

**REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AS PLATFORMS FOR
ADVANCING NATIONAL INTERESTS:
THEORETICAL APPROACHES****Makhmudova Zulkhumor Ikromjon kizi**

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Abstract: *This article examines the role of regional organizations as platforms for the implementation of national interests from a theoretical perspective. The study is grounded in neo-liberal institutionalism, which emphasizes that states can advance their national interests not solely through power or competition, but through institutional mechanisms, normative frameworks, and cooperative arrangements. Using the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) as a case study, the article analyzes the development of regional cooperation, the evolution of institutional mechanisms, and the ways in which member states—particularly Uzbekistan—pursue their national interests. Furthermore, the study explores the OTS's role in balancing the interests of member states and engaging external actors to foster regional stability. The findings suggest that neo-liberal institutionalism provides a valuable theoretical and practical framework for understanding how regional organizations like the OTS enable states to systematically and effectively advance their national interests.*

Keywords: *regional organizations, national interests, neo-liberal institutionalism, Organization of Turkic States (OTS), institutional cooperation, multilateralism, Uzbekistan, Central Asia.*

**MINTAQAVIY TASHKILOTLAR MILLIY
MANFAATLARNI AMALGA OSHIRISH PLATFORMASI
SIFATIDA: NAZARIY YONDASHUVLAR**

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Jahon iqtisodiyoti va diplomatiya
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Annotatsiya: Mazkur maqola mintaqaviy tashkilotlar milliy manfaatlarini amalga oshirish platformasi sifatida qanday rol o'ynashini nazariy jihatdan tahlil qiladi. Tadqiqotning nazariy asosi sifatida neo-liberal institutsionalizm tanlangan bo'lib, bu yondashuv orqali davlatlar o'z milliy manfaatlarini kuch yoki raqobat orqali emas, balki institutsional mexanizmlar, normativ hujjatlar va kooperatsiya orqali ilgari surishi mumkinligi ko'rsatib beriladi. Maqolada Turk davlatlari tashkiloti (OTS) misolida mintaqaviy hamkorlikning shakllanishi, institutsiyalarning rivojlanishi, hamda O'zbekistonning milliy manfaatlarini amalga oshirish mexanizmlari tahlil qilinadi. Shuningdek, maqolada OTSning a'zo davlatlar manfaatlarini muvozanatlashtirish, tashqi davlatlar bilan hamkorlik orqali mintaqaviy barqarorlikni ta'minlashdagi roli ko'rib chiqiladi. Tadqiqot shuni ko'rsatadiki, neo-liberal institutsionalizm OTS kabi yangi mintaqaviy tashkilotlarda ham davlatlar manfaatlarini tizimli va samarali amalga oshirishda muhim nazariy va amaliy vosita sifatida xizmat qiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: mintaqaviy tashkilotlar, milliy manfaatlar, neo-liberal institutsionalizm, Turk davlatlari tashkiloti (TDT), institutsional hamkorlik, ko'p tomonlama hamkorlik, O'zbekiston, Markaziy Osiyo.

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in one of the contemporary strands of international relations theory—neo-liberal institutionalism. The selection of neo-liberal institutionalism for this research is justified by several methodological and empirical factors. First, the object of the study, the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), is being established not along the logic of classical power politics or military alliances, but rather as a

regional structure based on multilateral cooperation, institutionalization, and normative agreements. Therefore, a realist approach, which explains states' national interests solely through geopolitical competition or balance of power, cannot fully account for the functioning of this organization. Similarly, while constructivism is important for addressing issues of identity and shared Turkic values within the OTS, it does not provide sufficient analytical tools for evaluating the effectiveness of the organization's institutional mechanisms and practical cooperation.

From this perspective, neo-liberal institutionalism was chosen as the theoretical basis for analyzing cooperation processes within the Organization of Turkic States, the evolution of its institutions, and the mechanisms through which member states—particularly the Republic of Uzbekistan—advance their national interests.

