pursuit, they took significant and deliberate steps, with one of the most crucial aspects being the development of a new alphabet. Recognizing the importance of language, culture, and education policies in distinguishing themselves from Russian influence, these republics swiftly initiated efforts to assert their linguistic and cultural distinctiveness. While there may be minor differences among the republics in line with the nation-state model, it is of utmost significance for their administrations and intellectual elites to prioritize their

national languages and cultural values while demonstrating the necessary sensitivity to preserve and promote their unique identities.

In the independent Turkish Republics, the construction of national identity is deeply rooted in reconnecting with their historical heritage, reviving traditions and customs that may have been overlooked or forgotten during the Soviet Union period, and implementing language policies. These language policies play a crucial role in shaping the sense of nation and identity among the people of these republics. By emphasizing the importance of their native languages and cultural practices, these nations are not only preserving their unique identities but also forging a stronger connection to their historical roots.

The Turkic Republics embarked on significant language reforms just before gaining their independence, aimed at distancing themselves from Russian influence. These reforms sought to rejuvenate their native languages by removing Russian words and adopting new alphabets. The central goal of these reforms was to promote national languages to the status of state languages, with a focus on reducing Russian influence and fostering indigenization of their languages. Simultaneously, these reforms aimed to bring the various written forms of Turkish closer together and encourage homogenization. Over the past decade, members of the broader Turkish community have initiated language planning initiatives for their respective languages. These endeavors are characterized by shared goals and independent decisions made on diverse platforms dedicated to discussing mother tongues and the choice of writing systems. This collective commitment underscores their dedication to preserving and enhancing their linguistic heritage and identity.²

The interest in language reform spans across ideological, economic, and cultural dimensions. It became especially prominent during the 20th century, with İsmail Gaspıralı's action plan, highlighting the importance of unity in "language, thought, and work," gaining significant attention after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This action plan served as a central topic of discussion in efforts to foster linguistic and cultural unity among Turkish-speaking communities.³ The transition of Turkish-speaking communities to the Latin alphabet necessitates cooperative endeavors to establish which letters should accurately represent their unique sounds in this script. Achieving this objective would enable these communities to enhance mutual comprehension of each other's written language. This undertaking is undeniably a vital endeavor that should be promptly undertaken to foster linguistic unity and understanding among these communities⁴

Kengerli's book "Turan Has a Hand and Lonely One Language", which was published by Yom Publishing in Baku in 2007, expressed in the following words in the ⁵Open Letter to Ali Bey Hüseyin Zâde, that the problems stemming from the alphabet at that time cost brings him to the point to utter the words:

²Bigehan Atsız Gökdağ, "Language Politics in Turkmenistan" *New Turkey*, P. 53 (2013): 2.

³Halil İnalcık, "Common Language in the Turkish World", *New Turkey*, P.55 (November-December 2013): 537.

⁴Aman Nurmammedov, "Opinions on the Alphabet of the New Turks" *Türk Yurdu*, Vol. 12, P. 61 (1992): 17

⁵He was born in the town of Salyan in the Baku Governorate of Tsarist Russia. He is a doctor, professor, writer, scientist, poet, painter. He is a member of the 1926 I. Baku Turkic Congress.

“...There are three things that separate people: One is distance, one is otherness of religion, and one is dumbness. Twenty-five years ago, while I was judging the state of our nation, while I was desperately searching for a cure for our troubles, I saw that even though our religion is one, distance and dumbness separate us. It has become clear as day that the main reason for the 'muteness', that is, our lack of a literary language, which would cause us to leave, was seen even when it was seen that the ferries, railways, telegrams, which were the benefits of civilization, went far from year to year. Meanwhile, the sentence 'educated', 'aydın', like my brothers, I did not know how to write my Turkish name. However, I present to your conscience the lines I have published by hitting my head on a stone, taking a pen in my hand and starting to write.”⁶

Uzbek leaders, Muhammed Salih, stated that the Cyrillic alphabet should be abandoned and the Latin alphabet should be adopted as follows:

