1926 Birinci Türkoloji Kurultayı: Tarihî ve Kültürel Önemi

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Özet

1926 yılında Bakü'de düzenlenen Birinci Türkoloji Kurultayı, Azerbaycan ve diğer Türk halklarının kültürel entegrasyon sürecinde temel bir dönüm noktası teşkil eden önemli bir tarihi olaydır. Geniş bir coğrafi alana yayılmış Türk halklarının temsilcilerini bir araya getiren bu uluslararası forumda, entelektüel ortamın oluşturulması ve ortak kültürel gelişim stratejilerinin belirlenmesi doğrultusunda küresel öneme sahip meseleler tartışılmıştır. Kurultayın en önemli bilimsel-pratik sonucu olarak, eski Sovyetler Birliği coğrafyasında yaşayan Türk dilli halkların Latin grafikli alfabeye geçişinin bilimsel-metodolojik temellerinin hazırlanmasını ve bu yönde stratejik kararların alınmasını özellikle vurgulamak gerekir.

Birinci Türkoloji Kurultayı'nın düzenlenmesi için mekan olarak Bakü'nün seçilmesi, nesnel bir tarihi zorunluluktan kaynaklanıyordu. Şöyle ki; 20. yüzyılın başlarında Azerbaycan, birçok entelektüel alanda olduğu gibi Türkoloji bilimi istikametinde de ilerici bir merkez statüsüne sahipti. Latin grafikli alfabenin kitlesel uygulama sürecine 1920'li yılların sonunda ilk kez Azerbaycan'da start verilmesi, bu bilimsel üstünlüğün pratik bir tezahürüdür. Dikkat çekici husus şudur ki; SSCB'nin dağılmasından sonra bağımsızlığını kazanan Türk devletleri arasında Latin alfabesine geçişi gerçekleştiren ilk cumhuriyet yine Azerbaycan olmuştur. Günümüzde Türk dilli devletlerin yazı sistemlerine bakıldığında, Azerbaycan'ın yanı sıra Özbekistan ve Türkmenistan'ın da Latin alfabesini kullandığı görülmektedir. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti ise bu geçişi henüz 1928 yılında hayata geçirerek ortak alfabe sisteminin uygulanmasında tarihi bir örnek teşkil etmiştir.

26 Şubat - 6 Mart 1926 tarihlerinde Bakü'de, İsmailiye binasında gerçekleştirilen Birinci Türkoloji Kurultayı; Türk dilli halkların dil, alfabe, edebiyat, etnografya ve kültür meselelerinin ortak bir bilimsel platformda tartışıldığı ilk büyük forum olmuştur. Kurultaya 131 delege katılmış, özellikle Latin grafikli ortak Türk alfabesine geçiş fikri bilimsel-metodolojik olarak temellendirilmiş ve sonraki yıllarda bölgede yürütülen alfabe reformları üzerinde güçlü bir etki yaratmıştır. 100. yıl dönümü arifesinde bu olay yeniden gündeme gelmektedir: Ortak alfabe, terminolojik koordinasyon ve Türkolojinin dijital altyapısı gibi modern konular, 1926 yılı gündeminin güncel mirasçıları olarak değerlendirilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Birinci Türkoloji Kurultayı, Latin grafiği, ortak alfabe, Türkoloji, terminoloji.

The First Turkological Congress of 1926: Historical and Cultural Significance

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Abstract

The First Turkological Congress, held in Baku in 1926, is a significant historical event that marks a fundamental turning point in the cultural integration process of Azerbaijan and other Turkic peoples. This international forum, which brought together representatives of Turkic peoples settled across a vast geographical area, discussed issues of global importance aimed at fostering an intellectual environment and defining strategies for collective cultural development. As the most vital scientific and practical outcome of the Congress, special mention must be made of the development of the scientific-methodological foundations for transitioning Turkic-speaking peoples within the former Soviet Union to the Latin script, as well as the adoption of strategic decisions in this direction.

The selection of Baku as the venue for the First Turkological Congress stemmed from an objective historical necessity. In the early 20th century, Azerbaijan held the status of a progressive center in the field of Turkology, as it did in many other intellectual spheres. The fact that the mass implementation of the Latin script began for the first time in Azerbaijan in the late 1920s is a practical manifestation of this scientific leadership. Notably, among the Turkic states that gained independence after the collapse of the USSR, Azerbaijan was once again the first republic to realize the transition to the Latin alphabet. Looking at the writing systems of Turkic-speaking states today, it is observed that, alongside Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan also utilize the Latin script. Meanwhile, the Republic of Türkiye set a historical precedent for the implementation of a common alphabet system by carrying out this transition as early as 1928.

Held from February 26 to March 6, 1926, in the Ismailiyya building in Baku, the First Turkological Congress was the first major forum where issues of language, alphabet, literature, ethnography, and culture of Turkic-speaking peoples were discussed on a unified scientific platform. With 131 delegates in attendance, the Congress scientifically and methodologically substantiated the idea of transitioning to a common Turkic Latin alphabet, which exerted a powerful influence on the alphabet reforms carried out in the region in subsequent years. On the eve of its 100th anniversary, this event returns to the spotlight: modern topics such as a common alphabet, terminological coordination, and the digital infrastructure of Turkology are regarded as the current successors to the 1926 agenda.