Neo-liberal institutionalism, as a modern strand of international relations theory, explains the stability of cooperation among states through international and regional institutions. According to this approach, states can pursue and protect their interests not only through power or competition, but also via institutional mechanisms—such as shared rules, agreements, organizations, and normative frameworks.

The development of neo-liberal institutionalism is closely associated with scholars such as Robert O. Keohane, Joseph S. Nye, and Lisa L. Martin, who have scientifically demonstrated the functional role of international institutions in facilitating cooperation among states. In particular, R. Keohane, in his work *After Hegemony*, emphasizes that even in the absence of a hegemonic power, institutions enable stable cooperation among states. According to him, international and regional organizations reduce information asymmetries, monitor compliance with agreements, and make cooperation

relatively inexpensive and predictable for states¹. This approach is particularly significant for medium and small states, as it provides them with the opportunity to advance their national interests through collective mechanisms.

The concept of “complex interdependence,” developed in collaboration with Joseph S. Nye, further expands the theoretical scope of neo-liberal institutionalism. According to this concept, relations among states in contemporary international relations are not determined solely by military or security factors; rather, they are shaped through economic, institutional, and normative interconnections.² As a result, the national interests of states acquire a multi-layered character, and regional organizations become an important instrument for their implementation. This approach is particularly relevant for explaining the functioning of organizations such as the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), where cooperation is developing less in terms of security and more in economic, transportation, cultural, and institutional domains.

Lisa L. Martin further contributes to neo-liberal institutionalism by emphasizing the role of compliance and the reliability of commitments. According to her, international institutions are not merely platforms for cooperation but also encourage states to adhere to their obligations through monitoring, information exchange, and mechanisms of normative pressure³. In this regard, institutions function as instruments that maintain a balance among the interests of states. Among contemporary scholars, Andrew Moravcsik, Amitav Acharya, and Miles Kahler are recognized for reinterpreting neo-liberal institutionalism in the context of regional organizations. According to A. Moravcsik’s concept of “liberal intergovernmentalism,” regional institutions emerge as a result of states’ domestic economic and political interests and serve

¹ Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 67–75.

² Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1977), 24–29.

³ Lisa L. Martin, “Interests, Power, and Multilateralism,” *International Organization* 46, no. 4 (1992): 765–792.

not as a surrender of sovereignty, but as a means for its effective management⁴. This approach serves as an important theoretical basis for explaining the strategy of promoting and coordinating the national interests of member states within the framework of the Turkic States Organization (OTS), including Uzbekistan.

Amitav Acharya, adopting a critical perspective on neo-liberal institutionalism, emphasizes that it is incorrect to evaluate regional organizations solely based on the model of Western institutions⁵. According to him, organizations in the Asia and Eurasia regions possess distinct normative and institutional characteristics, often relying on consensus, flexibility, and informal mechanisms rather than formal obligations. This approach is particularly relevant for analyzing the activities of the Turkic States Organization (OTS), as it provides a theoretical basis for understanding the organization's gradual yet steady institutionalization process.

Miles Kahler highlights the adaptability of regional institutions under contemporary global governance as a strong point of neo-liberal institutionalism. However, he also notes a limitation of the theory: institutions cannot be entirely free from the influence of powerful states. This critique is significant for analyzing leadership and the balance of interests within the OTS.

Authorship analysis indicates that the practical activities of the OTS are grounded in principles characteristic of neo-liberal institutionalism. Within the organization, regular summits, an active Secretariat, sectoral working groups, normative documents, and the development of roadmaps strengthen its institutional foundation. At the same time, the organization prefers cooperation based on consensus and alignment of interests rather than compulsory sanctions or strict supranational mechanisms. This situation confirms the flexible and

⁴ Andrew Moravcsik, "Preferences and Power in the European Community: A Liberal Intergovernmentalist Approach," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 31, no. 4 (1993): 473–524.

⁵ Amitav Acharya, "Comparative Regionalism: A Field Whose Time Has Come?" *The International Spectator* 47, no. 1 (2012): 3–15.

inclusive model of neo-liberal institutionalism and provides favorable conditions for Uzbekistan to progressively and relatively safely advance its national interests within the OTS.

