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Iğdır Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi

E-ISSN: 2147-6152

Yıl 15, Sayı 43, Ekim 2026

[Araştırma Makalesi] **Atıf/Citation**: İren, A.A. (2026). "The Organization of Turkic States through the Lens of Ontological Security and Security Governance: A Five-Stage Mechanism", *Iğdır Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*. (43): s. 129-151. **Gönderim Tarihi**: 28.01.2026 **Kabul ve Yayın Tarihi**: 01.06.2026-15.10.2026 **DOI**: 10.54600/igdirsosbilder.1874156

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The Organization of Turkic States through the Lens of Ontological Security and Security Governance: A Five-Stage Mechanism

Ontolojik Güvenlik ve Güvenlik Yönetişimi Merceğinden Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı: Beş Aşamalı Bir Mekanizma

ABSTARCT

This article analyzes the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) as a regional institutional site where security is constituted not only through material threat assessments but also through the pursuit of ontological security—the need to sustain coherent self-narratives and continuity over time. Moving beyond deterrence- or efficiency-centered accounts, it argues that the OTS increasingly translates identity-based claims and mnemonic politics into discursive–institutional governance capacity: the textualized design, specification and routinization of instruments through which a security-relevant agenda is made manageable inside the organization. Using a mechanism-oriented research design and qualitative document analysis, the study identifies a five-stage process. Normative authorization legitimizes cooperation through mandate and status-elevating texts; framing stabilizes a mnemonic meaning universe via reproducible devices; institutionalization routinizes cooperation through organs and meeting series; codification consolidates routines into written regimes (rules, strategies/roadmaps, legal and technical frameworks, standards); and path dependence is visible in serial continuation and follow-up/resourcing provisions that normalize routines and raise reversal costs. The article operationalizes identity continuity through observable organizational markers and shows how mnemonic narratives can function as capacity-producing resources in regional security governance.

Keywords: Organization of Turkic States, Ontological Security, Security Governance, Mnemonic Security

ÖZ

Bu makale, Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı'nı (TDT) güvenliğin yalnızca maddi tehdit değerlendirmeleriyle değil, aynı zamanda ontolojik güvenlik arayışıyla—aktörlerin zaman içinde tutarlı benlik anlatılarını ve sürekliliği sürdürme ihtiyacıyla—kurulduğu bölgesel bir kurumsal alan olarak analiz etmektedir. TDT'nin kimlik temelli iddiaları ve mnemonik (hafıza) siyaseti giderek söylemsel–kurumsal yönetişim kapasitesine dönüştürdüğünü savunan çalışma caydırıcılık ya da salt verimlilik odaklı açıklamaların ötesine geçerek, güvenlikle ilişkili gündemlerin teşkilat içinde yönetilebilir kılınmasını sağlayan araçların metinlerde tasarlanması, ayrıntılandırılması ve rutinleştirilmesine odaklanmaktadır. Mekanizma odaklı araştırma tasarımı nitel belge analizine dayanan çalışma, beş aşamalı bir süreç saptamaktadır. Normatif yetkilendirme işbirliğini yetki ve statü yükseltici metinler üzerinden meşrulaştırır; çerçeveleme, tekrarlanabilir araçlar yoluyla mnemonik bir anlam evrenini istikrara kavuşturur; kurumsallaşma, organlar ve toplantı serileri üzerinden işbirliğini rutinleştirir; kodifikasyon, rutinleri yazılı rejimlere (usul kuralları, stratejiler/yol haritaları, hukuki ve teknik çerçeveler, standartlar) dönüştürerek pekiştirir; patika bağımlılığı ise rutinleri normalleştiren ve geri dönüş maliyetlerini artıran seri süreklilik ile takip/kaynak tahsisi hükümlerinde görünür hale gelir. Makale, kimlik sürekliliğini gözlemlenebilir örgütsel göstergeler üzerinden operasyonelleştirir ve mnemonik anlatıların bölgesel güvenlik yönetişiminde kapasite üreten kaynaklar olarak işleyebileceğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı, Ontolojik Güvenlik, Güvenlik Yönetişimi, Mnemonik Güvenlik

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Introduction

In International Relations, regional organizations have been considered "security actors" based on alliance-style criteria: binding defense commitments, collective defense guarantees, integrated military structures, and deterrence capabilities. However, over the past two decades, advances in governance theory and security studies have prompted scholars to think more broadly: security is now seen as something that can be produced through networks, standards, routinized consultation practices, and multi-sector policy packages. This more encompassing perspective prompts us to reconsider organizations that do not fit the traditional alliance mould but that develop stable patterns of agenda-setting and governance-instrument design in areas that clearly matter for security. This puzzle has become particularly salient in the current debates on the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), particularly since 2021, when the OTS underwent a status upgrade through the organization's renaming and adoption of higher-level strategic documents. Since then, the OTS has articulated a renewed collective narrative and tied it to a multi-sector governance agenda, and recent studies increasingly view the post-2021 period as a visibility threshold for the OTS in terms of regional positioning (Cornell, 2025). Consequently, the question is not whether the OTS "is" an alliance in any strict sense but how it generates security relevance without alliance-type commitments.

What institutional instruments and routines enable the OTS to translate identity- and memory-based claims into a security-relevant governance repertoire, and how does this translation accumulate and evolve over time? The burgeoning empirical literature on the OTS has provided a variety of answers to this question. The first line of argument stresses the role of identity, culture, and belonging, arguing that a shared language, history, and culture produce a sense of "we-ness" and provide an ideational foundation for institutional cooperation (Yesevi, 2022; Mustofaev, 2022). Meanwhile, the second line of argument employs institutional design and functional coordination as explanations for the expansion of bodies, technical committees, and policy areas in terms of institutional deepening driven by the benefits of cooperation (Aydın and Liu, 2024; Salihi and Mehmetcik, 2025). Additionally, a third line of argument places the OTS in a geopolitical environment characterized by great-power competition, regional crises, and connectivity or corridor politics (Cornell, 2025; Demir, 2022; Koçak, 2023). Furthermore, sector-specific research on the economy, connectivity, digitalization, and disaster/crisis coordination focuses on concrete outputs and cooperation practices in particular policy domains (Baghırov, 2022; Sarı, 2023; Yaldız, 2023). While all of these approaches highlight important facets of the OTS's rise, they all leave a gap at the level of mechanisms, because research on regional security governance has shown that security can be produced through procedures, networks, standards and routine coordination (Krahmann, 2003, 2005), although it often treats symbolic resources - identity and memory - as background context rather than as active inputs into the design of governance instruments.

Ontological security approaches, in contrast, highlight how actors resort to routines and institutional arrangements in order to maintain identity continuity, secure recognition, and stabilize a "we" narrative (Rumelili and Adısönmez, 2020; Mälksoo, 2015). However, even when applied to regional organizations, the empirical connection between identity continuity and concrete, stage-specific indicators of institutional routinization and codification often remains underdeveloped. Moreover, mnemonic security scholarship demonstrates how collective memory delineates the boundaries of "we" but has little to say on how memory repertoires become textualized, standardized, and integrated into organizational instruments that structure governance

over time. Therefore, despite their important contributions, existing works still fall short of providing a step-by-step process-tracing account that links identity and memory repertoires to changing institutional forms in a way that transcends the alliance-deterrence dichotomy.

