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- ***Eurasia: Politics Today***
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- ***China's Infrastructure Projects in the Black Sea-Caspian Region***

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- begin articles with a brief abstract of 300-500 words and keywords;
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REGIONAL POLICY

THE EU IN CENTRAL ASIA: UNREALIZED AMBITIONS AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

The Soviet Union has disappeared from the maps of the world, leaving the EU a chance to participate in the political processes unfolding in Central Asia, even if the vast spaces between them limited Brussels' involvement in regional policies. This explains the European Commission's succinct definition: "a bridge to China, as well as to Afghanistan and the Middle East" and "a source of significant energy imports for the EU."

For the same reason, Central Asia remains outside the European neighborhood policy; in defiance of the Treaty of Lisbon, its members prefer to act independently on the

international arena: their interest in Central Asia and, therefore, their contributions to the common EU policy in the region differ vastly.

Following the signing of partnership and cooperation agreements with the Central Asian states, the EU became one of their important trade partners and key investors. As such, Brussels pays particular attention to democracy, human rights and civil society in all the regional countries and cooperates with them in the security sphere. Destabilization in Afghanistan has forced border security issues into the focus of corresponding programs and initiatives realized by the EU.

Their growing dependence on external sources of energy and an absence of guaranteed supplies stir up concerns in the EU member-states and in Brussels and breed hopes that Central Asia, with its considerable hydrocarbon resources and advantageous geographic location, may play an important role in energy supplies.

So far, EU policy in Central Asia leaves much to be desired, while the results of the projects it had initiated in the region are clearly contradictory. Brussels has achieved

a lot in diplomatic relations with the local states, which allowed it to expand its trade and economic cooperation and develop political coordination. However, its achievements in many other spheres (human rights, counteracting corruption and economic diversification) are not particularly impressive.

The worsening situation in Afghanistan will generate migration flows to the Central Asian countries and the European Union. Another migration crisis cannot be ruled out.

KEYWORDS: *European Union, Central Asia, energy fuels, security, normative power, resilience.*

Introduction

European Union's highly developed economic potential and its generally successful political integration made it one of the main centers of power in the contemporary world. Its role on the international arena and the consequence of its normative powers in its cooperation with the states in the developing regions of the world attracts a lot of attention; Brussels conveys its rules, norms and values through international and bilateral agreements, development programs, cooperation in the spheres of science, culture and humanitarian aid.

The EU members and the European Union as a whole have established relations with all five post-Soviet Central Asian states—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Central Asia was never a foreign policy priority of the European Union in the global hierarchy partly because, for obvious reasons, it never presented a real threat to its security and political stability.

The European Union has recognized the region's strategic importance in the geopolitical context (China's Belt and Road infrastructural project) and border security threatened by instability in Afghanistan.¹ Furthermore, its relations with energy-rich Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan should allow Brussels to diversify the sources of fuel supplies and limit Russia's role on the fuel market.

The EU Global Strategy: Norms and Values

The EU's Central Asian strategy is realized through its agreements with the local states and regulated by corresponding structures in Brussels. There are, however, certain nuances and specific competencies of the member-states and the EU supranational structures.

¹ See: "Central and South Asia: Connectivity and the Need for Stable Afghanistan," EEAS, 21 July, 2021, available at [https://eeas.europa.eu/regions/europe-and-central-asia/102221/central-and-south-asia-connectivity-and-need-stable-afghanistan_en], 21 August, 2021.

According to Art 3 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU), trade lies within the competence of EU institutions. Foreign policy was institutionalized within the Single European Act (SEA) of 1986, which set up a coordinating council on European Political Cooperation (EPC). Common foreign and security policies were set forth in the Maastricht Treaty of 1992. It was after the Treaty of Lisbon of 2009 that the EU established an External Action Service and appointed a High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

Formally, the Treaty of Lisbon removed some of the “pillars” of competences of European institutions (introduced with the Treaty of Maastricht on 1 November, 1993), yet continued treating foreign policy and security and defense policy as separate spheres of decision-making at the inter-governmental level. Unanimity was required on practically all issues, while the inter-governmental institutions preserved their importance; the European Council has the final say on the most debatable and important issues, i.e., sanctions.²

The Treaty of Lisbon did not establish wide supranational powers in foreign and security policy comparable to those in common commercial policy. The chaos, wherein none of the structures has enough controlling rights or power to pursue foreign and defense policy, is brought about by the fairly complicated institutionalized structures, the presence of the European External Action Service, specialized committees of the European Commission and the preserved powers of national ministries and departments.

There are three outstanding foreign policy problems:

- first, member states prefer to carry out their own regional foreign policy on the sly; this casts aside specialized EU structures;
- second, member states cannot agree among themselves, which de facto paralyzes foreign policy: practically all problems (except the very small number of issues that belong to the exclusive competence of Brussels) should be solved by consensus;
- third, the European Council objects to any encroachments on inter-governmental prerogatives.³

The Treaty of Lisbon significantly altered the overall principles and objectives related, in particular, to external action: “The common commercial policy shall be conducted in the context of the principles and objectives of the Union’s external action,” which means, in plain words, that the EU trade competence should be realized with common external aims and treaties, sustainable development, free and fair trade and the promotion of human rights in mind.⁴

In its strategy for the year 2015, “Trade for All: Towards a More Responsible Trade and Investment Policy,” the European Commission, which plays a strategically important role in common commercial policy, generated a formula: trade policy “will not only project our [EU] interests, but also our [EU] values.”⁵ From that time on, the Trade and Investment Strategy will not be limited to trade in goods and services, but will promote “around the world, values like sustainable development, human rights and the rule of law as the foundation of trade between the EU and the Central Asian countries.”⁶

² See: L. Van Middelaar, *Alarums and Excursions: Improvising Politics on the European Stage*, Agenda Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2019.

³ See: M. Westlake, “Afterword: The European Union’s New Foreign Policy—A Glass Half Full?” in: *The European Union’s New Foreign Policy*, ed. by M. Westlake, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2020, pp. 253-266.

⁴ M. Cremona, *A Quiet Revolution: The Common Commercial Policy Six Years After the Treaty of Lisbon*, Swedish Institute of European Policy Studies, Stockholm, 2017.

⁵ *European Commission. Trade for All: Towards a More Responsible Trade and Investment Policy*, 2015, available at [http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2015/october/tradoc_153846.pdf], 21 August, 2021.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

Having established sustainability as one of the inalienable aims of trade policy and one of specific trade instruments, the European Union shifted the emphasis from inclusion of EU obligations concerning sustainable development to their fulfilment.

The Laeken Declaration on the Future of the European Union of 2001⁷ registered the moving force that turned the EU into a global power that acts like a “force for good in the world.” The Union’s action on the international scene shall be guided by the principles, which have inspired its own creation, development and enlargement, and which it seeks to advance in the wider world...⁸

For a long time, the EU was promoting its norms and values in the developing countries of Central Asia as universal as part of the “soft power” concept. As formulated by Joseph Nye, it meant that the state can achieve the desired results through persuasion and attraction, rather than by coercion and the use of military force.⁹

The European Union developed it as a “normative power” idea elaborated by Ian Manners: “a normative power of an ideational nature characterized by common principles.”¹⁰

Unlike soft power, normative power is not opposed to the use of military force, even if Manners disagreed with those who insisted that the development of military power in the EU is the shortest road towards increasing its weight on the international arena: “It is tempting to think that the EU can have-its-cake-and-eat-it-too in militarizing its normative power.” He argued that it will undermine the EU’s “normative power”¹¹ and that reliance on the power of its norms rather than on the traditional forms of political power sets the EU aside from other international political actors.

In 2011, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton defined normative power as follows: “When so many countries wish to be our partners, we have the opportunity to build relationships that can make a difference to their citizens’ lives, and ours.”¹²

Certain critics of the normative power concept support a theory that claims that the EU does not differ from other international actors: it pursues its own national interests in defiance of moral or normative considerations. It is an instrument of “collective hegemony” added to the already available means used to realize the member countries’ national interests.¹³

The absence of a consensus and unanimity in foreign policy issues in the initial years after the adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon and of a common strategic culture, and the crisis that has changed the global political process forced the EU to revise its international strategy. Its 2016 version presents a more realistic approach to its role in international affairs: idealism restrained by “principled pragmatism.”¹⁴ In its new foreign policy the EU relies on resilience as the main guiding principle.¹⁵ This term, which is mentioned over 30 times in the Strategy, replaced similarly vague concepts of

⁷ See: European Council. Presidency Conclusions: European Council Meeting in Laeken, 14 and 15 December, 2001. Document no. 300/1/01 REV 1, available at [<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/20950/68827.pdf>], 21 August, 2021.

⁸ Treaty on the European Union. Art 21.1.

⁹ See: J.S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Public Affairs, New York, 2004, p. 5.

¹⁰ I. Manners, “Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?” *Journal of Common Market Studies*, No. 40 (2), 2002, p. 252.

¹¹ I. Manners, “Normative Power Europe Reconsidered: Beyond the Crossroads,” *Journal of European Public Policy*, No. 13 (2), 2006, p. 194.

¹² C. Ashton, *A World Built on Co-operation, Sovereignty, Democracy and Stability*, Corvinus University, Budapest, 25 February, 2011, available at [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-11-126_en.htm], 21 August, 2021.

¹³ See: A. Hyde-Price, “‘Normative’ Power Europe: A Realist Critique,” *Journal of European Public Policy*, No. 13 (2), 2006, p. 227.

¹⁴ “Shared Vision. Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union”, European Union, 2016, available at [http://europa.eu/globalstrategy/sites/globalstrategy/files/eugs_review_web.pdf], 21 August, 2021.

¹⁵ See: *Ibidem*.

stability, democratization, human rights and humanitarian security, which inevitably appear in all documents.¹⁶

Resilience was and remains a fairly comprehensive and vague concept, which experts and analysts¹⁷ have tried to clarify, apparently to no avail. No unified approach has been formulated, since in real life resilience refers to a wide range of strategies. According to the EU Strategy, “resilience [is] the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crises.”¹⁸

To specify the main provisions of the EU Global Strategy, in 2017, the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy issued Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council. A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU’s External Action,¹⁹ united Europe has resolved not only to prevent crises or other shocks, but also to ensure the continued functioning of state institutions during and after crises in a number of regions, including Central Asia.

The 2016 Strategy insists that “a resilient society featuring democracy, trust in institutions, and sustainable development lies at the heart of a resilient state,”²⁰ while the Joint Communication specifies that shortcomings in governance, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, gender equality, corruption or the shrinking space for public participation and civil society pose a fundamental challenge to the effectiveness of any society’s development efforts.²¹ An incapable state threatens the vitally important interests of the European Union, its incapability stems from its undemocratic nature and non-observance of human rights: resilience is the only adequate answer to the incapacities of inherently fragile repressive regimes.²²

The EU and the Central Asian Countries: The Beginning

As soon as the Soviet Union disintegrated, the EU and its members demonstrated their readiness to help the Central Asian countries. In 1991, the EU endorsed the TACIS program designed to support those post-Soviet states that undertook European-style reforms.

EU member states (Germany, France, and Great Britain in the first place) established bilateral relations with the Central Asian countries. In 1993, Germany opened embassies in all Central Asian countries and focused on the states with a German diaspora. The biggest such diaspora (nearly 1 million) was located in Kazakhstan; the policy of resettlement of ethnic Germans to Germany has reduced it to 200,000 at most.²³

¹⁶ See: W. Wagner, R. Anholt, “Resilience as the EU Global Strategy’s New Leitmotif: Pragmatic, Problematic or Promising?” *Contemporary Security Policy*, No. 37 (3), 2016, pp. 414-430.

¹⁷ See: P. Bourbeau, *On Resilience*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2018; *The Routledge Handbook of International Resilience*, ed. by D. Chandler, J. Coaffee, Routledge, London, 2016; J. Coaffee, “From Counterterrorism to Resilience,” *The European Legacy*, No. 11 (4), 2006, pp. 389-403.

¹⁸ “Shared Vision, Common Action...”

¹⁹ See: *Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council. A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU’s External Action*, European Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2017.

²⁰ “Shared Vision, Common Action,” p. 24.

²¹ See: *Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council*.

²² See: “Shared Vision, Common Action,” p. 25.

²³ See: T. Apendiyev, N. Abdukadyrov, R. Kubeyev, “History of German Diaspora in Kazakhstan in the Context of Migration System,” *Bulletin of the Georgian National Academy of Sciences*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 2019, pp. 127-134.

By the late 1990s, all Central Asian countries have signed partnership and cooperation agreements: in 1995, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan led the way; Uzbekistan followed in 1996. In 2004, Tajikistan signed an agreement on trade and cooperation that remained unratified until 2010.

The neutrality of Turkmenistan complicated its relations with the EU; the bilateral trade and cooperation agreement signed in 1998 remains unratified and uncoordinated. The European Parliament does not seek to expand its trade and economic relations with Turkmenistan due to the complicated situation with human rights in the country. Their economic relations are currently regulated by the Interim Trade Agreement.²⁴ Moreover, it was only in 2019 that the EU managed to finally open its office in Ashgabat.

The Partnership and Cooperation Agreements with the Central Asian countries are based on the supremacy of universal values; they are expected to support democracy and the market economy principles.²⁵ In its agreements with the regional states, the EU paid particular attention to different aspects of universal values. The agreement with Uzbekistan, for example, contains a section that obliges the sides to expand their cooperation, aim to establish functioning democratic institutions and ensure efficient protection of human rights and basic freedoms.

TACIS is the main instrument of EU assistance extended in exchange for reforms. It was specified that its efficiency directly depends on market and democratic reforms.²⁶ This means, in particular, that continued assistance depended on the achievements of the preceding period. According to EU bureaucrats, the program was exceptionally successful.²⁷

Russian experts have criticized this program since a considerable part of European money (allocated both by Brussels and on a bilateral basis) was spent on business trips of European experts to the region and on educational programs for Central Asian students in Europe. In short, money was used to create jobs in EU member countries. "The suggestions to use this money for business trips of experts from Russia are rejected by EU as utopian. Meanwhile, the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development as an investor and Chinese companies as economic operators have been cooperating for the last 40 years. Tens of thousands of kilometers of highways in all corners of the world, including Central Asia, have been built."²⁸ The Central Asian countries have already received €150-200 million under the TACIS program. Tajikistan, with about €400 million, was the main benefactor: it required foreign assistance to recover after the civil war.²⁹

The European Union paid particular attention to cooperation in the energy sphere. In 1993, it initiated TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia), a multilateral cooperation program in the energy sphere; Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia were also involved. By 1998, the sides arrived at the Baku Declaration on the revival of the Great Silk Road to connect Europe, the Caucasus and Asia.

²⁴ See: Interim Trade Agreement with Turkmenistan. European Parliament, available at [<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/delegations/en/interim-trade-agreement-with-turkmenista/product-details/20200407DPU25216>], 21 August, 2021.

²⁵ See: Partnership and Co-operation Agreement Establishing a Partnership between the European Communities and their Member States, of the One part, and the Republic of Kazakhstan, of the Other part [1999], Art 1.

²⁶ See: Council Regulation (Euratom, EEC), No. 2053/93 of 19 July, 1993 Concerning the Provision of Technical Assistance to Economic Reform and Recovery in the Independent States of the Former Soviet Union and Mongolia.

²⁷ See: A. Frenz, *The European Commission's TACIS programme (1991-2006): A Success Story*, European Commission, 2007, available at [http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/regional-cooperation/enpi-east/documents/annual_programmes/tacis_success_story_final_en.pdf], 21 August, 2021.

²⁸ V.F. Priakhin, "Evropeyskiy soiuz i Tsentralnaia Azia: Poiski novoy kontseptsii sotrudnichestva," *Aktualnye problemy Evropy*, No. 5, 2011, p. 137.

²⁹ See: *Central Asia Strategy Paper for 2002-2006 and TACIS Central Asia Indicative Programme 2002-2004*, European Commission, available at [http://www.eeas.europa.eu/central_asia/rsp/02_06_en.pdf], 21 August, 2021; *TACIS Central Asia Indicative Programme 2005-2006*, European Commission available at [http://eeas.europa.eu/asia/docs/rsp/tacis/05_06.en.pdf], 21 August, 2021.

In the 1990s, Central Asian countries were among the first 30 states to sign and ratify the Energy Charter; they accepted the Energy Charter Protocol on energy efficiency and related environmental aspects. The Energy Charter, an instrument of an “open and non-discriminatory energy market,” came into force in 1998.³⁰

In 1995, the European Commission launched the program of Interstate Oil and Gas Transportation to Europe (INOGATE), aiming to integrate the energy markets, achieve sustainable power production and coordinate investment projects. Realized within the European Eastern Partnership Neighborhood Policy, it was applied to the Central Asian states as well.

In 2004, the European Union tried to set up a multilateral political dialog regarding the energy and transportation spheres between the Caspian and Black Sea littoral states and Central Asian countries known as the “Baku Initiative”³¹ to integrate the energy markets of the 12 states involved in the program and the EU market, a logical development of the INOGATE program.

Various programs were the products of the EU’s desire to establish a unified energy market of the EU-Black Sea-Caspian-Central Asian countries in order to decrease the energy vulnerability of the European Union. The idea to create this energy market was formulated by Brussels in 2003 as “the third route of natural gas.”³² The participants of the meeting in Astana in 2006 discussed alternative routes and infrastructure, yet produced no significant results.³³

The EU launched several programs in the security sphere, including the Border Management Program in Central Asia — BOMCA (2003) and the Central Asia Drug Action Program — CADAP (2001). Commenced as working agreements between the European Commission and UNDP with more or less similar aims and intended as instruments of improving transborder cooperation, legal transit trade and fighting drug trafficking, they relied on EU funding of €5-6 million a year.

On the whole, the EU programs and mechanisms brought no significant results; internal political reforms, intended to copy the European patterns, remained unrealized; none of the aims declared in the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement was achieved. The pinching conditions under which assistance within TACIS was extended brought no positive results: Central Asian countries failed to observe their obligations.

The EU in Central Asia: Initial Strategy

In 2007, the EU adopted its first Central Asian Strategy.³⁴

By that time, the relations between the EU and the Central Asian countries were structured through a set of bilateral agreements and short-term sectoral interaction programs. Two years before,

³⁰ “Energy Charter Treaty Overview,” available at [<http://www.encharter.org/index.php?id=28>], 21 August, 2021.

³¹ *Conclusions of the Ministerial Conference on Energy Co-operation between the EU, the Caspian Littoral States and their neighbouring Countries*, available at [<http://w1.inogate.org/attachments/article/89/baku.pdf>], 21 August, 2021.

³² European Parliament and the Council (2003) Decision no 1229/2003/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2003 Laying Down a Series of Guidelines for Trans-European Energy Networks and Repealing Decision No 1254/96/EC, available at [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3A0J.L_2003.176.01.0011.01.ENG], 21 August, 2021.

³³ See: *Ministerial Declaration on Enhanced Energy Co-operation between the EU, the Littoral States of the Black and Caspian Seas and their Neighbouring Countries*, Astana, 30 November, 2006, available at [http://w1.inogate.org/attachments/article/90/FINAL_Astana_Conclusions_-_Road_Map_30-11-06_eng.pdf], 21 August, 2021.

³⁴ See: *The European Union and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership*, 10113/07. Council of the EU. Brussels, 2007, available at [<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10113-2007-INIT/en/pdf>], 21 August, 2021.

in 2005 the European Union had appointed its Special Representative for Central Asia: it clearly planned to deepen its cooperation with the local countries.

As part of the initial Strategy, the EU had initiated dialogs on human rights as the most important element of political cooperation. The first of these dialogs took place in 2007 between the EU and Uzbekistan, followed by similar meetings in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Turkmenistan, likewise, organized such discussions.

The EU hoped to persuade the Central Asian countries to adopt the European human rights standards by the prospects of wider cooperation, yet the results were not particularly impressive. Kazakhstan was the only country that adopted a National Human Rights Action Plan. Elaborated together with the UNDP and coordinated by Great Britain and the Netherlands, the plan did not demonstrate impressive results once implemented: according to the EU Delegation in Kazakhstan, the declared aims were fulfilled by 22.6%.³⁵

The EU revised its financial assistance instruments: according to its new approach to the relations with the Central Asian countries, it extended its financial aid not within TACIS, but within the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI), which coordinated development assistance programs on a global scale.

The European Union decided to concentrate on the potentially successful cooperation projects. The Strategy suggested “to make a special effort to apply its principled approach in ways that are realistically operational in this difficult political environment.”³⁶ An increase of annual targeted aid during the 2007-2013 budget period to €750 million was planned; a quarter of all subsidies were used to develop efficient administration. Poverty reduction and gradual movement towards social and economic stability were seen as preliminary conditions for the realization of the agenda: development assistance and state administration reforms became interconnected.³⁷

From that time on, the EU paid more attention to the energy issues and export of hydrocarbon resources from the Central Asian countries. Its 2007 strategy defined a direct gas delivery route from Central Asia to Europe as one of the EU national interests.³⁸ In 2008, the mandate of the EU Special Representative was extended to “provide input to the formulation of energy security aspects.”³⁹ The European Union put in significant efforts to achieve its aim—direct gas deliveries from Central Asia.

In an absence of an efficient multilateral interaction format in the energy sphere and due to the strained relations among the Central Asian states,⁴⁰ the EU had no choice but to rely on bilateral Memorandums on Mutual Understanding. Kazakhstan signed this document in 2006, followed by Turkmenistan in 2008 and Uzbekistan in 2011.

In 2011, President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso visited Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan to persuade their leaders to deliver gas to Europe along the Southern Gas Corridor, “a stepping stone in increasing European Energy security.”⁴¹ The total cost of the Southern Gas Corridor

³⁵ See: *Kazakhstan has Complied with the Recommendations of the 2009-2012 National Human Rights Action Plan only by 23%*, EU Delegation to Kazakhstan, Astana, 13 March 2013, available at [http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/kazakhstan/press_corner/all_news/news/2013/13.03.2013_en.htm], 21 August 2021.

³⁶ *Into Eurasia: Monitoring the EU's Central Asia Strategy*, ed. by M. Emerson, J. Boonstra, Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), Brussels; Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE), Madrid, 2010, p. 9.

³⁷ See: G. Volishin, *The European Union's Normative Power in Central Asia*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2014, p. 43.

³⁸ See: *The European Union and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership*, 10113/07, pp. 18-19.

³⁹ *Council Joint Action 2008/107/CFSP of 12 February 2008 Extending the Mandate of the European Union Special Representative for Central Asia*, Art 3 (1).

⁴⁰ See: G.Ch. Akunova, “Strany Tsentralnoy Azii: trudnosti na puti sblizheniia,” *Problemy postsovetskogo prostranstva*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 2020, pp. 300-311, available at [<https://doi.org/10.24975/2313-8920-2020-7-3-300-311>].

⁴¹ *Joint Declaration on the Southern Gas Corridor of José Manuel Durão Barroso (President of the European Commission) and Ilham Aliyev (President of the Republic of Azerbaijan)*, The Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku, 13 January 2011, available at [http://ec.europa.eu/energy/infrastructure/strategy/doc/2011_01_13_joint_declaration_southern_corridor.pdf], 21 August, 2021.

was assessed at €40 billion.⁴² The Trans Adriatic Pipeline is expected to cost €4.5 billion; the Nabucco West project, about €8 billion.⁴³

Prior to 2011, Nabucco (later renamed Nabucco West) had been the main pipeline project and enjoyed EU support: “The EU planned to increase its political influence in Azerbaijan and expand its energy cooperation with Turkmenistan to access Turkmenistan’s hydrocarbons. It could not, however, realize the Nabucco project and the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline as its component part. It turned out that hydrocarbon resources were not as vast as expected.”⁴⁴

As soon as realization of the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) project began, the European Commission announced that it fully supported both projects. Approved by the European Commission in 2016, the project was completed in 2020.

The anticipated effect, however, was not achieved: these economic projects were realized for political and security considerations; the EU wanted to limit Russia’s presence on the European energy market and ignored its economic advantages—lower prices and easily accessible pipeline systems.

The 2007 Strategy paid a lot of attention to security; Central Asia was seen and defined as a source of threats and challenges. The EU Strategic Interests: Security and Stability Section says, in part, that the EU is concerned with security and stability in Central Asia since “strategic, political and economic developments, as well as increasing trans-regional challenges in Central Asia impact EU interests both directly and indirectly.”⁴⁵ The BOMCA and CADAP programs are the EU’s most important initiatives when it comes to opposing terrorism, proliferation of WMD, instability caused by regional conflicts, failed states and illegal migration.⁴⁶

The EU generally failed to realize its impressive and ambitious plans: no comprehensive security concept was formulated for Afghanistan and Central Asia.⁴⁷ On the whole, in the past the greater part of the EU financial aid to Central Asia was separated from Afghanistan. In recent years, however, these two trends have become somewhat intertwined due to the “inclusion of Afghanistan in Central Asian actions,” since Central Asia demonstrates a far greater interest in Afghanistan today. In 2021, it was decided to increase BOMCA and BOMNAF (Border Management in Northern Afghanistan) funding for 2021-2025.⁴⁸

The EU policy of cooperation with Muslim countries of Central Asia, taking into account their geographical location, in particular with respect to Afghanistan, was presented as an achievement of its normative power. It demonstrated the EU’s ability to maintain special relations with the Muslim states, while promoting their values and norms, which demanded geopolitical and geocultural balancing.⁴⁹ At the same time, much of what the EU was doing to cope with problems did not account for regional and national specifics. Instead of coping with the problems of drug cartels and their considerable impact on the local elites, the BOMCA program was spearheaded against corruption in the ranks of the border guards.⁵⁰

⁴² See: Trans Adriatic Pipeline, TAP (2015) Southern Gas Corridor, available at [<http://www.tap-ag.com/the-pipeline/the-big-picture/southern-gas-corridor>], 21 August, 2021.

⁴³ See: “Nabucco Gas Pipeline,” Bankwatch Network, available at [<https://bankwatch.org/project/nabucco-gas-pipeline>], 21 August, 2021.

⁴⁴ S.S. Zhiltsov, “Energeticheskaya politika Turtsii v Kaspiyskom regione,” *Geoekonomika energetiki*, No. 2 (14), 2021, pp. 32-47, available at [DOI: 10.48137/2687-0703_2021_14_2_32].

⁴⁵ *The European Union and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership*, 10113/07, p. 4.

⁴⁶ See: *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 6.

⁴⁷ S. Peyrouse, J. Boonstra, M. Laruelle, “Security and Development Approaches to Central Asia: The EU Compared to China and Russia,” Working Paper No. 11, *EU-Central Asia Monitoring (EUCAM)*, 2012, p. 16.

⁴⁸ “Ambassador Opens Inception Webinar for BOMCA 10,” EEAS, available at [https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/turkmenistan_en/100862/Ambassador%20opens%20inception%20webinar%20for%20BOMCA%2010], 21 August, 2021.

⁴⁹ See: E. Kavalski, *World Politics at the Edge of Chaos: Reflections on Complexity and Global Life*, State University of New York Press, New York, 2015, p. 23.

⁵⁰ See: K. Czerniecka, J. Heathershaw, “Security Assistance and Border Management,” in: *The European Union and Central Asia*, ed. by A. Warkotsch, Routledge, London & New York, 2011, pp. 77-101.

Amid the failed “color revolutions” in some of the former Soviet republics and the new integration formats across the CIS territory, European influence on the political processes unfolding across post-Soviet Eurasia, including Central Asia, shrank considerably. At the same time, other actors—regional (Russia) and extra-regional (the U.S., China and Iran)—became much more visible in this part of the former Soviet Union.⁵¹

Very much like the EU Neighborhood Policy, the 2007 Strategy initially intended to foster regional cooperation, could not be implemented in the form of a regional dialogue under the EU aegis: the partners were far more interested in direct cooperation with the European Union.

The EU concept of conditioned cooperation with the Central Asian countries (aid and reform policy) was never clearly outlined; it was not supported by its implementation mechanisms either in its 2007 or later (2015) variants. It specified no circumstances under which the EU would have limited its technical and economic assistance, except for a general statement about disregard of European norms and values. The 2015 variant contains a statement made by the Director-General of the Union for External Policy: “The EU should not and cannot compete with Russia and China in the region.” It was stated in so many words that the EU strategy in Central Asia with its limited resources had to face many problems, political backslide, corruption and the local states’ inability to materialize the forecasted gas deliveries. In short, “the EU’s engagement in Central Asia is one of limited to no impact.”⁵²

The EU in Central Asia: New Strategy

The global financial crisis, migration problems and, on the whole, the systemic crisis of the EU forced Brussels to revise its foreign policy priorities, including those in the neighboring areas. In 2019, it adopted a strategy called *The EU and Central Asia: New Opportunities for a Stronger Partnership*.⁵³

It was much more positive than the previous one: it indicated the readiness of the EU to support Uzbekistan in its desire to join the WTO, to improve trade and transportation, to facilitate access to the Generalized Scheme of Preferences (GSP) and expand the partnership and cooperation agreements. In 2015, for example, the European Union and Kazakhstan had signed an Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, which came into power in 2020: Kazakhstan’s EAEU membership prolonged the ratification process. Similar agreements with Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are being negotiated. On the whole, the new Strategy offered new opportunities for cooperation and economic development.⁵⁴

In addition to the EU’s traditional aims in the human rights sphere the Strategy specified sustainable development as a point of fundamental importance. It is balanced with the other EU docu-

⁵¹ See: Yu.I. Nadochey, I.A. Safranchuk, “Evropeyskiy soiuz v Tsentralnoy Azii: granitsy normativnoy sily” (Review of the book by O.A. Spayser *Vliyaniye Evropeyskogo soiuz v Tsentralnoy Azii. Geopoliticheskie vyzovy i otvety*), *Vestnik mezhdunarodnykh organizatsiy*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 2018, pp. 280-286, available at [DOI: 10.17323/1996-7845-2018-04-14].

⁵² European Union, Directorate-General for External Policies, *Implementation and Review of the European Union — Central Asia Strategy: Recommendations for EU Action*, 2016, available at [Doi:10.2861/58706].

⁵³ See: *The EU and Central Asia: New Opportunities for a Stronger Partnership*, European Commission, 15 May, 2019, available at [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/joint_communication_-_the_eu_and_central_asia_-_new_opportunities_for_a_stronger_partnership.pdf], 21 August, 2021.

⁵⁴ See: J. Boonstra, “A New EU Strategy for Central Asia: From Challenges to Opportunities”, *ISPI*, 3 October, 2019, available at [https://www.ispionline.it/en/pubblicazione/new-eu-strategy-central-asia-challenges-opportunities-24062], 21 August, 2021.

ments of prime importance, EU Global Strategy 2016 among them. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were included in the Connecting Europe and Asia Strategy 2018.⁵⁵ The new document focuses on efficient management instead of political and economic reforms promoted in the 1990s.⁵⁶ It was the EU's response to the Chinese Belt and Road initiative: Brussels was ready to compete with or even oppose Beijing to prevent Central Asia's dependence on China. Very much like in the past, the EU is ready to pour several billion euros into new or realized projects;⁵⁷ China has already invested \$20 billion in Kazakhstan.⁵⁸ Peter Burian, EU Special Representative for Central Asia, criticized China's BRI project: to reveal its economic potential, the region needed more than "big infrastructure projects or trains delivering goods that only run through these countries" and "there is a need to have real, long-term investments that bring benefits to local communities, based on sustainable and long-standing solutions."⁵⁹

"Sustainable connectivity" as a declared objective is ambiguous; it has no clear short-term aims and, therefore, may face the problems that had prevented democratic transfer to Central Asia in the past. At the same time, today the EU is obviously abandoning its previous goals of achieving wide-scale reforms in Central Asia and approving the principles of sustainable development according to European standards, and thus differs from some other Western actors in the region.⁶⁰ However, such an aspiration of the European Union comes up against criticism on the part of many analysts.⁶¹

The EU Strategy for Central Asia replaced its basic aims and principles for transit states with the concept of resilience, which attracted a barrage of criticism.⁶² This trick allowed the EU to shift its responsibility of monitoring the fulfillment of human rights and freedoms in these countries to their civil societies. In fact, the poorly coordinated actions of the national delegations and EU offices (the European Commission and the European External Action Service [EEAS]) in the regional countries create a lot of problems. According to the experts of the Europe-Central Asia Monitoring (EUCAM) center, the countries that have no ties with the regional states, i.e. Spain, are poorly informed about the EU's goals in Central Asia.⁶³ Central Asian actors, likewise, are dissatisfied with the European projects launched to promote their development: "They have grandiose objectives, but only modest means, there is an absence of transparency in the recruitment of European companies to work on EU programs in the region, there are disproportionate salary levels offered to European expatriates, a lack

⁵⁵ See: *Connecting Europe and Asia — Building Blocks for an EU Strategy*, European Commission, 19 September 2018, available at [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/joint_communication_-_connecting_europe_and_asia_-_building_blocks_for_an_eu_strategy_2018-09-19.pdf], 21 August, 2021.

⁵⁶ See: N. Kassenova, "Central Asia and the EU Connectivity Strategy: Rising to the Good Governance Challenge," *PONARS Eurasia*, 9 October, 2019, available at [<https://www.ponarseurasia.org/central-asia-and-the-eu-connectivity-strategy-rising-to-the-good-governance-challenge/>], 21 August, 2021.

⁵⁷ See: E.M. Kuzmina, "'Bolshaia Evrazia': interesy i vozmozhnosti Rossii pri vzaimodeystvii s Kitaem," *Problemy postsovetского prostranstva*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 2017, pp. 229-239, available at [<https://doi.org/10.24975/2313-8920-2017-4-3-229-239>].

⁵⁸ See: "China Global Investment Tracker," American Enterprise Institute, available at [<https://www.aei.org/china-global-investment-tracker/>], 21 August, 2021.

⁵⁹ P. Burian, "Central Asia has Always Been Important for Europe," *IPS*, 27 August 2019, available at [<https://www.ips-journal.eu/topics/foreign-and-security-policy/central-asia-has-always-been-important-for-europe-3676/>], 21 August, 2021.

⁶⁰ See: N.J. Melvin, "The European Union's Strategic Role in Central Asia," in: *Engaging Central Asia*, ed. by N.J. Melvin, Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels, 2008, pp. 137-151.

⁶¹ See: *Ibidem*.

⁶² See: J. Boonstra, M. Laruelle, "A New EU-Central Asia Strategy: Deepening Relationships and Generating Long-Lasting Impact," EUCAM, available at [<https://eucentralasia.eu/ru/a-new-eu-central-asia-strategy-deepening-relationships-and-generating-long-lasting-impact-ru/>], 21 August, 2021.

⁶³ See: J. Boonstra, "Seven Pointers for the New EUSR for Central Asia," EUCAM, 22 June, 2021, available at [<https://eucentralasia.eu/seven-pointers-for-the-new-eusr-for-central-asia/>], 21 August, 2021.

of monitoring of allocated funds (which favors to misappropriation), and an overly opaque bureaucracy for NGOs and social activists who wish to benefit from offered opportunities.”⁶⁴

Experts of the Russian Council for Foreign Affairs have pointed at three major changes in Brussels’ new strategy:

- first, security and stability as two main factors;
- second, admission that other international organizations and integration structures have their own roles to play in the comprehensive system of regional relationships;
- third, the non-contradictory nature of expanded partnership agreements between the EU and the regional states with the Eurasian Economic Union.”⁶⁵

Conclusion

The European Union, which is responsible for 30% of the region’s total trade turnover, was and remains the biggest economic partner of the Central Asian countries. Real figures, however, demonstrate that trade is stagnating. Between 2007 and 2019, it increased by 16% (which is much lower than the increase in EU’s trade turnover with the rest of the world—39% for the same period). Its share (less than 1% in the total volume of the EU foreign trade and investments) is negligible.

Pursued in the EU’s strategic interests, its policy in Central Asia is highly pragmatic. On the other hand, unlike the EU, which is guided by the European agenda in all spheres, its separate members are guided by their own interests. The Central Asian states have no strategies related to interaction with the EU either at the national or regional levels. The Central Asian elites currently consider the EU a donor that funds their activities on a scale that is unattainable for their budgets.

There are two main reasons why the EU has not become an influential actor in Central Asia: first, its determination to promote democracy, civil society and human rights were interpreted as destabilizing technologies of color revolutions. In fact, it was only recently that Brussels discontinued its practice of exporting its values to the Central Asian countries.⁶⁶ European experts have registered the unsatisfactory results: “They learned how to build democratic institutions, with a proper façade but little content.”⁶⁷ Second, at no time Central Asia was seen by Brussels as a regional priority, hence the limited economic and military assistance. This means that the EU is no rival for Russia and China in the geopolitical and geo-economic confrontation in the region.

⁶⁴ S. Peyrouse, “A Donor without Influence. The European Union in Central Asia,” in: *Europe’s Eurasian Challenge*, PONARS, Washington, 2017, pp. 61-66.

⁶⁵ N. Mendkovich, “Novaia strategii ES v Tsentralnoy Azii,” *RSMD*, 24 January, 2020, available at [<https://russian-council.ru/analytics-and-comments/columns/asian-kaleidoscope/novaya-strategiya-es-v-tsentralnoy-azii/>], 21 August, 2021.

⁶⁶ See: S.S. Zhiltsov, “Borba za Evraziuu,” *Problemy postsovetskogo prostranstva*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2021, pp. 8-19, available at [<https://doi.org/10.24975/2313-8920-2021-8-1-8-19>].

⁶⁷ K. Kluczevska, S. Dzhuraev, “The EU and Central Asia: The Nuances of an ‘Aided’ Partnership,” in: *Managing Security Threats along the EU’s Eastern Flanks*, ed. by R. Fawn, Springer Nature, Cham, 2020, p. 238.

CICA AND ASIAN COOPERATION ORGANIZATIONS (SCO, ASEAN, OIC): COOPERATION POTENTIAL AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

The article contains an overview of the activities of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), a structure aimed at creating a comprehensive mechanism for developing and reconciling the positions of Asian countries on key security issues. The CICA is a forum that many regional states have joined as permanent participants. Eight countries and five international organizations, including the U.N., currently have an observer status at the CICA, which cooperates with existing regional organizations such as SCO, ASEAN, and OIC in a number of specific areas. The current concept of

CICA's work is aligned with five main spheres: military and political collaboration; the fight against new challenges and threats, including terrorism; drug trafficking; transnational crime and human trafficking; as well as the economic, environmental and human dimensions.

Cooperation with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, whose members (including the observer countries) are all also members of the Conference, will be of great importance for the further development of CICA. The presence of both resource-producing countries and large oil and gas importers in the organization creates the pre-

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conditions for the formation of an energy block within its framework, which will increase the energy security of its member states. The authors note that the interaction between ASEAN and the CICA can be based on five points required for building a “community of common destiny,” which were set forth by President of the People’s Republic of China Xi Jinping in Jakarta:

- (1) adhere to the principle of trust and strive for good neighborliness;
- (2) adhere to the principle of cooperation and mutual benefit;
- (3) constantly provide mutual assistance;
- (4) adhere to the principle of “living in perfect harmony”;

- (5) adhere to the principle of openness and tolerance.

The authors note that the problem of Afghanistan can become a point of contact and development of joint approaches and strategies of the CICA and the OIC in the context of international and regional security. The author concludes that the transformation of the CICA into the Organization for Security and Development of Asia, proposed by Kazakhstan, would mean an expansion of the conference format and a turn towards solving new problems. In addition, the urgent task of the CICA at present is the transition to qualitatively new levels of cooperation—preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention.

KEYWORDS: CICA, SCO, Belt and Road Initiative, security, Kazakhstan, ASEAN, OIC, cooperation.

Introduction

Kazakhstan’s initiative to convene the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA, Conference) is almost thirty years old. It was first proposed at the 47th session of the U.N. General Assembly on 5 October, 1992. The global geopolitical situation and military strategic security in Asia have since transformed several times. At present, the current chairmanship of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the CICA coincided with a new geopolitical reformatting of the global system.¹

The key processes in Asia (and more broadly in Eurasia) are the mounting confrontation between the United States and China, and the prospects for the implementation of China’s ambitious geopolitical and geo-economic Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Over the past period, the situation has significantly changed in such challenging regions as the Near and Middle East, South Asia, Asia-Pacific, Southeast and Northeast Asia; and in such problematic areas as the Arab-Israeli conflict, ISIS, Syria, the Iranian nuclear program, Afghanistan, and the Indo-Pakistani confrontation. The military policy and strategy in the security sphere of many Asian and Eurasian states, i.e., Japan, China, India, Russia, Turkey, etc., has undergone a transformation.