Keywords: First Turkological Congress, Latin alphabet reform, unified Turkic script, Turkology, linguistic integration.

Introduction

The early 20th century was a challenging period for Turkic peoples, characterized by shifting socio-political maps and the restructuring of cultural and educational policies. Under these circumstances, the First Turkological Congress convened in Baku with the intent of defining a common scientific and strategic agenda for Turkic-speaking peoples. "The First Turkological Congress, organized from February 26 to March 6, 1926, in Baku, the capital of our republic, is one of the most significant events in the scientific, cultural, socio-political life of the Turkic world and the Azerbaijani people in the 20th century. This historical event, which laid the foundation for an extremely important stage aimed at the cultural integration of the Turkic geography, holds exceptional importance primarily in terms of its essence and the systematic implementation of several fateful issues for numerous Turkic peoples" [Mammadov, 2016, p.3].

The Congress aimed not only to address language and alphabet issues but also to coordinate research in folklore, literature, ethnography, and history; thus, Turkology established itself as an independent and multifaceted field. "The First Baku Turkological Congress, a major scientific event for world science in general and the Turkic world in particular, is of great importance both historically and from a modern perspective. Held in Azerbaijan from February 26 to March 5, 1926, the First Turkological Congress is also a social event that opened broad horizons for the scientific-cultural unity of Turkic peoples, the development of common national-spiritual values, and the deepening of integration processes. Presenting Turkology as a large and systematic scientific doctrine, the Baku Turkological Congress resonated

internationally. This is Azerbaijan's valuable contribution to world Turkology and world science in a broader sense. The First Turkological Congress is a magnificent program for the scientific study of the centuries-old history and the great future of the Turkic world" [Habibbeyli, 2016, p.7]. The First Turkological Congress, which laid the foundation for a new stage in the cultural integration of Turkic peoples, not only confirmed the formation of Turkology as a serious and independent field of science but also determined its future development directions. "The First Turkological Congress confirmed that Turkology is a fundamental field of science and laid the foundation for a new stage of Turkic studies as a serious scientific discipline. At the same time, it created the ground for the emergence of substantial monographic and scientific-theoretical research works on Turkology. As a result, Azerbaijan became one of the prestigious scientific centers of Turkological research on a global scale" [Gasimov, 2019, p.25].

Organizational Framework, Participant Profile, and Ideological Shifts

It was no coincidence that the First Turkological Congress—recorded in history as one of the most remarkable events in the cultural life of Turkic peoples in the 20th century—was organized in Baku, with renowned and influential scholars invited. The congress, held in the Ismailiyya building, was chaired by Samadaga Agamalioglu, Chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the Azerbaijan SSR. The Presidium included Ruhulla Akhundov, Vasily Bartold, Alexander Samoylovich, Bekir Chobanzade, Akhmet Baytursunuly, Mehmed Fuad Köprülü, and others. A total of 131 delegates participated, "98 of whom were Turkic, 20 were Russian" [Ibrahimov, 2025], and the rest were from European scientific circles. The professional distribution included academicians, professors, teachers, journalists, politicians, and men of letters, demonstrating the international and multidisciplinary nature of the Congress.

Professor Kamil Veli Narimanoglu, calling the First Turkological Congress—considered the beginning of the history of Turkology—a "human drama" and a "tragedy-novel," writes: "Ultimately, the 1926 First Turkological Congress is a sad, mournful history and a human drama. This congress, which ended with the arrest and physical destruction of most of its more than 100 participants, selected scholars, and thinkers, is the largest document of intellectual genocide in recent history; it is an indictment against the history of the Soviet-Stalinist dictatorial regime of the 1930s. In this sense, the First Baku Turkological Congress is a tragedy-novel, essentially a painful and bitter requiem" [Narimanoglu, Agakishiyev, 2006, p.3]. The main reason for this characterization was the repressions of the 1930s, specifically the fact that the participants of the Congress were at the center of the "Red Terror." The repressions tragically altered the fates of several participants, creating gaps in the continuity of scientific networks. Nevertheless, the idea of scientific coordination and a common Turkic cultural space formed in 1926 continued to live in both émigré and local scientific schools.

The First Turkological Congress is characterized as the "beginning of the cultural revolution" in the lives of Turkic peoples. Its primary goal was to unite scattered Turkic peoples on a common scientific-cultural platform and to free their intellectual potential from obstacles. "The main goal of the First Turkological Congress was to develop the lagging areas of Turkic peoples and to create a turning point in their lives, science, and cultural development by removing all obstacles. For this, it was necessary to make serious changes in the alphabet, writing, terminology, spelling, and teaching methods. The solution to these important issues could only take place after the convening of the Turkological Congress" [Khalilov, 2013, p.363].