This article addresses this mechanism gap by bringing ontological security and regional security governance into a single analytic framework. Its core claim is that the OTS's identity-based repertoire does not operate only as a symbolic "language of belonging"; it can also function as a modular and routinizable resource that enables security-relevant themes (resilience, crisis/disaster coordination, connectivity, critical infrastructure, digital governance) to be linked to institutional formats. To capture this process, the article conceptualizes the dependent variable as discursive–institutional governance capacity (DIGC): the extent to which official texts design, specify, and routinize governance instruments through which a security-relevant agenda is intended to be made manageable inside the organization. DIGC is assessed through textualized institutional markers—mandate devices, meeting-series routines, procedural templates, programmatic instruments, standardization clauses, and follow-up/resourcing provisions—rather than through implementation outcomes.

DIGC should therefore be understood as a capacity of institutional design rather than a measure of policy implementation. It does not claim that the OTS has already produced effective operational outcomes in each policy field, nor does it measure material performance, compliance, or project delivery. Rather, it captures the prior organizational condition through which implementation becomes imaginable and administratively processable: the textual specification of mandates, routines, procedures, standards, follow-up mechanisms, and coordination formats. In this sense, DIGC occupies an intermediate analytical position between symbolic identity discourse and concrete policy execution. It asks whether identity- and memory-based claims are translated into institutional forms that can structure future action, not whether those actions have already succeeded empirically.

Against this background, this article proposes a five-step model demonstrating how references to identity and memory are translated into specific governance arrangements at the level of text: (i) normative authorization, (ii) framing, (iii) institutionalization, (iv) codification, and (v) path dependence, because normative authorization puts identity-based cooperation on a legitimate rule-based footing. Framing produces a shared mnemonic "meaning universe" through repetitive and reproducible rhetorical devices, while institutionalization turns cooperation into a routine practice through organizational structures and regular meeting formats. Codification further stabilizes these routines by inscribing them in written regimes, such as rules, strategies, legal or technical frameworks, and standards and path dependence comes about through serial continuity, fixed calendars, and follow-up and resourcing provisions, all of which increase the costs of reversal and gradually normalize cooperation as a standard practice.

This article makes two major contributions: first, it integrates ontological and mnemonic security perspectives in the study of regional organizations by examining observable institutional markers, and in so doing positions the OTS's security role at the crossroads of identity continuity and governance routines, as noted by Rumelili and Adısönmez (2020) and Mälksoo (2015). Moreover, it demonstrates that regional security governance can be identified not only by formal defense commitments or military indicators but also through discursive and institutional markers of governance design, such as recurring meeting series, organizational bodies and interfaces, strategies and roadmaps, standardization practices, and follow-up and reporting mechanisms.

The article proceeds as follows: the first section ties together security governance scholarship with ontological and mnemonic security, outlining the conceptual framework and key distinctions, and the second section details the mechanism-oriented research design, the scope of the dataset, and the coding strategy. Consequently, the third section presents the empirical findings step-by-step, following the evidence from the 2009 founding document to the 2021-2025 summit cycle and the final section assesses these findings against alternative explanations and discusses broader theoretical implications as well as avenues for future research.

1. Constructing Ontological Security in the OTS: Mnemonic Framing, Institutional Routines, and Governance Capacity

This study shows how security is produced in the OTS by analytically distinguishing between three concepts: ontological security (the need for identity continuity and routines), mnemonic security (conflicts over memory and the risk of "memory wars"), and security governance (the production of capacity through networks, procedures, and standards), because the purpose of this distinction is to clarify the conditions under which identity- and memory-based discourses are actually translated into institutional tools, rather than simply assuming that such discourses are equivalent to "security capacity" (Rumelili, 2015a; 2015b; Krahmann, 2003; Mälksoo, 2015). Ontological security approaches argue that states are motivated not only by a need for physical survival but also by a need to maintain a coherent self-narrative over time (Giddens, 1991; Steele, 2008; Ejdus, 2018), and from this perspective, stability is not about reducing material threats but about reproducing practices and routines that protect the continuity of actors' "biographical" stories about themselves. In times of uncertainty, actors obtain ontological security by routinizing their relations with "significant Others" (Mitzen, 2006), and institutional platforms, thus, play a key role as arenas of repeated interaction that help to sustain identity continuity. In the OTS case, the organization can be seen not only as a functional regional cooperation framework but also as an institutional "site of memory" where identity narratives that have been disrupted in the post-Soviet period are repaired and reassembled, and in this study, indicators of ontological security are coded as (i) emphases on "continuity," "stability," and "predictability," (ii) constructions of the role and self-definition of the "we," and (iii) signals of routinization such as references to regular summits, consultations, and institutional continuity (Giddens, 1991; Mitzen, 2006; Steele, 2008; Rumelili, 2020).

To grasp what "identity repair" involves and where potential tensions emerge, the concept of mnemonic (memory-based) security is particularly helpful, because state efforts to protect and consolidate their historical narratives are conceptualized here as practices of "mnemonic security" (Mälksoo, 2015), and external challenges to these narratives can create ontological risks that destabilize the continuity of the collective self. This perspective expands ontological security debates by treating the "protection of memory" not only as symbolic politics but as a security practice intended to fix identity (Mälksoo, 2015; Resende et al., 2025), and the OTS allows member states to build a collective biographical narrative around a common history, language, and culture, entwining national memory repertoires within a broader "Turkic World" narrative framework, and providing an identity-stabilizing anchor in uncertain times. In this study, mnemonic security is coded via (i) references to founding myths, a shared past, and teleological continuity ("common history," "civilization," "historical ties," etc.), (ii) defense of memory or recognition of external challenges ("distortion," "denial," "historical justice," etc.), and (iii) boundary-drawing and othering practices based on historical narratives, and mnemonic security is thus less concerned with the simple presence of "identity talk" and more concerned with

contested remembrance and the risk of "memory wars" it may create (Mälksoo, 2015). The existence of such risk does not mean that the organization will necessarily produce conflict; however, it means that a vulnerability exists, which needs analytical attention and sensitive political handling.

The OTS's production of ontological and mnemonic security is not, on its own, sufficient to explain "capacity." The transformation of identity- and memory-based resources into concrete cooperation practices and sustainable outputs depends on a security governance toolkit that makes security manageable within the organization. These tools appear as networks, procedures, standards, action plans, institutional interfaces and monitoring-and-evaluation arrangements (Krahmann, 2003; Kirchner and Sperling, 2007; Hameiri and Jones, 2015). For this reason, the analysis goes beyond discursive statements and traces the mechanisms through which the identity/memory repertoire becomes institutionalized.

How the OTS's ontological and mnemonic security pursuits are linked to institutional formats can be systematically traced through observable indicators in official texts. The Nakhchivan Agreement (2009) authorizes the cooperation mechanism by emphasizing a common language, history, culture, and traditions, thereby laying the ground for the institutional legitimation of a collective identity imaginary. The Istanbul Summit of 12 November 2021 constitutes a critical threshold, as the organization's official name was updated from the Turkic Council to the "Organization of Turkic States" and the "Turkic World Vision–2040" document was adopted—binding the identity narrative to texts both symbolically and strategically. In this sense, Vision–2040 not only reproduces an identity-and-purpose narrative but also functions as a reference text that nourishes ontological security by offering an institutional response framework in terms of priorities, instruments and roles (Giddens, 1991; Mitzen, 2006; Steele, 2008; Kinnvall and Mitzen 2020). In this study, indicators of security governance are operationalized not as performance measures but as text-based institutional signals such as (i) the establishment of institutional interfaces (councils/committees/working groups/secretariat arrangements), (ii) procedural planning language (roadmaps, action plans, implementation calendars, follow-up/reporting), and (iii) standardization (shared terminology, technical standards, and frameworks) (Krahmann, 2003; Kirchner and Sperling, 2007; Hameiri and Jones, 2015).