The role and place of the CICA are radically changing under these contradictory conditions. Kazakhstan must once again assume the responsibility for the evolution of this organization, strengthening cooperation and confidence-building measures. The current circumstances require a revision of the CICA agenda and a search for new security tools.

¹ See: G. Dubovtsev, “Osnovnye tendentsii i perspektivy razvitiia SVMDA,” *Kazakhstan-Spektr* (KISI), No. 3, 2019, pp. 29-43.

The President of the Republic of Kazakhstan had outlined the need for systemic and comprehensive approaches to solving key Asian security issues and presented Kazakhstan's vision of this issue as follows: "We are calling on all friends and partners to unite their efforts to improve the forum's efficiency and international competitiveness. For this purpose, its step-by-step, gradual transformation into a full-fledged regional organization is required. All the necessary conditions have been created for the institutional formation of the CICA, the legal framework has been developed, and its permanent structures are operational."²

Two new factors influence and dominate the global (including Asian and Eurasian) security systems.

- The first factor is the COVID-19 pandemic that broke out in 2020. The epidemiological crisis, which has seized the whole world, and simultaneously affected the health sector, the global economy and the regional security system (including NATO, SCO, OSCE and CICA) is truly unprecedented. The global pandemic caused by the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus acted as a marker of the ongoing changes and, at the same time, as their catalyst. If the countries of the world had not reached such a high level of interdependence and globalization, the epidemic would not have spread to the whole world. In fact, geopolitical changes will be a direct result of the pandemic, or will be related to an attempt to address the economic and social weaknesses revealed by the disaster.
- The second factor is the sharp aggravation and confrontation in the cyber security sphere.

These factors encourage relevant political actors to pay attention and build a CICA strategy with regard to these new threats.

CICA and SCO

The development and evolution of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, whose members (including the observer countries) are all members of the Conference, will be of great importance for CICA's fate.

Some experts believe that the SCO will hardly be able to take on a mediating function, since Russia enjoys much greater confidence of the parties involved in the regional border disputes (in particular, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan): for Russia, border instability is a strong destabilizing factor that constantly aggravates the relations between the Central Asian states.

In addition to border disputes, the SCO's activities are aimed at fostering interaction in other security areas. A number of documents adopted by the SCO are aimed at solving these problems. Among them is the Convention of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on Counteracting Extremism signed on 9 July, 2017 in Astana (now Nur-Sultan); Action Plan for 2018-2022 on the Implementation of the Provisions of the Treaty on Long-term Good-Neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation of the SCO Member States, adopted on 10 June, 2018 in Qingdao, China, following the meeting of the heads of the SCO member states; and the Program of Cooperation of the Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Countering Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism for 2019-2021 and the Anti-Drug Strategy of the SCO Member States for 2018-2023, approved there at the same time.

Notably, judging just by its official documents (SCO Charter, SCO Development Strategy until 2025, etc.), the SCO avoids being considered a military political organization. There is also resistance

² [<https://www.nur.kz/politics/universe/1799778-tokavev-prinal-ucastie-v-v-sammite-svmda/>].

(mainly from China) to the transformation of the SCO into an association with an integrative function that creates supranational governing bodies. As a result, the SCO only declaratively reacts to numerous problems that emerge in the process of ensuring regional security. Preference is often given to solving these problems through bilateral interstate contacts, rather than within the framework of the SCO or its structures.

According to experts, the realities of the modern global order are pushing for a military modernization of the SCO and a reinforcement of its military-political component. In particular, this refers to the conclusion of agreements on mutual assistance and the formation of the SCO peacekeeping forces with the inclusion of Russian and Chinese contingents. Experts propose to establish a permanent SCO coordination committee for security cooperation purposes. At the same time, it is vital to note the ambiguity of the positions of the SCO member states on the issue of cooperation in the security sphere.

Following the admission of India and Pakistan as full SCO members in 2017 allows to proclaim the “qualitative and quantitative strengthening of the SCO in the Eurasian space.” Its renewed political and economic core has emerged in the form of the big three: Russia-India-China. However, only time will reveal the capabilities of this core, provided the burden of unresolved problems in Sino-Indian relations.

Afghanistan remains an important factor that destabilizes the regional security system in the zone of SCO and CICA’s responsibility. Adhering to its established strategy in the Central Asian region, China is focusing on economic forms of pacifying Afghanistan by “extending the Sino-Pakistani economic corridor towards Afghanistan.” Essentially, this means the involvement of Afghanistan in the Chinese Belt and Road project and China becoming the main investor in the Afghan economy.

If Beijing’s plans to create new transport infrastructure are implemented in Afghanistan, there will be an alternative to the northern routes through Russia, and a Chinese-controlled passage to the south (the Indian Ocean) will open up for the Central Asian countries. Thus, the game between the leading regional and non-regional players on the Afghan field is not over just yet.

One of the problematic issues complicating the progress in regional integration is the permanent deficit of the authority of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Thus, the SCO turned out to be powerless in the face of yet another acute complication of Indian-Pakistani relations in early 2019. The reason for this is the absence of both appropriate structures capable of neutralizing internal organizational frictions and procedures for settling internal disputes within the SCO.

As a result, another crisis in relations between India and Pakistan was overcome through parallel bilateral contacts without direct participation of the SCO. Armed clashes around the Tajik-Kyrgyz border in the Ferghana Valley in April 2021 have once again actualized the issue of the effectiveness of the SCO’s mediation function in resolving conflict situations. However, the Organization’s disengagement from direct interference in interstate disputes or internal political conflicts may have a completely rational motivation, namely, an unwillingness to undermine the basic structure of the SCO by adopting recommendations or binding solutions that may cause dissatisfaction of the parties involved in conflict situations.

Economic cooperation between the SCO member states is typically carried out on a bilateral basis, which erodes the principle of collectivity in the economic sphere of its operation. The Central Asian states are competing for access to China’s financial and technological resources. Differences are noted between the approaches of China, Russia and the Central Asian states to the creation of free trade zones (FTZ). The idea of establishing FTZs, actively promoted by China, provokes a wary reaction from other SCO members, who fear China’s dominance in the commodity competition.

The presence of both resource-producing countries and major oil and gas importers in the Organization creates the preconditions for the formation of a self-sufficient energy block within its framework, which will dramatically increase the energy security of its member states.

The problem of drug trafficking is especially urgent for the Asian members of the SCO. Taking into account the emergence of maritime drug transportation routes from the Golden Triangle countries (Thailand, Myanmar, Laos) in addition to land routes, as well as the fact that it undermines the security of India and China, the SCO believes that the intensified cooperation with ASEAN in the fight against the drug threat has significant potential.

The SCO's practical experience in the field of countering terrorism, Islamist extremism and drug trafficking must be acknowledged as particularly successful. SCO member countries proceed from the fact that it is difficult to fight terrorism, which is an international phenomenon, alone. The coronavirus pandemic, which has affected the SCO countries and has posed the organization's members with the task of adapting to new realities, will force them to develop a collective response to biological security challenges more actively.

Thus, the following may become the points of contact between the CICA and the SCO and their exchange of experience in terms of achievements and shortcomings:

All countries are chiefly concerned with using the opportunities offered by the SCO to develop national economies, introduce innovations and technologies in production, and attract investments in projects carried out in these countries. China, India and Pakistan seek to gain access to oil and gas resources and raw materials and to create efficient channels for their delivery, while Russia and Kazakhstan are concerned with formation of new markets for their oil and gas. This stimulates the participation of the SCO countries in oil and gas production and transportation projects.

There is a mutual interest in the creation of international transport corridors to reduce the cost and shorten cargo delivery time. The digitalization of the SCO member countries' economies determines the directions of their cooperation in high-tech industries. Another common task for all SCO countries is to ensure food security. The development of economic cooperation within the SCO is greatly influenced by the international environment. Fears of the Chinese economic expansion are growing in Central Asian countries.

The SCO has an extensive representation; therefore, it should contribute to peace, stability, development and prosperity in Eurasia in accordance with its status. Security cooperation problems within the SCO framework arise because the Organization is willing to sacrifice efficiency for the sake of its core consensus principles. The SCO attaches great importance to maintaining state sovereignty.

In 2020, the world has entered a new era. The global COVID-19 pandemic has not only provoked a major global crisis in health care systems and economies, it has also led to the expectations of a new rise in terrorism and extremism, thus, critical new security challenges may arise for the SCO members. The deterioration of the situation in Eurasian hotspots, such as Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, will greatly affect the security environment for the SCO countries and the CICA. Against this background, cooperation in the security sphere between the countries on the SCO and CICA platforms is extremely relevant and necessary.³

³ Concerning the SCO issues, see: D. Bayshulakova, G. Dubovtsev, "SCO Activities at the Present Stage and the Interests of the Central Asian Countries," *Central Asia and the Caucasus. English Edition*, Vol. 21, Issue 3, 2020, pp. 7-14; D. Malyshcheva, "Shankhaiskaia organizatsiia sotrudnichestva i problemy bezopasnosti v Azii," *Rossia i novye gosudarstva Evrazii* (MEMO), No. IV (XLIX), 2020, pp. 25-36; A. Muratbekova, "Krizis identichnosti Shankhaiskoi organizatsii sotrudnichestva: chto budet dalshe?" *Vestnik mezhdunarodnykh organizatsiy: obrazovanie, nauka, novaia ekonomika* (NIU VSHE), No. 4, 2019, pp. 138-160; N. Rakhmatulla, "Rol ShOS v sovremennykh mezhdunarodnykh otnosheniakh: vzgliad iz Uzbekistana," *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn* (MID RF), No. 4, 2021, pp. 52-57; *Perspektivy mnogostoronnego sotrudnichestva ShOS s mezhdunarodnymi strukturami v interesakh razvitiia strategii Organizatsii*, ed. and comp. by Yu.V. Morozov, IDV RAN, Moscow, 2019, 344 pp.; L.S. Revenko, N.S. Revenko, "Potentsial i predposylki ekonomicheskogo sotrudnichestva stran Shankhaiskoi organizatsii sotrudnichestva," *Azia i Afrika segodnia* (IV-IAf RAN), No. 1, 2021, pp. 15-22; F. Suesong, "Sushchestvuiushchie mekhanizmy Shankhaiskoi organizatsii sotrudnichestva i ikh problemy dlia borby s netraditsionnymi vyzovami bezopasnosti," *Vestnik mezhdunarodnykh organizatsiy: obrazovanie, nauka, novaia ekonomika* (NIU VSHE), Vol. 17, No. 1, 2021; *ShOS v sisteme bezopasnosti v Evrazii: problemy mnogostoronnego vzaimodeistviia*, ed. and comp. by L.Ye. Vasiliev, IDV RAN,

CICA and ASEAN

ASEAN is a Eurasian platform for fostering dialog and implementing multilateral economic projects. The association's principle of separating the economic from the political is attractive to CICA as well. In this context, the experience of the association, albeit not entirely successful, plays a vital role in regulating trade exchanges, in particular, reducing tariff barriers and eliminating non-tariff restrictions, developing e-commerce, and establishing economic growth zones through public-private partnerships.

In recent years, it has become obvious that the center of global confrontation is moving to the Asia-Pacific region. At the core of this confrontation is the American-Chinese rivalry, which draws Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Australia, the Philippines, Vietnam, the countries of South-east Asia and ASEAN, and India into the conflict. Along with the practically open trade and economic war, which the United States had unleashed against the PRC, elements of a naval confrontation (deployment of a submarine fleet, etc.) are also present. The "pivot towards Asia" declared during Barack Obama's second term was replaced by the Trump administration's rhetoric on the importance of a "free and open" Indo-Pacific region (IPR).

China's geopolitical assessment of the Indo-Pacific region is based on its increasingly important geostrategic position. There are serious doubts in regard to the ability of the United States to maintain its leadership in the Asia-Pacific region. The American side vigorously promotes the concept of the Indo-Pacific zone and relies on the traditional strategic planning principles, which are centered on flexible deployment of forces and assets. Such a large-scale escalation is primarily intended to restrain China's aspirations.

At the initial stage of its formation and development, the CICA initiative relied on economic integration as the main tool for establishing stability, security and interaction. At the same time, the negative experience of the OSCE/CSCE in this sphere was barely taken into account. Asia (APR, SEA, ASEAN) is the only region that has recorded an increase in FDI inflow in recent years.

Since the acceleration of Eurasian integration and the registration of the EAEU, the idea of cooperation between the Eurasian formats (EAEU, SCO, CICA, and CSTO) with ASEAN has been put forward more than once. China's launch of the Belt and Road Initiative has opened up new and, most likely, the only opportunities for interaction with ASEAN since it contains the required component, namely, sea communications. In recent years, 136 states and 30 international organizations have joined the initiative. China was able to fill cooperation programs within the framework of certain international formats, such as BRICS, SCO, and CICA, with specific content.

Despite the fact that the content of the Chinese initiative offers nothing fundamentally new, it is perceived as a real alternative to the Western world order, which undoubtedly enhances China's status in the eyes of the developing world. The concept of strategic stability and security is an important factor in the context of Belt and Road. The initiative potentially answers a number of serious challenges. The Belt and Road Initiative is based on economic corridors that include oil and gas pipelines, port infrastructure, air, road and rail routes, transport and logistics schemes, warehouse complexes, joint value chains with other countries, etc. Partnerships with neighboring countries are required to implement such projects.

As part of the implementation of this part of its global comprehensive initiative, China pursues both trade and economic goals, as well as those in the field of security (combatting unconventional threats, developing the potential of the PRC's naval forces, projection of power). At the same time,

Moscow, 2020, 240 pp.; B. Khakimov, "ShOS i problemy evrazijskoi bezopasnosti," *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn* (MID RF), No. 2, 2021, pp. 144-145; W. Song, *China's Approach to Central Asia. The Shanghai Co-operation Organisation*, Routledge, London, 2018, 172 pp.

the Chinese intellectual elite is notably more focused on issues like joint economic cooperation and prosperity, while foreign authors pay greater attention to the study of the geopolitical and military-political dimensions of the Chinese Maritime Silk Road (MSR) strategy.

If the initiative for a comprehensive Indo-Pacific security system is launched, it is likely to include the key provisions of the PRC's two main foreign policy documents—the Concept of Maritime Cooperation within the Framework of the Belt and Road Initiative and China's Policy on Cooperation in the Field of Security of the Asia-Pacific Region. Among other things, this will mean new cooperation opportunities for the SCO, ASEAN and the CICA.

Realizing its inability to ignore the development of the IPR project, ASEAN cannot help but consider developing an effective approach to it, or, ideally, repeating its own “success story” in building multilateral dialog mechanisms in regard to security issues. The Organization's experts believe that the IPR can aggravate the problem of the South China Sea, which is located at the epicenter of the future ‘Indo-Pacifica,’ and is the arena of geopolitical clashes between China and the United States.

There are three institutions in an ASEAN-centric cooperative security system—the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting+ 8 (ADMM+); and the East Asia Summit (EAS).

The basic principle of ASEAN—the markedly neutral nature of cooperation and the strengthening of trust between its participants—cannot be applied to the Indo-Pacific region. That is, the fundamental principle of the CICA will not be able to function.

It is crucial to determine the place of ASEAN in Eurasian cooperation—if only due to the fact that the Belt and Road economic corridors will pass through Eurasia, and SEA will not remain outside the framework of the Chinese project due to its geographical location and the impossibility of replacing sea transportation with land transportation. From this point of view, the interest of ASEAN experts in cooperation with Eurasian dialog formats and initiatives, including the CICA, seems feasible.

The main question in the analysis of potential ASEAN-CICA connection is the following: how to adapt the ARF, ASEAN DMM+ 8 and EAS to the China-centered Eurasian security system, which will be based on the Belt and Road Initiative. An assumption can be made that ASEAN will position these dialog platforms as ready-made cooperation infrastructure that can be used to reduce the severity of the international terrorism threat, especially given the growing infiltration of the China's XUAR, Central Asia and Afghanistan by ISIS militants.

The interaction between ASEAN and the CICA may be based on five points required for building a “community of common destiny” set forth by President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping in Jakarta:

- (1) adhere to the principle of trust and strive for good neighborliness;
- (2) adhere to the principle of cooperation and mutual benefit;
- (3) constantly provide mutual assistance;
- (4) adhere to the principle of “living in perfect harmony”;
- (5) adhere to the principle of openness and tolerance.

Another point of possible conjugation of interests of the CICA and ASEAN is associated with maintaining a system of U.S.-centered security alliances that excluded such major players as China and Russia, which gives rise to obvious problems. In these conditions, the ASEAN countries set their sights on the formation of new institutions oriented to a greater extent on the practical cooperation in the security sphere. This idea found its reflection in the created mechanism—ADMM+. Establishing contacts between the CICA and ASEAN along these lines with the involvement of the SCO and the CSTO as dialog partners may be feasible.

As of 2020, the following specialized expert working groups were operating in ADMM+: humanitarian assistance and emergency response, maritime security, military medicine, combating terrorism, peacekeeping and humanitarian mine removal. It is also worth noting that the areas of cooperation within the framework of the ADMM+ are expanding significantly. Joint exercises are regularly held under its auspices.

Thus, the potential structure of ASEAN-CICA will require deeper, integration-oriented cooperation for the coupling of the EAEU development strategy and the PRC's Belt and Road Initiative. Partnership with the EAEU opens up the opportunities for ASEAN to penetrate deeper into the relatively closed and inaccessible continental region. For the countries of the Eurasian integration association, preferential ties with ASEAN are useful from the viewpoint of overcoming the restrictions caused by the absence of a protracted and convenient access to the sea.

ASEAN representatives have not been involved in a number of forums: Far Eastern Investment Congress in Vladivostok, Astana Economic Forum, Eurasian Week International Business Forum, and CICA. These events and institutions, no doubt important and timely, should be accompanied by the development of grassroots cooperation between the EAEU, CICA and ASEAN, that is, between enterprises, retail chains, online platforms, entrepreneurs, etc.

ASEAN is an attractive partner for CICA to establish meaningful and institutional interaction with an efficient multilateral dialog platform. The current obstacles to cooperation between the CICA and ASEAN are of a systemic nature. Overcoming them will require a lot of resources, the main of which is time.⁴

CICA and OIC

The OIC is currently undergoing a period of modernization. Security concerns affect few of the Organization's structures. These are the Jerusalem Foundation, the Jerusalem Committee and the Committee of Islamic Solidarity with the Peoples of the Sahel zone.

In accordance with the OIC Charter, priority areas of the program include peace and security issues; the fight against terrorism and poverty. Significant attention is also paid to food security, investment and finance, climate change, achieving interfaith peace, and human rights.

With regard to ensuring peace and strengthening security, the OIC currently operates in several spheres: resolution of the Middle Eastern crisis, struggle against international terrorism, examination of the situation in Kashmir (the Indo-Pakistani conflict) and provision of assistance and support to specific countries, including Afghanistan. This, along with the Middle East, is the sphere of CICA's responsibility.

Modern terrorist organizations operating in the Near and Middle East are no longer small poorly armed groups with very limited resources who are obsessed with a certain idea. They are well-organized structures with ramified international ties, multimillion-dollar income, internal division of spheres of activity, specializations, their own recruitment system, training camps, warehouses, work-

⁴ Concerning the ASEAN issues, see: V.V. Verzhinina, "Predsedatelstvo Vietnamu v ASEAN v 2010 i 2020 gg.: itogi i perspektivy," *Aziya i Afrika segodnia* (IV-IAf RAN), No. 4, 2021, pp. 48-53; Idem, "Soveshchanie ministrov oborony stran-chlenov ASEAN i dialogovykh partnerov (SMOA+) kak novy element formirovaniya arkhitektury bezopasnosti v YUVA," *Yugo-Vostochnaya Aziya: aktualnye problemy razvitiya* (IV RAN), Vol. III, No. 4 (49), 2020, pp. 34-46; E.A. Kanayev, A.S. Korolev, "Bolshaya Evrazia, Indo-Tikhookeanskiy region i otnosheniya Rossii s ASEAN," *Kontury globalnykh transformatsiy: politika, ekonomika, pravo* (TSIKO, Moscow), No. 1, 2019, pp. 26-43; E. Kanayev, A. Korolev, "EAES i ASEAN: rezultaty i perspektivy sotrudnichestva," *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya* (IMEMO RAN, Moscow), No. 1, 2020, pp. 64-72; G.M. Lokshin, E.V. Kobelev, V.M. Mazyrin, *Soobshchestvo ASEAN v sovremennom mire: ID «FORUM»*, Moscow, 2019, 296 pp.

shops, hospitals, laboratories for the manufacture of weapons, explosives and explosive devices, chemical weapons, poisons, means of communication and transportation, etc.

Terrorist organizations are constantly looking for new forms, means and methods of action, which allows them to deliver large-scale resonant strikes. They learn from each other, adopt others' experience and try not to repeat the mistakes of their predecessors. The functionaries of international terrorist structures have learned to manage the links of their terrorist networks quite effectively, despite their remoteness from the Middle East, using modern means of communication: from messenger agents to satellite communication systems and the Internet.

The issue of the homecoming of fighters from abroad is both a threat in the short term and a long-term challenge. It is unlikely that the conflicts in Syria, Iraq or Afghanistan will be resolved in the near future. There is a danger that extremist structures will survive and adapt to new conditions by switching to more sophisticated methods of terrorist activity, including the use of weapons of mass destruction and bacteriological weapons in cities.

The main source of terrorist threats for the PRC is separatism in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), which, in the words of the country's leadership, is the main battleground in China's fight against terrorism.

OIC believed that the list of terrorist organizations could not be limited to ISIS, Al-Qa'eda and Boko Haram. This list should also include extremist groups that preach hatred against religious minorities in all countries of the world.

Over the past few years, there has been an increased focus of the OIC on the Afghan issue. Afghan issues were on the agenda of most summits and sessions of the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM). The Afghan arena has been the intersection of the interests of numerous actors, i.e., Russia, Central Asian states, China, India, Pakistan, Iran, the United States and the EU countries. It can be assumed that after the Taliban came to power, the role of the potential importance of the OIC will only increase. The Afghan problem in the context of international and regional security can become a point of contact and development of joint approaches and strategies of the CICA and the OIC.⁵

Conclusion

The possibility of CICA's practical combination with other major geopolitical and geo-economic projects—BRI, SCO, ASEAN, OIC, Greater Eurasia and the EAEU is of decisive importance for its fate.

The CICA's goal is greater security and predictability in Asia and the world as a whole. Despite the above-mentioned problems, CICA has significant potential for strengthening interstate relations and cooperation in order to ensure stability and security in the region. CICA is a political platform founded on the principle of consensus. All of its members are equal to each other and bear obligations in accordance with the Almaty Act of 2002, the Declaration of Principles Governing Relations in the CICA, and other documents. The tactics of moving forward—from the simple to the complex—ensures the success of the CICA processes.

⁵ See: *Nestabilnost geostrategicheskogo prostranstva v stranakh Blizhnego, Srednego i Dalnego Vostoka: aktualnye problemy. Yezhegodnik 2019*, ed. by M.I. Krupyanko, IV RAN, Moscow, 2019, 284 pp.; *Nestabilnost geostrategicheskogo prostranstva v stranakh Blizhnego, Srednego i Dalnego Vostoka: aktualnye problemy. Yezhegodnik 2020*, ed. by M.I. Krupyanko, IV RAN, Moscow, 2020, 340 pp.; *Strany Vostoka v XXI veke: neravnomernost ekonomicheskogo rosta i neravenstvo sotsialno-ekonomicheskogo razvitiia. Tezisy konferentsii, posviashchennoy pamiati V.G. Rastiannikova*, ed. by I.V. Deriugina, 2020, 144 pp.; *Ekonomicheskie, sotsialno-politicheskie i etnokontsionalnye problemy afro-aziatskikh stran. Materialy konferentsii 16,18 marta 2020 g.*, ed. by O.P. Bibikova, N.N. Tsvetkova, IV RAN, Moscow, 2020, 148 pp.; *Ekonomicheskie, sotsialno-politicheskie i etnokontsionalnye problemy afro-aziatskikh stran. Yezhegodnik 2020 (Issue 3)*, IV RAN, Moscow, 2020, 436 pp.

The principle of cooperative security that forms the basis of the forum's ideology, contributes to the successful development of CICA. In contrast to the collective security concepts with a tough bloc approach, cooperative security implies the interest of the parties in the CICA process with the aim of maintaining peace and stability, resolving the existing differences and preventing possible conflict situations in the region, rather than protecting themselves against a third country. CICA has an observer status at the U.N. General Assembly and cooperates with specialized U.N. agencies in a number of specific areas.

Delegations from 40 countries and international organizations took part in the CICA summit held in May 2014 in Shanghai, which became the largest of all preceding meetings. At this meeting, President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping stated that the CICA "should become a platform for discussing security and cooperation throughout Asia, so that a new architecture of regional security and cooperation can be built on this foundation." He also noted that Asian peoples should "act and resolve all problems independently" that arise in Asia, and maintain security in the region.⁶

Since its inception, the CICA has barely manifested itself as an interstate collective structure that facilitates negotiations and the settlement of various conflicts between its participants. Regionalism and remoteness of different states from each other are not conducive to the development of CICA, which has yet to become a pan-Asian forum.

This leads to the following conclusions:

- CICA is a unique and novel model of a multilateral security forum (in Asia).
- A new concept of Asian security has to be developed on the basis of this model.
- The successful development of the CICA should be based on close cooperation between the RF, China, Central Asian states, ASEAN, OIC and SCO.
- The CICA needs to cooperate with ASEAN and the OIC, as well as with the OSCE and NATO in order to develop.
- The transformation of the CICA into the Organization for Security and Development of Asia, proposed by Kazakhstan, means an expansion of the conference format and a turn towards solving new problems. For this purpose, cooperation needs to be expanded in all five dimensions, similarly to the OSCE; however, first and foremost, activities in the military/political sphere need to be intensified. The most urgent current task of the CICA is the transition to qualitatively new levels of cooperation, such as preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention.

The following assumptions can be made regarding the largest Asian organizations and the possibility of their integration with the CICA:

- the most important and, apparently, the only instrument for transforming the CICA into a pan-Asian association is the SCO. This automatically means attracting and using the BRI and the geo-economic potential of the PRC;
- ASEAN is in a transitional phase of its development and is objectively interested in projecting its interests in Eurasia. CICA, inclusion in the Belt and Road Initiative, intensification of relations with the EAEU may provide such opportunities for the association;
- The opportunities offered by the CICA in relations with the Islamic world through the OIC are reduced exclusively to security problems. That is, the CICA could establish contacts with the eastern segment of the OIC, which includes a number of states of the Middle and Near East, i.e., Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, Iraq, Syria, etc.

⁶ See: "Bezopasnost stala tsentralnoy temoi sammita SVMMDA," available at [<https://news.21.by/world/2014/05/21/930381.html>].

For this reason, experts are proposing, as before, the following mechanism for strengthening the CICA institutions:

1. Increase the level of participation in the conference by holding summits and meetings of ministers of the participating states.
2. Develop cooperation on a variety of issues at the non-state level within the CICA framework.

As far as combating new challenges and threats is concerned, the CICA must prompt all of its member states to make political commitments and develop specific mechanisms for joint struggle against terrorist and extremist activities, organized crime, drug trafficking, illegal migration, etc.

3. Increase and reinforce the openness of the meeting by stepping up the activities of the observer countries, as well as more active involvement of other international organizations and close cooperation within the U.N., OSCE and SCO.
4. Create monitoring institutions in various spheres, i.e., on environmental problems, desertification, operations of anti-terrorist centers, fight against drugs, etc.
5. It is vital for the CICA not only to intensify diplomatic efforts, but also to possess effective levers of collective influence on the conflicting parties and countries that are responsible for destabilizing the situation in the region.

In addition, it is necessary to create bodies within the organization that specialize in resolving crisis situations and conflicts. The ongoing confrontation, armed conflicts and crises in various Asian regions demonstrate that the reaction and approaches to solving the key issues of Asian security must be systemic and complex.

6. As the initiator, Kazakhstan should intensify the discussion of this issue among the CICA participants. This task should become one of the priorities in Kazakhstani foreign policy. Consistent advancement of the Kazakhstani initiative to transform the CICA is important in ensuring peace and security throughout the Eurasian space. Its implementation can initially contribute to the synchronization of the security maintenance processes in Asia and Europe, and subsequently to the creation of a unified Eurasian security system. Promoting this Kazakhstani initiative not only in the CICA, but also in various U.N., OSCE and SCO structures and institutions in order to involve them in the discussion of this issue is therefore an urgent task.
7. The highly dynamic and unstable geopolitical situation in Asia requires Kazakhstan to work on multiple levels with its partners within the CICA, other international organizations and regional associations for the sake of forming a common Eurasian security system.

Only the creation of effective mechanisms for early warning and crisis prevention, settlement of ongoing conflicts, as well as a prompt response to modern security challenges and threats will ensure the transformation of the CICA into a full-fledged international organization for security and development in Asia.

8. Asia and the world as a whole do not need a new leader, rather, they require new non-aligned international cooperation architecture, which would be based on the principles of openness, equal and indivisible security. The CICA may well claim the role of such an organization.

From a geographical and geopolitical point of view, Central Asia occupies a crucial position in the implementation of almost all major continental projects of a strategic, transport and economic nature. That is, the subsequent fate of the CICA will depend on the will, efforts and influence of ma-

and medium-sized players and international organizations—Russia, China, India, Iran, Turkey, Kazakhstan, etc.

In general, multilateral formats are slated to give way to bilateral arrangements. Along with the already growing trend in bilateral cooperation, Russia will continue to implement integration projects (EAEU). Maintaining the security of Central Asia and the Republic of Kazakhstan through the CSTO and SCO, and, if possible, the CICA will remain strategically important for the Russian Federation and the regional countries.

All these factors will inevitably influence the dynamics and prospects of the CICA development to one degree or another. Thus, the organization is passing a new development stage under unfavorable conditions. This becomes evident following an analysis of the instability and turbulent development of the current geopolitical situation.

THE CASPIAN REGION: DEVELOPMENT RESULTS AND NEW TRENDS

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ABSTRACT

The Caspian region came into the focus of attention of the Caspian and non-regional states even prior to the collapse of the U.S.S.R. The increased global attention to this region was associated with the presence of proven and potential reserves of hydrocarbon resources, which increased the region's geopolitical significance. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Caspian region found itself in the center of geopolitical rivalry. From that time on, the subject of energy acquired a new meaning in the Caspian region. Western oil and gas companies and government agencies be-

gan to demonstrate an increased interest in the hydrocarbon resources of the Caspian region. Moreover, for decades the West has maintained a close focus on the Eurasian space, in particular, on the problems associated with the production and transportation of hydrocarbon resources.

The most acute geopolitical standoff occurred between Russia and the United States, which supported various pipeline projects. For Russia, the key task was to preserve its regional dominance, which had been growing over the course of several centuries. The United States supported the

geopolitical turn of the new Caspian states, advocating the creation of new hydrocarbon supply routes that would bypass Russian territory. The key task for the Caspian states was to increase hydrocarbon production and provide reliable routes for their export to foreign markets. Based on these goals, the Caspian states built their own foreign policy, including intraregional policy.

Thirty years later, the results of geopolitical rivalry are visible. The Caspian countries, which rely on financial resources and political support from non-regional actors, have implemented large-scale hydrocarbon export projects. The new pipeline architecture has changed the balance of power in the Caspian region, increasing the involvement

of the Caspian states in the energy policy of Turkey, China, and the EU. At the same time, the regional states have managed to solve the problem of the international legal status of the Caspian Sea in a five-sided format.

A new trend of the last decade has involved projects related to the construction of coastal infrastructure and expansion of shipping. The Caspian countries are growing increasingly more interested in participating in international transport projects, considering them as an important component of their foreign policy. Despite the attained agreements and solutions to key problems, competition between the Caspian states, which is greatly influenced by non-regional actors, is intensifying.

KEYWORDS: Caspian Sea, Caspian states, non-regional actors, pipelines, oil, gas.

Introduction

The Caspian has always been associated primarily with energy resources. For this reason, even before the collapse of the U.S.S.R., the attention of the U.S. and the EU was pinned to them. However, Western countries have only gained access to Caspian oil and gas in the late 1980s, when disintegration processes began in the Soviet Union. During this period, the elites of the Soviet republics located in the Caspian began to play an independent political game. The Union authorities could no longer obstruct the contacts between the Soviet republics and the oil giants. They did, however, attempt to control the negotiations, and the Union republics did not yet have all the powers to independently engage Western oil and gas capital in oil field development. In turn, foreign companies (i.e., Amoco and Chevron) were ready to establish direct contacts with the republican elites, seeking to gain access to Caspian oil and gas fields. Their interest increased when significant hydrocarbon reserves were discovered in the Caspian at the Azeri, Chirag and Gunashli fields in Azerbaijan and Tengiz in Kazakhstan.¹ As a result, in 1988 the Ministry of Oil Industry of the U.S.S.R. and Chevron signed a protocol of intent to create the Sovchevroil joint venture.² Only in 1991, when the influence of the Union authorities on the Soviet republics weakened further, Azerbaijan announced a tender for the development of the Chirag and Azeri fields. Western oil companies, including Amoco, Unocal, British Petroleum and Statoil, were among the participants. As a result, the Ministry of Oil Industry of the U.S.S.R. and the government of Azerbaijan signed a joint agreement that determined the rights

¹ See: T. Dzhuvarly, "Azerbaidzhanskaia neft: poiski ravnostvuiushchey," in: *Azerbaidzhan i Rossia: obshchestva i gosudarstva*, edited and compiled by D.E. Furman, Letniy sad, Moscow, 2001, pp. 379-434.

² See: O. Cherniavskiy, *Chernaia krov Kazakhstana. Neftianaia istoria nezavisimosti*, Print House Gerona, Almaty, 2017, p. 331.

of the Union republic to a part of the Caspian Sea and deposits therein. In July of the same year, the U.S. company Amoco was declared the winner of the tender, and the shares were distributed as follows: the U.S. company received 40%, the U.S.S.R.—40% and Azerbaijan—20%.³ A similar policy was pursued by Kazakhstan. In July 1991, an agreement was signed between Chevron and Tengizneftegaz.

As a result, prior to the collapse of the U.S.S.R., the Soviet leadership moved away from a tough position, in fact agreeing to cooperation of the Caspian republics with leading oil and gas companies. This interaction was considered in the context of the relations that were developing with the United States. In addition, the U.S.S.R. did not have the funds or the required technologies for independent field development.

After the collapse of the U.S.S.R., the new Caspian countries failed to fully and quickly play the energy card. Western oil giants and the state structures behind them were in no hurry to invest huge amounts of money in field development in the newly independent states.⁴ In turn, the Caspian states—Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan—expected to use their hydrocarbon potential in economic development. To achieve this, they needed to increase the oil and gas production volume, while seeking access to external markets. Accordingly, a bitter struggle has developed around the potential export directions of Caspian hydrocarbon resources. Russia counted on pumping Caspian hydrocarbons through its territory, while the U.S. and the EU supported the laying of new pipelines towards the West. China was building up trade and economic cooperation, and only kept a close watch on the Caspian hydrocarbons.

The issue of hydrocarbon resource development was closely related to the problem of the international legal status of the Caspian. It arose following the collapse of the U.S.S.R. The Caspian countries have taken diametrically opposite positions, proceeding primarily from the interests of the oil and gas business. As a result, the geopolitical struggle in the Caspian region has weakened the ability of the Caspian states to form a common position on key regional development issues.

Energy Ellipse Becomes a Reality

The concept of the energy ellipse first emerged in the work of John Roberts⁵ in the 1990s. He proposed to consider the Caspian states strategically important from the viewpoint of energy resources.

The beginning of the Caspian game most likely dates back to 1992.⁶ Subsequently, a meeting of representatives of major Western oil companies took place in Turkey. They proposed a project option that would ensure the transportation of Caspian oil from Baku through Turkey to the port of Ceyhan.

Russia showed an increased interest in oil and gas pipeline projects, both ongoing and under development, through which hydrocarbon resources produced in Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan could be exported. The Russian side advocated the use of its territory for the export of Caspian hydrocarbons, however, other regional states did not agree with Russia's position. As a re-

³ See: I.V. Prokofiev, "Neftegazovy kompleks Azerbaidzhana," in: *Nezavisimy Azerbaidzhan: novye orientiry*, in 2 vols., Vol. 1, ed. by E.M. Kozhokina, Russian Institute of Strategic Studies, Moscow, 2000, pp. 283-330.

⁴ See: S.S. Zhiltsov, "Energy Flows in Central Asia and the Caspian Region: New Opportunities and New Challenges," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 15, No. 4, 2014, pp. 69-79.

⁵ See: J. Roberts, *Caspian Pipelines*, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1996.

⁶ See: S. Shermatova, "The Oil Factor in the Chechen Conflict," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 5 (11), 2001, p. 71.

sult, pipelines have become the most acute foreign policy problem for Russia and, at the same time, one of the main instruments in the struggle to maintain a dominant position in the region.⁷

In the 1990s, the Caspian states could not increase their own oil and gas production, or implement export pipeline projects that bypass Russia. The required funds were lacking, and the production level was low. This allowed Russia to maintain a monopoly position in the export of hydrocarbon resources from the Caspian in the first years following the collapse of the U.S.S.R. However, this situation was not preserved for long. Western states⁸ and oil and gas companies have actively participated in the discussion of pipeline projects. They opposed Russian policy and did not support the participation of Russian companies in the development of deposits in the new Caspian states. Russia's position was weakened by the lack of a unified position on the participation of Russian companies in Caspian field development projects. Supporting participation in the project, Lukoil and the Ministry of Fuel and Energy of the Russian Federation actually insisted on dividing the Caspian into sectors. This undermined the position of the Russian Foreign Ministry and posed a threat to the preservation of the unique sea ecosystem.⁹ However, a number of experts believed that by participating in a consortia, Russia was defending its own interests.¹⁰ In general, apart from oil and gas companies, Russia opposed the development of Caspian fields and supported the limited participation of Western oil and gas companies in regional affairs. The new Caspian states took the opposite stance, believing that the global oil and gas companies needed to be involved in the development of the Caspian Sea deposits. Thus, different positions clashed in the region due to the formation of a new international relations system that took shape after the Cold War,¹¹ in the Caspian region, among others.

Fierce rivalry for access to oil and gas fields and control over export routes complicated the relations among Caspian states,¹² politicizing the issues related to the transportation of oil to foreign markets.¹³ Nevertheless, many large-scale pipeline projects have been implemented. Among them are the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline in the western direction, actively promoted by the United States.¹⁴ In late 2020, the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) was commissioned. It comprises the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline, the Trans-Anatolian gas pipeline (TANAP) and the Trans-Adriatic gas pipeline (TAP). The total length of the Southern Gas Corridor is about 3,500 km, and its annual capacity should equal 31 billion cubic meters of gas. The main source of gas for the SGC is the Shah Deniz Caspian field in Azerbaijan.

This corridor was established on the western coast of the Caspian Sea, creating conditions for the transportation of hydrocarbon resources to Turkey and European countries. On the eastern coast, China has implemented a gas pipeline project that, like a "gas skewer," has locked all the Central Asian producing countries onto Beijing.

In addition to pipeline projects on the western and eastern coasts, gas pipelines were built from Turkmenistan to Iran, and Turkmen gas was supplied to Russia. However, the export volume of Turkmen gas to the north and south was insignificant. In addition, the geopolitical significance of these pipeline projects, which carried hydrocarbon resources to the west and east, was disproportionate. These projects ultimately reduced Russia's influence and excluded Iran from the competition for the choice of export routes to foreign markets. Meanwhile, new pipeline projects were also in demand in

⁷ See: S.S. Zhiltsov, I.S. Zonn, *Kaspiiskaia truboprovodnaia geopolitika: sostoianie i realizatsia*, Vostok-Zapad, Moscow, 2011, pp. 52-63.

