Esteemed members of the protocol, Mr. President, Distinguished participants,

At the outset, I would like to greet you all on behalf of H.E. Halil Akın, Secretary General of the Turkic Council. As Turkic Council, it is a great pleasure for us to attend this conference, which is set to analyze integration dynamics throughout Asia with all its political, economic, cultural and security dimensions. In this respect, efforts of TASAM towards enabling regular meetings that bridge political and academic perspectives on a regular basis deserve particular accolade.

In my brief presentation, I will inform about the characteristics of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States -known in short as the Turkic Council- as a political integration initiative. Subsequently, I will try to indicate what kind of a framework the organization fits in among various integration movements in Asia.

As would be remembered, disintegration of the Soviet Union was the first turning point in relations between Turkey and other Turkic Speaking States. Turkey followed the process closely from the beginning and tried to position itself correctly. A Foreign Ministry delegation tasked to produce recommendations on the recognition of states intending to declare independence was dispatched to Central Asia and Azerbaijan in September 1991. The delegation recommended that all Soviet republics -with priority to be given to Turkic states- be recognized. Accordingly, in December 1991, Turkey became the first country to recognize Turkic states diplomatically.

The following year, the process of Turkic Summits was initiated with the first meeting held in Ankara. These meetings, which as a rule bring together six independent Turkic states on Head of State level, have been held ten times until the 2010 Istanbul Summit. At these Summits where political consultations were made and principles for further developing mutual relations were determined, decisions taken have accumulated significantly over time. For instance, content of the Istanbul Summit Declaration of 2010, which included i.e. common statements on regional and international issues, reached 60 articles in total.

During this process that spanned ten Summit meetings and the first 20 years of independence of Turkic states, the need for establishing a permanent structure came naturally on the agenda. At the Tashkent Summit of 1996, it was proposed that a Secretariat be established merely to organize summits. In Astana in 1998, even a statute was accepted, which was not finalized later, however. Finally in 2009, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey officially established the Turkic
Council by signing the Nakhchivan Agreement. The Agreement came into force in 2010 and Ambassador (R) Halil Akıncı of Turkey took Office as the founder Secretary-General.

Following an evolutionary line of development, the Turkic Council emerged as a structure based on a deeper idea than a sole Secretariat. That idea is political integration. As a matter of fact, when we look at the mandate delineated in the Nakhchivan Agreement, the Council is tasked to accomplish the following:

- To consolidate political confidence amongst the parties;
- Adopting common positions in foreign policy;
- Making joint contributions to regional and global peace;
- Free movement of goods, services and capital;
- Joining forces for a balanced economic development;
- Maintaining dialogue on good governance, rule of law and human rights.

One fact that needs to be noted here is that the Turkic Council is the first organization voluntarily established by Turkic States in history. It is of great political significance that Turkic states, after giving countless examples of fighting against each other for many centuries, have come together at this juncture and in this manner. In this sense, establishment of the Turkic Council is a strategic decision. Also, it is the second big turning point in relations among Turkic states after independence.

Having been mandated to carry out comprehensive cooperation towards the main goal of political integration, the Turkic Council has been organized accordingly to work in such a broad area: it is a fully-fledged international organization having an multinational Secretariat with diplomatic status in Istanbul. It has decision-making organs on all levels such as the Council of Heads of State, Council of Foreign Ministers, Senior Officials Committee. The Chairmanship-in-Office which is annually rotated among Member States and the standing consultative body Council of Elders give general direction to the work of the organization. Turkic Council can acquire observer status in other organizations and is able to give observer status to states and organizations in reciprocity.

In the functional sense, it is worth stressing that the Turkic Council is a political umbrella organization for various institutions of the Turkic World. Coordination among the Parliamentary Assembly TURKPA, the cultural organization TURKSOY, international Turkic Academy that is being established in Astana and the Turkic Business Council that was founded last year at the Almaty Summit, is provided by the Turkic Council.
The unifying and regulating function assigned to our organization is also apparent from the change made in the format of the Summits: Summits are now officially called “Turkic Council Summits”. The first Summit was held in Almaty last year. The Almaty Summit was a first as having a particular topic, “Economic Cooperation”. The topic of the second Summit to be held this year in Bishkek is determined “Educational, Scientific and Cultural Cooperation”.