The crucial point is that identity construction within the OTS should not be reduced to a nostalgic invocation of the past; it must be analyzed alongside governance capacity. Evaluations of Vision–2040 suggest that the document links cooperation to resilience and institutional continuity perspectives. It also seeks to concretize partnership beyond cultural and symbolic elements in policy areas such as transport, trade, connectivity and coordination. This allows the trust component at the core of ontological security to connect to collective action capacity for managing material risks. While a shared narrative produces social capital, that capital reduces the transaction costs of cooperation and enhances the institution's sustainability. Repeated interactions consolidate shared expectations and may provide a basis for a more predictable regional order and, in limited domains, the emergence of security community dynamics.

The integration of mnemonic security practices with governance manifests in the OTS through both symbolic–political instruments and expertise-oriented mechanisms. For example, joint work on a common alphabet is not merely a project of cultural proximity. It can be interpreted as an institutional step toward standardizing language to establish interoperability in education, digitalization, and mobility. Such mnemonic initiatives strengthen collective memory construction—capturable through an "family album" metaphor—while also creating an identity

infrastructure that grounds the societal legitimacy of shared projects. Yet converting this infrastructure into capacity depends on linking it to procedures, institutional routines and traceable policy outputs (Krahmann, 2003).

At the same time, the OTS's position in the generation of ontological security also places it in potential tension with competing external narratives, and the risk of "memory wars" identified in the mnemonic security literature is magnified, particularly when former hegemonic centers attempt to project their own historical narratives as normatively superior (Mälksoo, 2015). The OTS reduces this risk by channeling its emphasis on identity unity not into a confrontational "anti-Other" discourse, but into practical fields of cooperation such as transport corridors, trade and customs facilitation, and technical coordination. Recent assessments of the OTS's strengths and vulnerabilities in the international system note that in the context of geopolitical competition, identity politics must be finely balanced against a calibrated language of governance (Koçak, 2023).

On this basis, the analysis here conceptualizes ontological security as the "motivational drive", mnemonic security as the "identity/memory content and risk domain," and security governance as the "institutional toolkit". It examines the conditions under which identity and memory resources are translated into governance capacity via networks, procedures and standards, and the long-term sustainability of this hybrid architecture will depend on striking two balances: first, ensuring memory and identity continuity without locking it into an exclusionary or confrontational securitization spiral; second, converting the social capital generated by identity into durable path dependencies through institutional routines and concrete policy outputs.

2. Regional Security Governance and the OTS's Institutional Transformation as Governance Production

Security governance refers to a conception of security which goes beyond the state and the military, because, in contrast to seeing security as a property of the state that is imposed unilaterally from above, governance scholars see security as a property of a system which is generated through interactions among a multiplicity of public and private actors according to sets of rules and procedures. Governance scholars have pointed out that power and authority are today distributed across multiple institutions and actors rather than concentrated in one central location (Rosenau, 1992; Rhodes, 1996; Pierre and Peters, 2000), and, consequently, in the realm of security, this means that security is not generated through military means or deterrence alone, but also through a range of governance practices such as risk assessment, information sharing, technical standardization, and coordination routines (Krahmann, 2003; Avant et al., 2010). This article relies on a broad but clearly demarcated concept of security, which is understood as a field in which issues such as risks, vulnerabilities, resilience, crisis management, infrastructure protection, and cross-border interdependence are made manageable through institutions, rules, and routines (Webber et al., 2004), because not every form of cooperation is treated as "security", and, therefore, to be counted as security, institutional indicators must be present: specific mandates in official texts, regular formats of coordination, legal or technical frameworks, standard-setting provisions, and follow-up mechanisms.

In other words, the notion of security is only widened to the extent that official documents connect ideas of identity, risk, resilience, or crisis management to actual governance tools, while, at the same time, a region is not just a given geographic territory on the map, but also an institutional and relational space in which security interactions become denser. Regional security complex theory posits that security interdependence tends to concentrate at the regional level, and, since

order at this scale is structured by institutions, norms, and practices (Buzan and Wæver, 2009), debates on "rediscovering regions" have underscored the material infrastructures through which regional orders are actually constructed and maintained, such as transport routes, energy pipelines, and digital networks (Lake and Morgan, 1997), however, research on regionalism has demonstrated that regional orders do not have to replicate Western-style institutions, but can rather develop hybrid models that reflect local histories and cultural traditions (Acharya, 2001; 2014). This framework also allows for the analysis of organizations that do not conform to the classical military alliance format, because security can be generated through relatively flexible but stable tools: low-binding agreements that persist over time, soft coordination mechanisms, broad multi-sector agendas, and repeatable procedures--rather than through hard collective-defense promises, and, therefore, the key outcome of interest is thus not how operationally effective an organization is on the ground, but its discursive-institutional governance capacity (DIGC).

DIGC denotes the extent to which the official texts of governance tools (e.g., rules, regular meetings, templates, standards, follow-up provisions) are defined, organized and routinized in a way that makes a security-relevant agenda manageable in that organization (Börzel and Risse, 2010), while, from the angle of institutional transformation, organizations are not passive containers that mirror a given security reality, but are active assemblages that render security issues processable, trackable and repeatable in a particular way. Institutional design research has shown that institutions not only shape outcomes by delegating authority, but also by producing knowledge, setting agendas, coordinating actors and influencing compliance (Koremenos et al., 2001), and, thus, such transformations can occur incrementally, through small changes that accumulate over time: layering new rules on top of existing ones; reinterpretation of existing provisions; subtle redirection of institutional practices, although, even if each step is small, their repetition may amount to significant changes in how security is governed.

In this study, institutional transformation in the OTS is conceptualized as a five-stage mechanism. First, normative authorization establishes a legitimacy ground for cooperation by embedding identity-based claims within appropriateness criteria and mandate-elevating acts (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; March and Olsen, 1989; Suchman, 1995). Second, framing expands security meaning through issue-linkages and mnemonic devices that stabilize a shared “we,” while coupling identity claims to cooperation-oriented policy fields (Aggarwal, 1998; Hameiri and Jones, 2015). Third, institutionalization makes the frame durable through routinized organizational channels organs, meeting series, working groups, and consultation interfaces through which coordination becomes repeatable without hierarchical control (Börzel and Risse, 2010; Abbott et al., 2015; Slaughter, 2004). Fourth, codification consolidates routines into written regimes: rules of procedure, roadmaps, action plans, shared terminology and monitoring templates stabilize expectations in durable textual form and support standardization (Brunsson and Jacobsson, 2000; Tamm Hallström, 2004; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Fifth, path dependence reinforces continuity through serial repetition and follow-up/resourcing provisions that generate positive feedback and raise reversal costs over time (Pierson 2004; Adler and Pouliot, 2011).