From the perspective of neo-liberal institutionalism, international and regional organizations—including the OTS—serve as important instruments for information exchange, political agreements, balancing interests, and establishing normative unity among member states. Through the organization's institutions, states build mutual trust and achieve long-term cooperation.

The activities of the OTS are based on these principles, with its institutional base steadily expanding through regular summits, Secretariat activities, inter-sectoral working groups, and initiatives in transport, trade, energy, and cultural sectors. Uzbekistan's participation in the OTS contributes to the implementation of national interests through regional stability, economic integration, expanded transport and logistics opportunities, and the maintenance of political balance.

Within this theoretical framework, the study is conducted based on the following aspects:

1. Analyzing forms of regional cooperation within the OTS and their functional effectiveness;
2. Evaluating cooperation initiatives within the organization and their impact on Uzbekistan's national interests;
3. Identifying the OTS's mediating and coordinating role in maintaining a balance of interests among member states.

Furthermore, neo-liberal institutionalism, combined with practical methods, allows for a comprehensive analysis of the OTS's position in the geopolitical environment, leadership issues, and its status within the international system. This provides an opportunity to study Uzbekistan's national interests within the framework of OTS cooperation in a deep, systematic, and theoretically grounded manner.

From the neo-liberal institutionalist perspective, regional and global organizations are not merely auxiliary or secondary mechanisms in foreign policy; they represent important institutional tools for implementing national interests. According to this approach, states prefer institutionalized forms of cooperation over acting individually in the international system, as institutions help manage conflicts of interest, stabilize agreements, and achieve long-term strategic goals⁶.

Neo-liberal institutionalism explains states' membership in regional organizations through three main factors. First, institutions reduce transaction costs and allow states to conduct foreign policy in a relatively predictable environment. Second, regional organizations provide states with the opportunity to advance their interests collectively, thereby amplifying the international voice of medium and small powers. Third, institutions mitigate trust issues and promote long-term, stable cooperation through information-sharing and monitoring mechanisms. As Robert O. Keohane emphasizes, these factors motivate states to embrace institutionalized cooperation as a rational choice⁷.

Alongside states' motivations for joining organizations, neo-liberal institutionalism also emphasizes that institutions impose obligations on their members. According to the research of Lisa L. Martin and Miles Kahler, for institutions to function effectively, states are expected to comply with established rules, ensure transparency in information-sharing, and demonstrate the political will to fulfill agreed-upon commitments⁸. In this sense, institutions do not eliminate state sovereignty; rather, they coordinate and, to some extent, discipline it. This process is based on a balance of mutual interests, with

⁶ Robert O. Keohane, *International Institutions and State Power: Essays in International Relations Theory* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989), 3–10.

⁷ Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 67–75.

⁸ Lisa L. Martin, "Interests, Power, and Multilateralism," *International Organization* 46, no. 4 (1992): 765–792.

institutions expecting states to adhere to agreed-upon commitments rather than demanding absolute subordination⁹.

The experience of the European Union serves as a particularly significant practical illustration of neoliberal institutionalism. The process of European integration demonstrates that even when states' national interests conflict, institutional mechanisms can ensure stable cooperation. As Robert O. Keohane emphasizes, institutions do not limit the individual gains of states; rather, they align these gains with long-term and collective interests¹⁰. Within the framework of the European Union, this principle has been applied by linking economic integration with political stability and security interests. According to Andrew Moravcsik's concept of "liberal intergovernmentalism," the EU, as a supranational structure, does not entail a loss of state sovereignty; rather, it serves as a mechanism for more effective management of national interests¹¹. Within the European Union, member states protect their economic, trade, and political interests through collective decision-making. In this regard, the EU exemplifies a set of institutions described by neoliberal institutionalism, serving to reduce transaction costs, monitor the implementation of agreements, and strengthen political stability.