“The general Turkish alphabet is a job that we highly desire. We've been talking about this for twenty years. Finally, we have the opportunity to put this desire into action. Of course, to do this, it is necessary to switch to the Latin alphabet. Because the civil language union of the Turks is a very big business. After linguistic unity, historical unity, economic unity and others depend on it. The better we understand each other, the easier it is for us to become closer in other ways. It has to be done quickly. It must be passed in parliament and passed immediately. Among the people, there are those who want the Arabic alphabet. Those who want to teach children to read the Qur'an should teach the Arabic alphabet, but officially, it is necessary to teach our children the Latin alphabet. Because this Latin alphabet is not contrary to our language, and it is possible for us to get closer with Turkey and Azerbaijan, and with the Turks. This alphabet does not belong to anyone. Cyrillic is the Slavic alphabet, the Russian alphabet. Continuing the Russian alphabet is like continuing slavery. But it does not disturb our national pride to take an alphabet that is not counted by anyone, the Latin alphabet. There is no such nation as the Arab alphabet, the Cyrillic Russians, or the Latin nation. For us, the alphabet issue also has such a prestige side.”⁷

Turkey has maintained a strong interest in the brotherly republics, particularly in matters of social, economic, and cultural significance, forging close cooperation with them from the moment they gained their independence. In this regard, numerous mutual agreements were signed, and visits were exchanged. Notably, Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel organized a significant trip to the Turkish Republics on April 27, 1992. This extended journey spanned approximately eight days and included several key figures, such as Foreign Minister Hikmet Çetin, State Minister Cavit Çağlar, MÇP (Nationalist Work Party) Chairman Alparslan Türkeş, 19 Members of Parliament, as well as members of the press, businessmen, and bureaucrats. During this trip, Prime Minister Süleyman

⁶ Kamil Veli Nerimanoğlu, “On Common Communication Language in the Turkish World”, *Yeni Türkiye* P. 55 (November-December 2013): 570.

⁷ Orhan Kavuncu, “We Should Adopt the Latin Alphabet Without Delay”, *Türk Yurdu*, Vol.12, P.55 (1992): 45.

Demirel briefly addressed the Turkish communities residing in the Central Asian Republics at Ankara Esenboğa Airport:

“Today is a historical day for the Turkish world. The sister countries, which spread over a wide geography from the Adriatic to the Great Wall of China and have just gained their independence, are faced with the possibility of being a single ear, a single heart. Fate has separated our brothers and sisters here. We have migrated to the Mediterranean region, but we have been with you in spirit and heart. Our common language, culture and beliefs form the bonds that bind us together. The fact that we live in different geographies and have to use different alphabets has created different accents and dialects in our common language. However, thanks to this TV broadcast addressing the whole Turkish world, our relations will be strengthened again and we will be able to get to know and understand each other better. The unity of culture, civilization and language should not be understood as a longing for "monophony". The common history and culture, the construction of the common future of humanity, constitute the necessary basis for us to contribute together in these countries. The common values and ideals united by humanity have reinforced the ideals of brotherhood and solidarity of the Turkish world. With the realization of these values and ideals, one hundred years of longing has come to an end. Hoca Ahmet Yesevi, Yunus Emre and Ali Şir Great poets such as Nevai and great thinkers and scholars such as Farabi, İbn - i Sina, Biruni are the cultural circles that connect the Western and Eastern Turks. The interpretation of Islam by Hoca Ahmet Yesevi and Yunus Emre puts human love above everything else.”⁸

Süleyman Demirel's speech had a profoundly positive impact on the Turkish Republics. In response to his address, the Minister of Culture of the Republic of Turkey, Fikri Sağlar, conveyed the following message to President Saparmurat Niyazov Turkmenbashi of Turkmenistan and extended his remarks to address the Turkish delegation as follows:

“Our mother tongue is Turkish, but now we see English as a foreign language, we speak and write in Russian. Soon we will start using the Turkish alphabet. We will make use of the alphabet and Turkish books you brought to us in this regard,”⁹ he said and informed that Turkmenistan would soon accept Latin letters.

In the Turkic Republics, three predominant viewpoints emerged concerning the issue of alphabet change:

1. Staying with Cyrillic Alphabet: Some individuals argued for the retention of the Cyrillic alphabet, emphasizing its continuity and alignment with the historical legacy.

⁸İsa Kayacan, *Central Asian Turkic Republics*, (Ankara: Ece Publications: Ankara, 1993), 34-35-36-37.

⁹(*Turkmenistan*, Sabah Newspaper Supplement), 20 July 1992.

2. Switching to Latin Alphabet: Others advocated for transitioning to the Latin alphabet as a means to expedite integration with Western systems and facilitate international communication.
3. Reforming and Reusing the Arabic Alphabet: There was also a group that proposed reforming and reintroducing the Arabic alphabet, suggesting that it could serve as a viable option.