This conceptual framework makes it possible to trace mechanism by mechanism how security is constituted through instruments, procedures and standards in organizations with limited bindingness such as the OTS, without reducing the analysis to whether the organization is an alliance. It thereby enables security to be analyzed not only through threat discourse in official

texts but also through textualized governance design and intertextual repetition as observable evidence of DIGC.

3. Research Design and Method

Design expectations are structured as hypotheses. H1 posits that the OTS's security relevance is shaped not primarily through binding defense commitments but along the axis of ontological security: the organization stabilizes a collective "we" narrative and legitimacy claims tied to identity continuity, which are translated over time into a discursive–institutional governance capacity expressed through routinized formats, standards, and repeatable procedures. Empirical manifestations are traced through: (H1a) the joint presence of identity/belonging language with legitimacy/appropriateness registers in security-relevant contexts; (H1b) recurrent articulation of security alongside connectivity–infrastructure–digitalization and other governance domains; (H1c) rising salience of institutional operations and format markers (organs, mechanisms, meeting series); (H1d) increasing programmatic and procedural specification via strategy/roadmap/action-plan instruments and monitoring templates; and (H1e) clustering of periodic repetition ("every year," "regularly," numbered meeting series) with governance-format codes, indicating expanding routine density.

In order to discern whether the proposed mechanism in fact provides explanatory leverage beyond more conventional accounts, the analysis is framed as a competition between two alternative logics, each defined as a distinct causal pathway and corresponding set of specific, observable textual markers. The two logics are RH1 (functional coordination/efficiency), which justifies institutional deepening mainly in terms of instrumental cooperation benefits, such as transaction costs, reciprocity, and practical payoffs, with identity and mnemonic language playing a secondary role and largely decoupled from the design of governance instruments, and RH2 (threat-centered balancing/hard-security logic), which posits that perceptions of external threat will dominate the justificatory register, pushing institutional development toward deterrence-oriented formats and alliance-adjacent rationales rather than toward the identity-linked, multi-sector security-governance trajectory implied by H1. The comparison with rival explanations is conducted stage-by-stage, using two criteria: sequencing, whether the indicators appear in the order predicted by each explanation, and co-occurrence, whether identity and mnemonic claims are explicitly linked to the design of governance instruments or appear as free-floating, stand-alone rhetoric.

The alternative explanations are not invalidated because functional or geopolitical factors are absent, rather the question is whether these factors constitute the dominant sequencing logic for the evolution of institutional development over time. A functional-coordination account would expect that institutional deepening is largely driven by efficiency gains, technical problem-solving, and transaction-cost reductions, with identity-related language being merely decorative or secondary, whereas a threat-balancing account would expect that perceptions of external danger, deterrence-related rhetoric, and alliance-like security commitments drive and structure institutional development. The ontological-security mechanism, by contrast, predicts that identity and mnemonic claims will be consistently and explicitly linked to concrete governance instruments, and that this linkage will over time become increasingly routine and formally codified. Therefore, the empirical question is not whether efficiency or threat considerations matter at all, but whether they can explain the sequence of developments observed more convincingly than the identity-to-governance translation shown in this article.

The empirical strategy is qualitative document analysis tracing a five-stage mechanism—(i) normative authorization, (ii) framing, (iii) institutionalization, (iv) codification, and (v) path dependence—across successive summit cycles. A core dataset of agenda-setting strategic texts and summit declarations from 2021–2025 is complemented by the Nakhchivan Agreement (2009) to capture the founding-level authorization threshold. The primary corpus comprises 13 official texts. All primary texts were imported into MAXQDA and coded at the level of numbered articles, paragraphs, and subheadings using a stage-linked codebook derived from the mechanism's observable implications. Coding proceeded in two steps: deductive coding captured predefined indicators (authorization moves; mnemonic framing instruments; governance interfaces and meeting formats; procedural/programmatic instruments; legal/technical codification; and lock-in signals such as serial numbering, calendaring, and follow-up/resourcing provisions), and within-code refinement examined recurrent formulations and co-occurrence patterns between identity/mnemonic codes and governance-instrument codes. Each coded segment was linked to document metadata (title, date, article/paragraph number) to enable systematic retrieval of evidence traces.

The five stages are not an illustrative and casual sequence, but a mechanism of institutional translation because normative authorization provides the legitimacy conditions that make identity-based cooperation appear acceptable and appropriate. Framing offers a common mnemonic language - common stories, references, and symbols - that makes this cooperation meaningful and politically repeatable, and institutionalization translates that shared meaning into recurring organizational practices: councils, committees, ministerial meetings, sector-specific mechanisms. Codification stabilizes those routines further by anchoring them in written rules, strategies, roadmaps, legal frameworks, standards, and consequently, path dependence takes hold. Regularised formats, scheduled meetings, built-in follow-up procedures, resource allocations, and more raise the costs of undoing these arrangements, and thus make cooperation an expected, taken-for-granted organizational practice. In short, the causal logic is one of translation: identity-based legitimacy makes framing possible; framing supports routinization; routinization generates pressures for codification; and codification, in turn, creates the conditions under which institutional continuity becomes increasingly self-reinforcing.

Table 1. Corpus, Coded Units, and Discursive Institutional Governance Capacity (DIGC) Indicator Mapping[1]

Primary text	Type	Coded unit	DIGC indicators evidenced (codes)	Stage leverage	Key trace cues (brief)
Nakhchivan Agreement	Founding treaty	Article	AUTH; ORG	1,3	Establishment; organ architecture
Istanbul Summit Declaration	Summit decl.	Numbered art.	AUTH; FRAME; ORG; ROUT	1–3	Renaming; Vision/roadmap; mechanisms
Turkic World Vision–2040	Vision text	Heading/para	AUTH; PROG	1,4	Identity–purpose + governance domains

[1] DIGC code key: AUTH = mandate/legitimacy authorization; FRAME = mnemonic/identity framing devices; ORG = governance interfaces/organ activation; ROUT = routinization/serial formats; PROC = procedural codification; PROG = programmatic codification; LEGAL = legal/technical frameworks; STD = standardization clauses; FOLLOW = follow-up/resourcing; LOCK = lock-in/path dependence signals.

Primary text	Type	Coded unit	DIGC indicators evidenced (codes)	Stage leverage	Key trace cues (brief)
Strategic Roadmap 2022–2026	Roadmap	Item/para	PROG; FOLLOW	4,5	Timelines; instruments; follow-up logic
Samarkand Summit Declaration	Summit decl.	Numbered art.	PROC; PROG; ROUT; LOCK	3–5	Rules/Strategy; "regular"; TIF
Rules of Procedure	Procedural doc	Article/clause	PROC	4	Standardized internal procedures
OTS Strategy 2022–2026	Strategy doc	Section/para	PROG	4	Medium-term priorities + instruments
Ankara Extraordinary Decl.	Summit decl.	Numbered art./para	ORG; ROUT; FOLLOW	3–5	Crisis coordination; institutional follow-up
Astana Declaration	Summit decl.	Numbered art.	ROUT; ORG; LOCK	3–5	Regular NSC/FMs; scheduled meetings
Karabakh (Shusha) Declaration	Informal decl.	Paragraph	FRAME; ROUT	2–3	"Family/stability"; consultation language
Bishkek Declaration	Summit decl.	Numbered art.	AUTH; ORG; LEGAL; STD; FOLLOW; LOCK	1,3–5	Charter; first meetings; DEPA; resourcing WG
Turkic World Charter	Charter	Article/principle	AUTH; PROC/PROG (norm anchor)	1,4	Codified value repertoire/ideals
Gabala Declaration	Summit decl.	Numbered art.	LEGAL; LOCK; FOLLOW	4–5	Serial meetings; draft treaty; action plans