⁸ See: O. Fomenko, "Rossia v Kaspiiskom regione: nef't i politika," *Obozrevatel*, No. 7-8, 2001, pp. 38-42.

⁹ See: A.N. Greshnevnikov, V.I. Iliukhin, "Kaspiy: igra bez pravil," *Vestnik Kaspiia*, No. 1, 2005, pp. 54-57.

¹⁰ See: V.V. Shorokhov, "Azerbaidzhan i Rossia: put k sotrudnichestvu," *Vestnik Kaspiia*, No. 3, 1997, pp. 6-10.

¹¹ See: V.D. Pisarev, "Politika SShA v Kaspiiskom regione," in: *Evropa i Rossia: problemy iuzhnogo napravleniia. Sredizemnomorie—Chernomorie—Kaspiy*, Moscow, 1999, p. 376.

¹² See: A. Grozin, "Pokhmelie turanizma," *Vestnik Kaspiia*, No. 6, 2000, pp. 24-31.

¹³ See: K.S. Gadzhiyev, *Geopolitika Kavkaza*, Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, Moscow, 2001, p. 464.

¹⁴ See: "What Does the Caspian Want from Washington?" Caspian Policy Center, March 2021, 12 pp.

the Caspian states. By increasing oil and gas production, regional states have managed to stabilize the socio-economic situation and strengthen their positions in relations with the West and China.

The policy of the Caspian states, which was based on the accelerated development of hydrocarbon resources and an increase in exports, made it difficult to form multilateral mechanisms of political and economic cooperation in the Caspian. The interaction was limited to the fishing and environmental protection spheres. Azerbaijan sought to create alternative routes for the delivery of hydrocarbon raw materials to foreign markets. It engaged Turkey in pipeline projects and became a key link in the new pipeline architecture.

As a result, the new pipeline infrastructure created in the Caspian has weakened Russia's position. In addition to strengthening the political positions of the Caspian states, pipeline projects have created conditions for expanding the influence of non-regional actors.

However, despite the importance of increasing production, the additional volumes of oil and gas did not have a noticeable impact on world markets. The predictions about the transformation of the Caspian into a second Kuwait did not come true, and the expectations turned out to be overestimated. The Caspian states were the ones most in need of the "energy ellipse." There is an explanation for its rather modest success. First of all, the Caspian countries have constantly initiated interest in their oil and gas fields, thus trying to attract greater investments from the global oil and gas companies.¹⁵ Secondly, there were no objective prerequisites for the forecasted production growth. Third, there was no demand for additional hydrocarbon resources on the global market. Lastly, remoteness from the key sales markets had a certain effect. These and other factors contributed to the ability of the Caspian states to solve socio-economic problems; however, the Caspian hydrocarbon potential only had a limited impact.

Difficult Path to the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian

Following the collapse of the U.S.S.R., the unresolved international legal status of the Caspian Sea became a key regional problem. The Russian leadership sought to preserve political advantages for Russia and the right of veto on issues related to various Caspian development projects.¹⁶ Russia paid much attention to the protection of the marine environment and the preservation of its biodiversity. Finally, it sought to create mechanisms for five-sided cooperation of the Caspian states. It is no coincidence that in early 1992, when Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan were merely discussing draft agreements with Western oil and gas companies, Russia and Iran proposed a new mechanism of interaction between the Caspian states. However, this initiative did not coincide with the interests of the new Caspian states, which were attempting to divide the Caspian into national sectors for the subsequent development of oil and gas fields. The Caspian states appealed to the fact that they were not parties to the previous international treaties concluded between Russia and Persia (Iran) in the 19th-20th centuries. Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan insisted that they had no historical obligations and, unlike Russia and Iran, considered themselves free to pursue their foreign policy in the Caspian region. This largely determined their subsequent position in the negotiations on the international legal status of the Caspian. For this reason, the five-sided negotiations on the legal status of the Caspian

¹⁵ See: O. Cherniavskiy, *Chernaia krov Kazakhstana. Neftianaia istoria nezavisimosti*, Print House Gerona, Almaty, 2017, p. 331.

¹⁶ See: V. Babak, "Nef't Kaspii v otnosheniiakh Kazakhstana s Rossiei," *Tsentrlnaia Azia i Kavkaz*, No. 2, 1999, pp. 45-57.

Sea proved difficult. First of all, it was due to the difficulties in coordinating the distinct positions of the Caspian states.

Bilateral negotiations of the Caspian countries were more successful. Russia and Kazakhstan demonstrated that a compromise was feasible, announcing in January 1998 a rapprochement of their positions.¹⁷ In the middle of the same year, they signed the Agreement on Delimiting the Floor of the Northern Caspian Sea For the Purpose of Exercising Sovereign Rights to Subsoil Use, based on the median line principle.¹⁸

The bilateral breakthrough showed that agreements on an issue that is sensitive for the Caspian countries could be achieved. This gave impetus to the subsequent agreements between Russia and Azerbaijan, which previously insisted on dividing the seabed and the water surface.¹⁹ Progress with Russia was achieved in September 2002, when the presidents of the two states signed an agreement on delimiting adjacent sections of the Caspian Sea bed.²⁰

In 2003, a trilateral agreement was signed between Russia, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. This led to the resolution of the problem of international legal status in relation to the northern and central parts of the Caspian Sea.

A unique negotiating mechanism fostered the resolution of the problem of the Caspian Sea's legal status. In 1996, a special working group began to function, holding regular meetings with the aim of a rapprochement of the Caspian states on this issue. Its activities were later supplemented by the meetings of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Caspian countries. The third stage of the negotiations involved the summits of the Caspian states. The established diplomatic three-tier negotiating structure—the Special Working Group (SWG), the meeting of foreign ministers and the summit of the Caspian countries has clearly demonstrated its effectiveness.²¹

The work of the SWG and the meetings of foreign ministers allowed to bring together the countries' positions on most of the Convention's provisions. They concerned the protection of natural and biological resources, the shipping industry and other areas of cooperation.

In December of the same year, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan signed an Agreement on delimiting the Caspian Sea seabed based on the median line principle. As a result, four out of five states have reconciled their positions on the international legal status of the Caspian Sea.²² "Soft" division of the Caspian Sea provided additional guarantees to foreign companies.

Bilateral agreements reflected the changes in the nature of relations between the Caspian countries. Most important were urgent trade and economic development tasks, new field development and implementation of transport projects. This contributed to the departure of the Caspian states from their tough stances and prompted a search for compromise solutions.

¹⁷ See: "Joint Statement by the President of the Russian Federation B.N. Yeltsin and the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan N.A. Nazarbayev," *Vestnik Kaspiia*, No. 1, 1998, p. 7.

¹⁸ The median line used for the delimitation of water spaces between states with opposite and adjacent coasts is a line, each point of which is equidistant from the corresponding nearest points on the coasts of these states. Modification of the median line is carried out on the basis of the principle of justice and by the parties' agreement. The modified median line includes all areas that are not equidistant from the coasts of the parties and are determined with regard to islands, geological structures, and other special circumstances and incurred geological costs (see: "O pravovom statuse Kaspiiskogo moria. Informatsia rabochey gruppy MID Rossii, fevral 2001 g.," *Vestnik Kaspiia*, No. 3, 2001, pp. 2-4).

¹⁹ See: M. Mamedov, B. Volkonskiy, "Dno obshchee—voda vroz," *Vestnik Kaspiia*, No. 1, 2001, pp. 6-7.

²⁰ See: "Soglasenie mezhdru Rossiiskoy Federatsiei i Azerbaidzhanskoy Respublikoy o razgranichenii sopredelnykh uchastkov dna Kaspiiskogo mori," in: *Diplomaticheskie dokumenty po mezhdunarodno-pravovomu statusu Kaspiiskogo moria (1998-2003)*, Edel-M, Moscow, 2003, pp. 15-16.

²¹ See: S.S. Zhiltsov, I.S. Zonn, M. Soylemezidu, "Problema mezhdunarodno-pravovogo statusa Kaspiiskogo moria: mekhanizmy resheniia," *Rossia i mir. Vestnik Diplomaticheskoy akademii MID Rossii*, No. 4, 2017, pp. 74-84.

²² See: S.S. Zhiltsov, I.S. Zonn, A.G. Kostyanoy, A.V. Semenov, *Kaspiiskiy region*, Vol. 1, *Mezhdunarodno-pravovyye dokumenty*, S.Yu. Witte Moscow University, Moscow, 2018, p. 406.

The coordination of all positions in the draft Convention made the Fifth Summit of the Heads of the Caspian States possible. It occurred on 12 August, 2018 in Aktau, Kazakhstan. The key document adopted by the presidents of the Caspian states was the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea.²³ According to the estimates of the Russian President Vladimir Putin, it was an epochal event. The end of over two decades of negotiations on the main Caspian treaty, along with the signing of intergovernmental documents on cooperation through border agencies, in the spheres of economy, transport and prevention of incidents, and in the fight against organized crime and terrorism has opened a new chapter in the history of the regional mechanism of the Caspian Five.²⁴

In regard to the water space, the Caspian countries used the principle previously applied by Russia, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan in relation to the Northern Caspian. The Convention established 15-nautical mile territorial waters and an additional 10-mile wide fishing zone, where each of the states has exclusive fishing rights. Outside the fishing zone, a common water zone is preserved.²⁵

The document reflects the fundamental principles of interaction between the Caspian states in the military sphere: the use of the Caspian Sea for peaceful purposes and the resolution of all issues by peaceful means; ensuring a stable balance of weapons and undiminished security of each party; compliance with the agreed confidence-building measures.

The convention determined the approaches of the Caspian states to implementing projects that involve trunk pipeline being laid along the Caspian Sea seabed. Art 8 states that “the delimitation of the seabed and subsoil of the Caspian Sea into sectors is carried out by agreement of neighboring and opposing states, with regard to the generally recognized principles and norms of international law in order to implement their sovereign rights to subsoil use and to other lawful economic and economic activities related to the development of the seabed and subsoil resources.”²⁶

Thus, the Fifth Summit of the heads of the Caspian states brought certainty to the subsequent development of the Caspian region, cooperation between the Caspian countries, including the energy sector. It was the uncertainty in the issues of subsoil use that pushed the Caspian countries to look for ways to resolve controversial issues, not limited to issues of security and environment.²⁷

The Convention, as well as the accumulated experience of interaction in resolving controversial issues, allowed the Caspian states to agree on a new mechanism of multilateral cooperation. The countries agreed to create a High-Level Working Group (HLWG), which in the future has a chance to transform into an interstate mechanism for solving regional problems, by analogy with the Arctic Council.²⁸

In February 2019, the first meeting of the HLWG was held in Baku (Azerbaijan), at which a plan of its work was agreed. The parties started work on the Agreement on direct baselines in the Caspian, which was of great interest to all the Caspian states. In April 2019, the second meeting of the HLWG (Nur-Sultan²⁹) was held. The parties continued their discussion of the draft Agreement on

²³ See: “Konventsiiia o pravovom statuse Kaspiiskogo moria ot 12 avgusta 2018 g.,” in: *Kaspiy. Mezhdunarodno-pravovye dokumenty*, Compiled by S.S. Zhiltsov, I.S. Zonn, A.G. Kostyanov, A.V. Semenov, pp. 517-531.

²⁴ See: “Vystuplenie prezidenta Rossiiskoy Federatsii na Piatom kaspiiskom samite,” available at [<http://www.kr.emlin.ru/events/president/news/58296>], 12 August, 2019.

²⁵ See: R.F. Mamedov, “Mezhdunarodno-pravovoe sodержanie i znachenie Konventsii o pravovom statuse Kaspiiskogo moria ot 12 avgusta 2018 g.,” *Problemy postsovetskogo prostranstva*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2019, pp. 175-194.

²⁶ *Kaspiy. Mezhdunarodno-pravovyye dokumenty*, pp. 521.

²⁷ See: S.S. Zhiltsov, “Politika Rossii na Kaspii,” *Problemy postsovetskogo prostranstva*, No. 2, 2014, pp. 16-17.

²⁸ A.V. Kachalova, “Osnovnye printsipy raboty regionalnykh ‘morskikh’ ob’yedineniy s uchastiem Rossii,” *Problemy postsovetskogo prostranstva*, Vol. 6, No. 4, 2019, pp. 378-389, available at [<https://doi.org/10.24975/2313-8920-2019-6-4-378-389>].

²⁹ On 20 March, 2019, in his inaugural speech after taking the oath, the President of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev proposed to rename Astana Nur-Sultan in honor of the country’s first president, Nursultan Nazarbayev. The proposal was supported by the Kazakhstani parliament. On 23 March, the president signed a decree on renaming the capital, and on the same day a law on amending Art 2 of the Constitution on the name of the capital of Kazakhstan was published.

the methodology for establishing direct baselines in the Caspian Sea and agreed on a number of its provisions. During the meeting, the parties also reviewed various aspects of cooperation in the Caspian Sea and exchanged views on the implementation of the agreements reached at the end of the Fifth Caspian Summit.³⁰ In February 2021, the third meeting of the HLWG (Moscow) was held, at which the Caspian states continued to discuss regional problems. Thus, the multilateral mechanism of the Five, which was used until 2018 to prepare the text of the Convention, was transformed into a new multilateral mechanism for implementing the provisions of the adopted document.

Pivot to Infrastructure Projects

After the collapse of the U.S.S.R., almost all the Caspian countries were fascinated by the idea of developing and transporting hydrocarbon resources. Only Russia and Iran, with some delay, joined the rest of the Caspian states, launching geological exploration and development of hydrocarbon deposits. The Caspian countries heeded proper attention to the infrastructure facilities in the Caspian: ports and access roads; however, their construction progressed slowly, affected by the lack of funding and insignificant trade turnover. Only in the second decade of the 21st century, when it became apparent that the Caspian energy breakthrough was of a regional nature, did the Caspian countries begin to pay increased attention to the development of coastal infrastructure and the expansion of shipping. The impetus for this was provided by such factors as economic problems in the Caspian countries and China's Belt and Road initiative. Beijing sought to use the transport infrastructure of various countries, including those in the Caspian region.³¹

During this period, the Caspian states developed programs that aimed to implement infrastructure projects on the Caspian coast, taking into account China's interests, among others. In particular, Kazakhstan and China were building interaction within the framework of linking the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and the Kazakhstani national program Nurlyzhol, which was proposed in November 2014 by the President of Kazakhstan Nursultan. Nazarbayev.³²

In 2014, Kazakhstan decided to build a ferry complex in the village of Kuryk (Ersay), on the shores of the Caspian Sea. Its development was associated with plans for cargo transportation across the Caspian Sea. The construction of the Borzhakty-Ersay railway line began at the same time. This line was to become the infrastructure basis of the ferry complex in the port of Kuryk, which was acquiring key importance for Kazakhstan. At the same time, discussions began on the transport corridor that was supposed to connect the eastern and western shores of the Caspian. Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan took part in its discussion. In addition, a ferry line was opened between Baku (Alat—the ferry terminal of the Baku port)-Aktau (Kazakhstan), and the 686-km Uzen (Kazakhstan)-Gyzylgaya-Bereket-Etrek (Turkmenistan)-Gorgan (Iran) railway was put into operation.

In 2015-2016, work was completed on the commissioning of the northern terminals of the Aktau seaport, and the port of Kuryk was launched into operation. As a result, the total transshipment capacity of the Kazakhstan ports reached 19.5 million tons per year.³³ After the new ports were commissioned, their throughput was to increase to 23 million tons per year.³⁴

³⁰ [<http://www.mfa.kz/ru/content-view/kaspij-teizi-mseleleri-znindegi-zogary-degejdegi-zmys-tobyiny-ekinsi-otyry-syny-kommunikesi>], 23 June, 2019.

³¹ See: M.G. Glyants, R.Dzh. Ross, *Odin poias i odin put. Dolgiy marsh Kitaia v 2049 god*, Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, Moscow, 2021, 264 pp.

³² See: N.A. Nazarbayev, *Era nezavisimosti*, KazAksarat, Almaty, 2017, 508 pp.

³³ See: L.A. Parkhomchik, "Kazakhstanskiy proekt 'Novyy Shelkovyi put'," *AsyaAvrupa*, No. 2, 2016, pp. 33-39.

³⁴ See: A. Manasbay, "Modeli upravleniia morskimi portami: mezhdunarodnyi opyt i kazakhstanskaia praktika," *Kazakhstan Spekr*, No. 1, 2019, pp. 51-65.

In May 2018, a new port complex with an initial annual capacity of up to 15 million tons of cargo was commissioned in the village of Alat in Baku's Garadagh district. The Azerbaijani side expects to bring the port's capacity to 25 million tons.

Large-scale port infrastructure construction plans were realized by Turkmenistan. In May of the same year, a new international Turkmenbashi seaport was opened on the Caspian Sea coast.

Like other Caspian states, Russia also took steps to expand shipping opportunities on the Caspian. It was important for Russia to increase the dry cargo turnover through the Russian ports of Astrakhan and Olya. Russia was prompted to actively develop transport infrastructure by the policy conducted by the Caspian states, which created new transport facilities.

As a result, the construction of new infrastructure facilities by the Caspian states on the Caspian coast has intensified competition in the Caspian region. The regional countries are being driven in this direction by socio-economic problems and long-term plans to expand participation in international transport projects and initiatives.

Conclusion

The geopolitical situation in the Caspian region has been rapidly changing in the 21st century. The nature of relations between the Caspian states has been altered under the influence of the energy factor and the progress in the negotiations on the problem of the international legal status of the Caspian Sea. This allowed to resolve a number of fundamental issues vital for the development of the Caspian, and created the basis for cooperation between the Caspian states in the 2020s and 2030s.

Serious changes have taken place in the relations between the Caspian states. The issues of economic cooperation, the development of navigation in the Caspian and the formation of coastal infrastructure have come to the fore.

The Caspian region can be considered a testing ground for the successful resolution of interstate contradictions. Unlike the countries of Central Asia, which have failed to overcome their disputes, the Caspian states have developed compromise approaches to solving key regional problems. First of all, they managed to agree on a compromise approach to a phased solution of the problem of the Caspian's international legal status. The proposed mechanism for coordinating the parties' interests kept the Caspian states from unilateral actions, although such steps were taken in the 1990s.

A multilevel mechanism for resolving regional contradictions has become common in the Caspian region. The format of bilateral and trilateral agreements was successfully used along with the five-sided problem-solving format, which included meetings of representatives of the Special Working Group, the Conference of Foreign Ministers and summits of the Caspian states. Bilateral agreements between Russia and Azerbaijan, Russia and Kazakhstan allowed to create a basis for the subsequent normalization of relations in the Caspian. These agreements made it possible to strengthen the five-sided negotiation format, while the meetings were aimed at achieving this goal. Ultimately, this allowed to adopt the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea.

The Caspian states oppose the military presence of non-regional states in the Caspian Sea and the involvement of third countries in solving regional problems. This policy was consistently pursued by Russia, which has sought compromise options with the Caspian countries while defending its own positions. At the same time, the role of non-regional states in the region has changed dramatically over the past decades. Using various levers and mechanisms, they continue to advance their interests.

CENTRAL ASIA: THE BUMPY ROAD TOWARDS POLITICAL MATURITY

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ABSTRACT

Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the new Central Asian independent states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan replaced the Soviet republics of Central (Sredniaia) Asia and Kazakhstan. By the time they gained independence, these countries had already developed specific mechanisms of governance: The Communist Party and state structures had relied, to a great extent, on certain regional clan principles of decision-making inherited from their distant past. The new states immediately declared that they would strive to build Western-style political systems. They elected their presidents and parliaments, set up judicial systems, yet the political elites proved unable to realize the democratic standards of the West they supported in words. Over the course of three decades, heads of state, who dominated and still remain the dominant figures in their countries and are responsible for domestic and foreign policies have replaced each other without any real competition. None of the regional states can boast of competitive presidential elections. On the other hand, even though their political development may have external similarities, there are still numerous differences rooted in their very different past,

cultures and mentalities. The regional clan division, swept under the carpet during the Soviet period, was revived as an important and highly influential feature. Kazakhstan was divided into zhuzes; Kyrgyzstan is in the midst of an ongoing regional confrontation between the South and the North; in Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan regional clans have gradually gained a lot of political weight. This means that the leaders of all Central Asian countries had no choice but to take into account the interests of groups and clans and the ties between different tribes, which inevitably affected the principles of governance and choice of officials.

The personal characteristics of leaders who came to power after the Soviet Union had left the stage and their interpretations of the ongoing processes played a huge role in regional developments, the relationships between the regional states, the regional balance of power and the political situation.

Today, all the above-mentioned countries with the exception of Tajikistan, have elected new presidents either amid domestic political turmoil or through a power transit within the same group.

This means that in all Central Asian countries presidential elections are not seen as an instrument of change of power but,

rather, as an instrument of remaining in power. The complicated economic situation, the non-regional actors that put pressure on the local political elites and, recently, the

COVID-19 pandemic, which intensified the social and economic problems, did nothing positive for the political and economic stability in Central Asia.

KEYWORDS: *Central Asia, politics, political process, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan.*

Introduction

In the late 1980s, when the Soviet Union was still functioning, political processes in the republics of Central (Sredniaia) Asia and Kazakhstan (the formula used until 1993) gained momentum: nationalist movements became highly visible, which meant that the local elites wanted greater independence. They still perceived their republics as parts of the unified state, albeit with wider powers and less control by the center.

Amid the political chaos in the Soviet Union, the local leaders had no choice but to adjust and manipulate in order to remain in power. The local Communist Parties, bureaucracies and leaders of nationalist movements closed ranks in a tactical alliance and used it as an instrument of pressure on the Center without hesitation. The loud deliberations about democracy, economic and political changes suppressed the sounds of the vehement clan struggle for two main prizes—power and the property of the republic.

As soon as the Center reduced its control over the republics, the local leaders tried to redistribute their powers within the frameworks of the Soviet system. The Central Asian republics set up the post of president to consolidate their positions in the relationships with the Center and within the republics. In 1990-1991, the Supreme Soviets of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan elected their presidents. In Turkmenistan, the president was elected by popular vote in October 1990. In Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov scored his expected victory in late 1991 after a feigned political struggle that ended in early 1992.

In Tajikistan, the president and the opposition relied on the use of force in their struggle for power partly because the rapid population growth led to serious economic problems and water and land shortages.

In November 1991, elected president Rakhmon Nabiev succumbed to the opposition. It won the battle that it had been leading up to for several years, driven by its highly efficient propaganda and supported by some of the Eastern countries and Western political forces.¹ The president resigned in September 1992; his duties were transferred to the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet Akbarsho Iskandarov. Economic problems were mounting against the background of unfolding political struggle and continued warfare. In November 1992, Emomali Rakhmonov (later Rakhmon) was elected Chairman of the Supreme Soviet with the duties of the head of state. He seemed like an interim figure, a temporal head of state, yet his skillful maneuvering and the Constitution of 1994 extended his authority as head of state and consolidated his power.

On the whole, the history of newly built national states was unfolding amid an uncompromising struggle between their presidents and the opposition. In Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, the opposition

¹ See: A.I. Kuzmin, "Prichiny i uroki grazhdanskoj voiny," in: *Postsovetskaia Tsentralnaia Azia. Poteri i obretenia*, Vostochnaia literatura RAN, Moscow, 1998, pp. 215-294.

was pushed away from the political arena. By that time, the economic situation, which required fast and efficient measures and traditional state governance, left no other options. The division into clans (tribes), which had outlived the Soviet Union, survived in the new political context. At this stage the major changes caused by the Soviet Union disintegration coexisted with the Soviet past.²

The Central Asian countries had no choice but to introduce the post of a president, the key and dominant figure in the power system. In all Central Asian countries, he defined external and internal policies and was responsible for dealing with the most complex social and economic problems.

Moving towards Political Stability

Political stability Central Asian-style did not presuppose efficiency of the state machine and alternation of power. Eradication of opposition was the main and ultimate aim. It is hardly surprising, since the scarcity of resources inherited from the Soviet Union and the desire of the clan (group) in power to control the most precious resources forced the leader in power to keep the opposition within certain limits and reduce its influence to naught. Islam Karimov (president of Uzbekistan in 1991-2016) spared no effort to neutralize the powerful regional and national clans.³ In 1992, the Supreme Soviet of Uzbekistan amended the law on the deputy status according to which any deputy could be deprived of his status for anti-Constitutional activities and social and political destabilization.

The Constitution of Turkmenistan established the presidential republic, in which the president headed the state and the executive branch. In 1992, when the Constitution was elaborated and reforms planned, Saparmurad Niyazov, president of Turkmenistan in 1991-2006, pointed out that the country should not exactly copy the state systems of other countries: the history and traditions of the Turkmenians and their experience have formed a much more solid foundation.⁴

Each of the Central Asian states, therefore, had its own specifics, which determined, to an extent, their political future. Kazakhstan, for example, rejected the total democratization taken up by Kyrgyzstan, seen as the most democratic of all Central Asian republics. On the other hand, Kazakhstan avoided the authoritarian trends apparent in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, where from 1992 onwards, the president had developed into a dominant figure, while the powers of the parliament and the judicial system were largely limited. However, in Kazakhstan the institution of presidency played the key role in the republic's political development.

The above demonstrates that all Central Asian countries have their specifics. Kyrgyzstan was promoting the "democratic" principles based on the separation of powers and the non-government sector. Tajikistan was immersed in a civil war. In Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, the presidents were persistently elbowing out the opposition parties from the political arena,⁵ while limiting the power and influence of the parliament and the judicial system. Kazakhstan was moving towards

² See: Kh. Adeeb, *Central Asia: A New History from the Imperial Conquests to the Present*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2021, p. 442.

³ See: *Tsentrlnaia Azia: 1991-2009 gg.*, monograph, ed. by B.K. Sultanov, KISI at the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Almaty, 2010, p. 199.

⁴ See: K.P. Dudarev, "Postkommunisticheskiy avtoritarny rezhim," in: *Postsovetskaiia Tsentrlnaia Azia. Poteri i obretenia*, p. 167.

⁵ See: E.T. Seylekhanov, *Politicheskaiia Sistema Respubliki Kazakhstan: opyt razvitiia i perspektivy*, KISI at the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Almaty, 2009, p. 62.

its ultimate aim stage by stage. In April 1995, the President extended his term through a referendum⁶; a new Constitution gave more powers and, therefore, more political influence to the head of state.⁷

New leaders could act independently. There was no longer a Union center and no control on the part of the Communist Party. From that time on, the leaders of the new independent states could rely on the principles of governance inherited from their distant past: regional, tribal and clan ties were revived to play the main role in the domestic policies of the Central Asian countries.⁸

At the same time, they tried to comply with the demands formulated by Western countries: parliamentary and presidential elections, a multiparty system and separation of powers were introduced to demonstrate their adherence to the Western principles of political development. As could be expected, very soon it became clear that the local states were not ready to build their political systems after Western patterns⁹ that contradicted Asian traditions.¹⁰ Despite this obvious inconsistency, the ruling regimes used the democratic procedure and elections as one of the forms of political mobilization.¹¹

Kyrgyzstan, which created an illusion of democratic development, is one of the most adequate examples in this respect. Indeed, the number of political parties and NGOs was consistently increasing in the country that was branded an “island of democracy” in Central Asia. Under the Constitution of 1993, Kyrgyzstan became a parliamentary republic that relied on the separation of powers. At the same time, behind the baffling scenery, the president deprived the Supreme Soviet of all or nearly all powers, has consistently consolidated his power and did not support the idea of power rotation. The parliament allowed President Askar Akaev to take part in the presidential elections of 2000, a sure sign that authoritarian trends had cropped up amid democratic rhetoric and an illusory multiparty system.

Occupied with expanding his powers, the president of Kyrgyzstan was unable to offer any reasonably efficient methods of dealing with interregional contradictions. In a country divided into clans, regional groups and tribes, parliamentary governance format tested the country’s sustainability. This was amply confirmed by two coups d’état in independent Kyrgyzstan. The Constitution adopted in 2010, after yet another coup, limited the powers of the president and established a semi-presidential system, in which the head of state shared power with the prime minister.¹² As a result, the country acquired a malfunctioning parliamentary-presidential form of governance that pushed the state further along the road of regress.¹³ This meant that the Central Asian countries were not ready to establish Western-style political systems.¹⁴

⁶ See: R.N. Zhanguzhin, *Kazakhstan postsovetkiy*, Institute of Economics and International Relations, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Kiev, 2002, p. 129.

⁷ See: M. Karsakov, “Osobennosti transformatsii politicheskoy sistemy Kazakhstana v kontse 80kh-serediny 90kh godov,” *Tsentralnaia Azia*, No. 14, 1998, pp. 34-56.

⁸ See: A.D. Bogaturov, A.S. Dundich, V.G. Korgun, *et al.*, *Mezhdunarodnye otnoshenia v Tsentralnoy Azii: sobytiia i dokumenty*, Aspekt Press, Moscow, 2011, p. 19.

⁹ See: S.S. Zhiltsov, “Political Processes in Central Asia: Peculiarities, Problems, Prospects,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 2016, pp. 21-29.

¹⁰ See: D.B. Malysheva, “Paradoksy natsionalnoy idei i problemy stanovleniya gosudarstvennosti v postsovetском prostranstve,” *MEiMO*, No. 11, 1998, pp. 151-155.

¹¹ See: A. Kurtov, *Demokratia vyborov v Kazakhstane: avtoritarnaia transformatsia*, ASTI-IZDAT, Moscow, 2001, p. 331.

¹² See: UNDP Chief lauds Kyrgyzstan’s Democratic Transition and MDG Progress, 17 May, 2011, available at [<https://reliefweb.int/report/kyrgyzstan/undp-chief-lauds-kyrgyzstan%E2%80%99s-democratic-transition-and-mdg-progress>], 23 August, 2021.

¹³ See: D.A. Aleksandrov, I.V. Ippolitov, S.D. Popov, “Miagkaia sila kak instrument amerikanskoy politiki v Tsentralnoy Azii,” in: *Tsentralnaia Azia: Problemy i perspektivy (vzgliad iz Rossii i Kitaia)*, RISI, Moscow, 2013, p. 28.

¹⁴ See: S.S. Zhiltsov, *op. cit.*

Transition

The Central Asian presidents rushed to expand their powers by amending the Constitutions of their respective countries; the changes were made in the provisions concerning the territorial and state order. Over a fairly long period, the president remained the key figure in the system of power in all Central Asian countries.

The fact that all presidents did everything possible to remain in power is one of the clearest confirmations that the Central Asian states were not sufficiently developed to follow the recommendations of the West. In all of the regional countries presidents either extended their terms in office or changed the laws to be able to run for presidency again and again. During the transition period, when the region's countries were coping with internal and external challenges, the fact that the presidents remained in power since 1990 in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and since the mid-1990s in Tajikistan played a positive role. On the other hand, while the legal mechanisms were losing their efficiency, the archaic forms of mobilization and political activity were gaining significance.¹⁵

The First President of Kazakhstan put great efforts into strengthening the executive power vertical in order to overcome the contradictory influence of the regional elites, concentrate power in the hands of the president and stabilize the social and economic situation. However, consolidation of presidential power caused certain problems in the political sphere; and depriving the parliament of its independence did nothing good to the country's development.

In 2016-2017, Kazakhstan started looking for adequate power transfer mechanisms and found them in the form of a higher status of the Security Council in the power system. The Draft Law on the Security Council in the Republic of Kazakhstan presupposed that it would be chaired by Nursultan Nazarbayev for life. The Law on the Security Council of the Republic of Kazakhstan adopted in 2018 changed it from a deliberative into a constitutional body with wide powers and life chairmanship of the Leader of the Nation.¹⁶

This mechanism of redistribution of power within the executive branch prevented political aggravation and fostered the continuity of external and internal policies. On 19 March, 2019, Nazarbayev resigned from the post of head of state, which was transferred to Kassym-Jomart Tokaev, head of the Senate. On 9 June, 2019, he won the off-year presidential elections. It was not the final act of transit of power but, rather, a step towards a political system where Nazarbayev retained his political influence in Kazakhstan.¹⁷ As the Leader of the Nation and chairman for life, ex-president Nazarbayev partially balanced out the power of the president.¹⁸ Today, the Security Council is de facto "the second center of power in Kazakhstan with considerably expanded powers. It is no longer a consultative and deliberative body of the past. Today, it is a constitutional structure that coordinates unified state policy in national security and defenses, internal stability, protection of the Constitutional order and the national interests on the international arena."¹⁹ On the other hand, the off-term elections created prerequisites for political rivalry between the power centers with practically equal powers. The tipped balance of power between the parliament, the president and the government may cause conflicts between them.

The changed role of the Security Council of Kazakhstan can be defined as a constitutional reform that paved the road to other constitutional changes.

¹⁵ See: *Tsentrainaia Azia segodnia: vyzovy i ugrozy*, ed. by K.L. Syroezhkin, KISI, Almaty, 2011, p. 21

¹⁶ See: S.S. Zhiltsov, I. Zonn, "Political Development of Kazakhstan: Results and Prospects," *Central Asia and the Caucasus. English Edition*, Vol. 20, Issue 4, 2019, pp. 62-69.

¹⁷ See: S.S. Zhiltsov, "Tsentrainaia Azia: osobennosti politicheskogo razvitiia," *Vestnik Diplomaticheskoy akademii MID Rossii. Rossia i mir*, No. 1, 2020, pp. 143-160.

¹⁸ See: G. Abishev, "Nyneshniy sostav kazakhstanskogo parlamenta ustarel—mesto dolzhny zaniat odnomandatniki, 14 July, 2019, available at [<https://ia-centr.ru/experts/gaziz-abishev/nyneshniy-sostav-kazakhstanskogo-parlamenta-ustarel-ikh-mesto-dolzhny-zanyat-odnomandatniki/>], 16 August, 2021.

¹⁹ E. Ionova, "Kazakhstan v period tranzita vlasti," *Rossia i novye gosudarstva Evrazii*, No. 1, 2020, pp. 82-97

Kyrgyzstan has demonstrated that personal agreements and newly invented mechanisms of power transfer are highly unreliable. In 2017, Almazbek Atambaev, the then president of Kyrgyzstan, who represented the country's North, was looking for a suitable candidate as head of state to realize the "strong prime minister-weak president" alliance. In 2017, Atambaev lost, while Sooronbay Jeenbekov, who represented the country's South, won the presidential elections in a fierce struggle.

However, his term in power was short. On 4 October, 2020, the opposition parties started talking about large-scale violations during the parliamentary elections, when voters were bribed and threatened. After mass riots, the Election Commission annulled the election results.²⁰ The events that followed the annulment brought Sadyr Japarov, a former deputy with a prison term under his belt, to power. Political activism of the opposition liberated him from prison and he was nominated as the main candidate for the post of prime minister. Having won the preterm election, he became prime minister and president ad interim. The former president resigned. On 10 January, 2021, Japarov was elected president by a 79% majority.²¹

As the president, Japarov started promoting the idea of a Constitutional referendum, seeking to restore the presidential form of governance in a republic that was not ready for a parliamentary format. In April 2021, Kyrgyzstan carried out a referendum, where the new variant of the Constitution was adopted: the head of state consolidated his positions, while the parliament lost many of its instruments of control. Kyrgyzstan became a presidential republic once again; the parliament lost its right to form and control the executive branch.²² The new Constitution restored the right of the president to run for another term. The document that violated human rights and weakened the system of checks and balances was severely criticized by the Human Rights Watch, among others.²³

The Constitutional ups and downs which, in fact, deprived the country of a sustainable Fundamental Law, negatively affected its development: amendments are introduced by different political forces seeking certain advantages here and now; they have pushed aside any considerations related to the efficiency of state structures and settling interregional contradictions.

Authoritarian Trends: What Keeps Them Alive?

The West never hesitates to accuse Central Asian countries of authoritarianism and absence of democracy. In fact, Western critics either do not understand the current situation in the region and know nothing about its past, or are trying to put pressure on the Central Asian leaders. Indeed, in practically all countries the local elites that emerged in all Soviet republics in conformity with the local traditions and history, rather than branches of power, are locked in an uncompromising power struggle.²⁴ In Central Asia clans are rooted in the past and cultural traditions, while the division into tribes (clans) and territorial division play a key role in the political life of each of the local states. In fact, candidates were often appointed to high political or economic posts according to territorial di-

²⁰ See: Kyrgyzstan Election: Sunday's Results Annulled After Mass Protests, 6 October, 2020, available at [<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-54432030>], 10 October, 2021.

²¹ See: "Iz tiurny v presydeny za tri mesiatsa," 11 January, 2021, available at [<https://www.rbc.ru/politics/11/01/2021/5ffc07c39a7947703c6e0150>], 27 September, 2021.

²² See: "Freedom House. Nations in Transit 2020: Kyrgyzstan," available at [<https://freedomhouse.org/country/kyrgyzstan/nations-transit/2020>], 24 September, 2021

²³ See: "Kyrgyzstan: Withdraw Problematic Draft Constitution," Human Rights Watch, 5 March, 2021, available at [<https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/05/kyrgyzstan-withdraw-problematic-draft-constitution>], 24 September, 2021

²⁴ See: R.Yu. Khadyrov, "Osobennosti politicheskoy sistemy Tadzhikistana," *Problemy postssovetskogo prostranstva*, No. 2, 2016, pp. 104-111.

vision.²⁵ People from the same region or the same ethnic group, clan or region staked on “their own”: this is one of the main sources and accelerators of authoritarianism in the Central Asian countries. The Western standards, with the president, elections and a developing party system, had nothing to do with the traditional Asian societies.²⁶ The ideals, principles and standards of developed societies and actual national doctrines were replaced with distorted copies and illusory democracy; the national projects expected to develop the state languages, history and culture became mere decorations.²⁷ In fact, democratic institutions and procedures had nothing in common with the mentality and history of the Central Asian countries.²⁸ No wonder that political struggle had moved backstage, away from the public sphere to the space of clandestine agreements. Governments were dissolved, and preterm parliamentary elections were organized to consolidate the president’s positions. Competition was limited to regional elites that sought political power for the sake of control over economy. On the whole, the region failed to establish consistent rules of supreme power continuity.²⁹

Historical and cultural legacy of the local countries is the key factor behind their political systems. The Soviet Union’s disintegration left behind an ideological vacuum to be filled with mythologized history, historical heroes, etc.³⁰ Having rejected the communist ideology, leaders of all regional counties armed themselves with the idea of building up national states that required fully justified and legitimized efforts from the new political elites. History was used to link their statehoods to a more distant past and exaggerate their greatness.³¹

Redistribution of power in favor of the president has become one of the characteristics of the local states and their political systems. The Constitutions adopted in all countries in the early 1990s endowed the presidents with the broadest powers. In fact, the parliament was dominated by the president, who became the key figure. This was done to ensure the realization of a concerted state policy and suppress political rivalry among the branches of power. Subdued parliaments allowed the Central Asian countries to adopt new Constitutions under which the presidents acquired maximally wide powers and dramatically limited the consequence of the other branches of power.³²

In fact, this was done very much in line with the local traditions and historical development specifics of local societies. In all countries people perceived the head of state as the leader of the nation with unlimited powers; the volume of the powers extended to the executive branch differed from country to country. In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the parliaments are formally independent, while in the other Central Asian countries the powers of the presidents are unlimited.

In the absence of legally regulated mechanisms of interaction between the branches of power and domination of informal agreements concluded in the interests of certain clans to the detriment of

²⁵ See: R.Yu. Khadyrov, “Rol klanov vo vnutrenney politike Tadjikistana,” in: *Aktualnye problemy razvitiya post-sovetskogo prostranstva: materialy mezhdunarodnoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii (Moskva, 2 April, 2015)*, МГОУ, Moscow, 2015, p. 124.

²⁶ See: E. Luzanova, “Mezhdunarodny seminar ‘Politicheskoe razvitie Tsentralnoy Azii i Tsentralnoy Evropy: skhodstvo, razlichia, puti sotrudnichestva,” *Tsentralnaia Azia*, No. 10, 1997.

²⁷ See: V. Tuleshov, “K voprosu o formirovani i razvitiu identichnosti v Kazakhstane i Tsentralnoy Azii,” in: *Tsentralnaia Azia-25: mysli o proshlom, proektsiia budushchego*, ed. by M. Laruelle, A. Kurmanova, The Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies at George Washington University, Washington, 2017, pp. 36-38.