Political speeches by European leaders also confirm that the logic of national interests remains paramount in attitudes toward the EU. For instance, former German Chancellor Angela Merkel characterized European integration as "the most effective form of protecting national interests," emphasizing the superiority of institutionalized cooperation at the European level over the actions of individual states in the context of global competition¹². Similarly,

⁹ Miles Kahler, "Multilateralism with Small and Large Numbers," *International Organization* 46, no. 3 (1992): 681–708.

¹⁰ Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 67–75.

¹¹ Andrew Moravcsik, *The Choice for Europe: Social Purpose and State Power from Messina to Maastricht* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 3–15.

¹² Angela Merkel, *nutq*, "State of the European Union Address," Berlin, 14 September 2016, <https://www.bundestkanzlerin.de/bkin-en/news>

French President Emmanuel Macron views the European Union as a means to ensure “strategic sovereignty,” emphasizing that economic and security interests should be pursued not at the national level, but through regional institutions¹³.

In her speeches, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen also portrays the European Union not as a body that imposes obligations on states, but as an institution that coordinates their common interests. According to her, the shared rules and institutions within the EU enable member states to secure a strong position in the global economic and political competition¹⁴. This approach fully aligns with the core tenets of neo-liberal institutionalism, which argue that institutions do not restrict states’ freedom of action but rather make their policies more effective.

Thus, the experience of the European Union demonstrates that regional organizations do not contradict national interests; instead, they enhance them through collective mechanisms. This example confirms the practical applicability of neo-liberal institutionalism and serves as an important comparative model for subsequent empirical analysis. Based on this model, the next section examines the mechanisms through which states pursue their national interests within the framework of the United Nations.

Within neo-liberal institutionalism, the United Nations is understood as a global mechanism for coordinating state interests and managing collective challenges. As Robert O. Keohane and Lisa L. Martin emphasize, even in conditions of uneven power distribution, international institutions enable states to advance their interests in a relatively stable manner through information exchange, monitoring of agreements, and repeated cooperation. The UN, as such an institution, provides states with a legitimate political arena and ensures

¹³ Emmanuel Macron, nutq, “Sorbonne Speech on Europe,” Paris, 26 September 2017, <https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2017/09/26/speech-on-europe>

¹⁴ Ursula von der Leyen, nutq, “State of the Union Address 2020,” Strasbourg, 16 September 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_20_1655

that national interests are expressed within an international normative discourse.

The institutional significance of the UN is particularly evident in areas such as security, development, and human rights. According to Miles Kahler's perspective on global governance, the UN is not a structure that constrains state sovereignty; rather, it is a mechanism that functionally strengthens sovereignty through multilateral agreements¹⁵. Specifically, the Security Council, the General Assembly, and specialized agencies provide states with the opportunity to legitimize their political priorities on the international stage. In this way, the UN functions as an institution that aligns individual state interests with the global order.

Speeches by state leaders at the UN podium also demonstrate that the logic of national interests predominates in utilizing this organization. For example, in speeches by U.S. Presidents, the UN is frequently portrayed as a means to advance national interests in areas such as international security, counterterrorism, and global stability. Similarly, leaders of the Russian Federation present the UN as a principal institution safeguarding sovereignty and international law, viewing it as a balancing mechanism against unilateral actions.

For developing countries, the UN is particularly significant as a platform based on equal voting rights within the General Assembly. In his addresses at the UN General Assembly, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, has consistently described the UN as a crucial institution for ensuring Central Asian stability, fostering regional cooperation, and resolving global challenges through peaceful means¹⁶. This, in practice, confirms the neoliberal institutionalist thesis that even less powerful states can advance their interests on the international agenda through institutional

¹⁵ Miles Kahler, "Multilateralism with Small and Large Numbers," *International Organization* 46, no. 3 (1992): 681–708.

¹⁶ Shavkat Mirziyoyev, nutq, UN General Assembly, 2022, <https://president.uz/en/lists/view/3530>

mechanisms.