To make the coding procedure more transparent, three examples illustrate how textual evidence was classified. First, the 2021 Istanbul decision to rename the Turkic Council as the "Organization of Turkic States" was coded as AUTH because it constitutes a mandate- and status-elevating move that redefines the collective subject in institutional terms. Second, references to common history textbooks, cultural routes, commemorative calendars, and symbolic devices were coded as FRAME when they connected shared memory to reproducible practices rather than merely invoking cultural affinity. Third, clauses referring to regular meetings, numbered ministerial formats, action plans, standards-body cooperation, or personnel/budget follow-up were coded respectively as ROUT, PROC/PROG, STD, FOLLOW, or LOCK depending on whether they routinized interaction, codified procedures, standardized cooperation, or reinforced institutional continuity. Segments were not coded as DIGC indicators when they expressed general goodwill without specifying an institutional format, procedural device, standard, calendar, or follow-up mechanism.

In this study, "capacity" does not refer to operational effectiveness or implementation outcomes. The dependent variable is discursive–institutional governance capacity: the extent to which official texts design, specify, and routinize governance instruments through which a security-relevant agenda is intended to be made manageable inside the organization (see Table 1 for indicators and textual markers). Validity is strengthened by tracing clusters of indicators (verbs, templates, periodic structures, follow-up provisions) rather than isolated "security" statements; reliability is supported through two-stage coding, memoed coding decisions, and time-lagged

recoding of selected segments. While official texts may not fully reflect implementation, they define the boundaries of legitimacy and specify the organization's action repertoire, making them analytically privileged instruments for the study's claims.

4. Findings: Tracing Ontological Security and Regional Security Governance in the OTS through a Five-Stage Mechanism

The evidence below is analyzed as a textualized institutional design in official documents, not as implementation outcomes. The article, therefore traces discursive–institutional governance capacity—how identity/mnemonic claims are coupled to governance instruments in the predicted stage sequence (see Table 1).

4.1. Normative Authorization: Recognizing the OTS as a Legitimate Sphere of Cooperation

Stage Claim:In the first step, the OTS seeks to move the "Turkic World" reference beyond cultural belonging by grounding it in a founding order of institutional legitimacy. Rather than framing itself as a military alliance, the organization constructs international subjecthood, appropriateness, and rule-boundedness through founding texts, status-upgrading decisions, and higher-order mandate documents.

Observable implications: If normative authorization is operating, texts should (i) justify institutional design through shared identity references (history/language/culture), (ii) record mandate-elevating or status-upgrading moves (e.g., renaming) that consolidate institutional identity, and (iii) anchor continuity through overarching instruments (vision/roadmap/charter) and explicit reaffirmations of the founding reference.

Evidence traces: Article 1 of the Nakhchivan Agreement (2009)—stating that "the Parties have established the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States …"—carries identity-based cooperation into organizational form. A critical threshold is crossed at the Istanbul Summit (2021), where the Parties "decided to change the name of the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States to the 'Organization of Turkic States'" (Istanbul Summit Declaration, 2021: art. 1). This status shift from "council" to "organization" re-specifies the collective "we" in a higher-order institutional format. The same summit then stabilizes a shared future narrative by accepting Turkic World Vision–2040 and instructing the 2022–2026 Strategic Roadmap (Istanbul Summit Declaration, 2021: art. 2), translating identity continuity into a governance-programmatic direction. Subsequent reaffirmations of the founding reference (Samarkand Summit Declaration, 2022, art. 1) indicate both retrospective legitimation and forward-looking stabilization. Finally, the approval of the Turkic World Charter (Bishkek Declaration, 2024: art. 4) consolidates a shared value repertoire in an overarching document, giving identity and memory references a more durable normative frame.

Interpretation: Taken together, these traces indicate a two-step authorization logic: identity is first rendered institutionally legitimate through founding and status-upgrading acts; it is then stabilized through higher-order instruments that make collective action thinkable within a rules-based repertoire (sovereignty, territorial integrity, inviolability of borders). In ontological-security terms, Stage 1 answers "who are we?" by institutionalizing the "we" narrative in an authority regime capable of sustaining continuity claims across time.

Discrimination vs RH1 and RH2: This pattern is not reducible to RH1 (functional coordination/efficiency). Under RH1, efficiency/coordination rationales should dominate the authorization threshold, instead, the threshold is marked by identity-constitutive status elevation

and mandate instruments. Nor does it align with RH2 (threat-centered balancing) as an early driver. Under RH2, threat/deterrence cues should structure founding and status-upgrading moves; instead, authorization proceeds primarily through normative texts and institutional identity elevation (Walt, 1987). By the end of Stage 1, the "Turkic World" is stabilized as a legitimate collective subject within a rule-bounded institutional frame an enabling condition for subsequent framing, institutionalization, codification and path dependence.

4.2. Framing: Drawing the Boundaries of the "We" through a Discourse of Mnemonic Security

Stage claim: If Stage 1 establishes legitimacy, Stage 2 specifies the meaning universe within which that legitimacy is processed and reproduced. Drawing on Mälksoo's (2015) concept of mnemonic security, this stage treats memory not as background symbolism but as a security-relevant domain: narratives of the past become objects to be stabilized because they underpin the continuity of identity and ontological security. In the OTS context, framing operates on two linked levels: it (i) constructs a supranational "Turkic World" identity through shared history, language, and cultural references and (ii) builds a collective mnemonic infrastructure that situates national memories within a broader shared biography. Importantly, the framing logic is calibrated to avoid antagonistic securitization: rather than fixing the "we" through an oppositional Other, post-Istanbul texts tend to pair identity claims with cooperation-oriented agendas (development, connectivity, shared future), keeping mnemonic politics largely non-escalatory while still institutionally productive.

Observable implications: If Stage 2 is operating, texts should display: (i) mnemonic instrumentation (education/curricula, symbols, commemorative calendars, and place-based references) that makes the "shared past" reproducible; (ii) co-occurrence of identity/memory language with cooperation agendas (shared future, connectivity, development) rather than threat-centered framing and (iii) institutional carriers (commissions, routes/networks, awards) that translate memory into repeatable practices.

Evidence Traces: The second stage is characterized by the creation of a collective memory and identity by the OTS through the use of concrete symbols and institutions, and in this context, the Istanbul Summit Declaration (2021: art. 79) establishes a commission to finalize the draft textbooks on "Common Turkic History", "Geography of the Turkic World" and "Common Turkic Literature". This means that a common past becomes producible, teachable and uniform regardless of geographical location, because a common past is thus created and made available for teaching. Furthermore, they also symbolically and spatially anchor them, thus a common memory map and a recognizable center of culture are created. The Samarkand Summit Declaration (2022: art. 6) declares that Samarkand is the "Civilization Capital of the Turkic World", and therefore, a common memory map and a recognizable center of culture are created. The Istanbul Declaration also encourages the development of "cultural routes" and "networks of common history and heritage" (Istanbul Summit Declaration, 2021: art. 67), so the creation of a collective memory and identity is further reinforced.