These diverse perspectives highlighted the complex considerations surrounding the choice of alphabet and its implications for the Turkic Republics.

In the Turkic Republics, three perspectives on the alphabet shift have emerged. While some argued for continuing to use the Cyrillic alphabet, others urged converting to the Latin alphabet to assimilate more swiftly into the West, while yet others supported reforming and reusing the Arabic script. Namely:

“There were intellectuals who participated in the common language discussions in the Turkish World from different perspectives: Among them, there were those who proposed to create a new language consisting of the words that are statistically most commonly used among Turkish dialects, as well as those who hope and claim that a common Turkish language will spontaneously emerge with the increase in communication and interaction among Turkic peoples. approaches were also observed. In addition to these synthesizing ideas, Prof. Dr. Salichan Some prominent intellectuals of the Turkic world, such as Cigitov , Cengiz Aytmatov and Anar Rızayev from Azerbaijan, openly stated that Turkey Turkish should be the language of communication of Turkic peoples. Even among them, the Kyrgyz Prof. Dr. Salichan Cigitov argued that Turkey Turkish should be accepted as the official language for Kyrgyzstan.”¹⁰

“In the independent Turkish Republics, there was a need to define themselves, to maintain their connection with the past, to re-emerge the traditions and customs that were ignored or forgotten during the Soviet Union period, in short, to show that they are a separate nation. Language policies have a decisive role in the construction of nation and identity. The density of the Russian population in the republics and the efforts to maintain relations with Russia have made Russian the language of interethnic communication in some republics. The members of the general Turkish community have started a language plan for their language, either following each other or following each other ¹¹, on the platforms where they come together on the issues of their mother tongue and the alphabet in which their language will be written .

During this period, alphabet discussions began to gain prominence in various media outlets across the Turkish-speaking world, including newspapers, magazines, radio, and TV broadcasts. These discussions encompassed a range of script options, including Latin,

¹⁰Yakup Ömeroğlu, “Communication Language in the Turkish World”, *New Turkey*, P. 55 (November-December 2013): 585.

¹¹Bilgehan Atsız Gökdağ , “Language Politics in Turkmenistan” , 2.

Cyrillic, Arabic, and even the Gokturk alphabet. Among those advocating for the Latin alphabet, there were different proposals. Some suggested a return to the common Latin alphabet that had been used by Turkish-speaking communities in the former Soviet Union between 1928 and 1940. Others proposed making new additions or modifications to this alphabet. Some emphasized the importance of cultural cooperation between Turkey and the newly independent Turkic Republics and recommended the creation of a new alphabet based on the Latin script with the incorporation of a few additional letters. These discussions reflected the ongoing debate surrounding the choice of script for the Turkish-speaking world.¹²

Historian Raphael of Kazan Muhammetdinov notes:

“I think there are four aspects to switching to the Latin alphabet: political, educational, linguistic and technological aspects. Therefore, I think that Latinization is not primarily a linguistic and technological problem, but rather an educational and political problem. So how is our situation throughout the Soviet Union? As you know, in the first congress of the Turkic peoples held in Tatarstan in April of this year, the decisions regarding Latinization were also adopted. But as far as I know, they only officially deal with the Latin alphabet in Azerbaijan, while in other republics only amateur groups work. So far, such groups; I know that there are Kazan Tatars, Crimean Tatars, Gagauzs and Yakuts .

In my opinion, official circles will not operate in this field themselves. Accordingly, social organizations should find Turkish typewriters and start printing small texts and articles in Latin letters in their new publications. We need to take action now, we need to gradually accustom the people to Latin letters, otherwise we will play the letters game in our official language institutes for years or the circles involved in this business will make us play them exclusively.

You may ask where the hesitation and discouragement of the Soviet Turkish authorities come from in the Latinization of their governments . There are two reasons for this. First , the idea of Latinization also coincided with the Turkish Republics' defense of their own sovereignty. Accordingly, it is thought that it is very difficult to do both at the same time. The second reason is the advanced Russianization of some Turkic peoples, especially in the cities. Accordingly, some people think so. But if we do the letters reform in this difficult time, we will completely abolish our education system. In other words, they say that national schools should first stand up with Cyrillic letters and then switch to Latin after they get stronger. In my opinion, there is only one solution not to be afraid of these two reasons , and that is the spread of strong Turkism doctrine and ideology in all Turkic Republics. But that is not the case now. In order to distribute Turkism, it is necessary to sell and