²⁸ See: Kh.Kh. Khurramov, “Vzaimootnosheniya oppozitsii i vlastey v Tadjikistane: istoria i sovremennost,” *Problemy postssovetskogo prostranstva*, No. 2, 2016, pp. 112-116.

²⁹ See: *Vyzovy bezopasnosti v Tsentralnoy Azii*, ed. by A.A. Dynkin, V.G. Baranovskiy, IMEMO, Moscow, 2013, 150 pp.

³⁰ See: M.A. Neymark, “Kultura kak resurs natsionalnoy bezopasnosti Rossii,” in: *Sovremenny mir i geopolitika*, Kanon+, Moscow, 2015, pp. 158-175.

³¹ See: R. Agaev, “TsAR: problemy evoliutsii politicheskikh system,” in: *Tsentralnaia Azia: geopolitika i ekonomika regiona*, Krasnaia Zvezda, Moscow, 2010, p. 15.

³² See: D.E. Furman, “Evoliutsiia politicheskikh sistem stran SNG,” in: *Sredizemnomorye-Chernomorye-Kaspiy: mezhdru Bolshoy Evropy i Bolshim Blizhnim Vostokom*, ed. by N.P. Shmelev, V.A. Guseynov, A.D. Yazkova, Granitsa, Moscow, 2006, p. 136.

others, the political systems cannot cope with either internal or external challenges. The power structures are not self-sufficient; they are forums of sorts in which sub-state groups compete among themselves for greater security and for control over the state.³³

Conclusion

During the thirty years of independence, the Central Asian countries have achieved certain successes in their political development. All of them obey the principles of the separation of power; international observers are invariably present at elections. At the same time, the power system is, in fact, authoritarian. It is dominated by the head of state who relies on family, kinship and clan ties. The parliament, which is elected by popular vote, does not play an important role. Kyrgyzstan is the only exception, with the parliament coming to the fore under certain circumstances. On the whole, however, the legislative organ of power is pushed aside in all Central Asian states, while constitutional amendments are superficial.

The political future of the Central Asian countries is closely connected with their economic potential. Having escaped the control of the Soviet Union's authority, they were confronted by strong pressure on the part of non-regional actors, all them wishing to adjust their external and internal policies. This makes it much harder to apply democratic procedures similar to those used in the West. The local elites are locked in an uncompromising struggle for very limited economic resources. Traditions, political culture and local mentality are, likewise, very important. Hence, the regional countries' political development will be determined not only by the internal political factors. Economic problems and non-regional states will not disappear, and will continue playing their roles.

Today, political future of the Central Asian states remains under the strong pressure of economic problems and the pandemic. This has already invigorated the rivalry for the very limited resources, intensified the regional countries' inability to cope with the most acute problems, deteriorating social conditions and increased unemployment.³⁴ The above has strongly affected the approaches to the problems of social, political and economic stability practiced by the local elites. In 2020-2021, external debts increased; disagreements over the use of water and electric power resources have not disappeared despite the mechanism of interaction between the local countries, namely, the Consultative Meetings of Central Asian Presidents. Climate change adds its share of problems; internal migration is growing, incomes are shrinking, and social problems are deteriorating. These trends exacerbated the political situation, and stirred up negative feelings among the population, which may lead to increased political tension.

Very much like today, the presidents of all regional countries will be looking for a balance between individual groups and clans; they will try to curtail the positions of certain elites to prevent any threats to those in power. Informal agreements, instead of formal mechanisms of power, will dominate in the relationships between the political elites of the Central Asian countries. Parliamentary and presidential elections will be used to legitimize power and demonstrate their devotion to democratic procedures to the West.

³³ See: *Tsenralnaia azia i Kaspiyskiy region: riski, vyzovy, ugrozy: kollektivnaia monografiia*, ed. by B.K. Sultanov, KISI, Almaty, 2012, p. 79.

³⁴ See: S.S. Zhiltsov, "Koronavirus udaril po stranam postsovetskogo prostranstva," *Problemy postsovetskogo prostranstva*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2020, pp. 8-17, available at [<https://doi.org/10.24975/2313-8920-2020-7-1-8-17>].

THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES: THE RESULTS OF 30 YEARS OF DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

After gaining independence in 1991, the Central Asian states, which had no experience in conducting independent foreign policy activities, began to build their own foreign policy coordinate system and develop its conceptual framework. Given their unique geopolitical position and diverse resource potential, the regional states preferred to pursue an open and multi-vector foreign policy, which allowed them to realize their national interests. With regard to

the transformational processes in global politics and economy, as well as the geopolitical characteristics of their states, the political elites of the regional states have developed their own approaches to foreign policy.

The article analyzes the doctrinal foundations of the Central Asian countries' foreign policy, and the influence of global factors on the foreign policy formation of the regional states and intraregional cooperation.

KEYWORDS: *Central Asia, foreign policy, multi-vector, the U.S., Russia, China, Turkey, Iran, geo-economic projects, integration, regionalism.*

Introduction

Following the collapse of the U.S.S.R., the five Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) were forced to start building their sovereign foreign policy from scratch, with no experience and a shortage of qualified diplomats. Gradually, under the influence of internal and external factors, the conceptual basis of foreign policy and a system of foreign policy priorities was formed in the Central Asian countries.

Factors such as geographical location and the rich resource potential predetermined the choice of the Central Asian countries in favor of pursuing a multi-vector foreign policy. Orientation to various foreign policy centers of power was seen as a path that allowed,

- first of all, to declare themselves full-fledged entities of international relations,
- secondly, to strengthen their sovereignty,
- thirdly, to create favorable external conditions for the development of national statehood.

In addition to the development of bilateral ties and in the globalization context, the Central Asian countries preferred to integrate themselves into multilateral cooperation formats and profitable geo-economic projects actively promoted in the region by the leading political players. Relying on the principle of foreign policy balancing, the Central Asian states attempted to avoid dependence on geopolitical players that have a significant impact on the political and economic development of the region.

At the same time, the political leaders of the Central Asian countries made attempts to establish a regional integration association. Its creation was considered a mechanism for settling interstate contradictions and solving the internal socio-economic problems that these countries faced after the collapse of the U.S.S.R.

Doctrinal Foundations of the Central Asian Countries' Foreign Policy

Since gaining independence in 1991, the ruling elite of the Central Asian countries has begun to develop foreign policy principles and identify priority areas in foreign policy cooperation. Gradually, a doctrinal base was formed, which implied that the regional countries would pursue their foreign policy course, including the constitution, the foreign policy and national security concepts, and the development strategy.

Over three decades of Kazakhstan's independence, three foreign policy concepts have been adopted in the republic: the Concept of Foreign Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2001,¹ the Concept of Foreign Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2014—2020,² and the Concept of Foreign Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020—2030.³ All these documents testify to Kazakhstan's commitment to pursuing a multi-vector foreign policy aimed at balancing between the leading global and regional centers of power. A fundamental point in the Concept of Kazakhstan's foreign policy for 2020-2030 is the course towards strengthening the republic's leading position in the region.⁴

Due to underlying socio-economic problems, Kazakhstan's leadership sought to subordinate foreign policy to the internal tasks of the country's development. To achieve this goal, Kazakhstan's ruling elite focused on attracting foreign investments through an active foreign policy and improving national legislation. Strategy Kazakhstan-2030⁵ and Strategy Kazakhstan-2050⁶ designate the main priority areas of the republic's socio-economic policy that are aimed at strengthening and developing the national economy. Thus, Strategy Kazakhstan-2050 proclaimed that the implementation of national tasks would be facilitated by a consistent and predictable foreign policy course.⁷

¹ See: M.Sh. Gubaydullina, "Printsipy i vybor vneshnepoliticheskikh prioritetov Respubliki Kazakhstan v kontseptualno znachimyykh dokumentakh (vystupleniye)," available at [<https://articlekz.com/article/7001>], 17 июля 2021.

² See: "Utverzhdena Kontseptsia vneshney politiki Respubliki Kazakhstan na 2014-2020 gody," available at [<https://www.zakon.kz/4599704-utverzhdena-koncepcija-vneshnej.html>], 21 July, 2021.

³ See: "Kontseptsia vneshney politiki Respubliki Kazakhstan na 2020-2030 gody," available at [https://www.akorda.kz/ru/legal_acts/decrees/o-koncepcii-vneshnei-politiki-respubliki-kazahstan-na-2020-2030-gody], 21 July, 2021.

⁴ See: Ibidem.

⁵ See: "Strategiia 'Kazakhstan-2030' i ee ekonomicheskii prioritet," available at [<https://www.zakon.kz/60241-strategiia-kazakhstan-2030-i-ee.html>], 21 July, 2021.

⁶ See: "Strategiia 'Kazakhstan-2050'," available at [https://www.akorda.kz/ru/official_documents/strategies_and_programs], 26 July, 2021.

⁷ See: Ibidem.

Over thirty years of Kyrgyzstan's sovereign development, the following have been adopted: The Foreign Policy Concept of the Kyrgyz Republic of 1999,⁸ 2007,⁹ and 2019.¹⁰ These concepts emphasized that Kyrgyzstan is pursuing a balanced, pragmatic and multi-vector foreign policy. The new version of the 2019 Foreign Policy Concept of Kyrgyzstan notes that the country's foreign policy is aimed at creating and maintaining favorable conditions for its sustainable development.¹¹ The formation of friendly good-neighborly relations with the regional states and the strengthening and deepening of relationships with allies and strategic partners are among the central foreign policy priorities.¹²

Also, the key issues in Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy were reflected in the National Security Concepts of 2001, 2009, and 2012, and the National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Kyrgyzstan for 2013-2017.¹³

In Tajikistan, the first decade of independence was difficult due to the civil war that unfolded between the country's various political forces. It impacted Tajikistan's foreign policy, slowing down the process of developing its conceptual foundations.

The principles and priorities of Tajikistan's foreign policy were initially formalized on 24 September, 2002, with the adoption of the republic's first Foreign Policy Concept.¹⁴ In the context of the geopolitical transformations that occurred in Central Asia in the early 21st century, Tajikistan strove to defend its national interests, and to take an active part in the collective struggle against international terrorism.

In the same year, President of Tajikistan Emomali Rakhmon announced the open-door doctrine, which aimed to diversify the directions of the country's foreign policy. Based on internal socio-economic needs, the Tajik leadership intended to give impetus to the development of the economic aspect of diplomacy, making the republic's foreign policy more profitable.¹⁵ The second Foreign Policy Concept of the country, approved on 27 January, 2015, also contains a commitment to pursuing a multi-vector foreign policy or an open-door policy based on building friendly and mutually beneficial relations "with all near and distant countries."¹⁶

The following should be emphasized among the key political documents that consolidate the conceptual foundations of Turkmenistan's foreign policy: the Constitution of Turkmenistan of 18 May, 1992,¹⁷ the Declaration on the Foreign Policy of Turkmenistan in the 21st Century (1999),¹⁸ the Concept of Foreign Policy of Turkmenistan as a Neutral State of 27 December, 1995,¹⁹ The Foreign

⁸ See: "Kontseptsia vneshney politiki Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki ot 17 maia 1999 g.," in: *Khronika vneshnepoliticheskoy deyatelnosti Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki (1991-2002)*, Bishkek, 2003, 240 pp.

⁹ See: "Kontseptsia vneshney politiki Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki ot 10 ianvaria 2007 g.," available at [<http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/preview/ru-ru/4569/10?mode=tekst>], 21 July, 2021.

¹⁰ See: "Kontseptsia vneshney politiki Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki ot 11 marta, 2019 g.," available at [<http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/430044?cl=ru-ru>], 25 July, 2021.

¹¹ See: Ibidem.

¹² See: Ibidem.

¹³ See: "Natsionalnaia strategiiia ustoychivogo razvitiia Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki na 2013-2017 gg.," available at [<http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/61542?cl=ru-ru>], 3 August, 2021.

¹⁴ See: Z.Sh. Saidov, *Respublika Tadjikistan na mezhgosudarstvennoy arene do i posle ob'iaivleniia politiki "otkrytykh dverey"*, Dushanbe, 2015, 346 pp.

¹⁵ See: Ibid., p. 245.

¹⁶ "Kontseptsia vneshney politiki Respubliki Tadjikistan ot 27 ianvaria, 2015 g.," available at [<https://www.mfa.tj/ru/main/view/988/kontseptsia-vneshnei-politiki-respubliki-tadjikistan>], 5 August, 2021.

¹⁷ See: "Konstitutsiia Turkmenistana," available at [<https://worldconstitutions.ru/?p=124>], 5 August, 2021.

¹⁸ See: "Deklaratsiia o vneshnepoliticheskom kurse Turkmenistana v XXI v., osnovannom na postoiannom neitralitete, printsipakh mirolubiia, dobrososedstva i demokratii," available at [http://wiki-tm.com/index.php/Декларация_о_внешнеполитическом_курсе_Туркменистана_в_XXI_веке_от_27.12.1999], 5 August, 2021.

¹⁹ See: "Kontseptsia vneshney politiki Turkmenistana kak neitralnogo gosudarstva ot 27 dekabria 1995 g.," available at [http://continent-online.com/Document/?doc_id=31339053], 12 August, 2021.

Policy Concept of Turkmenistan for 2013-2017,²⁰ and The Foreign Policy Concept of Turkmenistan for 2017-2023.²¹

Since gaining independence in 1991 and up to the present time, Turkmenistan has adhered to the principle of permanent neutrality in its foreign policy. However, this does not prevent it from actively participating in global and regional processes. With regard to internal (socio-economic crisis in the country) and external (aggravation of geopolitical rivalry in the region) factors, in 2017, President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov approved a new version of the country's Foreign Policy Concept for 2017-2023.²² Development of a strategic partnership with the U.N. was declared a priority vector of Turkmenistan's foreign policy. The Concept also noted that Turkmenistan attaches particular importance to further strengthening interaction with such international organizations as the OSCE, OIC, Non-Aligned Movement, etc.²³

The conceptual foundations of Uzbekistan's foreign policy are enshrined in the following documents: the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated 8 December, 1992,²⁴ the Law on the Basic Principles of Foreign Policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated 26 December, 1996,²⁵ and the 2012 Foreign Policy Concept of Uzbekistan.²⁶ The 2012 Concept noted that,

- firstly, Uzbekistan pursues an open and pragmatic foreign policy, building interstate relations based on friendship and good neighborliness; and
- secondly, the republic does not join military or political blocs.²⁷

However, under the first President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov, the foreign policy guidelines declared in theory were not implemented in practice. At that time, Uzbekistan's foreign policy was based primarily on maneuvering between the United States and Russia. At the regional level, Uzbekistan's foreign policy was not constructive and balanced on the brink of a military conflict with the neighboring states.

Since Shavkat Mirziyoyev's victory in the elections in 2016, Uzbekistan began to pursue a more open and active foreign policy, both regionally and globally. As part of the internal economic liberalization strategy, a course was set to subordinate foreign policy to the country's internal needs. As part of this approach, the country adopted the Action Strategy on Five Priority Directions of Uzbekistan's Development for 2017-2021.²⁸ The document noted that one of the main priorities of Uzbekistan's foreign policy is the creation of a belt of security, stability and good-neighborliness around the country.²⁹

Thus, the foreign policy documents of all Central Asian countries reflected the multi-vector nature of their foreign policy. They declared the desire to obtain economic benefits through an active

²⁰ [<http://turkmenbusiness.org/category/blok-novosti/soobshcheniya-i-sobytiya?page=166>], 15 August, 2021.

²¹ See: "Prezident Turkmenistana utverdil Kontseptsiuu vneshnepoliticheskogo kursa strany na 2017—2023 gg.," available at [<https://turkmenportal.com/blog/9988>], 21 August, 2021.

²² See: *Ibidem*.

²³ See: *Ibidem*.

²⁴ See: "Konstitutsiia Respubliki Uzbekistan ot 8 dekabria 1992 g.," available at [<https://constitution.uz/ru>], 17 August, 2021.

²⁵ See: "Ob osnovnykh printsipakh vneshnepoliticheskoy deiatelnosti Respubliki Uzbekistan," available at [<https://parliament.gov.uz/ru/laws/adopted/85/3402/>], 17 August, 2021.

²⁶ See: "Senat Uzbekistana odobril riad zakonov," available at [<https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2012/08/30/senate/>], 21 August, 2021.

²⁷ See: "Senat odobril Kontseptsiuu vneshnepoliticheskoy deiatelnosti Uzbekistana," available at [<https://uzdaily.uz/ru/post/12420>], 26 August, 2021.

²⁸ See: "Strategiia deystviy po piati prioritetnym napravleniiam razvitiia Respubliki Uzbekistan v 2017-2021 gg.," available at [https://president.uz/ru/pages/view/strategy?menu_id=144], 26 August, 2021.

²⁹ See: *Ibidem*.

and open foreign policy. All the conceptual policy documents of the Central Asian countries indicate a course towards strengthening regional interstate cooperation.

Global Aspects of Foreign Policy of the Central Asian Countries

In the context of the new geopolitical configuration that took shape after the collapse of the U.S.S.R. in 1991 in Eurasia, the former Soviet republics were able to build their foreign policy course independently. Conducting an active foreign policy has become part of the strategy to strengthen national statehood and its new sovereign status in the global arena.

After the collapse of the U.S.S.R., the Central Asian countries began to pay close attention to building political and economic contacts with the West. Favoring the introduction of the liberal democratic principles in their socio-political systems, the leaders of the regional states, mainly Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, sought to intensify bilateral relations with Western countries, primarily with the United States. In 1992, the President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev made his first official visit to the United States, laying the foundation for the subsequent development of bilateral relations. Following the meeting, the presidents of Kazakhstan and the United States agreed to foster economic and military cooperation. The following package of documents was signed: an Agreement on Trade Relations, an Agreement on the Encouragement and Mutual Protection of Investments, a Memorandum of Understanding between the Governments of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the United States, and a joint statement on the conclusion of a convention on the avoidance of double taxation.³⁰

Faced with complex internal problems, Central Asian countries required financial and economic support from outside. Through various international financial institutions, Western countries allocated loans to the newly independent states, counting on their political loyalty. Meanwhile, by the late 1990s, the results of the political and economic reforms carried out in the regional countries were disappointing to the West. As they fostered the development of the regional states on the basis of democratic and market economy principles, Western countries expected to see a generation of Asian tigers. However, they encountered a new set of failed states.³¹ In the course of their sovereign development, all the regional countries had to deal with corruption, increased authoritarian tendencies and a lack of progress in economic reforms.³²

In the same period, relations between the Central Asian countries and Russia developed by inertia. This resulted from the absence of a clear vision of strategic regional goals and objectives on the part of the Russian leadership. Moreover, the latter was not ready to adequately respond to the problems associated with foreign compatriots.³³ Gaining an awareness of these problems as key for Russian foreign policy was a painful process.³⁴ Meanwhile, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan sought to develop closer economic and political relations with Russia based on economic feasibility. Back in 1994, speaking at Moscow State University, the President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev proposed to

³⁰ See: Yu. Komlyakova, "Democratization in Post-Soviet Central Asia: American Impact," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 15, Issue 1, 2014, pp. 121-122.

³¹ See: Ye. Rumer, "SShA i Tsentralnaia Azia posle 11 sentiabria," *Rossia i musulmanskii mir*, No. 11, 2003, pp. 90-103.

³² See: Ibidem.

³³ See: M.A. Neymark, "Russkiy mir i geopolitika," *Problemy postsovetskogo prostranstva*, No. 2 (4), 2015, pp. 78-100.

³⁴ See: Ibidem.

bring the interstate cooperation of the post-Soviet countries to a new level by creating the Eurasian Union.³⁵ The first president of Kyrgyzstan Aslan Akayev also noted that the path to the rise of the republic's industry primarily involves cooperation with Russia.³⁶ However, the attempts to create a multilateral Eurasian cooperation format have yielded no results. The agreements signed between Russia, Belarus and the regional countries³⁷ remained on paper and were never actually implemented.

In the 1990s, a mutual interest in cooperation emerged in relations between the regional countries and China. The political leaders of the Central Asian countries were impressed by the principles that China intended to use to build relations with the newly independent states. These principles, voiced by the Premier of the State Council of China in 1994 in Tashkent, included a course towards good-neighborliness, friendship and peaceful coexistence, mutually beneficial cooperation aimed to promote common prosperity, respect for the choice of the peoples of all countries, non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, respect for independence and sovereignty, and promotion of regional stability.³⁸ The political and legal normative base in relations between China and the countries of the region was laid gradually. In 1993, a declaration was signed on the foundations of friendly relations between China and Kazakhstan.³⁹ In 1994, Uzbekistan and China signed a Protocol on the basic principles of relations and on the development of mutually beneficial cooperation between the two countries.⁴⁰ In 1995, the Memorandum on the Development of Friendly Relations between the Kyrgyz Republic and the People's Government of Shanghai was signed.⁴¹

One of the key problems affecting the development of the region was the issue of territorial disputes. Their successful resolution could play a positive role in strengthening regional stability and security. The solution of issues of border disputes in bilateral and multilateral formats has thus become the priority in relations between the countries of Central Asia and China. Guided by this task, in 1996 the political leaders of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan met in Shanghai and signed a "military confidence-building agreement in the border area."⁴² This meeting laid the foundation for the development of the Shanghai cooperation format. At the turn of the 21st century, China and the countries of Central Asia managed to resolve all territorial differences, enshrining the results in special bilateral treaties. In this process, China's virtuoso level of diplomacy allowed it to achieve a solution to a range of border problems that was beneficial to it.⁴³ Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have ceded some of the disputed territories to China.⁴⁴

³⁵ See: *25 let idei evraziyskoy integratsii N.A. Nazarbayeva (v otsenkakh ekspertov KISI pri Prezidente RK)*, Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nur-Sultan, 2019, 296 pp.

³⁶ See: G. Rudov, *Nam suzhdeno zhit vechno v družhbe: dokumentalnye stranitsy rossiysko-kyrgyzskikh otnosheniy na rubezhe vekov*, ed. by Academician V. Ploskikh, Илим, Moscow, Bishkek, 2002, 352 pp.

³⁷ The Agreement on the Customs Union (1995), the Treaty on Deepening Integration in the Economic and Humanitarian Spheres (1996), the Treaty on the Customs Union and the Common Economic Space (1999).

³⁸ See: Ye.G. Garbuzarova, *Tsentrainaia Azia v sovremennykh miropoliticheskikh protsessakh*, Aspekt Press, Moscow, 2020, 192 pp.

³⁹ See: "Joint Declaration on the Foundations of Friendly Relations between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the People's Republic of China dated 18 October, 1993," available in Russian at [https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=1025860], 21 August, 2021.

⁴⁰ See: D.K. Yusupaliyeva, "Sotrudnichestvo mezhdru Kitaem i Uzbekistanom," *Problemy nauki*, No. 1 (60), 2021, pp. 21-23.

⁴¹ See: "Memorandum on the Development of Friendly Ties between the Kyrgyz Republic and the People's Government of Shanghai dated 26 October, 1995," available in Russian at [http://continent-online.com/Document/?doc_id=30224696], 27 August, 2021.

⁴² Zh. Lian, "Kitaiskaia diplomatiia v Tsentralnoy Azii v 1990-e gg.," *Sotsialno-politicheskie nauki*, No. 1, 2017, pp. 17-21.

⁴³ See: V. Paramonov, O. Stolpovskiy, "Pogranichno-territorialnye problemy v kitaisko-tsentralnoaziatskikh otnosheniakh," available at [<https://centrasia.org/newsA.php?st=1235032800>], 27 August, 2021.

⁴⁴ See: *Ibidem*.

With the start of the anti-terrorist operation in Afghanistan, all the regional states declared their readiness to assist the West in the fight against international terrorism. At the beginning of the 21st century, the U.S. military-political presence in Central Asia changed the balance of power in the region and opened a new page in relations with regional states. Agreements were reached with the ruling elites of the Central Asian countries, allowing the United States to use their infrastructure facilities for military and humanitarian purposes. Turkmenistan, with its status of a neutral state, also granted the United States the right to use its airspace and the airport in the capital Ashgabad for refueling aircraft carrying humanitarian supplies to Afghanistan. Each regional state has received economic support from Western countries and international foundations for their participation in the American military operation in Afghanistan. Generous financial assistance was aimed at solving social and economic problems in these countries. For example, in 2001, the IMF allocated a \$90-million loan to Kyrgyzstan.⁴⁵ In 2002, the World Bank announced a strategy for assisting Uzbekistan. The strategy envisaged the issuance of loans to the republic under two scenarios over three years: 300-350 million dollars subject to a decisive reform of the economy, and 150 million dollars if the pace of reforms is accelerated without a macroeconomic decline.⁴⁶

The global financial and economic crisis and internal problems have pushed the Central Asian countries to deepen economic cooperation with Russia. In 2010, the Customs Union began to function with the participation of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. Two years later, the Common Economic Space of the three countries was launched. In 2014, the leaders of the three above-mentioned states signed an agreement on the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), which came into force in January 2015. Soon, Kyrgyzstan joined the Union in order to give impetus to the development of its national economy. The republic's leadership considered its participation in the EAEU a means of solving economic problems and upholding geopolitical interests.⁴⁷ The institutionalization of Russia's relations with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan was negatively assessed in the West, which saw neo-imperial ambitions in Moscow's actions. The American leadership tried to convey these concerns to the political leaders of the Central Asian countries. Thus, in July 2020, during the annual meeting with the foreign ministers of Central Asian states in the virtual C5 + 1 format, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo expressed the intention of the United States to provide "unwavering support for independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity" to the regional countries.⁴⁸

Despite skepticism in regard to the subsequent development of Eurasian integration, fueled by Western countries, this Union did succeed and strengthen its positions, becoming an important factor in global politics and economy. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are focused on expanding economic cooperation within the Union, considering Eurasian integration a prerequisite for the sustainable development of their national economies and a vital factor in strengthening their political stability.⁴⁹ Gradually, Eurasian integration became attractive to other regional states. Structural economic reforms carried out in Uzbekistan stimulated its leadership to join the EAEU in 2020 as an observer state. The issue of Tajikistan's entry into the EAEU is being elaborated at the state level; both positive and negative aspects of the country's possible entry into the Union are analyzed. Tajikistan's accession to the EAEU will allow to unlock the republic's trade and investment potential, and to create a

⁴⁵ See: S.S. Zhiltsov, I.S. Zonn, *SShA v pogone za Kaspiem*, Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, Moscow, 2009, 200 pp.

⁴⁶ See: *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷ See: S. Zhiltsov, "The Post-Soviet Space: Previous Development and a New Configuration," *Central Asia and the Caucasus. English Edition*, Vol. 19, Issue 3, 2018, pp. 14-15.

⁴⁸ "Pompeo obsudil s glavami MID stran Tsentralnoy Azii prodovolstvennuiu bezopasnost," available at [<https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/8856971>], 7 August, 2021.

⁴⁹ See: S.S. Zhiltsov, "Borba za Evraziu," *Problemy postsovetskogo prostranstva*, No. 8 (1), 2021, pp. 8-19.

favorable labor migration regime.⁵⁰ According to various estimates, the number of migrants from Tajikistan working in Russia exceeds 1 million people.

The desire of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to diversify their hydrocarbon export routes and free itself of Russia's influence coincided with the interests of China, which needed new sources of raw materials. The participation of China and the Central Asian countries in joint infrastructure projects was beneficial for all parties. The implementation of these projects has brought great geopolitical and geo-economic benefits to China, opening up access to the energy markets of the regional countries. The elites of the Central Asian countries see China as an advantageous economic partner, who is ready to provide cheap loans and incur additional costs associated with infrastructure development.⁵¹ The first branch of the Turkmenistan-China gas pipeline was built in 2009, opening up Beijing's access to Turkmenistan's and the entire region's hydrocarbon reserves. In 2017, Kazakhstan began exporting gas to China from its western fields. In the future, the construction of the fourth branch of the gas pipeline, which will pass through the territory of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, is slated for completion.

Gradually, China became the dominant buyer in Turkmenistan's energy market. The Turkmen authorities plan to reduce economic dependence on China through the TAPI project. This project, lobbied by the United States as part of the New Silk Road initiative, includes the supply of Turkmen gas southward to India through Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, the prospects for this project are still vague, since the main gas pipeline routes traverse the countries where conflicts persist, and there is a danger of their escalation. Against the backdrop of Turkmenistan's growing economic dependence on China, Russia's return to the Turkmen energy market in 2019 was a timely one. Thus, after a three-year break, Gazprom resumed imports of Turkmen gas until 2028. Also, for several years now, Turkmenistan has been discussing the supply of its gas to the European market.⁵² A project for the construction of the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline, which will open the way for Turkmen gas to Europe, is under discussion. The signing of the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea in 2018 and the Memorandum of Intent on Joint Exploration and Development of the Dostlug Hydrocarbon Field in the Caspian Sea between Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan in 2021 increased the chances for the implementation of the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline.

Central Asian countries, primarily Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, demonstrate great interest in the American CASA-1000 project. It was developed by the Obama administration and is aimed at exporting electricity from the regional countries to Afghanistan and Pakistan. The cost of the project is \$1.86 billion. For the United States, this project bears more geopolitical burden than economic,⁵³ since it will orient the countries of Central Asia southward, weakening their economic and political ties to Russia and China. The project was launched in 2016 in Tursunzade. The COVID-19 pandemic has made certain adjustments, slowing down its implementation. The next phase of the CASA-1000 project started on 3 April, 2021, when the President of Kyrgyzstan Sadyr Japarov laid a capsule in the foundation of the first support of a high-voltage power transmission line in the village of Karabulak, Batken region.⁵⁴ The leaders of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have repeatedly stressed that they are pinning great hopes on the implementation of this project, which will give impetus to the develop-

⁵⁰ See: "Ekonomicheskiye efekty vstupleniya Tadzhikistana v Evraziyskiy ekonomicheskiy soiuz. Analiticheskiy doklad, No. 11, 2020," available at [https://eabr.org/upload/iblock/97a/EABR_Analytical_Report_RT_11_2020_RU_1.pdf], 7 August, 2021.

⁵¹ See: S. Zhiltsov, I. Zonn, E. Markova, "The Geopolitical Landscape of Eurasia Under the Pressure of Caspian and Central Asian Power Projects," *Central Asia and the Caucasus. English Edition*, Vol. 22, Issue 1, 2019, pp. 25-33.

⁵² See: *Ibidem*.

⁵³ See: A. Knyazev, "V CASA-1000 bolshe geopolitiki, chem ekonomiki," available at [<https://www.postsovet.ru/blog/asia/912413.html>], 7 August, 2021.

⁵⁴ See: "O khode stroitelstva CASA-1000 v Kyrgyzstane i Tadzhikistane," available at [<https://eenergy.media/2021/07/21/o-hode-stroitelstva-krupnejshogo-proekta-casa-1000-v-kyrgyzstane-i-tadzhikistane/>], 16 August, 2021.

ment of their national economies. On the one hand, the Central Asian countries expect to receive economic benefits from the implementation of the CASA-1000 project, on the other hand, they consider it an opportunity to diversify foreign economic and foreign policy contacts.

At the present stage, China has become the most active geopolitical player in Central Asia due to its large-scale regional economic policy. The Belt and Road (BRI) transcontinental cooperation project proposed in 2013 by the Chinese leadership seemed attractive to all Central Asian countries. Kazakhstan has defined its participation in this project in the Nurlı Zhol Kazakh state development program. Kyrgyzstan's political elite is also positively disposed towards deepening cooperation with China, which it considers an attractive investment partner for economic development purposes. Currently, Kyrgyzstan has an opportunity to implement the project for the construction of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway, which has been deliberated since the 1990s. However, China is in no rush to finance the project, which is estimated at \$4.5 billion. In the early stages of the BRI project, China has actively provided the regional states with investments and loans. However, faced with corruption schemes in Central Asian countries, Beijing chose to act more cautiously and only supports those initiatives that will be implemented on a co-financing basis.⁵⁵ Kyrgyzstan's economy is experiencing financial difficulties, so its authorities cannot assume such obligations. Due to this fact, Uzbekistan agreed to take part in the design and construction of individual sections of this railway. Relevant agreements were reached at a meeting of the Uzbek-Kyrgyz intergovernmental commission in March 2021.⁵⁶ Participation in the BRI project will allow Uzbekistan to implement the tasks related to the modernization of the national economy. "The terms of the Chinese project are most closely suited to the modern foreign policy of Uzbekistan, closely correlating with the tasks of diversifying foreign trade transport routes and attracting investments in the development of economic infrastructure."⁵⁷ Just as its neighbors, Tajikistan seeks to derive economic benefits from its participation in the Chinese project. A bilateral cooperation program aimed at converging the Chinese BRI project and the National Development Strategy of Tajikistan until 2030 was launched by Tajikistan and China.

Cooperation of Central Asian Countries with Non-Regional Players

Since their first days of independence, Central Asian countries have established political and economic contacts with Muslim countries, i.e., Turkey and Iran. Cooperation with Turkey, which the Central Asian countries relied on to get closer to the West, was of particular interest. However, in reality the interests of Turkey and the regional countries immediately began to diverge. Appealing to Turkic unity, Turkey sought to establish multilateral cooperation with the regional countries, emphasizing the creation of supranational institutions. Meanwhile, the political leaders of the regional states were rather wary of such initiatives,⁵⁸ seeing them as a threat to their national sovereignty. Thus, the

⁵⁵ See: K. Riklton, "Zheleznaia doroga Kitay-Kirgiziia-Uzbekistan: kto zaplatit?," available at [<https://inosmi.ru/economic/20210520/249754125.html>], 22 August, 2021.

⁵⁶ See: "Uzbekistan gotov vziat na sebia stroitelstvo chasti zheleznoy dorogi KNR-KR-RUZ," available at [<https://uz.sputniknews.ru/20210326/uzbekistan-gotov-vzyat-na-sebya-stroitelstvo-chasti-jeleznoy-dorogi-knr-kr-ruz-17984600.html>], 22 August, 2021.

⁵⁷ D.A. Borisov, "Vneshniaia politika Uzbekistana pri Sh. Mirziyev: strategii i praktika," *Izvestia Uralskogo federalnogo universiteta*, Series *Obshchestvennye nauki*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (188), 2019, pp. 130-139.

⁵⁸ See: G. Rudov, "Rol Turtsii i Irana v Tsentralnoy Azii," *Rossia i musulmanskii mir*, No. 12, 2010, pp. 114-118.

President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev emphasized that civilized interstate relations should be built on mutual respect for state sovereignty, rather than on ethno-linguistic grounds.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, the Turkish foreign policy vector has become one of the key elements in the foreign policy of the regional countries, which were interested in deepening economic and political cooperation with Ankara. Interaction between Kazakhstan and Turkey developed especially actively. Kazakhstan became the first of the Turkic Central Asian states, with which Turkey signed a strategic partnership agreement in 2009.⁶⁰

The interest of the Central Asian republics in the development and strengthening of interaction with Turkey in the Cooperation Council of Turkic States (CCTS, created in 2009) has increased. For Turkey, CCTS has become the promotion of its geopolitical interests in the region. The Central Asian countries viewed this integration mechanism as an opportunity to diversify their foreign policy. Turkmenistan joined the CCTS as an observer country. Joining the Council in 2019 as a full member was historic for Uzbekistan. The accession of Uzbekistan to the CCTS demonstrated the open nature of the republic's foreign policy and the versatility of its foreign policy strategy.⁶¹

All Central Asian countries seek to strengthen cooperation within the CCTS and increase the influence of this Turkic integration structure in the international arena. Thus, the following agreements were reached at the summit of the heads of CCTS states in April 2021:

- first, to change the name of the Union to Turkic Council, and
- secondly, to prepare Vision of the Turkic World-2040 and Strategy of the Turkic Council 2020-2025.⁶²

While fostering cooperation with Turkey, the Central Asian countries also furthered economic and political contacts with Iran. However, they were not particularly intense. Positive dynamics were only evident in the relations between Tajikistan and Iran. Tajikistan's affiliation with the Persian-speaking world made Iran as a priority vector of Dushanbe's foreign policy. Since Tajikistan gained independence, the factor of cultural, historical and civilizational proximity has become a decisive one in Tajik-Iranian relations.⁶³ In 2006, ethnocultural closeness led to the emergence of the Union of Persian-speaking States, with the participation of Tajikistan, Iran and Afghanistan. Tajikistan demonstrated a special interest in the development of this union, hoping for joint implementation of large-scale economic projects with the brotherly countries. The active promotion of integrative cooperation based on ideology and values was the result of Tajikistan's foreign policy aimed at diversifying foreign policy and foreign economic relations.

Infrastructural projects have become one of the priority areas of cooperation between Iran and the Central Asian countries. Back in the 1990s, cooperation with Iran provided the Central Asian countries with access to the Persian Gulf through the implementation of such projects as the construction of the Bafq-Bandar-Abbas (1995) and Mashhad-Seraks-Tejen (1996) railways. Iran was implementing its strategy of modernizing transport and communication routes, which corresponded to the interests of the regional countries that sought to find ways to enter world markets. The commissioning of the Bafq-Mashhad railway in 2005 reduced the distance to the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas for

⁵⁹ See: *G. Rudov*, op. cit.

⁶⁰ See: "Agreement on Strategic Partnership between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Turkey dated 22 October, 2009," available in Russian at [https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=30501274], 25 August, 2021.

⁶¹ See: "Mezhdunarodnye eksperty obsuzhdaiut vstupleniye Uzbekistana v Sovet sotrudnichestva tiurkoiazychnykh gosudarstv," available at [<https://nuz.uz/politika/44217-mezhdunarodnye-eksperty-obsuzhdayut-vstuplenie-uzbekistana-v-sovet-sotrudnichestva-tyurkoyazychnyh-gosudarstv.html>], 25 August, 2021.

⁶² See: K. Bozdogan, "Tiurkskiy sovet: Turkestan ob'iavlennyy odnoy iz dukhovnykh stolits tiurkskogo mira," available at [<https://inosmi.ru/politic/20210401/249469750.html>], 29 August, 2021.

⁶³ See: V.I. Mesamed, "Irano-tadzhikskie otnosheniia: problemy i dostizheniia," available at [<http://www.iimes.ru/?p=34967>], 29 August, 2021.

the Central Asian states by about 900 km. In 2007, a joint declaration was signed between Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Iran on the construction of the Gorgan-Bereket-Uzen railway. In 2014, this 934.5-km railway line was officially put into operation, which allowed to intensify regional economic ties. Speaking at the commissioning ceremony, the President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev emphasized that this new transport and communication route in the Central Asian states “will increase the importance of the regional market and the production focused on Asian markets.”⁶⁴

Meanwhile, relying on its transit potential, Iran also tried to overcome international isolation through more active participation in geo-economic projects in Central Asia. Thus in 2018, together with China, Iran, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan put into operation a railway along the Changsha (China)-Altynkol (Kazakhstan)-Bolashak-Serhetyaka (Turkmenistan)-Akyayla- Incheburun (Iran)-Tehran route within the BRI framework. This event opened up new trade and economic opportunities for the Central Asian states. The flow of cheap goods from China, Iran and Turkey rushed into the region, providing people with basic requirements and alleviating the internal economic crisis in the regional countries.⁶⁵ In April 2019, Uzbekistan joined this transport corridor, strengthening the transit potential of this Eurasian transport route.

Intra-Regional Level of Interstate Cooperation

After the collapse of the U.S.S.R., the countries of Central Asia faced regional problems: ethnic conflicts, territorial disputes and water energy conflicts. They sought to find mechanisms for interstate interaction. Their political leaders attempted to create multilateral cooperation formats: the Central Asian Union (1994), the Central Asian Economic Community (1998), the Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CAC). However, in the end, in 2005, the member countries of the CAC, which Russia had joined in 2004, decided to join the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC). The political elites of the Central Asian countries were aware of the need to pool resources and efforts in order to solve common socio-economic problems.⁶⁶

A new stage of interstate regional cooperation began in 2016, when Shavkat Mirziyoyev was elected president of Uzbekistan. This phase was distinguished by an increased level of activity of international contacts between the regional countries. Uzbekistan’s new foreign policy allowed to initiate the bilateral format of regional cooperation, as well as to create a collective interaction mechanism. Shavkat Mirziyoyev made his first official visits to Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. In 2017, a Strategic Partnership Agreement was signed between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.⁶⁷ Thus, the foundation was laid for the development of comprehensive cooperation. With Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan signed a Joint Declaration on furthering strategic partnership and strengthening good-neighborliness.⁶⁸ Relations between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan have been hampered by border disputes. In

⁶⁴ “Zapushchena zheleznodorozhnaia magistral Uzen-Bereket-Gorgan,” available at [<https://tj.sputniknews.ru/20141204/1013471452.html>], 29 August, 2021.