This shifts heritage from a static marker of identity to a governance project focused on mobility and connectivity, because identity is thus redefined in terms of mobility and connectivity. Identity framing also includes collective risk, and the Astana Declaration (2023: art. 4) commits to marking 6 February as a "Day of Remembrance and Solidarity for Victims of Disasters", which introduces a tragic moment into a shared calendar without turning memory into a source of

antagonism. Visual-symbolic coding reinforces this, because the Bishkek Declaration (2024: art. 5) endorses a "new flag" as a symbol of "Turkic identity, unity, common heritage and values", anchoring the "we" narrative in a stable, repetitive set of signs. The unofficial Shusha summit makes this framing discourse explicit, and the Karabakh Declaration (2024: para. 3) describes the Turkic world as "a family ..." striving for "peace, security, stability, development and prosperity", defining security in terms of belonging and order rather than threat. It connects this identity discourse directly to cooperation, because it requests "periodic consultations on issues of mutual interest at the regional and international levels ..." (Karabakh, 2024: p. 2, paragraph 2), thus creating a framework for cooperation. Finally, the international award of the Istanbul Declaration - "Contribution to the Unity of the Turkic World" (Declaration of the Istanbul Summit, 2021: article 74) - continues to maintain the rhetoric of unity through awards and prizes, replacing the repetition of words with symbolic capital, and therefore, the unity of the Turkic world is further reinforced.

Coding note: Stage 2 is coded when “Turkic World” identity references and common history–language–culture statements co-occur with cooperation agendas (shared future/connectivity/development) and are anchored in mnemonic devices (curricula, symbols, calendars, spatial designations), rather than clustering with threat/deterrence language.

Discrimination vs RH1 and RH2. Stage 2 is not well captured by RH1 (functional coordination/efficiency). Under RH1, symbolic production would remain peripheral to governance-instrument design; here, the “shared past” is standardized and institutionalized via textbooks, symbols, calendars and spatial anchors. Nor does the pattern fit RH2 (threat-centered balancing). Under RH2, one would expect antagonistic securitization and deterrence cues to structure the framing; instead, the texts foreground belonging (“family”), stability and consultation as the preferred grammar of security governance (Karabakh, 2024: para. 3; p. 2, para. 2). The evidence therefore supports a mnemonic-security framing that is institutionally productive yet largely non-confrontational.

Stage output: By the end of Stage 2, the OTS has constructed a shared mnemonic frame that makes the “Turkic World” governable as a collective identity. Memory becomes reproducible through standardized content, symbols, spatial anchors and incentives, while identity claims are paired with cooperation-oriented agendas that prepare the ground for routinization and subsequent institutional deepening.

4.3. Institutionalization: Routine Interactions, Socialization and the Production of “Trust”

The third stage institutionalizes the meaning world established at the second stage, and the shared meaning is now made durable by embedding it in routinized and predictable practices and procedures of the organizations. This does not imply that cooperation is necessarily efficient, but rather that governance structures, organs, meeting formats, and sectoral arrangements are becoming increasingly dense, thus having the effect of stabilizing expectations and anchoring cooperation as a repetitive process. Such routines are crucial because they translate the abstract "we" narrative into concrete and repetitive practices, and this in turn makes it possible over time to manage "security" through broadened and diversified forms other than narrow and treaty-based defense arrangements. Indicators of the third stage should be observable in official texts, and these indicators include: (i) descriptions of the bodies of the organization and their functions (councils, committees, secretariat tasks) as stable and permanent channels rather than one-off or ad hoc endeavors, (ii) standardized meeting formats ("regular," "annual," numbered meetings, or other

prearranged meetings), indicating that interaction is being routinized, (iii) sectoral penetration into fields adjacent to security (civil protection, interior and police, justice, and defense industry) without formal alliance-type commitments, and (iv) explicit linkages between the identity/solidarity rhetoric and the governance routines, indicating that the "we" narrative is sustained through routinized institutional practice, because the fundamental organization blueprint is already visible in the constitutive document.

Article 3 of the Nakhchivan Agreement (2009, art. 3) defines the OTS's main organs--Heads of State, Foreign Ministers, Senior Officials, the Council of Elders, and the Secretariat--thus placing cooperation within a permanent institutional framework rather than a symbolic or merely declarative platform, and post-2021, official texts begin to elaborate this structure into more concrete policy channels that deal with security-related issues without formalizing them as an explicit alliance. One illustrative case is the call for an OTS Civil Protection Mechanism (Istanbul Summit Declaration, 2021, art. 51), which makes crisis coordination a permanent governance mechanism rather than a one-off reaction, because routine is reinforced when summit texts emphasize ongoing, institutionalized consultation. The Samarkand Summit Declaration (2022, art. 18) refers to "periodic" meetings of National Security Council chiefs, thus indicating that security-related coordination is turning into a routine practice rather than a one-off reaction, and in doing so, the institutional vehicles concentrate on resilience, crisis management, and internal-security coordination rather than formal deterrence commitments that would resemble a military alliance.

Institutionalization also occurs via sectoral differentiation, and the Astana Declaration (2023, art. 21) also highlights nascent defence-industrial and military cooperation, while the same summit explicitly plans governance interfaces in the internal security field, therefore the envisaged joint meeting of interior and law-enforcement agencies (Astana 2023, art. 25) indicates that calendars and procedures are being established. These channels are consolidated in 2024, because the Bishkek Declaration (2024, art. 21) notes the first meeting of Interior Ministers and the first meeting of the Council of Justice Ministers, thus indicating that security-adjacent cooperation has been channelized through named institutional bodies with repeatable formats, rather than remaining on the level of vague or one-off declarations. Stage 3 is coded when texts shift from identity statements and symbolic gestures to repeatable organisational formats, new organs, clear mandates, scheduled meetings, and sectoral mechanisms, and key indicators include words signalling routinisation ("regular", "first meeting" as the beginning of an institutional series, numbered meetings, and formal decisions to establish mechanisms) and the appearance of governance interfaces that can bear security-related coordination (such as civil protection mechanisms, interior and justice cooperation, or regular NSC consultations).

Stage 3 is not merely a manifestation of RH1 (functional coordination), though functional needs may contribute to institution-building, because the difference lies in the scope and mode of routinization, and security-related governance channels (civil protection, interior and justice interfaces, regular NSC consultations) are institutionalized in ways that reinforce solidarity narratives, rather than technical efficiency or low-politics cooperation. RH2 (threat-centred balancing) also fails to account for the pattern, since the institutions that emerge are not primarily based on alliance-like commitments or a deterrence-oriented architecture, therefore if RH1 were sufficient, routinization would occur primarily in efficiency-oriented areas, and if RH2 mattered, we would observe institutionalization around deterrence and hard balancing. Instead, routinization occurs through consultation routines and sectoral governance mechanisms that

broaden the definition of "security", without making external threat the central organizing principle, thus by the end of Stage 3, the OTS has transitioned from framing to institutional carriers, and identity and memory-based narratives are now reinforced through routine governance channels, and security-related coordination has become a routinized organizational practice. This institutional groundwork sets the stage for Stage 4, where these routines are further consolidated and codified through written rules, strategies, standards, and legal frameworks, because this process is essential for the long-term stability and effectiveness of the organization.