¹²Erdal Şahin et al., *Studies on Transition to Latin Alphabet in Turkic Republics and Its Results Turkic Republics in the 10th Anniversary of their Independence* , (Haarlem -Netherlands: SOTA Publications, 2002) 63-64.

translate the books written and published in Turkey in other Turkic republics.”¹³

Turkologist Talmas Megsum Garipov said the following about the transition to the new alphabet of his own free will:

“Instead of the political, cultural and alphabet disorganization of the Turkish languages that lasted for the last seventy years, a new writing unity based on the Latin alphabet can be brought. The fact that more than one hundred and ten million Turks already constitute a single major language family in Europe and Asia, which does not have a common script, gives evidence for our proposal. Latin letters are the most common alphabet used by more than a third of humanity. The writing of Turkey Turkish, which is the strongest of Turkish rights, was founded on this and has been successfully performing its duty in sixty-four years of our century. lasting forty years from the twentieth years of our century In the Yanalif (New Alphabet) revolution, all Turkic languages of the Soviet Union (except Gagauz, Chuvash, and some others) were converted to Latin together. But since 1928, the writing reform in Turkey had built a bridge to the cultural customs of previous centuries, with the exception of Arabic script.”¹⁴ says.

2- Contemporary Turkish Alphabets Symposium

Following the declaration of independence by the Turkic Republics, the inaugural "Common Alphabet" symposium convened in Istanbul from November 18 to 20, 1991. Organized by Marmara University's Turkic Studies Institute, this symposium saw the participation of scholars and linguists from the Turkic Republics. The primary focus of the symposium was to engage in discussions regarding a shared alphabet, and each republic's perspective on this matter was presented. In his opening address at this gathering, the Rector of Marmara University, Prof. Dr. Orhan Oguz, made the following statement::

“...Today, we are truly commemorating a historical day for the Turkish world together. I see among you representatives of every Turkish community from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan to Turkey. People who have been far from each other for years and years, who are little aware of each other, come together to talk about their common issues and discuss their own issues on a technical level in their own language. This is something that we missed for years.”¹⁵

Ankara University's Contemporary Turkish Dialects and Literature Department Lecturer, Prof. Dr. Ufuk Tavkul, shared the following remarks during the symposium:

¹³Raphaeal Muhammetdinov , *International Symposium on Contemporary Turkish Alphabets*, (Istanbul: Marmara University Publications no : 565, (1992), 22-23.

¹⁴Talmas M. Garipov , *International Symposium on Contemporary Turkish Alphabets*, (Istanbul: Marmara University Publications no : 565, (1992), 24-25.

¹⁵Orhan Oğuz, *International Symposium on Contemporary Turkish Alphabets* (Istanbul: Marmara University Publications no : 509, 1992), 7.

“One of the most important national goals and policies of the Republic of Turkey for the future should be to ensure that the Turkish of Turkey becomes the common written language of the entire Turkic World. The first step in this will be to unite the Turkish dialects, which have become separate languages today, in a common Latin alphabet. Unfortunately, the first step was unsuccessful in this regard. Because there was no unity among the Turkic republics, which gradually adopted the Latin alphabet, and different Latin alphabets emerged. However, the solution of the problem of common writing and common spelling, the solution of the problem of spelling of Turkey Turkish as a common written language, will also play a major role in the establishment and development of Turkey Turkish as a common written language among speakers of different Turkish dialects.¹⁶

Following extensive scientific deliberations, a 34-letter alphabet was collectively agreed upon during the Contemporary Turkish Alphabets Symposium. The symposium concluded with the adoption of the following decisions:

¹⁶Ufuk Tavkul , “ Interaction Area and Strategic Importance of Turkish as a Eurasian Language”, *Yeni Türkiye*, P 55 (2013): 576.