Scientific Agenda and Content of Discussions

The central focus of the agenda was alphabet reform: challenges posed by the Arabic script in teaching and printing practices were raised, along with requirements for phonetic compatibility, readability, and standardization, while the scientific-methodological principles of transitioning to the Latin script were being developed. "The most important and controversial section of the congress was the section working on the alphabet system. Because the true purpose of the congress emerged here. In this section, the suitability of changing the Arabic letters used by the Russian Turks was discussed; if Arabic letters were to be abandoned, whether

the Cyrillic alphabet, the Latin alphabet, a common alphabet for all Russian Turks, or separate alphabets would be appropriate was debated" [Oral, 2024]. Parallel to this, methodological approaches in common terminology, linguistic poetics, dialectology, folklore, and ethnography were discussed. "At the Baku Turkological Congress, presentations were made and discussions held on many subjects such as alphabet, spelling, terminology, publication of historical texts, conducting compilation studies related to modern dialects and sub-dialects, dictionaries, grammar, publications, and the organization of new congresses to discuss ongoing work" [Buran, 2009, p.440]. Thus, the scientific-practical significance of the First Turkological Congress, which turned the ethnography, folklore, and common cultural monuments of Turkic-speaking peoples into subjects of research for world Turkologists and Orientalists, is determined by the fundamental decisions it adopted. These include strategic resolutions on formalizing the transition to the Latin alphabet, developing a common terminology for the Turkic world, and researching shared cultural monuments. "It is known that although many issues were discussed and found their scientific solution at the First Turkological Congress, its main line was the adoption of the new alphabet (Latin alphabet). In other words, the path leading to the congress was a path starting from the alphabet, which, along with the alphabet, had to solve many other problems" [Gasimov, 2019, p.29].

The proposal to transition to the Latin script was justified by arguments such as accelerating literacy, phonetic compatibility, and compatibility with printing technologies. As a result, the use of the Arabic alphabet was banned starting January 1, 1929, and the Latin-based "Yañalif" (a writing system based on the Latin alphabet created for non-Slavic peoples in the Soviet Union in the 1930s) was implemented. Although a transition to the Cyrillic script occurred later for political reasons, the 1926 decisions defined the line of rational standardization in Turkology.

The Congress, aimed at solving many scientific-theoretical and practical issues of Turkic-speaking peoples, consisted of 17 sessions and 37 reports, focusing on fields that shape national identity, such as ethnography, history, and regional studies. "As mentioned above, it would be unfair to limit the activity of the congress only to the alphabet. In the 17 sessions of the First Turkological Congress, 37 reports were heard, and problems related to the alphabet, terminology, ethnography, regional studies, history, culture, and methods of teaching the mother tongue—spelling and orthography—of Turkic-speaking peoples were discussed. It is also undeniable that every issue raised and discussed at the congress played an important role in the literary-cultural life of Eastern peoples, especially Azerbaijanis. More precisely, many scientific-theoretical and practical issues of Turkic-speaking peoples found their solution" [Gasimov, 2018, pp.124-125].

100th Anniversary: Current Position on the Political-Cultural Agenda

The President of the independent Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, has always kept this event in focus, issuing decrees for the celebration of its anniversaries at the state level: the 80th anniversary in November 2005, the 90th anniversary in February 2016, and the 100th anniversary in October 2025. Each decree and anniversary celebration is not just the commemoration of a historical event, but also aimed at strengthening the spiritual pillars of Turkic unity and deepening the process of national self-awareness. A century later, the ideas of the forum are back on the agenda. The Order "On the Celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the First Turkological Congress" signed by President Ilham Aliyev is an important document reflecting the strategic priorities of Azerbaijan's scientific and cultural policy. The main goal of the Order is to confirm the scientific and cultural significance of the First Turkological Congress held in Baku in 1926 at the state level. This document confirms that the congress is not only a historical event but also a significant symbol for the cultural integration of Azerbaijan and the Turkic world today.

Conclusion

The First Baku Turkological Congress was not only a scientific event but also a historical event reflecting a great human drama. The congress, held through both the spiritual and physical

efforts of more than 100 participants, selected scholars, and thinkers, remains an example of the perseverance of great intellectuals in history. As one of the most significant scientific and literary-cultural events in the history and fate of Turkic peoples, the First Turkological Congress constitutes the pinnacle of the enlightenment movement planned by intellectuals since the 19th century. This congress, which laid the foundation for a new stage in the cultural integration of Turkic peoples, is valued as an expression of the desires and ideals of Pan-Turkic enlightenment intellectuals.

The First Turkological Congress serves as a foundational manifesto on the path toward the scientific-cultural unity of Turkic peoples. It framed the issue of language and alphabet not merely as a linguistic problem, but as a large-scale integration project. Today, anniversary events held within the framework of the Organization of Turkic States at the initiative of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev show that the 1926 vision continues to live on a practical level through common terminology and digital language technologies. The legacy of the Congress is an important roadmap both for studying the past and for the future scientific-strategic development of the Turkic world.

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