⁶⁵ See: Ch. Guo., D.A Degtarev., Zh Jielin, “Implications of ‘One Belt, One Road’ Strategy for China and Eurasia,” *Vestnik RUDN. Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 2019, pp. 77-88.

⁶⁶ See: Z.A. Dadabayeva, Ye.M. Kuzmina, *Protsessy regionalizatsii v Tsentralnoy Azii: problemy i protivorechiia*, Institute of Economics of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 2014, 55 pp.

⁶⁷ See: “Strategic Partnership Agreement between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan of 6 March, 2017,” available at [<https://lex.uz/ru/docs/4647214>], 30 August, 2021.

⁶⁸ See: “Joint Declaration on Further Deepening Strategic Partnership and Strengthening Good-Neighborliness between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Republic of Kazakhstan,” available in Russian at [<https://president.uz/ru/lists/view/346>], 30 August, 2021.

March 2016, another tense situation arose on the border between the two states. The conflict was resolved with the help of the CSTO, to which the ex-president of Kyrgyzstan Almazbek Atambayev turned for help. The conflicting parties were reconciled in the framework of an emergency meeting of the CSTO Permanent Council in Moscow.⁶⁹ In September 2017, during the first state visit of the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev to Kyrgyzstan, the leaders of the two countries signed an Agreement on the Demarcation and Delimitation of the State Border.⁷⁰ However, the 200 kilometers of the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border have not yet been agreed upon. The first visit of the head of Uzbekistan to Tajikistan in a long time took place in 2018. Following the meeting, the parties agreed,

- first, to abolish the visa regime and restore transport links between the two countries;
- secondly, they reached an agreement on the last disputed section of the interstate border;
- thirdly, contracts worth about \$140 million were signed.⁷¹

The unresolved tension that arose in Kyrgyz-Tajik relations in 2021 due to border disputes, leading to armed clashes on the borders of both states, negatively affected the spirit of regional cooperation.

Uzbekistan's new policy has created conditions for the implementation of a multilateral regional interaction format. Thus, since 2018, heads of the regional countries have been meeting annually in a Consultative Meeting format. In August 2021, the third Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of Central Asia was held in the city of Turkmenbashi. Following the meeting, the participating states made a Joint Statement. The document noted that the countries of the region are willing to continue active cooperation in the implementation of the Treaty on a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone.⁷² It was also emphasized that the regional states are ready to provide all possible assistance for the earliest possible attainment of civil peace and harmony in Afghanistan.⁷³ The participants of the Consultative Meeting proposed to resolve the issue "of establishing a dialogue on security and cooperation in Central Asia as a permanent consultative platform for discussing topical issues of regional development on a systematic and regular basis."⁷⁴ Active intra-regional interaction demonstrated the desire of the political leaders of the Central Asian countries to take on the responsibility for solving pressing regional problems and to protect their national interests in the context of the growing geopolitical rivalry between the United States, China and Russia in the region. However, the increasing economic influence of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in Central Asia opens up an opportunity for them to claim the status of a regional leader, which may negatively affect regional cooperation.

Conclusion

After the collapse of the U.S.S.R., Central Asian countries were forced to start shaping their foreign policy in the context of a new geopolitical reality. The countries have made a choice in favor

⁶⁹ See: "Postoianny Sovet ODKB na vnocherednom zasedanii obsudil situatsiiu na neuregulirovannom uchastke kyrgyzsko-uzbekskoy granitsy," available at [https://odkb-csto.org/authorized_organs/permanent_council/postoyanny_sovet_odkb_na_vnocherednom_zasedanii_obsudil_situatsiyu_na_neuregulirovannom_uchastke_k/], 31 August, 2021.

⁷⁰ See: "Uzbekistan i Kyrgyzstan demarkirovali 1 170 kilometrov granitsy za god," available at [<https://tj.sputniknews.ru/20170904/uzbekistan-kyrgyzstan-demarkirovali-granitsy-1023244628.html>], 31 August, 2021.

⁷¹ See: "Pervy za 18 let vizit prezidenta Uzbekistana v Tadjikistan," available at [<https://centralasia.media/news/1435996>], 31 August, 2021.

⁷² See: "Joint Statement Following the Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of Central Asia," available at [<https://turkmenportal.com/blog/38734/sovместное-заявление-по-итогам-консультативной-встречи-глав-государств-центральной-азии>], 31 August, 2021.

⁷³ See: *Ibidem*.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*.

of pursuing a multi-vector foreign policy, considering it a condition for maintaining sovereignty. In addition, the regional countries have structured their foreign policy by relying on the principle of balancing between global and regional actors. As a result, the external factor began to play a decisive role in regional political and economic processes, setting the trajectory for the development of the Central Asian countries.

The multi-vector policy has allowed the Central Asian countries to maneuver between the United States, Russia and China. Under conditions of economic weakness and underdevelopment of political institutions, it allowed to defend their national interests. At the same time, the regional states have demonstrated interest in geo-economic projects that were proposed by the leading centers of global politics. Central Asian countries have exhibited interest in the New Silk Road and the Eurasian Economic Union, combining them with their national development strategies.

In the future, the direction of foreign policy of the Central Asian countries will be determined by a number of factors.

- On the one hand, these are the success of interaction within the region and the willingness to compromise on controversial issues and other long-standing regional conflicts.
- On the other hand, the extra-regional factor, or the desire of external players to use Central Asia in their own interests, will have a great influence.

In these conditions, much will depend on the political ambitions of the leaders of the regional countries and their ability to build interstate cooperation within the region in bilateral and multilateral formats.

FOREIGN POLICY OF THE SOUTH CAUCASIAN COUNTRIES: RESULTS AND NEW CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

The newly independent states (South Caucasian countries being no exception), the products of the Soviet Union's traumatic disintegration, needed independent foreign policies. Throughout the three decades of their independence they

formulated their priorities and defined approaches and principles under the strong pressure of certain factors.

This process has been unfolding amid the complicated social and political processes and geopolitical transformations in the region shaken by the post-Soviet ethnic conflicts. As could be expected, the newly independent South Caucasian states opted for different routes in their economic and statehood development, while their ruling elites took into account the external and internal contexts when shaping their foreign policies.

Different approaches and different foreign policy priorities opened the doors to non-regional geopolitical actors: the United States, the European Union, Iran and Turkey have joined Russia, whose presence is rooted in its

past. Recently, China, Israel and Japan have become interested in the region. Thus, today the regional countries are orientated to the interests of non-regional states. This has not benefited the situation in the region or cooperation among the regional states.

Foreign policy of the South Caucasian countries is inseparable from the regional security problems, which means that it should become an object of meticulous studies. In the latter half of 2020, the war in Nagorno-Karabakh changed the region's geopolitical setting and shattered its stability.

The article sums up the results of the policies pursued by the South Caucasian countries and identifies the challenges and possible developments in the region after the Karabakh war of 2020.

KEYWORDS: Southern Caucasus, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, non-regional states.

Introduction

Post-Soviet transfer was a complicated and even painful process for practically all former Soviet republics,¹ the South Caucasian states in particular. To promote their national interests, they needed independent foreign policy. However, this process was unfolding amid clashes of interests of regional and non-regional actors that sought to claim the leading roles in regional development.

Strategic relationships between the local states and global actors became one of the typical features of South Caucasian foreign policies: as small states, the regional countries opted for multi-vector and flexible foreign policy courses.²

The war in Nagorno-Karabakh and the complicated relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey led post-Soviet Armenia into a fairly convoluted social, economic and political situation.³

As an independent state, Armenia opted for complementarity,⁴ which presupposed partnership with all actors operating in the region. In this way Erevan demonstrated its openness to both friends and opponents.⁵ At the early stage of independence this approach allowed Levon Ter-Petrosian, the

¹ See: *Mify i konflikty na Iuzhnom Kavkaze*, Vol. 2, *Instrumentalizatsia temy konflikta v politicheskom diskurse*, InternationalAlert, 2013, p. 14.

² See: D. Degterev *et al.*, "Parametry mnogovektornosti vneshney politiki stran SNG. Prikladnoy analiz," *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnoshenia*, Vol. 62, No. 1, 2018, pp. 63-65.

³ See: H. Mikaelian, "Armenian Foreign Policy: Coordinating the Interests of the U.S., the EU, and Russia," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 3 (57), 2009, pp. 116-124.

⁴ The term was put into circulation by Vartan Oskanian, Foreign Minister of Armenia in 1998.

⁵ See: "Vneshnepoliticheskiy vybor Armenii: politika obespechenia maksimalnoy bezopasnosti," *Problemy post-sovetskogo prostranstva*, No. 3, 2015, p. 99.

first president of Armenia, to pursue a successful foreign policy by meandering between Russia and the West, to develop relations with Islamic Iran and unstable Georgia and to negotiate diplomatic relations with Turkey. He never looked at Russia as an indispensable ally and was convinced that his country's stability and wellbeing could be promoted by closer relations with Turkey.⁶ Everything changed in 1993: Turkey closed the land border with Armenia to demonstrate its solidarity with Azerbaijan, Erevan responded with revised approaches to the country's security.⁷

"Azerbaijani and Turkish menace prompted Armenia's leadership to rethink its initial anti-Russian attitudes."⁸ In 1995, the sides signed a treaty on a Russian military base in Armenia; in 1997, they signed a Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance as the legal basis of their strategic cooperation. While developing its relations with Russia, Armenia spared no effort to rely on the West to the greatest possible extent to balance out its reliance on Russia in security matters.⁹

The economic situation in Azerbaijan, the Karabakh conflict and the pro-Russian sentiments in the country's political elite headed by Ayaz Mutallibov, the first president of Azerbaijan (1991-1992) made pro-Russian foreign policy practically inevitable. Changes began as soon as Mutallibov left his post. Abulfaz Elchibey, the second president of Azerbaijan, supported Pan-Turkism and an alliance with Turkey; the Karabakh conflict forced the Azeri leaders to look for allies among the regional and non-regional actors. Disappointed in the Communist ideology, people wanted a new development model for their country, which explains a very logical turn towards Turkey and the West. This, however, did not bring expected financial assistance from Turkey. In the 1990s, Heydar Aliyev, the third president of Azerbaijan, launched a more balanced foreign policy. He established constructive relations with the United States and Turkey and developed partnership with Russia, while avoiding military alliances and full-fledged regional economic integration with either side.¹⁰

Independent Georgia, likewise, shaped its foreign policy from scratch amid ethnic and political conflicts, a civil war and economic crisis, the complicated regional context and a highly negative attitude to the Soviet past.

At first, Georgia's foreign policy was determined by the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the anti-Russian sentiments of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the first president of Georgia (1991-1992). Tbilisi broke off its relations with Russia¹¹ for the sake of a closer relationship with the West in expectation of economic support,¹² which never came. Under the pressure of Georgia's defeat in Abkhazia, an escalation of the civil war and economic collapse, the second president Eduard Shevardnadze readjusted his country's foreign policy in line with the principle of political realism.¹³ Until the late 1990s, the country was balancing between Russia and the West, it established useful contacts

⁶ See: L. Ter-Petrosian, *Selected Speeches, Articles, Interviews*, Archives of the First President of Armenia, Erevan, 2006, p. 136 (in Armenian).

⁷ See: J. Manukian, "Politika Turtsii na Iuzhnom Kavkaze i problemy bezopasnosti Respubliki Armenia 1991-2007gg.," in: *Vneshniaia politika respubliki Armenia. Problemy i vyzovy. Nauchno-prakticheskaia konferentsia, posviashchennaia 22-letiu nezavisimosti RA, 17 oktiabria 2013 goda*, EGU, Erevan, 2014, p. 94.

⁸ A. Terzyan, "Material Forces vs. the Force of Ideas: What Makes Russia Armenia's 'Best Friend'?" *Armenian Journal of Political Science*, No. 1 (8), 2018, p. 13.

⁹ See: S. Minasian, "Vneshniaia politika postsovetskoy Armenii: 20 let odnovremnenno na neskol'kikh stuliakh," *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnoshenia*, No. 1, 2013, p. 85.

¹⁰ See: Z. Shiriyevev, "Azerbaijan's Relations with Russia: Closer by Default?" *Russia and Eurasia Programme*, Chatham House, March 2019, p. 4, available at [<https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2019-03-14-Azerbaijan2.pdf>], 1 June, 2021.

¹¹ See: Z. Bakhturidze, *Vneshniaia politika Gruzii 1991-2014 gg: kliuchevye orientiry i partnery*, St. Petersburg, Avrora, 2015, p. 19.

¹² See: H. Mikaelian, op. cit., p. 117.

¹³ See: Z. Bakhturidze, op. cit., pp. 25-26.

wherever possible; it did not abandon its pro-Western orientation¹⁴ and persisted in its multi-vector foreign policy course.

By the end of the 1990s, the South Caucasian states have generally managed to realize their multi-vector foreign policy course and continued balancing between global actors.

Changes in the Foreign Policy of Armenia

Robert Kocharian, the second president of Armenia (1998-2008) “heralded a new era of Armenian foreign policy, largely hailed as ‘well-balanced’. He embarked on the construction of a new foreign policy identity that revolved around three core factors: genocide recognition; a complementary foreign policy; and, most importantly, full-scale European integration,”¹⁵ with a peaceful settlement of the Karabakh conflict as its cornerstone.

Unlike his predecessor,¹⁶ he added the item of international recognition of Armenian genocide to his country’s foreign policy agenda. At the same time, the Armenian leaders stated that recognition was a factor of moral rather than political importance, unrelated to the potential normalization of the Turkish-Armenian relations.

His ambitious agenda was based on “complementarity” and “involvement” (integration).¹⁷ Full-scale European integration became one of the foreign policy priorities. The first step in this direction was made in 2001, when Armenia joined the Council of Europe.¹⁸ Armenia’s inclusion in the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) (2005) was another important step in the same direction. Political and economic bilateral relations with European countries fostered Armenia’s European integration course.¹⁹

Washington’s increased interest in the region, which became apparent in the early 21st century and the fairly big Armenian diaspora in the United States prompted Kocharian to turn his attention to the American dimension of his country’s foreign policy. Erevan actively cooperated with the U.S. in the spheres of economy and defense, as well as anti-terrorist struggle and democratization; it took every chance to develop its contacts with NATO within the Partnership for Peace Program.

The relationship with Russia, however, have not disappeared from the agenda: “Kocharyan never questioned the significance of Armenian-Russian relations and viewed Russia as Armenia’s indispensable and strategic partner, despite his overtures to the West.”²⁰ This moved Russia to the forefront in security and economic segments.

¹⁴ See: Z.Z. Bakhturidze, *Vneshnepoliticheskiy kurs Gruzii v XXI veke: regionalnoe izmerenie*, Publishing House of the Politechnical University, St. Petersburg, 2018, p. 30.

¹⁵ A. Terzyan, “The Evolution of Armenia’s Foreign Policy Identity: The Conception of Identity Driven Paths. Friends and Foes in Armenian Foreign Policy Discourse,” *The Role of Identity, Norms and Beliefs in Foreign Policy of Armenia and Georgia*, October 2016, p. 149.

¹⁶ L. Ter-Petrosian was convinced that “collective memory” of Armenian genocide of 1915 would negatively affect his country’s foreign policy.

¹⁷ This means that the country should be involved in regional and world integration processes well-coordinated with its domestic and foreign policy.

¹⁸ See: “Council of Europe. Bilateral and Multilateral Relations,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, available at [<https://www.mfa.am/en/international-organisations/5>], 10 June, 2021.

¹⁹ See: *Republic of Armenia. National Security Strategy*, 2007, available at [<https://www.mfa.am/filemanager/Statics/Doctrinerus.pdf>], 10 June, 2021.

²⁰ A. Terzyan, *The Evolution of Armenia’s Foreign Policy Identity: The Conception of Identity Driven Paths. Friends and Foes in Armenian Foreign Policy Discourse*, p. 153.

In 2002, Armenia became one of the founders of the CSTO, which consolidated the military and political relationship between Moscow and Erevan; it was further developed by the Inter-Governmental Agreement on Military-Technical Cooperation signed in 2003.²¹

In 2002-2008, Russia acquired access to the strategic assets of Armenia, the controlling blocks of shares in the energy giants—the Hrazdan Hydroelectric power Plant and the Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant—and three scientific research institutes.²² In 2006-2007, it acquired control over power networks, the biggest mobile operators and railways of Armenia and the Armenian part of the Iran-Armenia gas pipeline. Since 2005, Russia's investments in Armenia have been growing increasingly more impressive.²³ By 2008, the trade turnover between the two countries reached \$1,059 billion (19% of Armenia's total trade turnover).²⁴

Armenia was expanding its relations with Georgia and Iran, the two transit countries that connected it with the rest of the world. Between 2001 and 2008, its trade turnover with Iran doubled, reaching \$228 million.²⁵ Cooperation in electric power production was consolidated by the gas pipeline from Iran to Armenia, commissioned in 2007; the first and second Iran-Armenia high voltage transmission lines and an alternative 91-km highway between the two countries were completed in the same year.²⁶

Georgia's transit potential was very important for Armenia: the blockaded country received from 60 to 80% of its trade turnover from Georgian territory,²⁷ traversed by part of the North-South main gas pipeline. Between 2001 and 2008, their trade turnover increased by 4.2 times.²⁸ Increasingly more Armenians opted for the Georgian Black Sea resorts.²⁹

Just as in the past, under Serzh Sargsian (2008-2018) Armenia paid particular attention to a peaceful settlement of the Karabakh conflict and international recognition of the genocide of Armenia. In 2008, in an effort to normalize bilateral relations with Turkey and open the borders, the Armenian leaders initiated a two-year “football diplomacy,” which Ankara ignored.

Armenia has been growing more active in Europe: it hoped that it would change the South Caucasian political landscape to speed up its integration in European institutions through the EU Eastern Partnership Program (2009). Between 2010 and 2013, Armenia actively cooperated with the EU in a hope to sign the Association Agreement and become an Associate Member. However, in October 2013, during his visit to the Russian Federation, President Sargsian announced that Armenia would join the Customs Union and would contribute to the Eurasian Economic Union. Erevan was disappointed with the EU, which had done nothing to settle the conflict by peaceful means; the crisis in the RF-EU relationships was another negative factor. Armenia, however, continued developing its relationship with the EU; in 2017, it signed the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA).³⁰

²¹ See: S. Minasian, “V kontekste problem regionalnoy bezopasnosti”, *Voенно-promyshlenny kuryer*, No. 20 (87), 8 June, 2005, available at [<https://vpk-news.ru/articles/1414%20>], 12 June, 2021.

²² See: G. Grigorian, “Torgovo-ekonomicheskie otnosheniya mezhdru Armeniyei i Rossiey (1991-2016)”, *Rossia i novye gosudarstva Evrazii*, No. 2, 2017, p. 57.

²³ See: *Statistical Yearbook of Armenia 2009*, Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia, available in Russian at [<https://armstat.am/ru/?nid=586&year=2009>], 1 July, 2021.

²⁴ Ibidem.

²⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶ See: “Iran. Bilateral Relations,” Foreign Ministry of the Republic of Armenia, available at [<https://www.mfa.am/hy/bilateral-relations/ir>], 15 June, 2021.

²⁷ See: S. Minasian, “Armenia and Georgia: Problems and Prospects,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 13, Issue 2, 2012, p. 47.

²⁸ See: *Statistical Yearbooks of Armenia*, Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia, available at [<https://armstat.am/en/?nid=586>], 1 June, 2021.

²⁹ See: S. Minasian, “Armenia and Georgia: Problems and Prospects,” pp. 46-47.

³⁰ See: The Parliament of Armenia ratified this agreement on 11 April, 2018. In March 2021, it entered into force (see [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_782], 21 June, 2021).

Relations with the United States occupied an important place in Armenia's foreign policy³¹ due to the role Washington played in the peaceful settlement of the Karabakh conflict and the volume of humanitarian and technical assistance. Armenia also maintained its interaction with NATO.

Amid Armenia's developing relationships with non-regional actors, Russia remained its foreign policy priority. Erevan wanted deeper military, political and economic bilateral and multilateral cooperation. Armenia joined the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015. "The Armenian-Russian partnership is viewed as the most important and indispensable factor for the maintenance of stability and security in the South Caucasus."³² Five years earlier, in 2010, the sides had signed a protocol under which the Russian military base could remain in Armenia till 2044 to ensure the country's security together with the Armenian army.³³ In 2013, the sides signed the Armenian-Russian treaty on the development of military and technical cooperation. In December 2016, Russia and Armenia created a regional air defense system and a united army group. "In 2016-2020 a total of 94% of Armenian arms imports came from Russia."³⁴

Erevan paid a lot of attention to its relationship with Tbilisi in hopes of using Georgia's transit potential. The countries' trade turnover continued to grow, increasing by 1.87 times; tourism, likewise, was developing.

Iran was and remains one of Armenia's foreign policy priorities. In 2008, the second part of the Iran-Armenia gas pipeline, a factor in Armenia's energy security, was completed.³⁵ In 2017, Armenia began creating the Meghri free economic zone to unite the markets of Iran, the EU, EAEU and China as an important factor in diversifying its blockaded economy. A temporary agreement signed between the EAEU and Iran aimed to create a free trade zone came into force in October 2019.

Today, in the context of its closer attention to the Southern Caucasus within the BRI initiative, China is moving to the fore in Armenia's foreign policy. It has already become one of its biggest trade and economic partners with a trade turnover of \$393 million in 2017.³⁶

The velvet revolution of 2018 brought Nikol Pashinyan to power. The new leader focused on the domestic agenda, while confirming the previous foreign policy course—strategic cooperation with Russia.³⁷ "Other factors supporting the Russia's positive image in Armenia include the large Armenian Diaspora in Russia, estimated at approximately 2-2.5 million, and the importance of private remittances from Russia that, despite recent declines, still account for the majority of all remittances, with slightly over \$1 billion transferred to Armenia from Russia in 2019."³⁸

³¹ See: *Annual Reports of the Foreign Ministry*, Foreign Ministry of the Republic of Armenia, available at [<https://www.mfa.am/hy/mfa-annual-report/>], 21 June, 2021 (in Armenian).

³² A. Terzyan, *The Evolution of Armenia's Foreign Policy Identity: The Conception of Identity Driven Paths. Friends and Foes in Armenian Foreign Policy Discourse*, p. 158.

³³ See: *Protocol No. 5 between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Armenia on changes in the treaty between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Armenia on the Russian military base in the territory of the Republic of Armenia of 16 March 1995*, RF Foreign Ministry, available in Russian at [https://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/international_contracts/2_contract/-/storage-viewer/bilateral/page-7/45120?_storageviewer_WAR_storageviewerportlet_advancedSearch=false&_storageviewer_WAR_storageviewerportlet_keywords=%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%8F&_storageviewer_WAR_storageviewerportlet_fromPage=search&_storageviewer_WAR_storageviewerportlet_andOperator=1], 18 June, 2021.

³⁴ P. Wezeman, A. Kuimova, S. Wezeman, "Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2020," *SIPRI Fact Sheet*, March 2021, p. 11, available at [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/fs_2103_at_2020_v2.pdf], 25 June, 2021.

³⁵ See: Armenia and Iran exchange gas for electricity.

³⁶ See: *External Trade Database*, Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia, available at [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_782], 1 June, 2021.

³⁷ *Republic of Armenia. National Security Strategy*, July 2020, available at [https://www.primeminister.am/u_files/file/Different/AA-Razmavarutyun-Final.pdf], 2 July, 2021 (in Armenian).

³⁸ B. Poghosyan, "Political and Economic Context of Armenian Membership in the Eurasian Economic Union," in: *Armenia's Precarious Balance: The European Union (EU) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)*, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2020, p. 17.

The results of the war in Nagorno-Karabakh, which began in September 2020, strongly affected Armenia's foreign policy. It lost control over a greater part of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic; when armed hostilities ended, Yerevan was drawn into conflicts over the borders, and had to consolidate its sovereignty and security. Today, Karabakh settlement is its central foreign policy problem.

In the new geopolitical realities, military/political and military/technical cooperation with Russia is one of Armenia's priorities. Russia plays a huge role in modernizing and re-arming Armenia's armed forces; it is involved in protecting the Armenian-Azeri border.³⁹ A balanced foreign policy has become a problem.

Azerbaijan: Foreign Policy Evolution

In the mid-1990s, Azerbaijan launched its multi-vector foreign policy based, to a great extent, on energy fuels. President Heydar Aliyev tried to use fuel export as a foreign policy instrument to consolidate his country's position in the Southern Caucasus, to settle the Karabakh conflict and develop the economy. The Azeri leaders established close relations with the West, which needed their energy resources. The West wanted access to the Caspian energy resources⁴⁰ and a pipeline system that would bypass Russia and Iran. The Intergovernmental Agreement on the Construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Oil Pipeline signed in 1999 and the Shah Deniz gas field, the biggest natural gas field in Azerbaijan discovered at approximately the same time, changed Baku's energy policy.⁴¹ Ties with the West were consolidated by the new energy export routes: from the late 1990s onwards Azerbaijan remains a member of TRACECA, the EU initiated transportation corridor Europe-the Caucasus-Asia.⁴²

In his relationship with the West Heydar Aliyev tried, in particular, to somewhat diminish the roles of Moscow and the Armenian lobbies in the United States and Europe.⁴³ In 1997, in an effort to balance out the global actors, Azerbaijan and Russia signed a Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Security, the legal foundation of bilateral relations, which made Russia one of the strategic partners and consolidated its trade and economic relations with Baku.⁴⁴

Aliyev sought closer relations with the Muslim world and, in particular, a normalization of relations with Iran. During his visit to Tehran in 2002, the countries signed 10 documents on bilateral cooperation in customs control, transport, road building, communications and culture.⁴⁵

³⁹ See: "Aram Safarian: Armiano-rossiyskoe voenno-politicheskoe i voenno-tekhnicheskoe sotrudnichestvo nakhoditsia na samom vysokom urovne," *Иносми.РУ*, 9 July, 2021, available at [<https://inosmi.ru/politic/20210709/250080882.html>], 12 July, 2021.

⁴⁰ See: E. Markova, "Otnoshenia SShA i Azerbaidzhana v Kaspiyskom regione (90-e gody XX veka)," *Problemy post-sovetskogo prostranstva*, No. 8 (2), 2021, p. 289.

⁴¹ See: S. Zhiltsov, "Energy Flows in Central Asia and the Caspian Region: New Opportunities and New Challenges," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 15, Issue 4, 2014, p. 73.

⁴² See: A. Valiyev, "Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy: What Role for the West in the South Caucasus," *Working Paper Series— Eastern Voices: Europe's East Faces an Unsettled West*, Center for Transatlantic Relations, March 2017, p. 139.

⁴³ See: S. Markedonov, "Rossia-Azerbaidzhan: protivorechivoe partnerstvo," *RSMD*, 1 November, 2013, available at [<https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/rossiya-azerbaydzhan-protivorechivoe-partnerstvo/>], 5 July, 2021.

⁴⁴ See: A. Nasibova, "Ot A. Mutalibova k G. Aliyevu: formirovanie vneshney politiki nezavisimogo Azerbajjana," *Istoria. Mezhdunarodnye otnoshenia*, Vol. 19, Issue 1, 2019, p. 85.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

In its relationship with Turkey, Azerbaijan relied, to a great extent, on their ethnocultural and religious closeness. In 1997, it developed into the “one nation-two states” formula of strategic political, economic and military importance.

In 2003, Ilham Aliyev came to power to continue his father’s foreign policy course, which was based on the balancing and multi-vector principles. From 2003 on, he has been paying a lot of attention to his country’s relationship with Russia, the EU and NATO, and Turkey, as well as the Karabakh conflict,⁴⁶ while never letting the Western trend of foreign policy out of sight.⁴⁷ In 2004, Azerbaijan joined the EU European Neighborhood Policy; in 2009, the Eastern Partnership program. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (2006), Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (2007) and the Southern Gas Corridor, the construction of which began in 2011, made Azerbaijan one of the most important EU partners in the energy sphere.⁴⁸

In 2013, Aliyev refused to sign the association agreement with the EU; by that time his policy had become more balanced: the country was no longer ready to tie itself to any specific geopolitical bloc.

Ilham Aliyev’s visit to the United States in 2006 revived the dialog between the two countries.⁴⁹ In 2007, Azerbaijan consolidated his country’s military potential through the first Individual Partnership Action Plan with NATO. In 2011, cooperation between Azerbaijan and the U.S./NATO was somewhat subdued: by that time Baku had opted for a multi-vector foreign policy course.⁵⁰ For the last decade, however, Azerbaijan has remained one of the members of NATO’s Partnership for Peace initiative.

Baku’s balanced foreign policy takes into account the Azeri diaspora in Russia; Aliyev remains convinced that his country needs to maintain military/technical and economic ties with Russia. In fact, the South Ossetia war of 2008, which changed the regional balance of forces, convinced the president of Azerbaijan that good relations with Moscow are a vitally important component of Karabakh settlement.⁵¹ The Armenian-Russian allied strategic relationship is not an obstacle to successful military-technical cooperation between Baku and Moscow. In 2013, Baku acquired military equipment totaling \$4 billion from Russia. Escalation of the Karabakh conflict of 2016 did not strongly affect the two countries’ bilateral relations. Strategic partnership in the military/technical, trade and economy spheres was maintained, amply confirmed by a 1.6-fold increase in trade turnover between 2008 and 2019.⁵² There are over 750 JVs in Azerbaijan, 330 of them with 100% Russian capital.⁵³ Bilateral cooperation in the humanitarian and cultural spheres is continuing.

In recent decades, the pro-Turkish vector has gained even more consequence in the Azerbaijani politics.⁵⁴ Today Turkey plays a much bigger role than before in transportation of fuel resources from

⁴⁶ See: V. Avatkov, “Osnovy vneshnepoliticheskogo kursa Azerbaidzhanskoy Respubliki na sovremennom etape,” *Kontury globalnykh transformatsiy*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 2020, p. 126.

⁴⁷ See: Azərbaycan Respublikasının milli təhlükəsizlik konsepsiyası, 23 May, 2007 (National Security Conception of the Azerbaijan Republic, 23 May, 2007), available at [<https://migration.gov.az/content/pdf/a959238a0eb184bcc3b26feb9c0cdec1.pdf>], 5 July, 2021 (in Azeri).

⁴⁸ See: I. Fedorovskaia, “Azerbaidzhan i Evrosoiuz: zigzagi otnosheniy,” *Rossia i novye gosudartsva Evrazii*, No. 1, 2015, p. 99.

⁴⁹ See: S. Cornell, *Azerbaijan since Independence*, London, 2011, p. 412.

⁵⁰ See: A. Areshev, “Amerikano-Azerbaidzhanskoe sotrudnichestvo: ‘Melkaia riab’ i regionalny kontekst,” *Noev kovcheg*, No. 17 (247), 2014, available at [<https://noev-kovcheg.ru/mag/2014-17/4710.html>], 27 June, 2021).

⁵¹ See: L. Aleksanyan, *Gruzia vo vneshney politike Turtsii na sovremennom etape*, PhD thesis, 23.00.04, Moscow, 2019, p. 24.

⁵² See: “The Foreign Trade of Azerbaijan,” The State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, available at [<https://www.stat.gov.az/source/trade/?lang=en>], 5 July, 2021.

⁵³ See: E. Kuklina, “Energeticheskiy vektor rossiysko-azerbaidzhanskogo ekonomicheskogo sotrudnichestva v tsifrovom prostranstve sovremennogo mira, *Eurasian Integration: Economics, Law, Politics*, 2019, p. 54.

⁵⁴ See: A. Nasibova, “Stanovlenie i razvitie azerbaidzhano-turetskikh otnosheniy (1990-2010 gg.),” PhD thesis, Saratov, 2020, p. 96.

Azerbaijan to the world market. Moreover, their military/political partnership was expanded thanks to the Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Support signed in 2010⁵⁵ and the Declaration on the Strategic Cooperation Council, which invigorated the military/political, military/technical, humanitarian and economic relations between Baku and Ankara.

In September 2020, due to Turkey's large-scale military and diplomatic assistance, Azerbaijan began and won the war against the unrecognized Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh. The conflict remains unresolved, yet Turkey has consolidated its position in the region and its impact on Azerbaijan. In June 2021, Baku and Ankara signed the Shusha Declaration on the allied relationship, which raised their bilateral relations to a higher cooperation level. The document mainly deals with in the military and security spheres; the two countries are negotiating a joint Turkic army.⁵⁶ Today, in the new geo-political context, the pro-Turkic vector dominates Azerbaijan's foreign policy.

Georgia's role in the energy, transport and communication projects, in the East-West corridor and the much stronger Turkish-Azeri tandem convinced Baku that it needs a closer relationship with Tbilisi, first and foremost, in the economic sphere. Azerbaijan pours more money than any other country into Georgia, and is one of Georgia's biggest trade partners. Aliyev actively supports the tripartite format of Turkey-Azerbaijan-Georgia cooperation initiated by Ankara in 2012.

In the last decade, Azerbaijan has been demonstrating more interest in the Eastern trend of its foreign policy and in China, in the first place. The sides pay particular attention to the economy, transport and logistics,⁵⁷ while Baku claims the role of a transport and communication corridor between China and Europe to diversify and upgrade its economy.

Georgia's Foreign Policy Evolution

In the mid-1990s, Eduard Shevardnadze performed a foreign policy U-turn towards the West. The 1999 Istanbul OSCE Summit accelerated the process: it was decided that Georgia would join the regional energy prospects.⁵⁸ Encouraged by the new potentialities created by its cooperation with the West, and scared to a much greater extent than before by the "Russian threat" in the form of Moscow's support of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Tbilisi was pushed closer to the West.⁵⁹ In 2002, Georgia expressed its desire to join NATO as one of its full-scale members.⁶⁰

Under Shevardnadze, Euro-Atlantic and European integration became the key components of Georgian foreign policy; its relations with Turkey as a counterbalance to Russia's position in the region came to the fore and promoted Georgia's interests in the Euro-Atlantic structures.

The Rose Revolution of 2003, which brought Mikhail Saakashvili (2004-2013) to power, opened a new stage in Georgia's foreign policy. The country was moving farther away from Russia towards the West. Under Saakashvili, all official documents related to the foreign policy aims, tasks

⁵⁵ See: *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti ile Azerbaycan Cumhuriyeti arasında stratejik ortaklık ve karşılıklı yardım anlaşması* (Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Support between the Turkish Republic and the Azerbaijan Republic), available at [<http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/sirasayi/donem23/yil01/ss645.pdf>], 1 June, 2021 (in Turkish).

⁵⁶ See: "Turtsia i Azerbaidzhan reshili sozdat sovmetnuiiu Tiurkskiuu armiu," RBK, 28 July, 2021, available at [<https://www.rbc.ru/politics/28/07/2021/610111d89a794702833cd138>], 1 July, 2021.

⁵⁷ See: S. Zhiltsov, L. Alexanian, S. Gavrilova, E. Markova, "China in the Southern Caucasus," *Central Asia and the Caucasus. English Edition*, Vol. 20, Issue 3, 2019, pp. 7-23.

⁵⁸ See: *Istanbul Document 1999-OSCE*, Istanbul, 1999, p. 281, available at [<https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/6/5/39569.pdf>], 12 July, 2021.

⁵⁹ See: A. Ayvazian, "Gruzia: vneshniaia politika malogo gosudarstva," *Sovremennaia Evropa*, No. 1, 2020, p. 87.

⁶⁰ See: D. Leushkin, D. Sukhiashvili, "Evolutsia i osnovnye etapy otnosheniy Gruzii i NATO," *Vestnik Nizhegorodskogo universiteta imeni N.I. Lobachevskogo*, No. 1, 2019, p. 39.

and strategic priorities reflected the country's pro-European course. Integration in NATO and the EU were two absolute foreign policy and national security priorities.⁶¹ In 2004, Georgia joined the EU European Neighborhood Program.

In 2004, NATO approved the Individual Partnership Action Plan for Georgia, which launched wide-scale reforms of the country's defense system. In 2006, Georgia joined an active dialog on its NATO membership: "The Georgian government also sought to consolidate the bilateral military relationship, not least by contributing forces to alliance operations in Kosovo, and to the U.S. coalition in Iraq" and Afghanistan. Georgia spared no effort to consolidate bilateral military relations with the U.S. as well⁶² Saakashvili hoped that they would strengthen Georgia's security, help resolve internal conflicts and promote Euro-Atlantic integration.

The relationship with Russia was going from bad to worse. In 2006, Saakashvili signed the law, according to which the country withdrew from the Council of Defense Ministers of the CIS countries. The Georgian-Russian relations worsened after the Five-Day War of 2008, as a result of which Russia recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The National Security Strategy of Georgia of 2011 defined Russia as an enemy and a threat to Georgia's national security.⁶³

After the 2008 conflict, Georgia relied on its integration with the EU and NATO as a security guarantee. It was at the same time that the NATO-Georgia Commission was set up to promote Georgia's integration with the Alliance. In 2009, Tbilisi officially engaged in the first Annual National Program and joined the EU Eastern Partnership Program. In 2010, Georgian leaders began negotiations with the European Union on an association agreement with the EU.

Under Saakashvili, strategic cooperation with Turkey was treated as one of the foreign policy priorities. The relationship with Russia was worsening, while Turkey increased its influence in Georgia to the extent that it acquired certain military/political, economic and cultural instruments of its influence and further consolidated its position in Georgia. Saakashvili permitted Turkification of Ajaria, so to speak. Today, Turkey controls certain vitally important economic sectors in Georgia.⁶⁴ In 2012, the trade turnover between the two countries reached \$1.6 billion; Turkey imported commodities in the amount of \$1.47 billion.⁶⁵

Georgia paid particular attention to its relations with Azerbaijan primarily because of the joint transportation and pipeline projects. After 2006, when the Russian Federation had discontinued gas supplies to Georgia, Azerbaijan increased its role in Georgia's foreign policy. Baku managed to replace practically all of the natural gas received by Georgia from Russia. Under Saakashvili, Azerbaijan with a trade turnover of \$1.3 billion in 2012⁶⁶ became Georgia's second biggest trade partner after Turkey and one of the biggest investors.

The relations between Georgia and Armenia remained good-neighborly: they are based on historical ties and Georgia's transit potential.

The victory of the opposition Georgian Dream Party at the October 2012 parliamentary elections opened a new stage in Georgia's foreign policy. "Integration in the European and Euro-Atlantic structures represents the main priority of the country's foreign policy course," while the U.S. remains

⁶¹ See: *National Security Concept of Georgia (2005)*, available in full at [<https://mod.gov.ge/uploads/2018/pdf/NSC-ENG.pdf>], 12 July, 2021; *Foreign Policy Strategy 2006-2009*, Foreign Ministry, available at [https://www.gfsis.org/media/download/GSAC/resources/115_1973_997704_Strategy_MFA2006-2009En.pdf] P. 9—10., 12 July, 2021.

⁶² N. MacFarlane, "The Reluctant Patron: Georgia-US relations," in: *Georgian Foreign Policy: The Quest for Sustainable Security*. Ed. by K. Kakachia and M. Cecire, Tbilisi, 2013. P. 88.

⁶³ See: *National Security Concept of Georgia*, 2011, available at [<https://mod.gov.ge/uploads/2018/pdf/NSC-ENG.pdf>], 12 July, 2021.

⁶⁴ See: L. Aleksanyan, op. cit., p. 96.