- 1) Sempozyumda muhtelif Türk bölgelerinden gelen bilim adamlarının hemen bütünü Türk boylarında Latin harflerine dönme düşüncesinin ortaya çıktığını belirtmişlerdir. Sempozyumumuzun iştirakçileri bu düşünceleri oy birliği ile tasvip ve kabul etmiştir.
- 2) Sempozyum Azerbaycan Parlamentosunda görüşülen Latin asıllı Azerbaycan Türk alfabesinin biran önce Azerbaycan Parlamentosundan çıkmasını temenni etmişlerdir.
- 3) Sempozyuma katılan bilim adamları Latin alfabesindeki aynı harflerin aynı sesleri gösterme prensibinde anlaşmaya varmışlardır.
- 4) Sempozyumda diğer Türk boyları arasında Latin asıllı alfabenin kabûlünün Türk boylarının birbirini anlamasında ve kültür birliğinin pekiştirilmesinde en önemli unsur olduğu görüşüne oybirliği ile varmışlardır.
- 5) Sempozyum Türk boyları için Latin asıllı aşağıda gösterilen alfabenin esas alınmasını tavsiye etmektedir.

a	b	c	ç	d	e	ä
f	g	ğ	h	x	ı	ı
j	k	q	l	m	n	ñ
o	ö	p	r	s	ş	t
u	û	v	w	y	z	

- 6) Bu Sempozyumda alınan ilmi kararların yetkili organlara duyurulması tavsiye edilmiştir.

Prof. Dr. İsmail Engin
 Doç. Dr. Nadir Devlet
 Prof. Dr. Ahmet Temir
 Prof. Dr. Ahmet B. Erçilasun
 Doç. Dr. Stepan Kuroğlu

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Doc. Dr. Osmar T. Serricay =

(Bilgin Mr. Gampetinos Rafael Mlekent
SS CB deki türk halkları Asamblesinin Başkanı

Prof. Dr. F. I. Abdullayev

Doğ. Dr. Alameddin Mehmedoğlu Aliye. 21. 7. 11

Tataristan millet vekili Razil Valeev - P.K.

Pr. Pr. Aslanov Vagif

Doc. Tazpolot Sadikov

Doq. dok. Yusufov Berdiyari

Dr. Yavuz Akpınar

Dr. Sanakulov. Hojigit.

Арифов Мустафа Язиевич

Prof. Karbjaroč B. Ćimpr. AR

Pr. doc. Musayev Kemerbay

Prof. Dr. Mirfatih Zekiye

Prof. DR. BURENOT SAPAR, A.G., A.M., A.P.S.

Prof. Dr. Musainov Kobej Shakhmetuly

Prof. Dr. Talmas Garipov (Bashkirdistan, Ufa)

Doç. Dr. Ceyhan Mehmet Bakkenov

Doc Dr. Ogorov Nikolay (Çuvaşistan, Çeboksari)
Doc Torosov Amantay (Çuvaşistan, Çeboksari)

Doq. Torgaev Amantay (Kazakhstan, Almaty)

27. Cumaqulov Çetin (Kırgızistan) 2 Ocak 1991

F. d. ⁰ Ferit Ag

Prof. Feridun Ağasıoğlu Celilov

Doc. Dr. Almas Galimcan - Ugli Seybul (in)

Dr. Muhammed Ali Sheikh

prof. Dr. Hakkı Dursun Yıldız

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newly independent Turkic Republics want to switch to the Latin alphabet as follows:

- 1-Seeing it as a means of reinforcing national independence
- 2-Getting away from the Cyrillic alphabet, which was perceived as a means of oppressing the peoples during the Soviet period;
- 3- Reviving the ties between the Turkish peoples and their states, thanks to the common alphabet;
- 4- The desire to move away from Russia, as seen in the example of Uzbekistan.

As a matter of fact, the country's transition to the Latin alphabet, which is a Western ally that supported the Afghanistan operation after September 11, meant that it moved away from Russia. While it was expected that the transition to the Latin alphabet was expected to be completed in 2010, Uzbekistan started to follow a pro-Russian policy again, and today there are discussions on whether it is necessary to switch to the Cyrillic alphabet again .¹⁸

“The general opinion of the scholars of different Turkic communities was that the Latin alphabet was most suitable for the Turkic languages, dialects and dialects. The unanimous support of this view at the 'Contemporary Turkish Alphabets' symposium on 18-20 November 1991 confirms this opinion. The acceptance of Latin letters by Turkic communities will undoubtedly be a great revolution in the general history of Turkish culture. Because a common alphabet will form the most important basis for the different Turkic communities to begin to agree on writing. As it is known, Turkic communities had to change their alphabet against their will, and as a result, they suffered a great cultural blow. In other words, their separation from each other in writing was out of their own free will.”¹⁹

Despite the "common alphabet" symposium, Azerbaijan deviated from the decisions made and introduced the letters 'ə,' 'x,' and 'q' into the alphabet recommended by the congress. Similarly, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan also departed from the 34-letter alphabet that had been agreed upon during the symposium. These deviations reflected the complexities and challenges in achieving a unified alphabet among the Turkic Republics.