4.4. Codification: Vision–2040 and Shared Symbolic and Standardizing Moves

Stage claim: Whereas Stage 3 institutionalizes cooperation through routinized channels, Stage 4 consolidates these channels by translating them into written regimes. Codification refers not to repeated declarations of intent or values but to the adoption of textual devices that specify how the organization will function, which goals it will pursue through which instruments, and where shared standards or legal frameworks will be produced. In ontological-security terms, codification supports predictability and continuity by stabilizing expectations in durable textual forms (Giddens, 1991; Mitzen, 2006; Steele, 2008). From a security-governance perspective, it thickens discursive institutional capacity through proceduralization and standardization (Krahmann, 2003; Kirchner and Sperling, 2007; Hameiri and Jones, 2015).

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When Stage 4, or codification, is in place, three different mirrors should be reflected in official documents: procedural codification, which involves written rules standardizing the organization's internal functioning and decision-making, programmatic codification, which includes roadmap-type instruments that translate broad visions into medium-term priorities and concrete, traceable commitments, and sectoral codification, which comprises technical frameworks and standardization clauses in specific policy fields, usually connected to identity-charged objectives. In other words, identity-based visions are transformed into strategies and then into legal-technical language that approaches treaty-like forms. One evident manifestation of this codification process is the adoption of the OTS Rules of Procedure in the Samarkand Summit Declaration (2022, art. 2), which establishes the organization's internal functioning on written rules, standardizing decision-making and coordination and decreasing dependence on ad hoc initiatives. This decision is complemented by the same declaration, which welcomes the “OTS Strategy 2022–2026” (2022, art. 3), a programmatic step that converts broad purposes into a medium-term governance roadmap by matching priorities to specific timelines and tangible areas of cooperation. This programmatic step directly draws on the Istanbul Summit’s earlier approval of the Turkic World Vision–2040 and the recommendation to develop the 2022–2026 Strategic Roadmap (Istanbul Summit Declaration, 2021, art. 2), and therefore, these instruments tie assertions of identity and purpose (“who we are/what we aim for”) to a codified governance trajectory that outlines how the organization will make these goals a reality in practice.

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Observable implications: If Stage 4 is at work, we should witness codification in written texts along three lines: (i) procedural codification by means of written rules which standardise internal organisational functioning and decision-making, (ii) programmatic codification via roadmap-type instruments which transform broad visions into medium-term priorities and concrete, trackable commitments, and (iii) sectoral codification in specific policy fields, e.g. through technical frameworks and standardisation clauses often explicitly tied to identity-based goals, and these reflect a shift from vision to strategy, and from relational broad statements into treaty-like texts.

Evidence traces, including procedural and programmatic codification, indicate that the formal codification of internal operations in written rules and standardisation of decision-making and coordination, reducing the reliance on ad hoc initiatives, is captured by the Samarkand Summit Declaration (2022: art. 2) adoption of the OTS Rules of Procedure, and the same declaration also endorses the "OTS Strategy 2022–2026" (2022: art. 3), which converts overarching goals into a medium-term governance track by tying priorities to timelines and clear areas of cooperation. This programmatic step directly draws on the Istanbul Summit's earlier approval of the Turkic World Vision–2040 and the recommendation to develop the 2022–2026 Strategic Roadmap (Istanbul Summit Declaration, 2021, art. 2), and therefore, these instruments tie assertions of identity and purpose ("who we are/what we aim for") to a codified governance trajectory that outlines how the organization will make these goals a reality in practice.

Evidence traces (sectoral legal and technical codification): Codification extends beyond internal rules and strategy documents into sector-specific regimes. The Bishkek Declaration underscores the signing of the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement (DEPA) and its character as a legal framework (Bishkek, 2024: art. 27), marking a move from generalized coordination calls toward rule-based cooperation in the digital economy and digital trade. The same declaration calls for close cooperation among national standards bodies in standardization and conformity assessment, and for alignment with international standards (Bishkek, 2024: art. 29), thereby activating technical codification through shared baselines. As the security-governance literature emphasizes, standardization enhances measurability and auditability, harmonizes infrastructures and stabilizes cooperation through common technical reference points.

Identity-to-treaty movement: The Gabala Declaration (2025: art. 13) calls for accelerating a draft titled "Treaty on Strategic Partnership, Eternal Friendship and Brotherhood." By linking relational-normative expressions ("eternal friendship and brotherhood") to treaty form, this move seeks to stabilize identity-laden relational expectations through a more binding textual anchor—an instance of codification that goes beyond technical rule-making.

Coding note: Stage 4 is coded when texts introduce or approve written devices that (i) standardize internal functioning (rules of procedure), (ii) programmatically specify priorities and instruments (strategy/roadmap), and/or (iii) codify cooperation in sectoral domains through legal and technical standards (e.g., DEPA; standards-body cooperation). A key indicator is the coupling of identity-laden goals (Vision–2040; relational expressions) to these codified instruments.

Discrimination vs RH1 and RH2: Codification partially overlaps with RH1's expectation that institutions produce rules to reduce transaction costs (Keohane, 1984). Under RH1, codification would be primarily efficiency-oriented rationalization; here, codification also fixes identity-and-purpose claims into a written governance track and stabilizes relational expectations through legal form (March and Olsen, 1989). Under RH2, codification would prioritize binding collective defense provisions and deterrence architecture (Waltz, 1979); instead, the dominant outputs are procedural rules, strategies/roadmaps, standards, and sectoral legal frameworks consistent with broadened security governance rather than an alliance trajectory.

Stage output: By the end of Stage 4, the OTS's governance architecture is stabilized through codified instruments—procedural rules, strategies/roadmaps, legal frameworks, and standardization clauses—that set expectations in text and lay the groundwork for Stage 5, where repetition and reinforcement generate path-dependent effects.

4.5. Path Dependence: Institutional Lock-In, Expectation Stability, and the Routinization of Outputs

Stage Claim: OTS cooperation moves away from one-off summit decisions and towards a routinized path, and this manifests itself in regular meetings, established activity calendars, and rules on how to enlarge and finance the secretariat. Cooperation takes a path-dependent institutional form, and path dependence occurs when initial actions generate increasing returns, positive feedback, and accumulated investments, which makes reversal more expensive (Pierson, 2000; Mahoney and Thelen, 2012; North, 1990). For the purposes of this research, we search for text evidence of "routinization", regular meetings, and subsequent rules as indicators of lock-in in governance rather than evidence of actual implementation, because this indicates that actors continue to invest in OTS infrastructure, increasing the costs of reversing direction.

Observable implicaations: If Stage 5 is correct, official texts should contain more: regular scheduling ("annual", "regular", periodic timeframes); regular meetings ("Xth meeting", enumerating outcomes, discussions of continuing or broadening a format); and financing and follow-up rules (plans for additional personnel and funding, timelines for proposals, monitoring and reporting), and this indicates that actors continue to invest in OTS infrastructure, increasing the costs of reversing direction.