⁶⁵ See: *National Statistics Office of Georgia. External Trade*, available at [<https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/35/external-trade>], 15 July, 2021.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.

the main ally.⁶⁷ Georgia changed its attitude to Russia: today it is ready to abandon its anti-Russian rhetoric, settle the conflict and establish good-neighborly relations. The Government Program—For Strong, Democratic and Unified Georgia—says, in part, that one of the main objectives of Georgia’s foreign policy is “de-escalating the existing tense relations with the Russian Federation and achieving the normalization of relations based on respect for Georgia’s sovereignty, territorial integrity, inviolability of its internationally recognized borders.”⁶⁸

The dialog Georgia initiated to normalize the relationship between the two countries revived bilateral relations with Russia in trade, economy, transportation and the cultural and humanitarian sphere.⁶⁹ Russia annulled its embargo on Georgian import, simplified the visa regime for Georgians and restored transport communication with Georgia. Between 2012 and 2019, the trade turnover between Russia and Georgia increased 2.8-fold to reach the figure of \$1.47 billion. Georgian export rose nearly 10-fold.⁷⁰ The two countries, which disagreed on security issues, made trade the cornerstone of their cooperation.⁷¹

Integration with NATO and the EU was and remains the two major goals of Georgian leaders. In 2014, Tbilisi signed an Association Agreement with the European Union. Enacted in 2016, it introduced a visa-free regime for Georgian citizens and coordinated trade standards.⁷² No matter how hard Georgia tried to transfer its export flows from the CIS to the EU countries, in 2019 the share of the former in Georgia’s export was 53.8% against 21.1% of the latter.⁷³ In 2021, Georgia announced that it intended to apply for a full-scale membership in the European Union in 2024.

It turned out rather difficult to become a member of NATO. “The Substantial NATO-Georgia Package (SNGP), a set of measures and initiatives aimed at strengthening Georgia’s defense capabilities and developing closer security cooperation and interoperability with NATO Members” was approved in 2014.⁷⁴ In 2020, the sides confirmed a revised SNGP, yet Georgia’s future as a NATO and EU member remains vague and is highly improbable in the short term due to internal instability and territorial problems.

In the last decade China acquired a special place and special consequence in Georgia’s foreign policy. In 2017, the sides signed a free trade agreement; Georgia counts on considerable economic gains expected from the BRI project: Chinese investments⁷⁵ and economic diversification.

Georgia is not overjoyed by the region’s new geopolitical context created by the Karabakh war and its results. It does not want Russia to have a greater role in the region; it does not need new transit corridors that will diminish its own role as a transit country,⁷⁶ and is very cautious about Turkey’s more powerful role in the region. To sum up: the altered balance of power in the Southern Caucasus; stronger Turkish influence and deepened Turkish-Azeri strategic alliance, on the one hand, and greater tension between Russia and the West, complicated relation between Washington and Tehran and

⁶⁷ See: *Resolution on Basic Directions of Georgia’s Foreign Policy*, 2013, available at [<https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2016-02/Parlementsresolutie%20Georgie.pdf>], 15 July, 2021.

⁶⁸ *Government Program. Georgia*, May 2015, available at [http://gov.ge/files/50258_50258_105367_15.07.17-May7,2015-ForStrong,Democratic,andUnifiedGeorgia-GovernmentofGeorgiaProgram.pdf], 11 July, 2021.

⁶⁹ See: J. Melikyan, “Georgia’s Foreign Policy After the October 2012 Parliamentary Elections,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 15, Issue 1, 2014, p. 72.

⁷⁰ See: *National Statistics Office of Georgia. External Trade*.

⁷¹ See: O. Karpovich, O. Shakirov, “Rossia i Gruzia: Vremia vzaimodeystvovat,” *Problemy postsovetskogo prostranstva*, No. 8 (1), 2021, p. 27.

⁷² See: A. Ayvasian op. cit., p. 85.

⁷³ See: *National Statistics Office of Georgia. External Trade*.

⁷⁴ *Relations with Georgia. NATO*, available at [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_38988.htm], 15 July, 2021.

⁷⁵ See: S. Zhiltsov, L. Alexanian, S. Gavrilova, E. Markova, op. cit., p. 23.

⁷⁶ See: “Priniali po-sosedski: Gruzia obnovila druzhbu s Armeniei i Azerbaidzhanom”, *Izvestia*, 16 May, 2021, available at [<https://iz.ru/1164283/kseniia-loginova/priniali-po-sosedski-gruziia-obnovila-druzhbu-s-armeniei-i-azerbaidzhanom>], 16 May, 2021.

confrontation between the U.S. and China, on the other, deprive Georgia of any chances to diversify its foreign policy contacts.

Conclusion

Over the last decade, the foreign policies of all South Caucasian countries have depended, to a much great extent than before, on regional security. Their balanced and multi-vector foreign policy strategies have consolidated the positions of non-regional actors. In fact, in their foreign policies they were following the increasingly tense relationship between Russia and the West. Confrontation between these two global actors narrowed down the space for foreign policy maneuvers and made well-balanced policy practically impossible.

The second Karabakh war of 2020 and the altered balance of power in the region added new foreign policy challenges to the old ones. The new postwar geopolitical realities challenged Azerbaijan, which had, on the whole, successfully realized its “balancing policy” with the risk of stronger Euro-Atlantic (Turkish in particular) foreign policy component before the war. Armenia, which had relied on the balance of interests in its foreign policy in the past, had to master a new skill of meandering. Today, Georgia’s pro-Western foreign policy and the vague prospects of its EU and NATO membership, the unregulated relations with Russia and potential new transport corridors demand a reassessment of its role in the region.

PERCEPTIONS OF CHINA AND OTHER GREAT POWERS AMONG KAZAKHSTAN AND KYRGYZSTAN YOUTH

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ABSTRACT

This article studies the perception of great powers in the eyes of students in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan using data collected through an online survey. The research has compared the perceptions of

China's and other Great Powers' economic, political, and military authority among the youth of Central Asian countries during the COVID-19 pandemic. To analyze these perceptions, young people from Kazakhstan

and Kyrgyzstan (N = 262) took part in a survey in the spring of 2021. Responses were analyzed to reveal the differences in perception by applying descriptive and inferential statistical methods, i.e., one-sample t-test. An association of geodemographic factors with the perception towards global powers was discovered by applying the chi-square test statistical method. The early research

revealed that the role of the other Great Powers was seen mainly in political terms, while China's role was mostly economic, however, recent studies made it clear that China's political influence is increasing in the region. Another finding from this research is that China's position on human rights and environmental issues is more negatively perceived than that of the other Great powers.

KEYWORDS: China, power, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, perception.

Introduction

The significance of Central Asia is rooted in its geostrategic position: it lies on the ancient Silk Road and possesses reserves of oil, natural gas, and other minerals. For centuries, it has been the bridge connecting the East and the West, and today it still plays this critical role in the global economy. It is manifested in China's Belt and Road Initiative and other projects, such as the TAPI and NABUCCO. Oil and gas-rich fields make the region attractive for China, which seeks to improve economic and political relations with each of the Central Asian states.¹

In *The Grand Chessboard* Brzezinski assumes that only control over the Eurasian Balkans (Central Asia, the Southern Caucasus, and Afghanistan) may ensure stable global hegemony at a certain stage, which is why America must conduct an active policy in Central Asia and contain China's rising power. Therefore, after the collapse of the U.S.S.R., the U.S. recognized the newly independent states and supported them financially with credits and loans. The U.S. obtained military bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to secure the logistical support to the troops in Afghanistan following the 9/11 attacks. Initially, China and Russia did not react to the establishment of U.S. bases in Central Asia, however, following the Andijan events, which led to a change in Uzbekistan's foreign policy, at the 2005 summit the members of the SCO requested that the U.S. put a deadline on withdrawing the bases from the region.²

Even though certain scholars and commentators speak of a great power rivalry in the region that is similar to that of the 19th century, both the U.S. and Chinese officials emphasize the fact that their policies are not designed to undermine Russian influence. EU representatives in particular refrain from competing with Russia in their rhetoric.³ Along with Russia, the EU, Turkey, India and Iran have economic, political and security interests in this strategically important region. The EU has long been one of its largest trading partners, but China surpassed the EU and others in 2010.⁴

¹ See: A. Berdiyev, N. Can, "The Importance of Central Asia in China's Foreign Policy and Beijing's Soft Power Instruments," *Central Asia and the Caucasus. English Edition*, Vol. 21, Issue 4, 2020, pp. 15-24.

² See: L. Sagbansua, N. Can, "Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Turkic Republics and Turkey: Economic and Business Dimensions," *Canadian Social Science*, Vol. 7, Issue 2, 2011, pp. 80-87.

³ See: E. Sancak, N. Can, "The Economic-Political Relations of Post-Soviet Russia in Eurasia Region," *International Journal of Business and Management Studies*, Vol. 1, Issue 3, 2012, pp. 423-442.

⁴ See: F. Godement, "Seeking an Alliance by Any Other Name?" in: *The New Great Game in Central Asia. European Council on Foreign Relations*, available at [https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/China-Analysis_The-new-Great-Game-in-Central-Asia_September2011.pdf], 31 August, 2021.

Niklas Swanström states that India and Russia are interested in strategic cooperation with China in connection with the region. Though China initially refused any relevant proposals, the U.S. presence in the region following the 9/11 attacks changed China's position. The close U.S.-India relations were perceived as a rival alliance by Chinese foreign policy makers, and led to the SCO becoming a platform for a China-Russia alliance. In addition, Russian oil and natural gas reserves have become a foundation for a deepened relationship between the two countries.⁵

In the last two and a half decades, after investing billions of dollars throughout the region, as China turned into the number one trading partner for most Central Asian countries, some observers assert that China is now the core power in Central Asia. Despite the recent phenomenal growth in trade and investment, China's growing influence in the region is still far from making Central Asia its own "backyard." The influence of Russia and, to a lesser extent, the United States on regional relationships should not be ignored.⁶

Despite the fact that Central Asian leaders' have a positive view of China due to its foreign policy of good neighborliness, experts on the region and the locals are anxious about the growing Chinese engagement and wonder about Beijing's true ambitions.⁷ The perception of China is different in different parts of Central Asia. Based on published works, China is not a reason for concern in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, but in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan "the Chinese issue" has become a part of the social and political debate.⁸ In the two latter countries, political life has been plagued by crises and public debates involving their relations with their great neighbor. Many surveys of the last decade reveal that China remains a challenge for Central Asia, including issues that have been regarded as resolved. Expert assessments of the situation are generally more critical than those of political leaders.⁹

China's continuing advances lead many to believe that in the foreseeable future, China will become a great power that may even surpass the U.S. economically and militarily, as it is currently the second largest economy after the U.S. The rise of China is visible in its immediate vicinity, although its activities differ from region to region. China's future behavior towards Central Asia during its ascent is an important issue. From both modern-day and historical perspectives, the rise and fall of China suggest certain behavior patterns that would make its behavior predictable for its Central Asian neighbors.¹⁰

This article explores the Central Asian view of the rising China through the prism of opinions of the Kazakh and Kyrgyz youth. The adoption of survey instruments to assess Central Asian perspectives will allow researchers to make systemic comparisons with the collected data, thus providing an overall view of different societies' responses to China's global superiority.

This study addresses the empirical gap between perceptions of China's rise among the youth of Central Asian countries. Central Asian countries differ in a number of ways, and in the methodological section, we will explain our choice of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan as the preliminary point for the survey. In the findings section, we present our analysis that allows to make a comparison between the perceptions of Russia, the U.S., EU, and China in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Youth

⁵ See: N. Swanström, "China and Central Asia: A New Great Game or Traditional Vassal Relations?" *Journal of Contemporary China*, No. 14 (45), November 2005, pp. 569-584.

⁶ See: H. Zhang, "Building the Silk Road Economic Belt: Challenges in Central Asia," *Cambridge Journal of China Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 2015, U.K., pp. 17-35.

⁷ See: D. Gurbanmyradova, *The Sources of China's Soft Power in Central Asia: Cultural Diplomacy*, Master's Thesis, Central European University, Budapest, 2015.

⁸ See: M. Laruelle, S. Peyrouse, *China as a Neighbor: Central Asian Perspectives and Strategies*, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, Singapore, 2009, p. 201.

⁹ See: *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ See: K. Shamshidov, "China's Approach to Multilateralism with an Emphasis on Its Influence," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 13, Issue 4, 2012, pp. 23-43.

perceptions were captured by the online survey during the COVID-19 pandemic. The consequences revealed in this research article are in no way decisive; however, they edge the way for upcoming study. The response to the question of the potential development of the survey results will be subsequently investigated in the conclusion.

Literature Review

It is argued that people's perception of the rival states is vital in foreign policy-making. However, some studies neglect the contextual and individual factors, since different national threats may be constructed differently. Surveys of the perception of the state are necessary and important to understand the individual opinions.¹¹

Recent survey studies have focused on common perceptions in various countries and in different regions. For instance, occasional anti-Chinese demonstrations show popular mistrust in certain Central Asia countries, such as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, although official representatives seem to have positive feelings. This can be compared with Dingxin Zhao's argument. He implies that perceptions of the elite Chinese students differ from those of others being more positive than negative towards the U.S., labelling it more often as a superpower than an adversary.¹²

Many specialists focus on security and threat perception, based on which they frame the securitization theory. Scholars argue that the definition of a national security threat is a subjective rather than an objective fact that emphasizes the possibility of political manipulation of security measures.¹³

Numerous scholars state that accepting China as a unique major power undermines the ideal U.S. development model. The results of regression analysis of survey statistics in 13 Asian countries indicate that a positive assessment of China from the viewpoint of its democratization level and the positive effect on a specific country negatively correlates with a positive perception of the United States.¹⁴

Laruelle and Royce studied Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan). The survey reveals three leading powers, among which Russia occupies the top spot in the public opinion, China is in the second place with a relatively high positive rating, and the U.S. comes the last.¹⁵

Silver, Devlin, and Huang studied the public opinion on China's economic growth in their 2019 survey. The findings indicate that China's economic growth is mostly welcomed in emerging countries, but its neighbors are cautious about its rapid growth.¹⁶

Owen's comparative content analysis study of the feelings towards China and Russia in Russian-language online media in Kyrgyzstan exposes the changing tendency in the perception of China as a reaction to its reorientation from the economic to the political sphere. Although Russia has been

¹¹ See: M. Zhou, "How Elite Chinese Students View Other Countries: Findings from a Survey in Three Top Beijing Universities," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, Vol. 47, No. 1, 2018, pp.167-188.

¹² See: *Ibid.*, p. 170.

¹³ See: B. Buzan, O. Weaver, J. Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, Lynne Rienner, London / Boulder, CO, 1998. 247 pp.

¹⁴ See: M. Tsai, "Will You (Still) Love Me Tomorrow: Pro-Americanism and the China Factor in Asia," *Asian Journal of Social Science*, No. 49, 2021, pp. 21-30.

¹⁵ See: M. Laruelle, D. Royce, "No Great Game: Central Asia's Public Opinions on Russia, China, and the U.S.," *Kenan Cable*, No. 56, 2020.

¹⁶ See: L. Silver, K. Devlin, C. Huang, "China's Economic Growth, Mostly Welcomed in Emerging Markets, but Neighbors Wary of Its Influence," Pew Research Center, December 2019 available at [https://www.pewresearch.org/global/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/12/PG_2019.12.05_Balance-of-Power_FINAL.pdf], 31 August, 2021.

perceived as politically influential in the region, the growth of Chinese political influence is observed, particularly in the media.¹⁷

Chen and Günther's survey study among students made it clear that if China continues investing in projects, such as construction of hospitals, roads and bridges, which improve the quality of life, the perception of China will change positively compared to Russia.¹⁸

Chen and Jiménez-Tovar studied the perception of China and Russia via surveys among students in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. The findings of the study reveal the difference between the views of Kyrgyz and Kazakh students. Kazakh students believe that China is the most influential, whereas Kyrgyz students think differently, but they also agree that in the long run China may surpass Russia.¹⁹ Chen's pilot survey conducted in Kazakhstan also confirms that Kazakh youth feels generally positive about China's rise.²⁰

Peyrouse surveyed the perception of EU in Central Asia. His study reveals Russia is considered the most influential regional actor and is perceived positively. China takes the second place; the U.S. and EU takes the third and fourth place, respectively. He claims that the public is not well-informed and large-scale surveys are not possible due to the absence of well-funded research institutions and access limitations in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. He highlights the distinction between opinions of the elite and the general public, placing more value on the elite, since it is more aware of international events than the general population and has greater influence in framing state foreign policies.²¹

There is extensive academic debate on Central Asia in terms of its perception of China and the Great Game-like rivalry. Laruelle and Peyrouse's monograph is a good example of these contending views. The study focuses on the feelings in the region about geopolitical issues and problems. They claim that the increasing Sinophilia or Sinophobia feelings may have a vital political, geostrategic, and cultural impact on the region and affect the Chinese expansion either positively or negatively.²²

Method and Data Analysis

The study adopts a positivist philosophy, aimed at obtaining results by empirically testing the knowledge base. This study presents the views of the Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan youth objectively, without adding the researchers' subjective speculations. It applies the deductive approach, whereby the study is rooted in data that testifies to varying perception towards major global powers. Kuczynski and Daly state that deductive approaches are generally used along with positivist philosophy, with researchers collecting data from a large sample to validate the a priori hypotheses or realities.²³ Saunders claims that research philosophy generally determines the research methods, and positivists

¹⁷ See: C. Owen, "Making Friends with Neighbors? Local Perceptions of Russia and China in Kyrgyzstan," *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 2018, pp. 457-480.

¹⁸ See: Y.-W. Chen, O. Günther, "Back to Normalization or Conflict with China in Greater Central Asia? Evidence from Local Students' Perceptions," *Problems of Post-Communism*, No. 67 (3), 2018, pp. 228-240, available at [<https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2018.1474716>].

¹⁹ See: Y.-W. Chen, S. Jiménez-Tovar, "China in Central Asia: Local Perceptions from Future Elites," *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies*, No. 3 (3), 2017, pp. 429-445.

²⁰ See: Y.-W. Chen, "A Research Note on Central Asian Perspectives on the Rise of China: The Example of Kazakhstan," *Issues & Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 3, 2015, pp. 63-87.

²¹ See: S. Peyrouse, "How Does Central Asia View the EU?" *EUCAM Working Paper*, No. 18, 2014.

²² See: M. Laruelle, S. Peyrouse, "China as a Neighbor: Central Asian Perspectives and Strategies," Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, Singapore, 2009, p. 201.

²³ See: L. Kuczynski, K. Daly, *Qualitative Methods for Inductive (Theory-Generating) Research*, Handbook of Dynamics in Parent-Child Relations, 2003, pp. 373-392.

apply quantitative research methods employing surveys or experiments.²⁴ The current study also applied a survey research strategy, wherein data was collected from university students from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan using a convenient sampling technique. Similar sampling studies have been adopted by various researchers, such as Guo and Feng²⁵; Chen and Jiménez-Tovar,²⁶ Chen and Hao²⁷ and Chen and Günther.²⁸ Data was collected using a structured 7-point questionnaire using closed-ended questions. The questionnaire was framed with research objectives in mind, as suggested by Wegner.²⁹ Data was analyzed using IBM SPSS version 24. Scale reliability was checked with the help of Cronbach’s alpha and data was analyzed using inferential statistics, such as chi-square and one-sample t-test.

Data was collected from 262 young respondents with a median age of 20 years from Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. The sample profile details are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Sample Profile

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	112	43
	Female	150	57
Country	Kazakhstan	128	49
	Kyrgyzstan	134	51

Table 1 shows that the sample consisted of 43% male respondents and 57% of female respondents. 49% of the respondents were from Kazakhstan; 51%, from Kyrgyzstan.

Comparative Perception of Global Powers by Kyrgyz & Kazakh Youth

The study aimed to understand the comparative perception of global powers by youth in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Respondents were asked to choose the global power they viewed most positively. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 demonstrates that the European Union was seen most positively by the Kyrgyz and Kazakh youths, wherein 47% people preferred this global power. The United States of America was favored by 30% of Kyrgyz and Kazakh youths as most positive global power, followed by the Russian Federation selected by 16% of Kyrgyz and Kazakh youths. China was viewed most positively by only 7% of the respondents.

²⁴ See: M. Saunders, P. Lewis, A. Thornhill, *Research Methods for Business Students*, 5th Edition, Pearson Education, London, 2009.

²⁵ See: S. Guo, G. Feng, “Understanding Support for Internet Censorship in China: An Elaboration of the Theory of Reasoned Action,” *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, No. 17 (1), 2012, pp. 33-52.

²⁶ See: Y.-W. Chen, S. Jiménez-Tovar, op. cit.

²⁷ See: Y.-W. Chen, Y. Hao, “Czech Perceptions of the Rise of China: A Survey Among University Students,” *Asia Europe Journal*, No. 18 (1), 2020, pp. 157-175.

²⁸ See: Y.-W. Chen, O. Günther, op. cit.

²⁹ See: T. Wegner, *Applied Business Statistics: Methods and Excel-Based Applications*, Juta and Company Ltd., 2012.

Table 2

Positively Perceived Global Power

Most Positively Perceived Global Power	Frequency	Percentage
China	18	7
Russian Federation	43	16
United States of America	79	30
European Union	122	47

The significance of the results obtained was checked with the Chi-square goodness of fit test with 5% level of significance. The following hypothesis was set for the test:

H01: Kyrgyz and Kazakh youths have an equally positive perception of all global powers.

Ha1: Kyrgyz & Kazakh youths don't have an equally positive perception of all global powers.

Table 3

**Chi-Square Test Statistic
for Positively Perceived Global Power**

Most Positively Perceived Global Power	Observed N	Expected N	Residual	Chi-Square Statistic with Sig.
China	18	65.5	-47.5	93.695, .000
Russian Federation	43	65.5	-22.5	
United States of America	79	65.5	13.5	
European Union	122	65.5	56.5	
Total	262			

Table 3 demonstrates that the statistical value of chi-square equaled 93.695, which was associated with a .000 significance level. As the significance value was under .05, there was inadequate evidence to accept the null, which led to the acceptance of the alternate hypothesis. Thus, it can be concluded that Kyrgyz and Kazakh youth didn't have an equally positive perception of the global powers. They perceived the EU most positively and China — least positively among all superpowers.

Apart from discovering the most positive perception, responses were also collected in both countries on a seven-point scale about various parameters, such as the desired alignment of their countries' foreign policy, economic and military power, and the situation with human rights in major global powers, namely the U.S., the EU, China, and Russian Federation.

Reliability of the construct was tested using Cronbach's alpha, whose value was found to be equal to .821, which is more than the cut-off value of .7. Hence, we can conclude that the scale used to judge the comparative perception of global powers by Kyrgyz and Kazakh youth was reliable. The results of comparative perception of global powers are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Comparative Perception of Global Powers

Perception Parameters	Country	N	Mean Value	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Foreign policy alignment	China	262	3.85	-1.512	.132
	Russian Federation	262	4.56	5.687	.000
	United States of America	262	4.95	10.027	.000
	European Union	262	5.37	16.261	.000
Economic power	China	262	5.82	22.027	.000
	Russian Federation	262	4.94	11.113	.000
	United States of America	262	6.07	28.659	.000
	European Union	262	5.69	23.770	.000
Military power	China	262	5.71	21.932	.000
	Russian Federation	262	5.79	24.425	.000
	United States of America	262	6.10	30.507	.000
	European Union	262	5.21	14.987	.000
Human rights situation	China	262	3.03	-8.490	.000
	Russian Federation	262	3.85	-1.523	.129
	United States of America	262	5.40	16.946	.000
	European Union	262	5.84	23.967	.000

Table 4 reveals that the European Union was perceived most favorably by the Kyrgyz and Kazakh youth as the target for the alignment of their country’s foreign policy, since it received the highest mean value of 5.37. This was followed by the United States of America, with an average value of 4.95 and the Russian Federation, with an average value of 4.56. China was perceived negatively by the Kyrgyz and Kazakh youth as the target for the alignment of their country’s foreign policy, with a mean value of 3.85.

The United States of America was perceived as the most powerful economy, with a mean value of 6.07, followed by China, with a mean value of 5.82. The Russian Federation with a mean value of 4.94 was perceived as the least powerful economy among the global powers. The United States of America was also perceived as the greatest global military power (6.10 mean value) followed by Russia (5.79 value). The European Union with a mean value of 5.21 was considered as the global power with the least powerful military.

The European Union was perceived by the Kyrgyz and Kazakh youth as the global power with the most positive human rights situation, with an average value of 5.84, followed by the United States of America, with an average value of 5.40. The human rights aspect in the Russian Federation and China was not perceived positively by the Kyrgyz and Kazakh youth, as they assigned a less than average value to both countries, i.e., 3.85 to the Russian Federation and 3.03 to China. The human rights aspect in China was perceived most negatively among the global powers by the Kyrgyz and Kazakh youth.

The results obtained demonstrate that the European Union was perceived most favorably as the target for the alignment of foreign policy and human rights situation, whereas the United States of America was perceived as the greatest economy and military power. China was perceived most negatively by the youth in both countries in terms of two parameters, namely, foreign policy alignment and human rights. The Russian Federation was perceived as the global power with least powerful economy.

The significance of the results obtained was tested with one-sample t-test at a 5% level of significance. The test hypothesized the following:

H02: All global powers were perceived equally as the targets of the countries' foreign policy alignment.

H03: All global powers were perceived equally as economic powers.

H04: All global powers were perceived equally as military powers.

H05: All global powers were perceived equally in terms of the human rights situation.

Table 4 demonstrates that the *t* statistical value was found to be associated with a less than .05 significance level for every parameter except one, i.e., alignment of foreign policy with China. This led to the rejection of null hypotheses H03, H04 and H05. Insignificant results were obtained for China in terms of foreign policy alignment, since it was associated with a significance value of .132 (greater than .05); this led to the partial rejection of null hypothesis H02.

Thus, it can be concluded that Kyrgyz and Kazakh youth didn't perceive the global powers equally across various parameters. The European Union was perceived most favorably as a target for the alignment of their respective countries' foreign policy and human rights. The United States of America was perceived as the country with the most powerful economy and the most powerful military. China was perceived most negatively in terms of the human rights situation.

Perception of China as a Neighboring Global Power

Data was collected on a 7-point scale to reveal the perception of China as a neighboring global power. Respondents were asked to rate the statements related to trade with China, Chinese investments, Belt and Road Initiative, power of the Chinese military in Central Asia, China's impact on global environment, China's effect on democracy in other countries and overall feelings towards China. Reliability of the construct was tested using Cronbach's alpha, whose value was equal to .841, which is higher than the cut-off value of .7. Hence, it can be concluded that the scale used to assess the perception of China as a neighboring global power by Kyrgyz and Kazakh youth was reliable. The results of perception of China as a neighboring global power have been presented in Table 5.

As seen from Table 5, Kyrgyz and Kazakh youth positively perceived trade with China, Chinese investment and Belt and Road Initiative: these were the statements with higher than average ratings. Trade with China was seen most positively by the Kyrgyz and Kazakh youth. However, China's military power in regard to Central Asian countries and its impact on global environment and democracy in other countries was perceived negatively, as the respondents assigned a lower than average value to these statements. China's effect on democracy in other countries was seen most negatively by the Kyrgyz and Kazakh youth. Overall feelings towards China were rated lower than average, i.e., 3.75, showing a negative perception of China.

Table 5

Perception of China as a Neighboring Global Power

Statement	N	Mean	t-Statistic	Sig. (2-Tailed)
Trade with China for Central Asian countries	262	4.60	6.142	.000
Chinese investments for Central Asian countries	262	4.19	1.787	.075
Belt and Road Initiative for Central Asian countries	262	4.34	3.543	.000
Chinese military power from the point of view of Central Asian countries	262	3.48	-4.503	.000
China's impact on the global environment	262	3.70	-2.504	.013
China's effect on democracy in other countries	262	3.43	-5.402	.000
Feelings towards China	262	3.75	-2.463	.014

The significance of the obtained results was tested using a one-sample t-test at a 5% level of significance. The test hypothesized the following:

H06: Kyrgyz and Kazakh youth hadan indifferent perception of China as a neighboring global power.

Table 5 demonstrates that the t statistical value was found to be associated with a significance value of less than .05 for each statement except one, i.e., Chinese investments in the Central Asian countries. Since insignificant results were obtained for Chinese investments in the Central Asian countries, as this parameter was found to be associated with an insignificant value of .075; this led to a partial rejection of null hypotheses H06.

Thus, it can be concluded that Kyrgyz and Kazakh youth were not indifferent towards China as a neighboring global power. Overall, China was perceived negatively by the Kyrgyz and Kazakh youth. China's impact on democracy in other countries was the most negatively perceived factor. However, Kyrgyz and Kazakh youth positively perceived trade with China and its Belt and Road Initiative.

Recent Trends in Perception of China

Researchers sought to understand the trends in the perception of China in the last three years. Data was collected on a 7-point scale from Kyrgyz and Kazakh youth in regard to their feelings towards China in the last three years. The results are presented in Table 6:

Table 6

Recent Trends in Perception of China

	N	Mean	t-Statistic	Sig. (2-Tailed)
Feelings towards China in last three years	262	3.561	-4.124	.000

Table 6 demonstrates that a lower than average value, i.e., 3.56, was obtained for the statement, meaning that the perception of China has slightly worsened in recent years. The significance of the results obtained was tested using a one-sample t-test at a 5% level of significance. The test hypothesized the following:

H07: Kyrgyz and Kazakh youth’s attitude towards China was indifferent in recent years.

Table 6 demonstrates that the t statistical value for the trends in perception of China is associated with a significance value of under .05. This led to the rejection of H07. Thus, it can be concluded that perception of China has slightly worsened in recent years.

Geodemographic Characteristics of Respondents and Perception of Global Powers

Data was collected from male and female respondents from Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Researchers sought to find out whether there was a gender- or nationality-based difference in perception of global powers. The relationship between gender and perception of global powers was observed in the cross-table presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Gender and Perception of Global Powers

Gender	Global Power				Total	Chi-Square with Sig.
	United States of America	China	European Union	Russian Federation		
Male	30 (27%)	5 (5%)	51 (46%)	25 (22%)	111 (43%)	6.590, .086
Female	49 (32%)	13 (9%)	71 (47%)	18 (12%)	151 (57%)	

Table 7 demonstrates that male and female respondents do not differ significantly in their perception of global powers, wherein both males and females perceived the European Union (seen most positively by 46% of males and 47% of females) most positively, followed by the United States of America (seen most positively by 27% of males and 32% of females) and the Russian Federation (seen most positively by 22% of males and 12% of females). Both male and female respondents perceived China as the least positive global power, wherein only 5% of males and 9% of females considered China the most positive superpower.

The significance of the results obtained was tested with the Chi-square goodness of fit test with a 5% level of significance. The following hypothesis was set forth to be tested:

H08: Males and females did not perceive global powers differently.

Table 7 demonstrates that a Chi-square value of 6.590 was obtained with a significance value of .086, which was greater than .05. This led to the acceptance of hypothesis H08. Thus, it can be concluded that there was no difference in perception of global powers in males and females.

Similarly, the relationship between nationality and perception of global powers was observed using the cross-table presented in Table 8.

Table 8

Nationality and Perception of Global Powers

Global Power	Nationality		Chi-Square with Sig.
	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	
United States of America	46 (34%)	33 (26%)	4.110, .250
China	10 (8%)	8 (6%)	
European Union	61 (45%)	61 (48%)	
Russian Federation	17 (13%)	26 (20%)	
Total	134 (49%)	128 (51%)	

Table 8 demonstrates that perception of global powers did not differ significantly based on nationality. Both Kyrgyz and Kazakh youth perceived the European Union (45% of Kazakh and 48% of Kyrgyz youth) most positively, followed by the United States of America (34% of Kazakh and 26% of Kyrgyz youth), and the Russian Federation (13% of Kazakh and 20% of Kyrgyz youth). China was positively perceived only by 6% of Kyrgyz youth and 8% of Kazakh youth.

The significance of the results obtained was tested with Chi-square goodness of fit test with a 5% level of significance. The following hypothesis was set forth to be tested:

H09: Kyrgyz & Kazakh youth did not perceive global powers differently.

Table 8 demonstrates that a Chi-Square value of 4.110 was obtained with a significance value of .250, which was greater than .05. This led to the acceptance of hypothesis H09. Thus, it can be concluded that there was no difference in the perception of global powers among Kyrgyz & Kazakh youth.

Conclusion

Central Asia, as the transit zone of the global economy and an important source of natural gas and oil, as well as other minerals, is a geo-economically important region. The proximity of Russia and China further augments the region’s geopolitical importance. There are various views on how major powers’ policies towards the region are shaped. One of the theoretical approaches claims that public perception shapes the formation of foreign policies of the respective states to some extent.

This article is a survey study conducted on 262 students from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The study reveals that the U.S. is perceived as the most powerful economy, whereas Russia is seen as the least powerful economy. The U.S. is perceived as the greatest military power, followed by Russia, and the EU is seen as the weakest military power. The EU is perceived as a global power with the most positive human rights situation, while Russia and China are not perceived positively as far as human rights are concerned.

The hypothesis that all global powers were perceived equally for the purpose of aligning the respective country’s foreign policy is proven to be wrong in this study. Respondents revealed their feelings towards the major powers across various parameters; the perception of the EU as the most favorable in the foreign policy and human rights spheres, the U.S. as the most powerful economy and military power, and China as the least popular on human rights situation.

Respondents positively perceive the trade with China and have positive feelings towards the Belt and Road Initiative. Chinese military power and its effect on global environment are perceived negatively by the respondents in the study, moreover, respondents see China's negative impact on the democracies in other countries. The study also tested the hypothesis of a perception difference between the Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan youth. The results proved the hypothesis wrong, as youth in both countries perceive China negatively as a military power, but praise trade relations with China. The Road and Belt Initiative is perceived particularly favorably. Furthermore, the study examined whether gender plays a role in perception and revealed that gender does not play any role in the perception of global powers.

In order to study the subject matter more extensively and propose generalized regional assumptions, surveys should be conducted in other Central Asian states, i.e., Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan.

TURKISH-IRANIAN COMPETITION IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA

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ABSTRACT

Turkey and Iran have maintained stable relations for decades and established cooperation by exploring their common interests despite many political disputes, ideological differences, or economic competition. But recently, many emerging disagreements of the two neighbors started to test the breaking point of this longtime balance. Today, Ankara and Tehran are trying to get a better hand against each other through diplomatic, military, and economic instruments. Starting by presenting an overview of Turkish-Iranian relations, this article focuses on the main points of friction be-

tween the two actors in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. The region is going through a critical juncture with crucial events such as the Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020 and the aftermaths of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. So far, Turkey has increased its regional influence by strengthening its economic and diplomatic presence and establishing military cooperation. This target is pursued through the Turkic identity, which provides the ideological basis for Ankara's regional strategy. The Islamic Republic of Iran, on the other hand, is trying to defend the regional status quo to resist the

containment strategy and international isolation that it has been facing since the revolution. The “axis of resistance” idea that Iran pursues, especially in the Middle East, is almost nonexistent in the Central Asian and Caucasian region due to the Russian factor, lack of sympathy to such an approach on the part of the regional actors, and the Regime’s reluctance to change the status quo in its Northern and Eastern borders. In addition to Ankara and Tehran’s competing regional desires, several bilateral problems to solve

in energy, trade, security, and migration management put the actors on the opposing sides. The study claims that the incompatibility between the actors’ regional strategies increases to the point that their rivalry in the Middle East will expand to Central Asia and the Caucasian region. But in contrast to this slow process, there are imminent common issues that can only be solved by a joint effort by Turkey and Iran, and this necessity will restrain the damages of this incompatibility on bilateral relations.

KEYWORDS: *South Caucasian politics, Central Asian politics, Turkish-Iranian relations.*

Introduction

Ankara and Tehran have managed to keep balanced and steady relations despite their disagreements for a long time. Even during the international sanctions against Iran, Turkey came up with a proposal to solve the nuclear issue. Although the international community did not accept this proposal, Turkish politicians applauded the similar Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action when it was agreed upon by the P5+1 countries in 2015. However, for the last decade, many new disputes have appeared. Especially in the Syrian Civil War, Turkey and Iran found themselves on opposing sides. In Iraq, some cooperation on the Kurdish issue was achieved, but Turkish military operations are opposed by Tehran while Ankara is raising its concern about the Iranian influence in Baghdad. Furthermore, the South Caucasus appeared as the center of the disagreements and made it more difficult for the actors to continue the balance that existed for decades. Starting by summarizing the Turkish-Iranian relations in general, this study examines the competition between Ankara and Tehran in the South Caucasus and Central Asia and tries to identify primary areas of rivalry and the possibility of cooperation.

Overview of Turkish-Iranian Relations

Since the 1979 Islamic revolution, Turkey and Iran have managed to cooperate despite many areas of disagreement. Iran perceived Turkey’s alliance with the U.S. as a threat, while the Islamic Regime in Tehran caused suspicion in Ankara. But this milieu of distrust did not stop them from cooperating in a variety of issues. The two countries signed a long-term natural gas contract in 1996 for thirty years, a deal which, to this day, makes Turkey the biggest customer of Iranian gas. When the U.N. sanctions on Tehran’s nuclear program in 2006 hit the bilateral trade, Turkey even produced a plan to solve the issue in 2010.¹ Although the plan was not accepted by the international commu-

¹ See: P. Hafezi, “Turkey, Brazil Seal Deal on Iran Nuclear Fuel Swap,” Reuters, 16 May, 2010, available at [<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-deal-idUSTRE64F29P20100516>], 3 August, 2021.

nity, Ankara applauded a similar Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). When the Kurdish Autonomous Region in Iraq held a referendum for independence in 2017, Turkey and Iran opposed the idea and coordinated with Baghdad on the situation.² And when the Donald Trump administration revoked the JCPOA and sanctioned the Islamic Republic again in 2018, Turkey sought waivers from the sanction. Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs vocally condemned the killings of Iranian general Qasem Soleimani and top nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh in 2020.³ To sum up, the relations between the two regional powers have been a quest of cooperation among conflicting interests.

Tahiroglu and Taleblu describe this relation as a simultaneous “enmity and amity” that keeps a balance “between the extremes, allowing bonds to often bend but never break,” and in this context, they refer to Turkey and Iran as “frenemies.”⁴ Çevik, similarly, describes the model of relation between them as a “pendulum between limited cooperation and controlled rivalry.”⁵ The necessity for the two neighbors to keep economic partnership, shared political concerns such as Kurdish issue, hesitance on provoking the neighbor with a similar power (either economic or political) that holds many levers against the other, and avoidance of any additional disorder in the region lie behind the positive side of this ambivalent relation and prevent these actors from burning the bridges altogether. On the other hand, the factors such as the international pressure on the Islamic Republic, Turkey’s NATO membership, incompatible stances on regional political issues, cultural-ideological differences, and both parties’ aim at regional leadership constrain the level of cooperation between them.

But recently, the balance between rivalry and partnership seems to be disrupted by emerging frictions. The list of frictions between Turkey and Iran can be summarized as

- (1) being on the opposing sides of the Syrian Civil War since 2011;
- (2) competing interests in Iraq;
- (3) Turkey’s recent attempt to soften her relations with the Gulf countries;
- (4) Turkey’s increased influence in the South Caucasus;
- (5) increasing irregular migration through Iran to Turkey;
- (6) competing regional energy and infrastructure projects of Ankara and Tehran.

Especially after the Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020, many analysts argued that a conflict between two countries is imminent. According to Çevik, the unprecedented level of cooperation during the Rouhani era ended, and a limited rivalry is unavoidable.⁶ Vali Nasr is not positive about the limited nature of the upcoming rivalry and claims that the “Middle East’s next conflict will be between Ankara and Tehran.”⁷ Arguing that the main cause of this division is not religion or ideology but “old-fashioned realpolitik,” he highlights the contradictory position of the actors in the Middle East

² See: “Turkey, Iran, Iraq Consider Counter-Measures Over Kurdish Referendum,” Reuters, 21 September, 2017, available at [<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-kurds-referendum-minis-idUSKCN1BW1EA>], 3 July, 2021.

³ See: B. Dag, J. Aliyev, “Turkey Condemns Killing of Iranian Nuclear Scientist,” Anadolu Agency, 29 November, 2020, available at [<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/turkey-condemns-killing-of-iranian-nuclear-scientist/2059329>], 3 August, 2021.

⁴ M. Tahiroglu, B.B. Taleblu, “Turkey and Iran: The Best of Frenemies,” *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 14, Issue 1, 2015.