34 letters formed by adding five letters ('Ä ä', 'Ñ ñ', 'X x', 'Q', 'W w') to the Latin-based alphabet recommended for Turkish dialects and used in Turkey Turkish. common alphabet was signed. Later, on December 25, 1991, Azerbaijan decided to abandon the Cyrillic letters and switch to the Latin alphabet, but instead of the letter 'Ä ä' it accepted 'ə'. This acceptance was also the first deviation from the common 34-letter alphabet. The characters of this alphabet which are not found in the alphabet in force in Turkey are ' ', ' ' and ' x '. On

¹⁷ International Symposium on Contemporary Turkish Alphabets, 18-20 November 1991, Marmara University Press, 67.

¹⁸Ainur Nogeyava “Alphabet Debates in the Turkish World” *Turkish World in the 21st Century International Symposium Proceedings 02-05 December Lefke, KKTC* (2010) 409-410-411.

¹⁹State, *International Symposium on Contemporary Turkish Alphabets*, 1-2.

April 12, 1993, Turkmenistan and on September 2, 1993, Uzbekistan adopted the Latin alphabet. In the alphabet adopted by these two Turkish Republics, the deviation from the 34-letter common alphabet is quite high. Turkmenistan adopted 'y' instead of 'i', 'Ÿ' instead of 'y', and 'j' instead of 'c'. While Uzbekistan is based on the English spellings of letters such as 'ş' and 'ç', 'sh' and 'ch', on the other hand, it has combined two different letters by accepting the rounded 'a' and 'o' with a single code as 'o'.²⁰

If we explain this with a few examples, the differences arising from the alphabets used in the Turkish World will be better understood. This complicates the agreement between the Turks. For example; Take the phrase “en verimli yıllar”. According to the alphabet used in Azerbaijan, it is written as “ən verimli illər”. If a Turkish Turk reads this expression, he will understand it as "the most productive provinces" and give it a wrong meaning.

Another example; The word “Çıkış” in Turkey is written as “Chiqış” according to the alphabet in Uzbekistan. If a Turk who goes to this country does not speak English, he will not be able to give any meaning to this word. On the other hand, the word “Nasılsın” is written as “nähilisin” in Turkmenistan. In that case, it is obvious that the Turks do not understand each other.

“Today, an important common issue of the Turkish Republics is the issue of national language. Before the Russians brought the Turkestan geography under the rule of the socialist regime, there was not much difference between Turkic languages (dialects). Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Karakalpak, Uzbek, Tatar and Turkmen dialects were so similar that they had no difficulty in getting along with each other and they had a common literary language. However, as a result of the Turks' being under the rule of Tsarist Russia and then the Soviet Union, the Russians began to follow an extremely harsh policy regarding language and writing.”²¹

During the era when the Latin alphabet was adopted in the Soviet Union, despite dialectical differences, there existed a strong cultural unity among the Turkish-speaking peoples. This sentiment is articulated by Retired Staff Colonel Rahmi Apak in his book "Memoirs of a Seventy-One Officer":

“One day (1920) we were walking in the Azerbaijan (Baku) park with Mr. Ferit. Five or six girls are walking side by side in front of us. I noticed, they speak exactly like Istanbulites. I was surprised. What are these Istanbul girls doing here? I asked. In response, Ferit Bey, speaking with the Istanbul accent among the local Azeri Turkish youth here is a sign of pride. There is no one among these young people who has not

²⁰Open, XX. *The Reasons, Development and Results of Alphabet Changes in the Turkish World at the Beginning of the Century*, 4-5.