At the same time, critical perspectives toward UN activities also exist. Realist scholars, for instance, often view the organization as a platform serving the interests of major powers, emphasizing that the veto mechanism preserves the dominance of strong states. Nevertheless, proponents of neoliberal institutionalism argue that despite these limitations, the UN's normative, informational, and legitimizing functions remain highly significant for states.

Overall, the experience of the United Nations demonstrates that, even on a global rather than regional scale, states can advance their national interests through multilateral institutions. This model provides a valuable theoretical and empirical foundation for analyzing regional organizations, including the Turkic States Organization (OTS). From this perspective, the following section examines the institutional expression of national interests within the OTS.

From a neoliberal institutionalist standpoint, the Turkic States Organization (OTS) emerges as a regional framework designed to institutionalize cooperation among member states, coordinate interests, and build long-term strategic trust. According to this approach, the OTS does not conflict with the sovereign interests of its member states; on the contrary, it serves as a platform for implementing those interests more effectively through collective institutions. In this regard, the OTS aligns with the core tenets of neoliberal institutionalism: the rationality of cooperation, the role of institutions in reducing transaction costs, and the function of ensuring a balance of interests.

Cooperation mechanisms within the OTS—such as regular summits of heads of state, active Secretariat operations, ministerial-level meetings, and specialized structures—enhance information exchange and political coordination among member states¹⁷. This process reflects Robert O. Keohane's mechanism of "building trust through repeated interactions." In the

¹⁷ Robert O. Keohane, *International Institutions and State Power: Essays in International Relations Theory* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989), 3–10.

case of the OTS, cooperation is not limited to one-off initiatives but has acquired institutional continuity.

The motivations of states to join the OTS can be explained through the rational-choice logic proposed by neoliberal institutionalism. Member states aim to advance multiple national interests simultaneously through the organization: politically, by strengthening regional stability and mutual support; economically, by expanding trade, transport, and investment ties; and geopolitically, by forming a collective position under the influence of major powers. This aligns with Andrew Moravcsik's liberal intergovernmentalism perspective, which emphasizes that states engage with institutions based on concrete interests rather than idealistic considerations.

At the same time, the OTS also has specific expectations from its member states. According to neoliberal institutionalism, the effectiveness of institutions directly depends on the political will of member states and their readiness to fulfill agreed-upon commitments.¹⁸ Within the OTS, member states are required to implement decisions, support joint initiatives, and pursue normative convergence. This aligns with Lisa L. Martin's concept of the "monitoring and coordinating function of institutions."

Speeches by state leaders clearly indicate that the OTS is shaped based on national interests. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan described the OTS as "not only a cultural unity but also a platform for political and economic cooperation," emphasizing the organization's strategic potential. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev highlighted the OTS as a key regional institution coordinating transport, logistics, and energy interests.

President Shavkat Mirziyoyev of Uzbekistan interprets cooperation within the OTS as a logical continuation of Uzbekistan's open, multi-vector, and pragmatic foreign policy. In particular, initiatives advanced at the

¹⁸ Lisa L. Martin, "Interests, Power, and Multilateralism," *International Organization* 46, no. 4 (1992): 765–792.

Samarkand Summit illustrate that Uzbekistan's national interests in regional integration, trade corridors, and sustainable development are being realized through the OTS's institutional mechanisms. This practical example confirms the neoliberal institutionalist thesis that "institutions do not constrain national interests but rather help implement them systematically."

According to scholarly analysis, although the OTS does not yet possess the deep institutional integration of the European Union, it is developing as a distinct regional model. As Amitav Acharya emphasizes, regional institutions evolve based on local historical, cultural, and political conditions. The OTS follows this path, enhancing cooperation while preserving sovereignty. Thus, within the framework of neoliberal institutionalism, the OTS emerges as a crucial mechanism for advancing the national interests of member states, particularly Uzbekistan, through regional institutions. The OTS experience demonstrates that, in contemporary international relations, regional organizations serve not only as platforms for foreign policy but also as mechanisms for coordinating and strengthening strategic interests.