⁵ S. Çevik, “The End of a Détente: Turkish-Iranian Relations after the Iranian Presidential Elections,” *FES*, 10 June, 2021, available at [<https://www.fes.de/en/referat-naheer-mittlerer-osten-und-nordafrika/iran-elections/artikelseite-iranelections/das-ende-der-entspannung-die-tuerkisch-iranischen-beziehungen-nach-den-iranischen-praesidentschaftswahlen>], 17 August, 2021.

⁶ See: Ibidem.

⁷ V. Nasr, “The Middle East’s Next Conflicts Won’t Be Between Arab States and Iran,” *Foreign Policy*, 2 March, 2021, available at [<https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/02/the-middle-east-s-next-conflicts-wont-be-between-arab-states-and-iran>], 4 August, 2021.

and the South Caucasus. According to Sinan Ciddi, this change is also related to Ankara's decision to seeking its interest in the region by closely cooperating with Russia to "rein in Iran's influence."⁸ The hope for a Moscow-Ankara-Tehran triangle that appeared during the Astana Process faded away when Iran was left out of the table after the Azeri-Armenian War in 2020. According to Kamran Bokhari, for Tehran, Ankara is the only power that can threaten its interests since it is the sole actor "with both the intent and capacity to confront Iran."⁹

Turkey's Interests in the South Caucasus and Central Asia

For Turkey, one of the priorities in the region is diversifying its energy suppliers by reaching the Caspian and Central Asian resources. In December 2020, the European countries received the Azeri gas through Turkey for the first time in history.¹⁰ The agreement with Azerbaijan does not have a destination clause that would serve Turkey's goal of becoming an energy hub, unlike the previous long-term contracts with Iran and Russia that prevented Turkey from reexporting the excess gas it purchases.¹¹ Although Ankara has reduced the dependency on Russia and Iran by increasing the LNG import capacity and dealing with Azerbaijan through the TANAP project, the Central Asian hydrocarbon resources are yet to be connected to the Turkish market. The agreement between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan to end the Kepez/Serdar natural gas basin dispute to establish a shared Dostlug (friendship) facility has been applauded in Ankara.¹² A possible Turkmen-Azeri pipeline would serve as a starting point for connecting to Kazakh resources as well.¹³

Ankara's another goal is making it easier for Turkish companies to reach the Central Asian market. Although the region has a significant share in Turkish foreign trade, logistics is still an issue. Turkey had a pricing crisis with Iran in 2014 which resulted in a substantial increase in truck transit fees from \$307 to \$614.¹⁴ A similar dispute happened with regards to Turkish trucks that could not buy fuel while they were transiting through Iran.¹⁵ The difficulties pushed Ankara to seek alternative

⁸ S. Ciddi, "Opportunities for the United States in the Turkish-Iranian Rivalry," *Newlines Institute*, 16 March, 2021, available at [<https://newlinesinstitute.org/turkey/opportunities-for-the-united-states-in-the-turkish-iranian-rivalry/>], 3 April, 2021.

⁹ K. Bokhari, "The Coming Turkish-Iranian Competition," *Newlines*, 24 February, 2021, available at [<https://newlinesmag.com/argument/the-coming-turkish-iranian-confrontation/>], 18 April, 2021.

¹⁰ See: N. Erkul, "TAP Opens Commercial Gas Flow from Azerbaijan to Europe," *Anadolu Agency*, 31 December, 2020, available at [<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/energy/natural-gas/tap-opens-commercial-gas-flow-from-azerbaijan-to-europe/31469>], 30 July, 2021.

¹¹ See: G. Rzayeva, "Gas Supply Changes in Turkey," *The Oxford Institute for Energy Studies*, January 2018, available at [<https://www.oxfordenergy.org/publications/gas-supply-changes-turkey/>], 30 July, 2021.

¹² See: O. Jalilov "Turkey Expresses Readiness to Deliver Gas from Turkmenistan to Europe," *Caspian News*, 27 February, 2021, available at [<https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/turkey-expresses-readiness-to-deliver-gas-from-turkmenistan-to-europe-2021-2-27-0/>], 27 June, 2021.

¹³ See: F. Indeo, "Settling the Caspian Issue and Realizing the Trans-Caspian Energy Corridor," *The Diplomat*, 7 October, 2018, available at [<https://thediplomat.com/2018/07/settling-the-caspian-issue-and-realizing-the-trans-caspian-energy-corridor/>], 29 June, 2021.

¹⁴ See: "Turkey and Iran Agree on Transit Truck Fee," *Anadolu Agency*, 17 November, 2014, available at [<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/economy/turkey-and-iran-agree-on-transit-truck-fee/100649>], 13 June, 2021.

¹⁵ See: İ. Yezdani, "Iran Will Not Sell Fuel to Turkish Trucks Upon Turkey's New Plan, Says Iranian Envoy," *Hurriyet Daily News*, 29 October, 2014, available at [<https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/iran-will-not-sell-fuel-to-turkish-trucks-upon-turkeys-new-plan-says-iranian-envoy--73592>], 8 July, 2021.

routes such as cargo ships from Turkmenistan through Azerbaijan.¹⁶ Turkish Foreign Ministry also focuses on the Middle Corridor project as part of the Chinese Belt and Road initiative to strengthen these alternative routes.¹⁷ As part of this project, the Aktau port of Kazakhstan sent the first commercial goods to Turkey through the Caspian Sea in 2021.¹⁸ Establishing such an alternative is crucial for Turkey to negotiate transit prices with Iran and Russia in the future. The 2020 Karabagh War caused another hope for Turkey's logistics difficulties. Art 9 of the ceasefire agreement includes a transit route from Azeri exclave Nakhchivan to Azerbaijan proper, which would make it easier for Turkey to reach Azeri and Central Asian markets.¹⁹ Nevertheless, there has been no development on the realization of the project since the agreement.²⁰

Until recent years, Ankara focused on soft power instruments and economic cooperation with the regional countries. The lack of a defense partnership with the regional countries presented Turkey as a "shy guy" in the military sector.²¹ Nevertheless, the cooperation seems to have extended towards the military sector too. The intensive use of Turkish drones in the Karabagh war by the Azerbaijani side and the establishment of the Turkish-Russian observation post in Azerbaijan as part of the ceasefire agreement showed that Ankara's military exposure in the region has already started to change the existing power balance. The security cooperation in Central Asia is also increasing. Prominent Turkish defense company ASELSAN established KAE (Kazakhstan and Aselsan Engineering) in partnership with the Kazakh government in 2011 to reach to Central Asian market directly.²² Turkmenistan, one of the regional countries with sour relations with Turkey in the 1990s and early 2000s, became the second-biggest customer of Turkish arms exports by 2020.²³ Uzbekistan also signed a military cooperation agreement with Ankara in December 2020.²⁴

Iran's Interests in the South Caucasus and Central Asia

Iran seeks a different foreign policy in the South Caucasus and Central Asia than other parts of the world, which even gives the impression that the Islamic Republic "has neglected" the region.²⁵

¹⁶ See: G.S. Gul, "Türkmenistan'a TIR'lar artık İran'dan değil, Hazar'dan gidiyor (Trucks to Turkmenistan are No Longer Going from Iran, but from the Caspian)," *Dünya*, 25 January, 2015, available at [<https://www.dunya.com/gundem/turkmenistana-tirlar-artik-irandan-degil-hazardan-gidiyor-haberi-269418>], 11 September, 2021.

¹⁷ See: "Turkey's Multilateral Transportation Policy," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, available at [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-multilateral-transportation-policy.en.mfa], 12 June, 2021.

¹⁸ See: N. Butyrina, "Port Aktau: vektor otpravki gruzov—Turtsia," *Kaspiiskiy Vestnik*, 8 February, 2021, available at [http://casp-geo.ru/port-aktau-vektor-otpravki-gruzov-turtsiya/?mc_cid=9baa454575], 23 July, 2021.

¹⁹ See: "Statement by President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and President of the Russian Federation," Kremlin, 10 November, 2020, available at [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64384>], 29 March, 2021.

²⁰ See: "Baku, Yerevan, Moscow Not Discussing Opening of Zangezur Corridor, Armenian PM Insists," TASS, 15 July, 2021, available at [<https://tass.com/world/1314275>], 29 March, 2021.

²¹ See: A. Balcer, "Between Appeasement and Rivalry: Turkey and Russia and their Neighborhoods," in: *Global Turkey in Europe*, Edizioni Nuova Cultura, Rome, 2015, p. 49.

²² See: "About KAE," KAE, available at [<https://www.kae.com.kz/en/about-company.html>], 5 May, 2021.

²³ See: "Emerging Suppliers in the Global Arms Trade," SIPRI, available at [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/sipriinsight2013_emerging_suppliers.pdf], 18 April, 2021.

²⁴ See: "Turkish, Uzbek Defense Ministers Sign Military Agreement, Underline Further Defense Cooperation," *Daily Sabah*, 27 October, 2020, available at, [<https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkish-uzbek-defense-ministers-sign-military-agreement-underline-further-defense-cooperation>], 1 June, 2021.

²⁵ See: F. Atai, H. Azizi, "The Energy Factor in Iran-Turkmenistan Relations," *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 45, Issue 6, 2021.

This becomes more apparent in comparison with Tehran's assertive Middle East policy. Edward Wastnidge describes the Iranian foreign policy in the post-Soviet space as "rational and reliable" in contrast with the "misadventure" in the Middle East.²⁶ The reasons for this difference are reluctance to open another front of friction with the U.S. in its northern and eastern borders, avoiding any dispute with Russia, which would worsen the international isolation, and the secular ideology of post-Soviet republics that is not compatible with the Islamic revolutionary ideas.

Having been involved in many conflicts in the Middle East, such as Yemen, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, the Islamic Republic tries to maintain the status quo in Central Asia and the South Caucasus. Iran has been against fundamental changes in the region; the most obvious example of this was the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, which was considered as a "frozen conflict" until the balance crucially changed in late 2020. This policy relates to Tehran's desire to prevent Western powers, especially the U.S. and Israel, from acquiring another foothold to pressure Iran. Therefore, the strengthening of military ties between Azerbaijan and Israel is a source of concern among Iranian decision-makers. Instead of disrupting the existing situation, Iran prefers to follow the lead of the Russian Federation in the region. According to the former Iranian ambassador to Russia Mehdi Sanaei, this position makes sense since Tehran and Russia have analogous interests in the Caspian basin and Central Asia.²⁷ Bandwagoning Moscow is also compatible with Iran's desire to keep Russia on the same side in its struggle with the Western powers.

Another pillar of Iran's Caucasian and Central Asian policy is the Regime's quest for overcoming international isolation through regional organizations. In this context, Tehran pushed for more integration in regional organizations such as the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). American pressure on Iran limits this effort as well, since the regional republics are reluctant to harm their relations with the U.S. on behalf of Tehran's ongoing disputes with the West.²⁸ Iran became an observing member of SCO in 2005, but since then, the organization has kept Iran waiting because of the U.N. sanctions. Recently, Tehran's hope for joining the SCO has revived with newly elected Iranian president Raisi's diplomatic push for the membership.²⁹ The partnership with EAEU, on the other hand, is already working within the framework of an interim free trade agreement, and the negotiations for a full-scale FTA are planned to be completed in 2021.³⁰ Integration in regional organizations will not only strengthen Iran's political position in its conflict with the U.S. but also help to overcome the burden of the protracted economic difficulties.

Conflicting Interests Between Turkey and Iran

Increasing the Turkish influence in the South Caucasus is one of the biggest concerns for Tehran. In addition to tight Turkish-Azerbaijani military cooperation, a direct land route between Nakh-

²⁶ See: E. Wastnidge, "Central Asia in the Iranian Geopolitical Imagination," *Cambridge Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, 2017.

²⁷ See: M. Sanaei, *Vzaimootnoshenia Irana i Tsentralnoi Azii*, Veche, Moscow, 2020, p. 103.

²⁸ See: S. Akbarzadeh, "Iran and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 69, Issue 1, 2014, p. 33.

²⁹ See: N. Grajewski, "Iranian Membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Motivations and Implications," Washington Institute, 15 September, 2021, available at [<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/iranian-membership-shanghai-cooperation-organization-motivations-and-implications>], 17 September, 2021.

³⁰ See: N. Smagin, "EAEU-Iran Trade and its Prospects," *Russian International Affairs Council*, 6 April, 2021, available at [<https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/caeu-iran-trade-and-its-prospects/>], 12 September, 2021.

chivan and Baku would lessen Azerbaijan and Turkey's dependency on Iran. Turkey and Azerbaijan's pipeline project to Nakhchivan also will serve the same purpose. Isolation of Iran after the Karabagh War and Turkish participation already caused discontent among Iranian decision-makers. This point would force Iran to take balancing measures in the Caucasian region. Ankara's increasing influence is also enhancing the nationalist sentiment among Turkic peoples, which is another cause of concern for Iran. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey tried to establish its regional policy with nationalist rhetoric which alarmed Iranian decision-makers due to the significant Azeri minority in Iran. This came to the surface during the so-called "poem crisis" after the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2020. When the Turkish president read a poem that mentioned how Azerbaijani people were cut off by the Aras River, the Iranian minister of foreign affairs, Javad Zarif, condemned it as a provocation³¹. The tension continued when a photograph of the Azerbaijani president and his wife through the lenses of an Iranian sniper was released to the Internet.³²

The identity-driven foreign policy of Turkey is also expanding towards Central Asia, especially with the activities within the framework of the Turkic Council. With the membership of Uzbekistan, the organization is serving as a platform for more cooperation.

Azerbaijan's close cooperation with Israel is another concern for Iran. Iranian politicians have been vocal about their discontent with Israeli influence in Baku. Although Turkish-Israeli relations have been also sour for the last decade, both parts have been giving signals of detente in their relations.³³ Azerbaijani decision-makers also expressed their readiness to act as a mediator to bring the two parties together.³⁴ The emergence of an Israel-Turkey-Azerbaijan triangle would cause even stronger pressure in Iran which would detriment its relations with Ankara. Turkish analyst Omer Ozkizilcik posits that the increasing Turkish influence in the region is contributing to "contain Iran."³⁵ Furthermore, Ankara desires to solve regional issues without the involvement of Tehran. The Astana process, which aims to solve the disagreements in the Syrian Civil War between Turkey, Russia, and Iran, was considered as a new model of interrelations for these three actors to solve regional issues in the future. However, so far, Turkey is keen on handling the issues with Russia and tries to push Iran out of this equilibrium instead of advancing the trilateral mechanism. The most obvious example of this was after the Karabakh war when Iranian calls for being a mediator in the conflict were mostly ignored. At the same time, Russia "legitimized" Turkey's role as an actor in the South Caucasus by establishing the common military observation post.³⁶

The two regional powers have also been contesting in international infrastructure projects. For example, a prospective Trans Caspian pipeline from Turkmenistan to Turkey through Azerbaijan and Georgia would hinder Iran's TAPI project to connect Turkmen gas to India and Pakistan. Cooperation

³¹ See: "Turkish, Uzbek Defense Ministers Sign Military Agreement, Underline Further Defense Cooperation," Aljazeera, 11 December, 2020, available at [<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/11/iran-protests-to-turkey-over-meddling-poem-recited-by-erdogan>], 19 March, 2021.

³² See: "Azerbaijani President Seen through Iranian Sniper's Scope on Karabakh Border: Photos," Al Masdar News, 17 November, 2020, available at [<https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/azerbaijani-president-seen-through-iranian-snipers-scope-on-karabakh-border-photos/>], 19 March, 2021.

³³ See: T. Gumrukcu, D. Butler, "Turkey and Israel Want to Improve Ties After Presidents' Call," Reuters, 14 June, 2021, available at [<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkey-israel-want-improve-ties-after-presidents-call-turkish-ruling-party-2021-07-14/>], 30 August, 2021.

³⁴ See: "Azerbaijan Ready to Host Trilateral Summit with Turkey, Israel," *Daily Sabah*, 26 April, 2021, available at [<https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/azerbaijan-ready-to-host-trilateral-summit-with-turkey-israel>], 19 August, 2021.

³⁵ O. Ozkizilcik, "Turkey is Helping Contain Iran by Encircling its Sphere of Influence," TRT World, 23 June, 2021, available at [<https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/turkey-is-helping-contain-iran-by-encircling-its-sphere-of-influence-47771>], 1 September, 2021.

³⁶ See: D. Trenin, "Moscow's New Rules," *Carnegie Center Moscow*, 12 November, 2020, available at [<https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/83208>], 10 September, 2021.

on such projects to achieve mutual gains during the 1990s was undermined by the U.S. opposition when Iran wanted to connect the Turkmen natural gas resources to Turkey. Instead, Iran could only buy Turkmen gas for its domestic needs.³⁷ In addition to the regional competition, bilateral energy trade is also turbulent. Turkey has a long-term contract for Iranian natural gas, which makes it the biggest customer for Tehran. Turkish part is dissatisfied with the contract due to the high price, destination clause, and the quality of the gas. The disagreements went to the international court, which resulted in Iran paying Turkey \$1.9 billion compensation.³⁸ Iranian officials, on the other hand, have been accusing Ankara of being an “irresponsible partner” for not fulfilling its requirements.³⁹ The contract will end in 2026, and the two countries will try to use above mentioned issues as leverage to get a better deal for themselves. The U.S. sanctions already caused a decrease in Iranian exports to Turkey, and if the natural gas contract expires without a renewal, it will harm the Islamic Republic’s economy significantly by creating a deficit in bilateral trade. This would hinder the hopes for a commercial recovery in the prospect of the U.S. to lift the sanctions. Studies show that Turkey would significantly benefit from lifting the sanctions thanks to the preferential trade agreement of 2015.⁴⁰

International migration seems to be one of the possible points of friction between the two countries, especially after the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. Hosting more than three million Syrian and almost half a million Afghan refugees, Turkey is already struggling with irregular migration. The pressure from the opposition is forcing the government to present itself more actively in preventing future migration.⁴¹ Most recently, one of the newspapers close to the government published a full front-page report that accused Iranian government officials of helping Afghans to move to Turkey.⁴² The mountainous border between the two countries pushed Turkey to take more serious precautions such as building a wall, which, for now, seems to be unable to prevent migrant influx.⁴³ The Islamic Republic is already hosting around three million Afghan migrants, and the worsening economic situation due to the sanctions is pushing them westwards for seeking jobs either in Turkey or in Europe⁴⁴. The emerging Taliban rule in the country will only add to this flow and create another question between Tehran and Ankara due to the lack of a common institutionalized migration management mechanism.

Conclusion

Turkey is pushing for a gateway to Central Asia and the South Caucasus with military, economic, and cultural instruments to change the regional balance of power in favor of its interests. This policy is already bearing fruits such as the increased influence in the South Caucasus, cooperation

³⁷ See: F. Atai, H. Azizi, op. cit.

³⁸ See: “Turkey to Receive \$1.9b from Iran Over Gas Dispute,” *Financial Tribune*, 24 January, 2017, available at [<https://financialtribune.com/articles/energy/58155/turkey-to-receive-19b-from-iran-over-gas-dispute>], 14 September, 2021.

³⁹ See: A. Vatanka, “Iran and Turkey: Power Dynamics in the South Caucasus,” *Middle East Institute*, 8 February, 2021, available at [<https://www.mei.edu/publications/iran-and-turkey-power-dynamics-south-caucasus>], 12 September, 2021.

⁴⁰ See: S. Ay, “Removal of Iran Sanctions: Is It Opportunity or Threat for Turkey?” *Bilig*, No. 89, Spring, 2019.

⁴¹ See: A.J. Yackley, “Turkey Will Not Act as EU ‘Warehouse’ for Afghan Refugees, Says Erdoğan,” *Financial Times*, 26 August, 2021, available at [<https://www.ft.com/content/09abc27e-607c-4d83-8e39-84eaa179565e>], 4 September, 2021.

⁴² See: “Devlet göçmen kaçakçılığı yaparsa (If the Government Smuggles Immigrants),” *YeniŞafak*, 22 August, 2021, available at [<https://www.yenisafak.com/infografik/devlet-gocmen-kacakciligi-yaparsa-16809>], 3 September, 2021.

⁴³ See: A. Küçükgöçmen, “Turkey Reinforces Border to Block Any Afghan Migrant Wave,” *Reuters*, 23 August, 2021, available at [<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkey-reinforces-border-block-any-afghan-migrant-wave-2021-08-22/>], 1 September, 2021.

⁴⁴ See: T. Miles, “More than 700,000 Afghans Leave Iran as Economy Slows,” *Reuters*, 05 December, 2018, available at [<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-iran-migrants-idUSKBN1O4145>], 1 September, 2021.

within the Turkic Council, and significant growth in trade with regional countries. On the other hand, Iran is facing wearisome sanctions and isolation led by the U.S. and trying to limit the damage of this pressure through a pro-status quo approach in the region. Unlike its assertive Middle East strategy, Tehran seeks to strengthen its position by striving for regional integration, easing the American pressure by partnering with Russia and China, and balancing the increasing Turkish impact. The difference between Turkey and Iran's regional policies did not undermine the bilateral relations until very recently. But crucial developments such as the changing balance of power in the South Caucasus after the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War, Turkey's determination on becoming less reliant on Iranian hydrocarbon reserves, Tehran's concern on soaring nationalist discourse in Baku and Ankara, and the fear of regional instability after the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan have already shaken the delicate balance between rivalry and cooperation in bilateral relations of the two neighbors. So far, Turkey is striving for more regional impact through the intergovernmental organizations and bilateral partnerships that are mostly set up around the Turkic identity. Turkey's sour relations with the Western powers, especially with the U.S. and Israel, limit the damage of this development for the Islamic Republic since a combined effect of the American policy to contain the Islamic Regime with the Turkish regional advance would be severe for Tehran. Iran is trying to balance the containment by holding on to its quest for membership in regional organizations such as SCO and EAEU. Newly elected Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi is already going after the SCO membership and a final Free Trade Agreement to relieve Tehran from isolation. Both the Turkish effort to create its area of influence by identity-driven regional policy and the Iranian pursuit to find itself room for a maneuver within the Eurasian intergovernmental organizations are significant. Yet, it is unlikely that a conflict between the actors would arise because of these slow processes in the short-term. Therefore, more imminent issues such as bilateral trade, migration management, and energy partnership will define to what extent Turkey and Iran would keep up the regional rivalry at the cost of bilateral relations.

KAZAKHSTAN'S SOVEREIGNTY IN THE CONTEXT OF KAZAKH-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the problem of sovereignty of the Republic of Kazakhstan through the prism of Kazakh-Russian interstate relations. The key conclusions made by the authors are that, first of all, Kazakh-Russian relations are based on

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the post-Soviet model and the concept of the sovereignty of the Republic of Kazakhstan, which retains significant elements of the Soviet constitutional model of relations between the Union center and the republics; secondly, as part of this sovereignty model, the Republic of Kazakhstan has to make concessions in the economic, financial and other forms of sovereignty.

However, the Republic of Kazakhstan makes no concessions in matters of territorial integrity and other fundamental aspects

of its sovereignty. Thirdly, it was easier for the Republic of Kazakhstan to maintain the image of the Russian Federation as a strategic partner between 1991 and the mid-2000s, but since that time, the Russian Federation has been pursuing an openly neo-imperial policy in the post-Soviet space, thus, the increasing securitization of the relations with the Russian Federation requires great efforts from the Republic of Kazakhstan to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

KEYWORDS: *Kazakhstan, Russia, sovereignty, national interests, territorial integrity.*

Introduction

This article aims to study the problem of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Kazakhstan in its relations with Russia. Kazakhstan is one of Russia's closest allies, and many reviewers have the impression that Russia is a reliable defender of Kazakhstan's sovereignty. It is, however, clear that there are influential nationalist political forces in Russia, which have been making territorial claims to Kazakhstan since 1991. The diplomatic scandal in December 2020, caused by the statements made by the State Duma deputy Vyacheslav Nikonov, unequivocally indicates that the issue of Kazakhstan's territorial integrity in relations with Russia remains topical and relevant thirty years after the collapse of the U.S.S.R. and Kazakhstan's acquisition of independence.

To study the problem of Kazakhstan's sovereignty and territorial integrity, the article proposes to discuss the following three questions:

- (1) Russia's attitude to Kazakhstan's sovereignty in Kazakh-Russian relations;
- (2) The existing relations between Kazakhstan and Russia on the issue of Kazakhstan's sovereignty as seen through concessions and upholding of sovereignty in various spheres of these relations;
- (3) Two main stages of Kazakh-Russian relations (1991 to mid-2000s; mid-2000s to present day) from the viewpoint of protecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Kazakhstan.

Methodologically, the study is based on a realist approach of the international relations theory, in which the concepts of state sovereignty and its territorial integrity play a central role. When studying the post-Soviet sovereignty model, a realistic approach is projected onto the international relations system in the Near Abroad.

In addition, since the issue of Kazakhstan's sovereignty is being examined in the regional context of the post-Soviet space and its security system within it, Buzan and Wæver's theory of regional security complexes is undoubtedly beneficial in the study of this issue.

Russian Deputy's Territorial Claims and Kazakhstan's Reaction

In December 2020, the issue of Kazakhstan's sovereignty and territorial integrity came to the fore in its relations with Russia. The impetus for the aggravation of Kazakh-Russian relations was the statement made by State Duma deputy Vyacheslav Nikonov, who announced the historical belonging of northern Kazakhstan to Russia. These words of the Russian deputy caused a diplomatic scandal, wherein Kazakhstan handed a note of protest to the Russian embassy, which stated that "the provocative attacks of some Russian politicians towards Kazakhstan, which are growing more frequent, are causing serious damage to allied relations between our states."¹

In fact, this is not the first time Kazakhstan has faced territorial claims made by Duma deputies and non-government politicians in Russia. This is not the first time that the Kazakh Foreign Ministry has expressed protest to the Russian Foreign Ministry in connection with such statements. As a rule, after yet another diplomatic protest, Kazakh-Russian relations quickly returned to their usual condition, which are characterized by the leaders of both states and experts as friendly and allied.

However, this time Kazakhstan's reaction to the territorial claims made by Russian public figures was markedly different from previous cases in both duration and media coverage. Usually, a diplomatic note was followed by the publication of several materials by Kazakhstani experts refuting and condemning territorial claims, after which the situation returned to the normal track. But in this case, the media campaign lasted much longer—over several weeks—and involved a far greater number of authors, including well-known politicians, public figures, publicists and activists of various movements. A protest demonstration was held by Kazakh nationalists at the Russian Consulate General in Almaty.²

The campaign culminated with the publication of an article by the country's president, Kassym-Zhomart Tokayev under the title "Independence Above All." Written through the prism of the 30th anniversary of Kazakhstan's independence, the article affirms "the eternal triad of our sovereignty—our vast land, our (Kazakh) language and our (interethnic) unity."³ Tokayev's main focus in the article was on the land of Kazakhstan and its territorial integrity within the internationally recognized borders. At the same time, he emphasized that it is important "to adequately respond to all provocative actions that cast doubt on our territorial integrity ... and to be ready to defend national interests not only through diplomacy, but also from a tougher position."⁴

Experts have made various assumptions about the causes of the incident and its impact on Kazakh-Russian relations. In general, however, the prevailing opinion was expressed by the well-known expert Sultan Akimbekov, namely, that one episode could not have an impact on the complex relations system between Kazakhstan and Russia.⁵ Akimbekov noted that Kazakhstan has publicly demonstrated its disagreement with some aspects of Russian politics. Kazakhstan probably had a certain

¹ "Territorii Kazakhstana—podarok Rossii": MID RK otreagiroval na zaiavlenie rossiyskogo deputata," available at [<https://rus.azattyq-ruhy.kz/politics/18537-territoriia-kazakhstan-eto-podarok-so-storony-rossii-mid-rk-otreagiroval-na-zaiavlenie-rossiiskogo-deputata>], 12 December, 2020.

² See: "MID Kazakhstana peredal notu Rossii v sviazi s vyskazyvaniiami deputata Gosdumy Nikonova," available at [<https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/10241035>], 2 January, 2021.

³ K.Zh. Tokayev, "Nezavisimost prevyshe vsego," available at [<https://www.kazpravda.kz/news/prezident2/polnii-tekstati-tokaeva-nezavisimost-previoushe-vsego>], 6 January, 2021.

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ See: "Kazakhstan i Rossia: soiuznichestvo i ekonomicheskai konkurentsia. Interv'yu s Sultanom Akimbekovym," available at [<https://www.caa-network.org/archives/21466/kazakhstan-i-rossiya-soiuznichestvo-i-ekonomicheskaya-konkurencziya-intervyu-s-sultanom-akimbekovym>], 21 February, 2021.

tactical need for this demarche. It was as a surprise for Russia, but the parties clarified their positions. This episode will most likely not affect their relationship as a whole.⁶

Having accepted the protest of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan through its embassy in Nur-Sultan, Russia did not respond to it for a long time, apparently considering the incident insignificant and not in need of an official diplomatic response. Only in early May 2021, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov responded and commented on the situation in an interview with the Khabar channel on Kazakh TV. Lavrov lamented the drawbacks of democracy, when Russian politicians are simply trying to attract attention to themselves by making provocative statements about the territorial integrity of Kazakhstan.⁷ At the same time, the Russian Foreign Minister pointed out that such statements come from politicians who do not determine Russia's policy towards Kazakhstan. "But no statements of this sort, statements that somehow question any of the agreements or our alliance have been or will be uttered by those who do determine the policy of the Russian Federation in relation to Kazakhstan. These agreements are based on complete respect for each other's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence. We are developing allied relations on the basis of those documents that have been agreed and signed by the heads of state, approved by parliaments and constitute the law, being a part of international law."⁸

Russia and the Sovereignty of Post-Soviet States

Kazakhstan's course towards allied relations with Russia has put the former in the group of post-Soviet countries that prioritize their relations with Russia. Experts divide the post-Soviet states into three groups, depending on their policy towards Russia. The first group includes the three Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, which at the end of the 1980s viewed their dependence on Russia as a threat to their security and sovereignty, and prioritized the establishment of relations with the West. In the 2000s and 2010s, Georgia and Ukraine, which increasingly pursued a pro-Western and anti-Russian policy, grew closer to this group of states. The second group of post-Soviet states that view their dependence on Russia as a favorable factor, and therefore pursue a pro-Russian foreign policy include Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia. Finally, the third group of post-Soviet states assume the middle position between these two groups: its member states do not shift their policy either towards Russia or the West. These states include Azerbaijan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.⁹ If the ruling elites of the post-Soviet states saw a threat to their sovereignty in relations with Russia, they tried to distance themselves from it. Where relations with Russia were not viewed as a threat to sovereignty, the leaders of the post-Soviet states tried to strengthen their relationship with it.

The attitude to sovereignty in general and to the sovereignty of post-Soviet states in particular is of great importance in Russia's foreign policy. As noted by Ruth Deyermond, in its foreign policy, Russia demonstrates two different approaches to the sovereignty of the states with which it maintains

⁶ See: *Ibidem*.

⁷ See: "‘Eto neizbeznaia chast demokraticeskoy zhizni.’ Sergey Lavrov prokommentiroval skandalnye zaiavleniia v adres Kazakhstana," available at [<https://rus.azattyq-ruhy.kz/politics/23829-eto-neizbeznaia-chast-demokraticeskoi-zhizni-sergei-lavrov-prokommentiroval-skandalnye-zaiavleniia-v-adres-kazakhstana>], 5 May, 2021.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ See: R. Abdelal, *National Purpose in the World Economy: Post-Soviet States in Comparative Perspective*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 2001, p. 4.

relations. The first approach, which corresponds to the Westphalian concept of state sovereignty, is used by Russia for states that are not a part of the post-Soviet space. However, Russia applies a different concept of sovereignty for the post-Soviet states, which can be defined as the post-Soviet model of state sovereignty.¹⁰

The classical Westphalian concept of state sovereignty is based on the principles of the territorial integrity of the state, the legal equality of all states and non-interference in the internal affairs of states. Russia regards the Westphalian concept of state sovereignty as the unshakable basis of relations between states and the foundation of the system of international law and international institutions that form the legitimate structure of interstate relations.¹¹ As Ruth Deyermond notes, from the very beginning of the 21st century, Russia has acted in the international arena as the most consistent defender of the Westphalian state sovereignty model. From this position, Russia condemned the U.S. and British invasion of Iraq in 2003 as a violation of sovereignty of an independent state, unsanctioned by the U.N. Security Council. From the same standpoint, Russia condemns the color revolutions in the post-Soviet space, considering them interference in the internal affairs of the former Soviet republics by Western states.¹²

In its relations with states outside the post-Soviet space Russia adheres to the classical Westphalian concept of sovereignty, but in relations with the post-Soviet states, Russia uses a different concept of sovereignty, which experts define as post-Soviet. As Ruth Deyermond notes, since the 1990s Russia's relations with the former Soviet republics has been based not on the international sovereignty model, but rather on the Soviet constitutional model of relations between the Union center and the republics.¹³ According to the Soviet constitution, the Union republics were considered national states of their titular nations. However, the Kazakh S.S.R., for example, could not be considered a full-fledged national state of the Kazakhs:¹⁴ the republic was deprived of the most important condition of national statehood—sovereignty: the republic was ruled from Moscow, rather than from its own capital.

In post-Soviet conditions, decisions made by several states, including those made with significant participation of Russia, use the terminology of international law, rather than Soviet constitutional law. Thus, the CIS charter, adopted in the first years after the collapse of the U.S.S.R., indicated that relations between the member states of this organization were built on the basis of respect for the sovereignty of the parties and international law.¹⁵ In reality, however, Russia largely applied the practice of Soviet constitutional law in relation to the CIS states, violating their sovereignty in one way or another.

As Ravi Abdelal notes, post-Soviet governments view their dependence on Russia in a dramatically different light.¹⁶ While Georgia, Ukraine and the Baltic states see this dependence as a serious threat to their very existence, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia see their dependence on Russia as a favorable factor. They consider their relationship with Russia not as a threat to their sovereignty, but as mutually beneficial cooperation. The leaders of these four countries do not see a serious threat to their sovereignty and national interests in the post-Soviet model used by Russia in its approach to the sovereignty of post-Soviet states.

¹⁰ See: R. Deyermond, "The Uses of Sovereignty in Twenty-First Century Russian Foreign Policy," *Europe-Asia Studies*, August 2016, pp. 957-984.

¹¹ See: *Ibid.*, p. 957.

¹² See: *Ibid.*, pp. 962-967.

¹³ See: *Ibid.*, pp. 967-971.

¹⁴ See: R. Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed. Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, 1996, pp. 32-35.

¹⁵ See: *CIS Charter*, available at [<http://cis.minsk.by/reestr/ru/index.html#reestr/view/text?doc=187>], 1 May, 2021.

¹⁶ See: R. Abdelal, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

Kazakhstan: Concessions of Sovereignty in Relations with Russia

In hierarchical relations with Russia, which seeks to assert its dominance and hegemony in relations with post-Soviet states, the latter have to make certain concessions of their sovereignty and national interests in order to obtain economic and other benefits. This is typical not only of the post-Soviet space, but also of other world regions. In the post-Soviet space, Russia's application of the post-Soviet model of sovereignty leads to noticeable concessions of sovereignty by the CIS countries. For instance, experts define Belarus, whose leader Alexander Lukashenko agreed to create a Russia-Belarus union state in 1999, as a "semi-sovereign state."¹⁷

It is apparent that Russia is the leading party in the Kazakh-Russian relations, and Kazakhstan is dependent on Russia in many aspects. This situation developed back in the Soviet period and remains in many respects to this day. Therefore, today the issue of Kazakhstan's sovereignty is at the core of Kazakh-Russian relations.

As mentioned above, Russia applies the post-Soviet concept of sovereignty in relations with the post-Soviet states, including Kazakhstan, which is different from the Westphalian concept that is rooted in the Soviet period. The post-Soviet concept presupposes sovereignty concessions to Russia from the neighboring countries for the sake of economic benefits and maintaining security. However, states often have to make concessions of their sovereignty in relations with larger states. This occurs not only in the post-Soviet space, but everywhere in international politics.

As a state pursuing an active pro-Russian policy, Kazakhstan is an important economic partner of Russia, which, along with the EU and China, is one of the country's top three trading partners. The volume of mutual trade between Kazakhstan and Russia has averaged \$12 billion in recent years.¹⁸ For Russia, Kazakhstan is one of the leading trade partners among the post-Soviet states. At the same time, there are factors in the economic relations between Kazakhstan and Russia that are harmful to Kazakhstan. One of these factors is Kazakhstan's long-standing negative balance in mutual trade with Russia.¹⁹ Kazakhstan's negative balance in trade with Russia arises, in particular, due to the fact that Russia often restricts the supply of Kazakhstani products to its market by non-economic methods. This irritates the business sector, but Kazakhstan rarely protests against the actions of the Russian authorities.

Perhaps, the concessions of economic sovereignty in trade relations between Kazakhstan and Russia are determined by Kazakhstan's dependence on Russia in the transport infrastructure for exporting Kazakh oil to Western markets, which is deemed more important by Kazakhstan's leaders. The problem with Kazakhstan as the world's largest landlocked oil state is that it has no alternative for exporting its oil other than China and—mainly—Russia. Drawing attention to Kazakhstan's lack of access to the sea, Nursultan Nazarbayev emphasized that the state should pay special attention to the development of cooperative ties and the strengthening of complete confidence with neighboring states, primarily with Russia and China.²⁰

¹⁷ K.J. Hancock, "The Semi-Sovereign State: Belarus and the Russian Neo-Empire," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, No. 6, 2006, pp. 117-136.

¹⁸ See: A. Nikonov, "Glavnye torgovye partnery Kazakhstana: 10 stran s naibolshim tovarooborotom," available at [<https://inbusiness.kz/ru/news/glavnye-torgovye-partnery-kazakhstana-10-stran-s-naibolshim-tovarooborotom/>], 2 May, 2021.

¹⁹ See: N. Kassenova, "Kazakhstan and Eurasian Integration: Quick Start, Mixed Results and Uncertain Future," in: *Eurasian Economic Integration: Law, Policy and Politics*, ed. by R. Dragneva, K. Wolczuk, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, UK, and Northampton, USA, 2013, pp. 149-154; B. Sultanov, "Kazakhstan and Eurasian Integration," in: *Eurasian Integration—The View from Within*, ed. by P. Dutkiewicz, R. Sakwa, Routledge, London and New York, 2015, p. 106.

²⁰ See: *Address by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Leader of the Nation, N. Nazarbayev "Strategy Kazakhstan-2050": New Political Course of the Established State*, available at [https://www.akorda.kz/en/events/astana_kazakhstan/]

As Avinoam Idan and Brenda Shaffer note, the landlocked post-Soviet countries remain closely tied to Russia economically and strategically, and also maintain a very balanced policy towards Russia and the West.²¹ Being landlocked imposes serious restrictions on Kazakhstan's foreign policy, including the need for sovereignty and territorial concessions to the country that provides access to the sea. In particular, Kazakhstan has demonstrated compliance in the delimitation of borders with China, Russia and Uzbekistan.²²

As experts point out, Kazakhstan's financial system depends on the financial system of Russia in the economic relations between Kazakhstan and Russia. After the idea of a ruble zone failed in the early 1990s, Kazakhstan, like other post-Soviet states, was forced to introduce its national currency, tenge, which from the very beginning was made dependent on the Russian ruble.²³ For almost thirty years, the Kazakhstan authorities have always set the tenge/ruble rate to keep the tenge weak against the ruble. As has been observed in recent years, whenever the ruble has weakened as a result of Western anti-Russian sanctions, the tenge automatically weakened against the ruble and Western currencies, although Kazakhstan is not under sanctions. The Kazakhstan authorities are pursuing this course voluntarily, without pressure from Russia, as it is economically beneficial for the country. However, this course reflects Kazakhstan's financial dependence on Russia.

One of the clearest manifestations of Kazakhstan's pro-Russian policy is its participation in regional organizations headed by Russia. Kazakhstan is a member of both the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), although not all post-Soviet states are members of these organizations, as they fear for their economic and political independence. The leaders of these states are concerned that Russia may be using regional integration as an instrument of economic, military, political and cultural domination over these countries. According to Irina Busygina and Mikhail Filippov, this makes Russia unable to find a balance between cooperation and domination in the post-Soviet space, which limits its possibilities for regional integration.²⁴ In this case, Kazakhstan has to balance between the Russian domination policy and the protection of its own sovereignty.