²¹Kılıç, Remzi (2009) “Education Issues in Turkey and Turkish Republics”
<http://host.nigde.edu.tr/remzikilic/makale/index.php?entry=entry091114-201135> [08.10.2020]

read Reşat Nuri's novel *Çalı Kuşu*. He said, "They are giving five liras a night for this novel, which is circulating from hand to hand, which is too old and worn out to be read."²²

In the 1920s, Turkish and Soviet Turkish-speaking people could readily comprehend each other. Theater troupes from Baku performed various plays in Istanbul during 1918-1919. Intellectuals from Istanbul had the opportunity to witness the works of Azerbaijani Turkish writers, some of whose names they had just become familiar with. Ömer Seyfettin, a prominent figure in Turkish literature who watched these plays, asserted that there was no significant dialectal distinction between Azerbaijani Turkish and Istanbul Turkish:

"Those who went to the theater of the Azerbaijani people were faced with an insignificant dialect difference. However, the dialect of the people of Kastamonu is farther from the Istanbul dialect! The words are almost one. The sentence structure is one. The only wording like 'myself' they use instead of 'myself' is exceptional! Such an insignificant difference, or even a difference, is not worth counting. There is also some locality in some of the tasrif siga (conjugation suffixes) of our Azerbaijani brothers. But when they say, 'I would like to say ..', we immediately understand that it means 'I mean ..'"²³

Renowned Azerbaijani poet Bahtiyar Vahapzade expressed the following sentiments in a letter published in the January 2001 issue of the *Journal of Turkish World Studies*:

"The fact that the Turkish people have been separated from each other for centuries has created great differences in language. Therefore, Turkish peoples in the former Soviet Union could not adequately understand each other in their mother tongue. They began to speak Russian as a common language. This was a big disaster for us. As a Turk, I consider this a great insult to myself. And as a way out, I want the Turkish of Turkey to be taken as the language of communication for all Turkish rights. I want every Turk to speak and write in his own dialect in his own country. But in the meetings to be held between us, let's take the Turkish of Turkey as the language of communication for each of us."²⁴

"Turkish language union has a history of approximately 80 years. The measures and practices taken by the Soviets to prevent the realization of this idea, especially from the hands of the captives and neighboring Turks, caused a devastating damage to the Turkish language. However, as a result of the establishment of 18 different Turkish alphabets in the Soviet Union and the obligation to use them, the fact that dialects and even accents are handled with an understanding as if they are an independent language and have nothing to do with Turkish is enough to show the gravity of the situation.

²²Rahmi Apak, *Memoirs of a Seventy-Seven Officer*, (Ankara: Turkish Historical Society Publications, 1988), 272.

²³Mustafa Argunşah, *Common Language in the Turkish World, Turkish Knowledge Festival*, September 25, 2002, (Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu Publications, 2008), 16.

²⁴Bakiler, *The Truth of the Word 1.*, 34.

Likewise, after the abandonment of the Arabic alphabet and the transition to the Latin alphabet, which was initiated with a sudden decision after the Communist revolution in Turkish captive Soviet hands, the Cyrillic alphabet obligation in the 1940s was a part of the policy of assimilation and Russification of the Turkish communities spread over various regions of the same nation, by degenerating their national identities. Alphabet unity is of great importance in terms of being the first step and the first step to be overcome for the realization of Turkish language unity in Turkey and in the Turkish world. In short, the turmoil that we have pointed out in its current situation will only be possible with the establishment of the alphabet unity.”²⁵

“The common Turkish Latin alphabet used for the Turkish written languages in the Soviet Union and the Turkish Latin alphabet used in Turkey since 1928 were the same except for the change in only 4-5 letters. I think the 34-letter Common Turkish Latin alphabet, which was recommended by some intellectuals and linguists in Turkey after 1985 and supported by the TDK, is the most appropriate alphabet for all Turkish written languages. One of the most important conditions for the Turkish world to unite in cultural and other fields and act jointly is the use of a common alphabet. It doesn't matter if it is this alphabet or this alphabet, the important thing is that they use the same alphabet. Like all languages, all Turkish written languages can be written in the desired alphabet. Since it is not possible to go to the old Arabic alphabet or the Göktürk Orkhon alphabet today, this 34-letter common Turkish Latin alphabet is the most suitable common alphabet. The alphabet that Uzbekistan has been using since 1995 is unfortunately very distorted in terms of both vowel sounds and spelling of the Uzbek language. Turkmenistan at first adopted an alphabet with very unnecessary and strange currency signs. However, they soon received more suitable letters. However, what we want is not the common Turkish Latin alphabet. The most suitable alphabet for the common alphabet is today's Azerbaijani Latin alphabet and Gagauz Latin alphabet. They are considering an alphabet close to the common Turkish alphabet in Tatarstan, but for now they do not implement it because Russia opposes it.”²⁶

“Even the languages spoken and written in the Turkish World are not called 'Turkish', but are referred to by community names. On the other hand, there are some downsides that require a solution that is not just naming, especially in the language domain:

²⁵Recep Küçükizsiz, “Towards Alphabet Unity on the Way of Unity in Language, Idea and Work”, *Türk Yurdu*, C.11, S 52(1991): 20.