Evidences traces: Evidence of regular scheduling is an indicator of lock-in in text, and the Istanbul Summit Declaration mandates the "Turkic Medical World Congress" annually in October (Istanbul Summit Declaration, 2021: art. 59), which ties cooperation to a calendar rather than a one-off event. From an ontological-security perspective, these cycles allow for stabilizing expectations and a sense of continuity in uncertain environments (Giddens, 1991; Mitzen, 2006; Steele, 2008), and repeated summits emerge as particular formats are repeated over time, thus the Gabala Declaration refers to the fourth meeting of the Secretaries of the Security Councils and documents its outcomes (Gabala, 2025: art. 10).

Over time, institutional memory accumulates and the format becomes routinized and taken for granted, because commitment devices and financial contributions strengthen lock-in through tangible investments and expectations that are difficult to reverse, and the Samarkand Summit agrees to establish the Turkic Investment Fund (TIF) (2022: art. 29). This also applies to cooperation within a standing monetary institution, which is bound to require more coordination and subsequent decisions, and similarly, security-related dialogue becomes routinised, therefore the Astana Declaration supports the regular meetings of Heads of National Security Councils (Astana, 2023: art. 20) and regular informal meetings of Foreign Ministers during the UN General Assembly (Astana, 2023: art. 23), shifting coordination from ad hoc summits to regular rounds of dialogue.

A key aspect of lock-in is the safeguarding of secretariat investments, and the Bishkek Declaration calls for the Working Group on expanding the secretariat's personnel and budget to complete its work and submit a proposal to the 2025 informal summit (Bishkek, 2024: art. 26), linking funding decisions to a proposal timeline and follow-up mechanism, and the Gabala Declaration then endorses the relevant action plan on personnel and budget expansion "in the near future" (Gabala, 2025: art. 20), reinforcing secretariat development via codified procedure. In institutional terms, these developments generate sunk costs and new coordination requirements that yield increasing returns over time, raising the cost of change (North, 1990).

Coding note: Stage 5 is coded when documents exhibit clustered evidence of repetition and routinization: explicit references to periodicity ("annual," "periodic"); evidence of repetitive

meetings ("Xth meeting," reference to continuation, enumerated outcomes); and rules for funding or follow-up (decisions on staffing and budget, action plans, proposal deadlines, monitoring/reporting procedures). Emphasis is placed on repetitive and routinized repetition and routinization, rather than isolated references, and discrimination against RH1 and RH2: According to RH1 (functional coordination/efficiency), repetition and follow-up might simply be evidence of learning, adjustment, or efforts to improve coordination, however, in this case repetition also serves as a continuity-producing device that sustains governance routines tied to collective identity: it sustains a shared sense of "us" through periodic rhythms. Under RH2 (threat-based balancing), one would expect meeting intensity and frequency to correspond to peaks and troughs in perceptions of external threat, but instead, routinization is anchored in calendars and repetitive formats that persist beyond specific crises, therefore the dominant trajectory is most consistent with a path-dependent dynamic: repetitive formats and administrative investments progressively increase reversal costs and entrench cooperation as a routine, taken-for-granted practice of the group.

Stage outcome: At the end of Stage 5, OTS governance is consolidated through repetitive rhythms, repetitive meeting formats, and explicit funding commitments, which increase reversal costs and entrench cooperation as a routine, taken-for-granting practice of the group, because this process has evolved from initial OK and framing, through routinization and rule formulation, into a form of institutional lock-in which makes OTS cooperation permanent.

Conclusion

This article examines the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) as a regional governance arena where security is constructed not only through material threat perceptions but also through the pursuit of ontological security, because building on the ontological security focus on identity continuity and stable routines is crucial. The article shows how the OTS translates shared identity and shared memory claims into concrete institutional practices and situates security concerns within a broader governance agenda, thereby redefining the security relevance of the OTS beyond narrow military coordination through what the article calls discursive institutional governance capacity (DIGC). By this, the article means the way governance tools are textually designed, specified, and routinized in such areas as connectivity, resilience, crisis and disaster coordination, critical infrastructure, and digital governance, which enables the OTS to stabilize its collective self-narrative through predictable institutional formats and codified expectations. The OTS's ontological security strategy is not only about expanding its portfolio of activities, but also about stabilizing its collective self-narrative through predictable institutional formats and codified expectations, because a mechanism-focused analysis reveals that this transformation unfolds according to a five-stage pattern rather than an ad hoc or random one.

Normative authorization provides a basic sense of appropriateness that legitimates cooperation by embedding references to shared language, history, and culture into founding documents and mandate-upgrading texts, while framing defines a specific mnemonic meaning universe in which memory becomes something that can be reproduced institutionally through curricula, symbols, commemorative practices, spatial anchors, and the like. Institutionalization incorporates this meaning universe into organizational routines, bodies, recurring meetings, sectoral interfaces, and so on, which together make security-adjacent coordination repeatable without turning the OTS into an alliance, because codification consolidates these routines by translating them into written regimes, thereby locking expectations into durable textual artefacts. Path dependence is

discernible in serial continuation, calendared repetition, and follow-up and resourcing provisions that normalize cooperation as a standard practice and gradually raise the costs of reversal, consequently, the summit outputs and strategic documents from 2021 to 2025 indicate that the OTS's ability to make security "governable" increasingly relies on texts, formats, regularity, and standardization.

This implies that ontological security should be understood not only in terms of identity discourse but also in relation to institutional design features that stabilize expectations, such as procedural templates, programmatic instruments, recurring meeting formats, and codified standards, therefore, methodologically, the study provides a way to operationalize routinization through observable textual indicators that can be applied to regional organizations. The study also demonstrates that mnemonic security can operate not only as symbolic remembrance but also as an institutional design practice that underpins DIGC, however, the results should be read with the following limitations in mind: first, given the reliance on official documents and discursive–institutional indicators, this analysis does not directly measure implementation outcomes, and second, while the single-case design permits in-depth within-case temporal tracing, it limits broader generalizability.

Future research can thus test the proposed mechanism in comparative perspective, employ mixed-methods combining document analysis with elite interviews and institutional process-tracing evidence, and gather systematic data on projects, budgets, and organizational outputs to assess how, and where, textual governance design is actually translated into implementation, because the article's main contribution is the explanatory power of the five-stage mechanism for tracing how identity continuity is converted into institutional practices. The article also contributes to the debates on regionalism and security governance by conceptualizing mnemonic security as a capacity-generating resource that broadens action repertoires through routinized and codified instruments, moreover, the OTS case provides a useful empirical setting for theorizing how ontological security is translated into institutional outputs in regional organizations, and for clarifying when such path-dependent trajectories are likely to be robust, and when they are fragile, under changing political conditions.

The study’s single-case design allows for close within-case tracing of how identity and mnemonic repertoires become attached to governance instruments, but it also limits the extent to which the findings can be generalized across regional organizations. Future research could therefore examine whether the same mechanism operates in other identity-rich but weakly binding regional organizations, such as ASEAN, the Gulf Cooperation Council, the African Union, or the Commonwealth of Independent States. Such comparisons would help determine whether DIGC emerges mainly where shared identity narratives are institutionally dense, or whether similar design capacities can also develop through functional coordination or threat-driven institutionalization. Comparative work could also assess the conditions under which textual design capacity is translated into implementation capacity, an issue that remains beyond the scope of the present article.

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Financial disclosures

The author declared that this study did not receive any financial support.

Acknowledgements

The author have nothing to acknowledge of any persons, grants, funds, institutions.