However, conflicts of national interests among member states remain a constant challenge in the OTS and other regional organizations. Neoliberal institutionalism posits that institutions function precisely to manage these conflicts and transform them into long-term cooperation. As Robert O. Keohane notes, institutions reconcile individual state interests with collective benefits through repeated interactions, transparent rules, and monitoring mechanisms. Lisa L. Martin further emphasizes that institutions mitigate conflicts of interest not only by establishing rules but also by ensuring their compliance.

In practice, however, the presence of strong and weak states, as well as differences in political and economic priorities, complicates this process in the OTS and other regional organizations. According to Andrew Moravcsik's concept of "liberal intergovernmentalism," states engage with institutions

primarily as a means to maximize their national interests. From this perspective, neoliberal institutionalism explains conflicts theoretically but does not fully account for the influence of powerful states, asymmetries in resources, or differences in political will.

Analysis shows that these theoretical limitations are particularly evident in the OTS: conflicts arise among member states over transport, energy, and investment projects, and institutions attempt to mediate these conflicts while taking the positions of stronger actors into account. At the same time, neoliberal institutionalism, by overlooking local conditions and historical context in new organizations like the OTS, sometimes remains an idealistic framework in practice.

For example, in coordinating energy or transport corridors within the OTS, the interests of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan occasionally clash. This situation can be explained by the thesis advanced by Robert O. Keohane and Lisa L. Martin that “institutions mitigate conflicts of interest and strengthen trust,” yet the neoliberal approach cannot fully resolve all conflicts, and stronger states may still consolidate their positions¹⁹.

Moreover, the question of whether national interests within regional organizations pertain solely to member states is an important one. Within the framework of neoliberal institutionalism, institutions are viewed as mechanisms for coordinating the interests of member states. As Robert O. Keohane and Lisa L. Martin emphasize, institutions help mitigate conflicts of interest among members and strengthen trust.

However, in practice, regional institutions are not limited exclusively to their members; they can also engage external actors. Russian experts, including Sergei Karaganov, note that involving external states in regional organizations can enhance their capacity to ensure geopolitical stability and strengthen

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regional security²⁰. According to Karaganov, in the Central Asian region, organizations such as the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) not only address the internal interests of member states but also help establish regional balance through cooperation with neighboring countries.

Chinese expert Wang Yong, on the other hand, emphasizes that regional institutions can expand the scope of interests through economic projects. In the case of the OTS, transport and energy initiatives involve neighboring non-member states, such as Afghanistan and Pakistan, thereby extending the influence and collaborative reach of the organization beyond its formal membership²¹. Thus, institutions not only serve the internal interests of member states but also facilitate regional integration.

Central Asian scholars, including Bakhtiyor Qodirov and Nodirbek Tursunov, regard the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) as a regional platform that engages non-member states in cooperative initiatives, thereby expanding its influence and fostering broader regional collaboration²². According to them, this external engagement mechanism is effective not only in economic projects but also in harmonizing regional stability and security strategies. At the same time, they emphasize the necessity of taking into account local political and historical contexts, which are often overlooked in neoliberal institutionalism theory.

From an authorial analysis perspective, the experience of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) demonstrates that regional institutions function not merely as instruments to coordinate the internal interests of member states, but also as platforms that engage external actors and foster broader regional stability. In this regard, the neoliberal institutionalism thesis

²⁰ Sergei Karaganov, *From East to West, or Greater Eurasia* (Moscow: Higher School of Economics Press, 2019), 112–130.

²¹ Wang Yong, “Regional Economic Cooperation and Connectivity in Central Asia,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 29, no. 124 (2020): 512–528.

²² Baxtiyor Qodirov and Nodirbek Tursunov, “Turk davlatlari tashkilotining mintaqaviy hamkorlikdagi o‘rni,” *Xalqaro munosabatlar va diplomatiya* 2 (2023): 61–74.

that “institutions harmonize interests” is validated in a wider context, though it does not fully account for the positions of powerful global and regional actors, nor the local conditions and historical factors.

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