²⁶Timur Kocaoğlu, “Common Language in the Turkish World, Common Communication Language, Common Alphabet Drafts: Encountered Problems, Reflections on Solutions”, *Yeni Türkiye* P. 101 (May-June 2018):131

1-The alphabet of each is different; if the Latin alphabet is to be unifying, it should not be separate instead of each; An alphabet consisting of common signs of Latin origin should be used.

2- The need for real scholars who will reveal which phonetic differences in words can be explained by which sound equivalence continues. On this subject, a work called Turkish World, Phonetics of Turkish from Past to Today should be prepared together with the scholars of the Turkish World .

It should not be too late to start comparative studies of supplementary knowledge in genre languages .

4- Under the leadership and management of the Turkish Language Institution, ten grammarians to be determined from each of the Turkish-origin peoples should be asked to give the etymology of at least 20, at most 100 words; Although the results of this do not seem to be immediate, let's not lose sight of the rapid development of computer access network services.

5-It is necessary to prepare a comparative dictionary of Turkish Languages, including Mongolian.²⁷

6- Instead of Russian being the common language of the peoples of Turkish origin, it should be sought to create a Turkish esperanto that reminds of the mother Altai .²⁸

²⁷As a matter of fact, "**Comparative Dictionary of Turkish Dialects**" was prepared in two volumes by the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Culture Reference Works Series 54, Ankara (1992)

²⁸Sadık Tural, *Common Language in the Turkic World Turkish Knowledge Festival September 25, 2002*, (Ankara: Turkish Language Institution Publications, 2008),9.

CONCLUSION

Until the first quarter of the 20th century, there existed a unified alphabet among Turkish communities. For a thousand years, Turks had used the Arabic alphabet after adopting Islam as their religion. During this period, individuals who traveled from Istanbul to various Turkish regions could easily understand each other, as their cognates in the Turkish-speaking world shared the same script without any complications.

However, with the decisions made at the Baku Turkic Congress in 1926, Soviet Russia compelled Turkish communities under its rule to adopt the Latin alphabet. This alphabet quickly spread from the Adriatic to the Great Wall of China. A few years later, the Republic of Turkey also underwent an alphabet change, adopting the same Latin alphabet. This meant that the Turkish-speaking world was once again unified under a common alphabet, which caused concern for the Soviet regime. The cultural unity among the Turks would have continued, which alarmed the Soviet government. To counter this, the Soviet regime wasted no time in transitioning the Turkish-speaking populations under its control to various Cyrillic alphabets. This task was relatively easy as the oppressed population couldn't resist. However, the regime went further by attempting to accelerate the process of Russification. It systematically eradicated elements of Turkish culture in these regions, isolated them from the outside world, and imposed Soviet ideology. Ultimately, Turkish culture suffered a significant blow in this process.

Following the death of Stalin in 1953, a power struggle ensued within the Soviet Union. Mikhail Gorbachev, who eventually assumed leadership as the General Secretary of the Communist Party, initiated various reform movements in an attempt to rescue the declining empire and alleviate its burdens. However, these efforts were unable to prevent the eventual dissolution of the Soviet Union. The once-mighty Soviet Empire, which had reached superpower status by 1991, became a thing of the past.

The declaration of independence by Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan marked a period of rapid and profound transformation within these newly independent nations. Among the most significant developments in terms of Turkish culture was the quest for a common alphabet. In pursuit of this objective, the

"International Symposium on Contemporary Turkish Alphabets" was convened in 1992, under the auspices of Marmara University, with the participation of Turkish scholars and linguists. As a result of the decisions made during this symposium and under the direction of political will, many of these nations transitioned from the Cyrillic alphabet to the Latin alphabet. However, while these decisions represented a step towards a common alphabet, individual republics went beyond these agreements by introducing unique letters into their alphabets. This prevented the realization of a fully unified alphabet across all Turkish-speaking nations.

In the present day, with the establishment of the Organization of Turkish States and favorable political circumstances, the idea of a unified alphabet has resurfaced. It is believed that with the involvement of linguists and a specific task assigned to them, this goal can be achieved swiftly. This idea holds great significance in terms of effectively conveying our historical and cultural heritage to the new generation, emphasizing the importance of preserving and promoting our shared linguistic and cultural richness.

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