**Distinguished participants**, The Turkic Council, which is finding its place in Asia as a new integration initiative, is first and foremost an organization dedicated to strengthening solidarity and cohesion amongst Turkic states. The most important tenet of the organization is the particular commonality of language, history, culture and identity among Turkic speaking peoples. The stature of Turkic states, which hitherto have not been considered a grouping *per se*, will be significantly enhanced if they become a bloc on the international stage. It is evident that, even though Turkic republics have reached maturity and gained self-confidence in the last 20 years, their collective actions will carry more weight compared to individual action. In this regard, there should be no doubt that Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan will take the place reserved for them, sooner or later.

From a geographical viewpoint, the Turkic Council is a new formation linking Central Asia, Caucasus and the Middle East. Being situated between the eastern and western sides of the Caspian Sea as well as between the Black Sea and Mediterranean basins, the organization is located at the epicenter of strategic routes. It is the heir of the historical Silk Road binding the Asian and European continents. In this sense, it is a movement of integration that visibly carries a Eurasian identity. While the organization can be defined best as regional cooperation, it can also be described as interregional cooperation, thanks to its geographical reach into three major regions.

When this whole area of cooperation is considered in quantitative terms, six independent Turkic states reflect an aggregate potential that is quite striking. They have:

- a total population of 136.6 million; the 9th biggest in the world,
- a total land area of 4.73 million km\(^2\), the 7th biggest in the world,
- a total GDP of 1.41 trillion Dollars; amounting to the 13th biggest economy in the world.

On the other hand, the fact that the GNP of the six countries increased almost six-fold during the last 20 years; whereas their foreign trade volume showed a ten-fold increase, indicates a serious economic dynamism.
The priority task for the Turkic Council is to coordinate collective efforts to make the best out of this potential by taking pertinent steps. Although these countries, which were part of a single system of production in the Soviet times, have made headway in forming their national economies, there is still more to be done for transition to market economy and integration with world markets. Diversification of economic activities and formation of an efficient transport infrastructure integrated with Eurasia are the prominent issues. The main focus in these efforts is to attain results to the benefit of the peoples of member states in the shortest possible time. It is with this understanding that the topic of “Economic Cooperation” was chosen for the first Summit of the Turkic Council.

Turkic states, coming to the forefront in Eurasia with their strategic location, economic dynamism, young population structure and rich natural resources, also display an active political profile. They have managed to become active players in regional and global organizations that they joined as new members as recent as 20 years ago. Some examples to the point are the UN Security Council non-permanent membership terms of Turkey and Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan’s campaign for membership to the Security Council at a time of hardship for the country and the OSCE Astana Summit hosted by Kazakhstan as the Chairman-in-Office of the said organization. As a matter of fact, the numerous challenges that exist in the Asian continent necessitate that these countries multiply their regional and international partnerships and strive to deepen them. It must be acknowledged that, in an environment where the capacity of Euro-Atlantic institutions falls short, political integration initiatives originating from East and Southeast Asia need more time to bear fruit, effects of the security vacuum emanating from Afghanistan are closely felt, conflicts in the Caucasus impede regional cooperation, it is hardly possible to think otherwise.

In the light of all these parameters, it would be pertinent to see the Turkic Council as a new circle among institutional initiatives aiming at integration in Asia. Drawing on a clear sense of regional ownership, it works to produce regional solutions to serve stability, development and security, which are needed by its member states in the face of current challenges in Asia. Naturally, its conducts its efforts in complementarity with other organizations that member states belong to and other initiatives they actively participate in. Similarly, it is empowered by the constructive relations that its member states have with third countries on the regional and global plan. The organization is determined to maintain and develop these relations, since capacity for regional cooperation, which is one of the major shortcomings in Asia, can only be built on such common ground. In this regard, we are already working together with other international organizations.
In conclusion, if we are to liken the network of relationships in the centre of Eurasia to intersecting circles, the Turkic Council is designed to be the “inner circle” that binds together Turkic states. It has the necessary cultural and humanitarian affinity, a sustainable scale with regard to its size and a flexible decision-making mechanism to enable effective cooperation to be an “inner circle”. In contrast to other organizations in the world based on a common language, it bears no trace of colonialism. Neither was it imposed from the outside at the end of war, as was the case in Europe. On the contrary, it is based on full equality, joint political will and a unity of interest.

Like all considerable movements of integration, the integration of the Turkic world will be able to yield its results in the longer term. Despite being in the establishment stage, it has managed to set priorities among a large catalogue of resolutions decided on the Head of State level during 20 years and started economic cooperation. In this process, deepening cultural cooperation will be the cement holding the building blocks of integration.

However its institutional structure shall be shaped, the Turkic Council is sure to present its contribution to the climate of cooperation on the Asian continent. In any case, this contribution can be expected to be an original one.

Thank you for your kind attention.