



15 DECEMBER WORLD TURKIC LANGUAGE FAMILY DAY: MEMORY AND A SHARED FUTURE

The decision taken at UNESCO's 43rd General Conference, held in Samarkand on 3 November 2025, to officially proclaim 15 December as the "World Turkic Language Family Day" should be regarded not merely as a symbolic achievement for the Turkic language and the Turkic world, but as a multi-layered development with historical, cultural, and diplomatic dimensions (UNESCO, 2025). While this decision ensures the international recognition of the ancient heritage of the Turkic languages, it simultaneously provides an institutional framework that strengthens a shared sense of belonging among countries and communities belonging to the Turkic language family and sets a collective orientation toward the future. Decisions of this nature adopted by a norm-setting international organization such as UNESCO go beyond the mere registration of the past and create a new sphere of global visibility centered on shared identity and memory.

From this perspective, the selection of 15 December is not coincidental. One of the earliest and most powerful references to the written history of the Turkic language, the Orkhon Inscriptions, dating back to the eighth century, demonstrate not only the existence of a highly developed written language but also how political consciousness, state tradition, and collective identity were constructed through language. The Orkhon Valley Cultural Landscape, included in UNESCO's World Heritage List, confirms the significance of these inscriptions not only for Turkic history but also as part of humanity's shared cultural heritage (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2025). The Orkhon Inscriptions occupy a foundational place in the history of the Turkic language, as they demonstrate that Turkish was capable, from its earliest periods, of expressing abstract thought, social order, and historical consciousness (Turkish Language Association, 2025).

The introduction of the Orkhon Inscriptions to the modern scholarly world in the late nineteenth century constituted a decisive turning point in the formation of Turkology as an independent academic discipline. Following extensive philological research, the Danish linguist Vilhelm Thomsen identified the inscriptions as Turkish and announced their decipherment to the scholarly community on 15 December 1893. Thomsen's work represented not merely the decoding of a script but the scientific verification of the historical continuity of the Turkic language through modern academic methods. This development facilitated the recognition of the historical existence of the Turks by modern scholarship and laid the groundwork for the institutionalization of Turkology studies. UNESCO's reference to 15 December reflects a deliberate choice to connect this scientific breakthrough with contemporary cultural diplomacy (UNESCO National Commission of Türkiye, 2025).

The emergence of the decision to designate a "World Turkic Language Family Day" is not the result of a singular or sudden cultural demand, but rather the outcome of a multilateral and long-term diplomatic preparation process that matured between 2021 and 2025. The proposal prepared by the Turkic states under Türkiye's coordination was structured in alignment with UNESCO's fundamental principles concerning cultural diversity, multilingualism, and the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, and was brought onto the agenda of the General Conference through consultations across relevant platforms. The maturation of the process at technical, diplomatic, and conceptual levels demonstrates that the decision rests not only on a symbolic but also on an institutional and sustainable foundation. This indicates that the capacity of the Turkic world to act in a coordinated manner on issues of shared belonging, particularly in foundational domains such as language and memory, has been strengthened.

The announcement of the decision in Samarkand also carries particular significance in terms of spatial symbolism. Historically one of the most important centers of knowledge, culture, and civilization, Samarkand occupies a central place in the intellectual memory of the Turkic-Islamic world. The proclamation of the UNESCO decision in this city enabled the establishment of a strong connection between the historical depth of the Turkic languages and the contemporary process of institutional recognition, symbolically affirming the integration of the decision with historical roots.

The reactions observed across the Turkic world following the adoption of the decision demonstrate that the language issue is increasingly becoming a strategic topic. Evaluations conducted within the framework of the Organization of Turkic States emphasize that language is not merely a cultural element but a fundamental binding factor that supports intersocietal interaction, academic cooperation, and long-term integration processes. This approach reveals that language policies are no longer addressed solely within national boundaries but are increasingly considered through a regional and multilateral perspective. The international recognition of 15 December has provided a strong foundation of legitimacy for this perspective (Organization of Turkic States, 2025).

Within this framework, the events held and planned in Turkic states as of 15 December have been shaped not as isolated celebrations but around a shared narrative of language and memory. In Türkiye, the historical development of the Turkic languages and contemporary language policies have been addressed through academic meetings; in Azerbaijan, studies focusing on the

intellectual foundations of the idea of linguistic unity in the Turkic world have come to the fore. Similarly, scientific events held in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan have emphasized the place of Turkic languages within the history of civilization (AzerTAc, 2025; Gov.kz, 2025; Kabar, 2025).

This picture demonstrates that 15 December has the potential to evolve rapidly from a merely symbolic day of commemoration into a shared sense of time and calendar consciousness based on language within the Turkic world. The real impact of days proclaimed by UNESCO can only emerge through sustained academic production, educational policies, and mechanisms of cultural cooperation. In this respect, the “World Turkic Language Family Day” may be regarded as an institutional reference point where discussions on the shared linguistic heritage of the Turkic world will be renewed annually.

In this context, the relationship between UNESCO’s decision and efforts toward a common Turkic alphabet should be considered from a broader perspective. Although the issue of a common alphabet is often framed around technical details or narrow debates, in reality it constitutes a strategic instrument that enhances mutual intelligibility, facilitates the circulation of knowledge, and encourages joint academic production within the Turkic world. The common alphabet does not aim to replace existing national alphabets; rather, it seeks to achieve long-term harmonization in areas such as joint publishing, educational materials, digital content, and scientific communication (Organization of Turkic States, 2024). Indeed, some known works published in Türkiye in recent years based on the common alphabet demonstrate that this process has made a concrete and constructive beginning.

UNESCO’s emphasis on the “language family” reframes the alphabet issue by removing it from a narrow technical framework and repositioning it within a perspective of historical continuity and cultural diversity. The historical experience revealed by the Orkhon Inscriptions demonstrates that the Turks possessed the capacity to use different writing systems across different periods. This historical flexibility indicates that contemporary initiatives for a common alphabet can be approached not as ideological impositions but as cultural and practical facilitators. The proclamation of 15 December situates this debate within an inclusive framework that unites historical memory with visions of the future.

One of the most important academic arenas in which this continuity will be manifested is undoubtedly the Turkology Congress planned to be held in Baku in 2026. Coinciding with the centenary of the 1926 Baku Turkology Congress, this event will provide an opportunity to reassess one of the most significant thresholds in the history of Turkology concerning debates on language, alphabet, and modernization. Accordingly, the coming year is expected to witness numerous international academic conferences, publications, and joint research initiatives related to the Turkic language and culture. When considered together with UNESCO’s decision on 15 December, these

developments indicate that studies on the Turkic language may gain renewed momentum on a global scale.

In conclusion, UNESCO’s proclamation of 15 December as the “World Turkic Language Family Day” constitutes a strategic development that strengthens the position of Turkic languages within universal cultural heritage and enhances the cultural diplomacy capacity of the Turkic world. However, the lasting impact of this decision depends on moving beyond symbolic recognition toward concrete steps aimed at the joint preservation of shared cultural heritage. In this context, the creation of digital archives, the support of joint dictionary and terminology projects, and the development of artificial intelligence-based translation and language technologies designed to enhance mutual intelligibility among Turkic languages offer significant opportunities. Existing artificial intelligence technologies possess the potential to make the proximity among Turkic languages more visible and to accelerate academic production. Rather than becoming entangled in technical details of alphabet debates, advancing through these technological possibilities will contribute more concretely to the strengthening of a shared linguistic consciousness. Through such steps, the Turkic language can be sustainably positioned not merely as an element of historical memory, but as one of the foundational components of a shared future.

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