Kazakhstan: Where No Sovereignty Concessions Are Possible

Like any independent state, Kazakhstan views its sovereignty through the prism of the Westphalian concept of sovereignty. The foreign policy of Kazakhstan, its relations with other states are based on this understanding of sovereignty. This also applies to relations between Kazakhstan and Russia, although the latter, as mentioned above, builds its relations with the neighboring states on the post-Soviet sovereignty model, forcing them to make sovereignty concessions. As a result, some CIS countries limit their relations with Russia or even halt them altogether, while other countries are forced to seek a balance between sovereignty concessions in certain areas (usually economic) and the preservation of the fundamental aspects of sovereignty in its Westphalian understanding.

participation_in_events/address-by-the-president-of-the-republic-of-kazakhstan-leader-of-the-nation-nnazarbayev-strategy-kazakhstan-2050-new-political-course-of-the-established-state-1], 4 May, 2021.

²¹ See: A. Idan, B. Shaffer, "The Foreign Policies of Post-Soviet Landlocked States," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 2011, p. 224.

²² See: *Ibid.*, p. 252.

²³ See: R. Abdelal, *op. cit.*

²⁴ See: I. Busygina, M. Filippov, "Russia, Post-Soviet Integration, and the EAEU: The Balance between Domination and Cooperation," *Problems of Post-Communism*, September, 2020, p. 2.

Over the thirty years of independence, Kazakhstan has developed a certain *modus vivendi* of relations with Russia in matters that relate to its sovereignty. Kazakhstan is willing to make sovereignty concessions on those issues that do not affect its independence, but at the same time defends sovereignty where it does concern its independence. Over the years, Kazakhstan sometimes had to defend its sovereignty against Russia's attempts to get concessions on issues that were considered by the Kazakhstan leadership as threatening its sovereignty and independence.

To understand Kazakhstan's approach to the issue of sovereignty in its relations with Russia, let us consider the case with the proposal to create a Eurasian Parliament in 2012. At that time, Kazakhstan did not agree with the proposals put forward by Russia on the creation of supranational bodies of the regional integration organization. However, as noted by *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, in Kazakhstan the idea of the Eurasian Parliament was received with hostility and considered an attempt on state sovereignty.²⁵ The framework and conditions for Kazakhstan's participation in integration projects was outlined by Nursultan Nazarbayev, who pointed out in December 2012 that issues of the country's political sovereignty were not even up for discussion, and therefore any act that would threaten Kazakhstan's independence would lead to a withdrawal from such an association.²⁶

Commenting on the situation with the Eurasian Parliament, Russian journalist Mikhail Rostovsky notes that the Kazakhstani political elite was generally ready for the idea of a close economic alliance with Russia. However, this time, Astana was offered something fundamentally different: the creation of supranational political bodies. Kazakhstani society perceived it as direct encroachment on state sovereignty. A wave of discontent began to rise in the country. By January 2013, the situation had grown so serious that Nursultan Nazarbayev, the founder of the concept of Eurasian unity, took over the fight against the idea of a Eurasian Parliament. Without directly mentioning the idea of the Eurasian Parliament, he actually put a decisive end to it.²⁷

As Rostovsky notes, Kazakhstan "is not ready to give up a single bit of its political independence. Indeed, at one time the republic was firmly focused on preserving the U.S.S.R. However, more than 20 years [Rostovsky's article was written in 2013] have passed since then. The Kazakhstani elite, and society as a whole, have realized all the advantages of independence, which nobody wishes to give up. However, it seems that many in power in Moscow do not see all these nuances at close range."²⁸

The situation with the Eurasian Parliament in 2012 resembles the incident with the statement made by the Russian Deputy Vyacheslav Nikonov in 2020 in regard to Kazakhstan's sovereignty in Kazakh-Russian relations. The similarity is that in both cases Kazakhstan's sovereignty came under threat. In 2012, Russia's proposal for a Eurasian Parliament threatened the political sovereignty of Kazakhstan in the sense of the state's right to independently make decisions and create laws, rather than concede this right to a supranational body dominated by another state. In 2020, the threat was to the state's territorial integrity as its fundamental prerequisite. The two situations were also similar in that both in 2012 and in 2020, Kazakhstan acted decisively in defending its sovereignty.

At the same time, the situations in 2012 and 2020 also had their differences. They are mainly of a socio-psychological nature and are associated with the perception of threats to state sovereignty by

²⁵ V. Panfilova, "Nazarbayev reshit problemy 'Baykonura.' Prezident Kazakhstana sgladit raznoglasiya po kosmodromu vo vremia vizita v Moskvu," available at [https://www.ng.ru/cis/2013-02-08/1_nazarbaev.html], 5 May, 2021.

²⁶ See: *25 let idei evraziiskoy integratsii N.A. Nazarbayeva (v otsenkakh ekspertov KISI pri Prezidente RK)*, Kazakhstan Institute of Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nur-Sultan, 2019. 296 pp., available at [http://kisi.kz/images/files/_19.pdf], 6 May, 2021.

²⁷ See: M. Rostovsky, "Pochemu Nazarbayev razliubil Soiuз. Kak zamazat treshchiny v alianse Rossii i Kazakhstana," available at [<https://www.mk.ru/politics/2013/01/31/806106-pochemu-nazarbaev-razlyubil-soyuz.html>], 6 May, 2021.

²⁸ Ibidem.

the Kazakh society. In our opinion, the threat of 2020 was perceived in Kazakhstan as more serious, as more existential than the threat of 2012, which did not attract as much attention to itself as the most recent case. In order to understand this difference, we would like to briefly analyze the evolution of Kazakh-Russian relations since 1991.

Geographic Factor and Security in Kazakh-Russian Relations

In the study of international relations, Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver's regional security complex theory (RSCT) is prevalent. It attaches paramount importance to the geographical factor in relations between states.²⁹ The key RSCT concept states that, despite globalization, most security threats in international relations are still territorial in nature and their degree depends on geographic distance.³⁰ RSCT, as its authors Buzan and Wæver emphasize, is a security theory in which geographic factors are central.³¹ Most states are concerned mainly with the capabilities and intentions of their neighbors.³² Due to this fact, interdependent relations in the security sphere are usually concentrated in regional clusters, or "security complexes." The Regional Security Complex (RSC) is defined as "a set of units whose major processes of securitization, desecuritization, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another."³³

The concept of securitization is central to the Buzan-Wæver theory. It is "the discursive process through which an intersubjective understanding is constructed within a political community to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object, and to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat."³⁴ As a rule, in international politics, national states are considered the most important objects of securitization. Accordingly, desecuritization is understood as the reverse process of removing the perception of threats from any state from the public consciousness.

RSCT is, in our opinion, the most adequate theoretical tool for studying the relations between Kazakhstan and Russia in the post-Soviet period. This is primarily due to the fact that the geographical factor plays a vital role in the relations between Kazakhstan and Russia, which affects Kazakhstan's perception of its sovereignty and territorial integrity depending on Russia's actions and policies. It is important that, being geographically close, Kazakhstan and Russia are crucial components of a single Post-Soviet regional security complex. Kazakhstan's security cannot be discussed separately from that of Russia within this post-Soviet security complex, and vice versa.

Time-wise, our analysis is divided into two stages:

- the first lasted from 1991 to the mid-2000s, when Kazakhstan was dominated by the image of Russia as its ally and a guarantor of its territorial integrity.
- The second stage began in the mid-2000s and continues to the present day, wherein the securitization of Russia is gaining increasing importance for Kazakhstan.

²⁹ See: B. Buzan, O. Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003.

³⁰ See: A.L. Lukin, "Teoria kompleksov regionalnoy bezopasnosti i Vostochnaia Azia," *Oikumena*, No. 2, 2011, p. 8.

³¹ See: B. Buzan, O. Wæver, op. cit., p. 70.

³² See: A.L. Lukin, op. cit., p. 8.

³³ B. Buzan, O. Wæver, op. cit., p. 44.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 491.

Sovereignty of Kazakhstan at the Early Stage of Kazakh-Russian Relations

At the first stage of Kazakh-Russian relations, Russia was perceived in Kazakhstan as a natural ally, which was in many respects a continuation of the strong pro-Russian and pro-Russia sentiments that emerged in Kazakh society back in the Soviet period. Back in the 1990s, however, nationalist forces made themselves known in Russia, making territorial claims to Kazakhstan and claiming that its northern part conceded to Kazakhstan by the communist regime, belonged to Russia. Such statements contribute to the securitization of Russia in Kazakhstani society, primarily its nationalist part. However, these sentiments could not challenge the image of Russian authorities as an ally of Kazakhstan, which not only makes no claims to Kazakhstan's territory,³⁵ but is always willing to help in case of outside encroachments.

This perception of Russia in the 1990s suggests that it was based on Kazakhstan's profound trust in Russia, which has historically developed during the Soviet period. As Christopher Stevens notes, the policy that aims at a strategic alliance with Russia was determined not only by the rational calculation of President Nazarbayev, who was aware of Kazakhstan's vulnerability. The policy of multilateral cooperation with Russia was based on broad public support and the perception of Russia as a friendly state and a strategic partner of Kazakhstan.

In the long-term strategic document "Kazakhstan-2030," published in 1997, which determined the main directions of the country's development until 2030, Nursultan Nazarbayev pointed to the absence of threats to the security and territorial integrity of Kazakhstan as its most important advantage. "We understand that all potential threats to the national security of Kazakhstan at present and in the near future do not have and will not have the character of a direct military invasion and a threat to the state's territorial integrity. It is absolutely clear that neither Russia, nor China, nor the West and Muslim countries have any incentive to attack us."³⁶

Despite the image of Russia as a strategic partner of the regional states that is predominant in Kazakhstan and Central Asia, experts have pointed to the strength of imperial traditions and the influence of nationalist forces in the power institutions of the Russian Federation. The influence of these forces led the liberal reformist Russian government in power in the early 1990s to seek consensus with them in foreign policy, including policy towards Central Asia. As noted by Rajan Menon, this consensus is based on the formal recognition of the independence of the Central Asian states, but at the same time presupposes Russia's special rights and interests in the region.³⁷ In his opinion, the most likely scenario for the relations between the Central Asian countries and Russia in the post-Soviet period is "life next to the bear," that is, maintaining internal stability, while taking Russia's strategic interests into account.³⁸

Kazakhstan's Sovereignty and Russia's Neo-Imperialism

The image of Russia as a strategic ally in the public opinion of Kazakhstan has largely concealed the imperial essence of its foreign policy in 1990-2000. The economic crisis that followed the collapse

³⁵ See: C.A. Stevens, "Russia-Kazakhstan Relations in the Early Post-Soviet Era: Explaining the Roots of Cooperation," *Europe-Asia Studies*, No. 7, 2020, p. 1155.

³⁶ N.A. Nazarbayev, "Kazakhstan 2030. Prosperity, Security and Improved Well-Being of All Kazakhstanis. Message from the President of the Country to the People of Kazakhstan," available in Russian at [<https://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/K970002030>], 7 May, 2021.

³⁷ See: R. Menon, "In the Shadow of the Bear: Security in Post-Soviet Central Asia," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 1995, p. 158.

³⁸ See: *Ibid.*, p. 169.

of the U.S.S.R. during this period hindered the pursuit of Russia's neo-imperial policy in the post-Soviet space. The mid-2000s rise in oil prices contributed to Russia's economic recovery. Since this time, Russia's neo-imperial policy in the post-Soviet space acquired increasingly more distinct features.

In trying to explain Russian foreign policy under Putin since the mid-2000s, George Breslauer compares it to Russian policy under Gorbachev and Yeltsin. From his point of view, Gorbachev and Yeltsin mentally proceeded from a weak position of the Soviet Union/Russia in international relations. Emotionally, both leaders felt an irrepressible desire to be accepted by the West and to join the family of Western nations. Putin's foreign policy, on the other hand, is based on a sense of a new-found strength, and emotionally, on feelings of disappointment and resentment towards the West.³⁹

Russia's neo-imperial policy in the post-Soviet space led it to a war with Georgia in 2008, as a result of which Abkhazia and South Ossetia separated from Georgia and declared themselves independent states. However, Kazakhstan and other CIS states did not recognize their "independence." This was a collective decision of the CIS countries, which feared that they may be the next victims of Russia's neo-imperialism, encouraging it with the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The CIS countries, such as Kazakhstan, believed at that time that no concessions should be made to Russia on this issue, since it directly affected their sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Nevertheless, Russia's aggressive policy did not cause a high level of its securitization in most of the CIS countries, including Kazakhstan. In 2014, Russia's actions led to tangible securitization in Kazakhstan and other CIS countries by annexing Crimea from Ukraine and occupying Donbass with the help of local separatists. Subsequently, it immediately became clear that Russia poses a serious threat to the territorial integrity of the post-Soviet states, but first and foremost—its bordering countries.

The securitization of Russia in Kazakhstan is determined by the fact that Kazakhstan projects onto itself the possibility of Russian aggression and, like in Ukraine, the loss of part of its territory. In our opinion, the high level of securitization of Russia in modern Kazakhstan determined the reaction of its leadership and society to the statement made by State Duma Deputy Vyacheslav Nikonov in December 2020. What is the reason for this resonance?

There is a vital detail that went almost unnoticed in the comments of experts and journalists, but which undoubtedly was in the center of attention of the Kazakhstan leaders when they launched the media campaign in response to Nikonov's statement. It is an interview with Vladimir Putin, which he gave in June 2020. In this interview, Putin noted that when the U.S.S.R. was created, "many republics received a huge amount of Russian lands." At the same time, Putin said: "The following question arises: what if a certain republic became part of the Soviet Union, but received a huge amount of Russian lands in the process, and then decided to withdraw? Then it should have withdrawn with whatever it came in with, and did not take gifts from the Russian people along with it." Putin did not specify which republics and which lands he had in mind. However, he did clarify that when the Soviet Union was created, the right to withdraw from it was stated in the agreement, however, the withdrawal procedure was not outlined.⁴⁰

The statement made by Putin has sparked great apprehension in Russia's neighboring post-Soviet countries, including Kazakhstan. For this reason, the press secretary of the President of the Russian Federation Dmitry Peskov explained that the words of his superior do not mean that Russia has territorial claims to former Soviet republics. Putin "was not talking about gifts. He spoke about the systemic mistakes made earlier in the Soviet constitution, which did not provide for a number of situations."⁴¹

³⁹ See: G. Breslauer, "Observations on Russia's Foreign Relations under Putin," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 25, No. 4, 2009, p. 370.

⁴⁰ A. Mamashuly, "'Nyneshnie granitsy i istoria ne dolzhny stat razmennoy monetoy.' Slova Putina vyzvali vozmushchenie," available at [<https://rus.azattyq.org/a/russia-putin-about-lands/30684930.html>], 7 May, 2021.

⁴¹ Ya. Shimov, "'Podarki ot russkogo naroda.' Kto i kak perekraival kartu SSSR," available at [<https://www.svoboda.org/a/30686453.html>], 7 May, 2021.

Only a year later, in July 2021, it became clear from the article “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians”⁴² that Putin was referring to Ukraine in his interview a year earlier. However, there was no explanation from the Kremlin in 2020, except for Dmitry Peskov’s comment, thus, the leaders of Ukraine, Kazakhstan, the Baltic states and other states bordering on Russia were alarmingly wary of whether Putin had them in mind when he mentioned Russia’s territorial gifts?

Nikonov’s statement sounded amid the high level of securitization of Russia in Kazakhstan and was perceived in the context of Putin’s interview. Nikonov’s statement acquired a completely different meaning in Kazakhstan, with more weight than just another territorial claim made by a Russian deputy. Although the reaction was explicitly a response to Nikonov’s statement, it was implicitly referring to the statement of Putin-Nikonov. In this form, this statement had a completely different weight and meaning, which predetermined Kazakhstan’s reaction to the statement.

Conclusion

The research carried out by the authors demonstrates that the protection of sovereignty and territorial integrity occupy an important place in relations between Kazakhstan and Russia. The unprecedented reaction of Kazakhstan to the statement made by Russian State Duma deputy Vyacheslav Nikonov about the historical belonging of northern Kazakhstan to Russia proves that the issue of the territorial integrity of Kazakhstan in relations with Russia has not lost its relevance over time, moreover, it has intensified. In its post-Soviet foreign policy, Kazakhstan is one of the countries for which relations with Russia are of priority importance. Russia builds its relations with neighboring countries on the post-Soviet sovereignty concept, so Kazakhstan has to make concessions of economic, financial and other types of sovereignty. However, as the history of Kazakh-Russian relations shows, Kazakhstan does not make concessions in matters of territorial integrity and other fundamental aspects of its sovereignty.

The image of Russia as a strategic partner of Kazakhstan is of great importance in the relations between Kazakhstan and Russia, as it contributes to the strengthening of trust. From 1991 to the mid-2000s, it was easier for Kazakhstan to maintain the image of Russia as a strategic partner, since Russia’s economic weakness had made it more difficult to implement neo-imperial policy in the post-Soviet space. Since the mid-2000s, Russia has been pursuing an open neo-imperial policy in the post-Soviet space, fostering its image as a threat, even in states loyal to Russia, such as Kazakhstan. The increasing securitization of Russia requires great efforts from Kazakhstan to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

⁴² “Statiya Vladimira Putina ‘Ob istoricheskome edinstve russkikh i ukrainsev’,” available at [<http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>], 14 July, 2021.

ETHNIC RELATIONS AND MIGRATION

ACCULTURATION OF ARMENIANS IN RUSSIA: ROLE OF SOCIAL IDENTITIES AND DIASPORA ACTIVITY

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A B S T R A C T

The Armenian diaspora is one of the largest in Russia and in the world.

The Armenians living in the Krasnodar Territory are a large and active group, thus, an investigation into the problem of their acculturation is of scientific and practical importance. Based on the theory of social identity, the theory of acculturation, and the regional socio-cultural context, the study focused on the role of ethnic, regional and Russian national (civic) identities and diaspora activity in the acculturation of the Armenians in the Krasnodar Territory. The study used the scales from the MIRIPS project questionnaire (*Mutual Intercultural Relations in Plural Societies*). The sample consisted of 181 respondents. Using structural equation modeling, the ethnic and Russian national identities of the Armenians living in the Krasnodar Territory were revealed as factors that contributed to their integration, and regional identity—as factors that fostered assimila-

tion. Diaspora activity was determined by both ethnic and regional identity and predicted the Armenians' attitudes towards integration and separation. Also, diaspora activity of the Armenians in the Kuban region facilitated the interconnection of ethnic and regional identities with the separation strategy. In general, the study revealed that all identities (ethnic, regional and Russian national) contribute to a certain degree to the acceptance of the host society culture by the Armenians in the Krasnodar Territory. At the same time, diaspora activity can be an effective mechanism for the adaptation of migrants or a source of problems associated with increased impenetrability of diaspora's borders, the migrants' exclusive focus on their ethnic group and their decreased desire for sociocultural integration into the host society. It is important to take this into account when shaping the regional interethnic relations policy.

KEYWORDS: *acculturation, ethnic, regional, Russian national identity, diaspora activity, Armenians, Russia.*

Introduction

Theoretical Background

Migration in the modern world actualizes the problem of studying new ethnic communities, including diasporas.¹ In this study, diaspora does not merely refer to the sojourn of representatives of a certain ethnic group outside their national state as a national minority, but also denotes a special type of human relationship, a specific system of formal and informal ties, people's life strategies and practices. These connections, strategies and practices are based on the common exodus from the "historical homeland" (or the perceptions, historical memory and myths about such an exodus), as well as on efforts to maintain a way of life as a national minority in an ethnically different host society.²

¹ See: R. Brubaker, "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 2005, pp. 1-19, available at [Doi: <http://doi.org/10.1080/0141987042000289997>]; R. Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1997, 240 pp., available at [Doi: <http://doi.org/10.2307/591321>].

² See: V. Diatlov, "Armiane Rossii: diasporalnye strategii integratsii," *21 Vek*, Vol. 2, No. 6, 2007, pp. 60-70.

The Armenian diaspora is one of the largest in the world.³ In Russia, it numbers approximately 1,182,000 people.⁴ There are different viewpoints in regard to the activity of the Armenian diaspora in Russia: certain researchers claim that this diaspora has a high potential and is very active.⁵ Others, on the contrary, note that in comparison with the Armenian diasporas in non-CIS countries the Armenian community in Russia does not have a strong political, financial or organizational potential.⁶

According to Asia Berberian and Oksana Tuchina, the Armenian diaspora in the south of Russia, especially in the Kuban, is quite numerous (about 24% of all Armenians living in Russia) and active.⁷ On the one hand, the Kuban Armenians are distinguished by their openness and readiness to interact with other ethnic groups in the region; they are actively involved in the life of the region. On the other hand, they represent a community internally consolidated along ethnic lines, and the level of loyalty to people of their ethnicity is higher than to members of the host society.⁸

Based on the theory of social identity,⁹ researchers examine the strength of identification as an important factor of activity in “own” group. Thus, it was revealed that people who identify themselves with their group are more prone to prosocial behavior towards other group members.¹⁰ A study conducted among Jews in Poland¹¹ demonstrated that the strength of intragroup ties, which is a component of ethnic identity, predicts diaspora involvement. A positive relationship between diaspora activity and ethnic identity was identified in a study by Martinez Damia et al.¹² Studies of Armenians in the Rostov region demonstrate that their diaspora activity is mainly focused on the preservation of Armenian national identity and their cultural values.¹³ Based on these findings, an assumption can be made that Russian national identity and orientation towards the host society will not contribute to diaspora activity.

³ See: *Armenia's Diaspora—Its Role and Influence*, Foreign & Commonwealth Office U.K. Report, 2014, available at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/armenias-diaspora-its-role-and-influence].

⁴ See: O.B. Leontieva, L.G. Mkrtchian, “Armianskaia diaspora Rossii: sovremennyye podkhody k izucheniu,” *Vestnik Samarskogo universiteta. Istoria, pedagogika, filologia*, Vol. 26, No. 4, 2020, pp. 8-14, available at [Doi: 10.18287/2542-0445-2020-26-4-8-14].

⁵ See: E. Minasian, “O roli armianskoy diaspory v otnosheniakh mezhdru Rossiyskoy Federatsiey i Respublikoy Armeniia: sotsialno-ekonomicheskie i kulturnye svyazi,” *Chelovechesky kapital*, Vol. 6, No. 138, 2020, pp. 29-37, available at [DOI: 10.25629/HC.2020.06.04].

⁶ See: O.B. Leontieva, L.G. Mkrtchian, op. cit.

⁷ See: A.S. Berberian, O.R. Tuchina, “Issledovanie natsionalnoy identichnosti i istoricheskogo opyta lichnosti v titulnom armianskom etnose i sopriazhennoy armianskoy diaspore v Rossii,” *Rossiyskiy psikhologicheskiy zhurnal*, No. 2, 2018, pp. 190-214.

⁸ See: A.V. Dmitriyev, V.V. Voronov, E.A. Mikhaylova, “Prognoznnoye modelirovanie mezhetnicheskikh otnosheniy v rossiyskikh regionakh na osnove analiza identifikatsionnykh strategiy diaspornykh i zemliacheskikh grupp,” *Monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniya: ekonomicheskie i sotsialnye peremeny*, No. 6, 2017, pp. 97-124, available at [DOI: 10.14515/monitoring.2017.6.06].

⁹ See: H. Tajfel, J.C. Turner, “The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior,” in: *Psychology of Intergroup Relation*, ed. by S. Worchel, W.G. Austin, Hall Publishers, Chicago, 1986, pp. 7-24.

¹⁰ See: B. Simon, S. Sturmer, K. Steffens, “Helping Individuals or Group Members? The Role of Individual and Collective Identification in AIDS-Volunteerism,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 26, 2000, pp. 497-506.

¹¹ See: M. Bilewicz, A. Wojcik, “Does Identification Predict Community Involvement? Exploring Consequences of Social Identification Among the Jewish Minority in Poland,” *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, Vol. 20, 2009, pp. 72-79, available at [DOI: 10.1002/casp.1012].

¹² See: S. Martinez Damia, D. Marzana, S. Alfieri, M. Pozzi, E. Marta, M.L. Martinez, “Psychological and Structural Barriers to Immigrant Community Participation: The Experience of Peruvians in Santiago de Chile,” *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 2020, pp. 1-14, available at [https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12472].

¹³ G.P. Ferenchuk, “Armianskaia diaspora i kultura formirovaniya rossiyskoy identichnosti,” in: *Armiiane Iuga Rossii: istoria, kultura, obshchee budushchee. Materialy Vserossiyskoy nauchnoy konferentsii*, Rostov-on-Don, 2012, available at [https://armeniansite.ru/armyanskie-diaspor/82-armyanskaya-diaspora-i-kultura-formirovaniya-rossijskoj-identichnosti.html].

A study of Armenians in Russia revealed that their significant ethnic identity promotes active participation in the life of the diaspora.¹⁴ Researchers also note that the involvement of diasporas in the life of their regions leads to an assimilation of the norms and rules of regional and local communities and to the formation of a socio-territorial, regional identity, which in turn contributes to an increase in a diaspora's activity in the region and its consolidation.¹⁵ However, there are practically no studies aimed at identifying the influence of regional and Russian national identity on diaspora activity.

A large body of previous research shows that acculturation strategies can be predicted by identities of migrants and ethnic minorities.¹⁶ Based on John Berry's theory of acculturation,¹⁷ many researchers have established¹⁸ that when both ethnic and Russian national (identifying oneself with the host country) identities dominate, a person is focused on integration; meanwhile, when ethnic identity strongly dominates, a strategy of separation prevails, and when national identity strongly dominates—a person seeks to assimilate. As for regional identity, a study of Russian ethnic minorities in Latvia and Georgia¹⁹ found that regional identity (identifying oneself with a certain place) is positively associated with an integration strategy and negatively—with assimilation.

However, the relationship between identities and acculturation strategies among members of Russia's Armenian diaspora has barely been studied.

There are few studies that reveal the relationship between diaspora activity and acculturation strategies. It has been established that the absence of the diaspora as a source of social support can have negative consequences for the acculturation of migrants and ethnic minorities.²⁰ A study of Armenians in Russia showed that those who have interacted with a community organization for a prolonged period of time have less pronounced hyper-ethnic attitudes (ethno-egoism and ethno-isolationism), which indicates an orientation towards both preservation of their culture and accepting the culture of the ethnic majority.²¹ However, no studies have been conducted on the relationship between diaspora activity and assimilation strategies. In addition, the mediating role of diaspora activity in the relationship between identities and acculturation strategies has not been sufficiently analyzed.

This research focuses on the study of the relationship between ethnic, regional and Russian national identities, diaspora activity and acculturation strategies of the Armenians in the Kuban region. It also tests the mediation role of diaspora activity in the relationship between identities and the acculturation strategy.

¹⁴ See: V.V. Konstantinov, M.V. Vershinina, "Vzaimosviaz etnicheskoy identichnosti migrantov-armian i usloviy ikh prozhivania v primaimushchem soobshchestve," *Psychological Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 2014, pp. 71-79.

¹⁵ See: A.V. Dmitriyev, V.V. Voronov, E.A. Mikhaylova, op. cit.

¹⁶ See: J.W. Berry, J.S. Phinney, D.L. Sam, P. Vedder, "Immigrant Youth: Acculturation, Identity, and Adaptation," *Applied Psychology*, Vol. 55, 2006, pp. 303-332; K. Liebkind, T.A.E. Mähönen, S.A. Varjonen, I. Jasinskaja-Lahti, "Acculturation and Identity," in: *Cambridge Handbook of Acculturation Psychology*, ed. by D.L. Sam, J.W. Berry, 2nd edition, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2016, pp. 30-49, available at [Doi:10.1017/CBO9781316219218.004].

¹⁷ See: J.W. Berry, *Mutual Intercultural Relations*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2017.

¹⁸ See: J. Georgas, D. Papastylanou, "Acculturation and Ethnic Identity: The Remigration of Ethnic Greeks to Greece," in: *Key Issues in Cross-Cultural Psychology*, ed. by H. Grad, A. Blanco, J. Georgas, Swets & Zeitlinger, Lisse, Netherlands, 1998, pp. 114-127; A. Portes, R.G. Rumbaut, *Immigrant America: A Portrait*, 3rd edition, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 2006.

¹⁹ See: T.A. Ryabichenko, N.M. Lebedeva, I.D. Plotka, "Mnozhestvennye identichnosti, akkultratsiia i adaptatsiia russkikh v Latvii i Gruzii," *Kulturno-istoricheskaya psikhologia*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2019, pp. 54-64, available at [Doi: 10.17759/chp.2019150206].

²⁰ See: C. Ward, S. Fox, J. Wilson, J. Stuart, L. Kus, "Contextual Influences on Acculturation Processes: The Roles of Family, Community and Society," *Psychological Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 1, 2010, pp. 26-34, available at [https://doi.org/10.1007/s12646-010-0003-8].

²¹ See: V.V. Konstantinov, M.V. Babayeva, "Transformatsia etnicheskoy identichnosti migrantov-armian, vovlecheniykh i ne vovlecheniykh v deiatelnost natsionalno-kulturnoy avtonomii," *Vestnik RUDN, Series Psikhologia and Pedagogika*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 2020, pp. 128-142, available at [DOI 10.22363/2313-1683-2020-17-1-128-142].

Based on literature analysis, the following hypotheses are set forth.

Hypothesis 1. Social identities will predict diaspora activity of the Armenians in the Kuban region in different ways:

- (a) significant ethnic and regional identity will contribute to diaspora activity,
- (b) significant national identity will hinder diaspora activity.

Hypothesis 2. Social identities will be associated with acculturation strategies in different ways:

- (a) significant ethnic identity will predict the preference for separation and integration strategies,
- (b) significant regional identity will predict the preference for the integration strategy,
- (c) significant Russian national identity will predict the preference for integration and assimilation strategies.

Hypothesis 3. Active participation in the life of the diaspora will be positively related to integration and separation strategies, and negatively—to the assimilation strategy.

We also formulated a *research question*: What is the mediational role of diaspora activity in the relationship between social identities and acculturation strategies of the Kuban Armenians?

Method

Procedure and Sample

The socio-psychological survey was carried out offline at Krasnodar Territory universities, NGOs, and in areas with large populations of ethnic Armenians. In this study, a convenient sample was used (“snowball method”). Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous, with no reward expected. The sample included 188 respondents (see Table 1)

Table 1

Gender and Age Sample Characteristics

Respondents	N	Gender		Age			
		Male	Female	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Armenians from the Krasnodar Territory	188	79 (42%)	109 (58%)	17	66	26.3	10.8

Note: M—means; SD—standard deviation.

Measures

The study used the scales from a questionnaire created within the framework of the Mutual Intercultural Relations in Plural Societies (MIRIPS) project.²² The respondents answered the ques-

²² See: N.M. Lebedeva, A.N. Tatarko, *Strategii mezhhkulturnogo vzaimodeystvia migrantov i naselenia Rossii*, Collection of scientific articles, RUDN, Moscow, 2009, pp. 10-63.

tions using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire included the following scales:

Identity. Ethnic identity: the scale included four questions, i.e., “I am proud to be Armenian.” Regional identity (identification with the regional community): the scale included four questions, i.e., “I am proud to be a resident of the Kuban.” Russian national identity (identification with the Russian society as a whole): the scale included four items, i.e., “I feel that I am a part of Russian culture.”

Acculturation strategies: integration—four questions, i.e., “It is important for me to be fluent in both Armenian and Russian”; assimilation—four questions, i.e., “I prefer social activities in which only Russians participate”; separation—four questions, i.e., “I prefer social activities in which only Armenians participate.”

*Diaspora activity.*²³ The scale included fourteen questions aimed at identifying the respondent’s participation in various events conducted by the Armenian diaspora. For example, “I typically participate in fundraising for the activities of the Armenian community and church.”

Demographic characteristics. Respondents’ gender and age were controlled.

Data processing. The authors utilized descriptive statistics, α -Cronbach to determine scale reliability, structural equation modeling (path analysis) in SPSS 22.0 with the AMOS application.

Results

The results presented in Table 2 demonstrate that ethnic identity is the most pronounced among the three identities among the Armenians in the Kuban, followed by national, and regional identity with the least significance. The preferred strategy was integration, the least preferred—separation. Assimilation occupied the middle position, but it was weakly pronounced. Diaspora activity was quite high.

Table 2

Means and α -Cronbach Indicators for All Variables

Variables	M	SD	α
Ethnic identity	4.75	0.82	0.91
Regional identity	3.56	0.98	0.77
Russian national identity	4.05	0.99	0.82
Integration	4.42	0.59	0.64
Assimilation	2.83	0.63	0.67
Separation	2.45	0.68	0.81
Diaspora activity	4.07	0.69	0.94

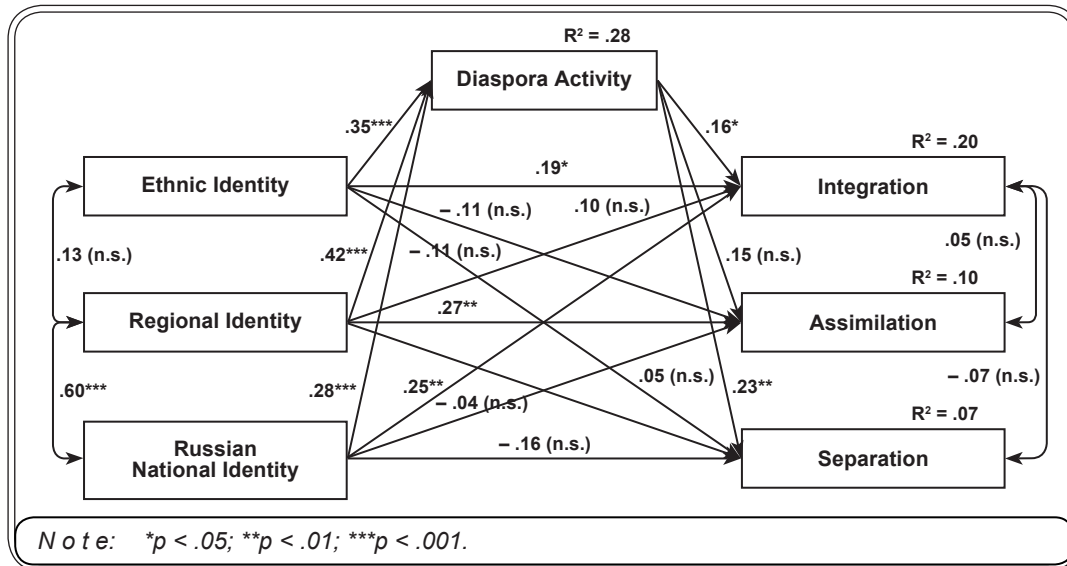
Note: M—means; SD—standard deviation.

The data was subsequently analyzed using structural equation modeling to test hypotheses and answer the research question. The results are shown in Figure 1. We controlled the gender and age of the respondents. Since they did not have significant effects on the studied variables, they were not displayed in the model.

²³ See: A.S. Berberian, O.R. Tuchina, op. cit.

Figure 1

Path Model of the Relationship Between Ethnic, Regional and Russian National Identities, and Diaspora Activity of the Armenians in the Kuban Region with Their Acculturation Strategies



The results obtained revealed good model indicators: $\chi^2 / df = 0.04$; SRMR = 0.009; CFI = 1.00; RMSEA = 0.001; PCLOSE = 0.970. The data generally demonstrated that ethnic and regional identities were positively associated among Armenians with diaspora activity, while Russian national identity was negatively related to the latter. We also found that ethnic and Russian national identities showed a significantly positive relationship with the preference for the integration strategy, and regional identity was positively related to the assimilation strategy. Diaspora activity of the Armenians in the Kuban region predicted strategies of integration and separation. The rest of the relationships were statistically insignificant.

Mediation analysis showed a significant positive indirect effect of ethnic ($\beta = 0.15, p < 0.05$, 95% CI: 0.06, 0.32) and regional ($\beta = 0.07, p < 0.05$, 95% CI: 0.02, 0.12) identities on separation via diaspora activity. Other indirect effects were not significant.

Discussion and Conclusions

This research was devoted to the study of the relationship between ethnic, regional and Russian national identities and the Armenian diaspora's activity in the Kuban region and the diaspora members' acculturation attitudes.

The results of the study demonstrated that a significant ethnic identity contributes to diaspora activity. These findings are consistent with the results of other studies.²⁴ We also found that the regional Kuban identity predicted the dynamic activity of Armenians within the diaspora. At the same time, Russian national identity was negatively related to diaspora activity. Thus, our first hypothesis was fully confirmed. The more Armenians feel that they belong to an ethnic group and the more they feel

²⁴ See: V.V. Konstantinov, M.V. Vershinina, op. cit.; M. Bilewicz, A. Wojcik, op. cit.

like residents of the Kuban, the more involved they become in the diaspora activities. Conversely, a significant Russian national identity contributes to a decrease in involvement in the diaspora's activities.

The ethnic and Russian national identity of the Armenians in the Kuban region predicted their preference for the integration strategy, while regional identity was positively associated with the assimilation strategy. These results partially confirmed our second hypothesis, and are consistent with data from other studies. Using the example of the repatriation of ethnic Greeks, Georgas and Papastylianou²⁵ showed that migrants with a “mixed” identity (i.e., Albanian Greeks) were oriented towards integration. In addition, the result we obtained in regard to the relationship between regional identity and assimilation strategy, is not fully consistent with the results of previous studies. In their study of the Russian ethnic minority in Latvia and Georgia, Ryabichenko, Lebedeva and Plotka²⁶ revealed that place identity (regional identity) is positively associated with integration and negatively—with assimilation. This may be due to the peculiarities of the socio-cultural context. For Armenians living in the multicultural society of the Krasnodar Territory, regional identity presupposes the acceptance of cultural diversity, which can lead to decreasing importance of their own cultural norms, rules, and the acceptance of the norms and traditions of the region where they live, that is, to assimilation. Similar results were obtained by Konstantinov and Babayeva²⁷ in their study of the Armenians in the Penza region, where the number of ethno-indifferent Armenians who accepted the culture of the majority in the region of residence has increased.

We also found that diaspora activity was positively associated with a preference for integration and separation strategies. These results partially confirmed our third hypothesis. The results of this study are similar to those obtained in the Russian regions²⁸ and the United States.²⁹ We can claim that the diaspora activity of the Armenians in the Kuban region contributes to both the preservation of their own culture and the acceptance of the culture of the ethnic majority.

In addition, as we sought an answer to our research question, we found that diaspora activity mediated the relationship of ethnic and regional identities with separation. This is an interesting result, which demonstrates that ethnic identity directly contributes to integration, and regional identity contributes to assimilation. However, if there is involvement in the diaspora's activities, these identities orient Armenians primarily towards preserving their own culture.

In general, the study demonstrated that both ethnic and Russian national identity of the Kuban Armenians contributed to their integration, and regional identity contributed to their assimilation. Active participation in the life of the Armenian community was determined by the significant ethnic and regional identities and mediated the relationship of these identities with separation attitudes. Thus, if the Kuban Armenians are involved in the life of their diaspora, their ethnic and regional identities determine the orientation towards separation. If they are not involved, these identities contribute to the acceptance of the host society culture. It is important to take this into account when building the regional interethnic relations policy. On the one hand, participation in the diaspora's activities is an effective mechanism for the adaptation of migrants, and a resource for their survival and social success. On the other hand, diaspora activity is a source of problems and conflict situations. For instance, this can increase the impenetrability of the diasporas' boundaries and encourage the orientation of migrants only to their ethnic group, thereby reducing their desire for sociocultural integration into the host society.

²⁵ See: J. Georgas, D. Papastylianou, op. cit.

²⁶ See: T.A. Ryabichenko, N.M. Lebedeva, I.D. Plotka, op. cit.

²⁷ See: V.V. Konstantinov, M.V. Babayeva, op. cit.

²⁸ See: V.V. Konstantinov, M.V. Vershinina, op. cit.

²⁹ See: *Armenia's Diaspora—Its Role and Influence*.

THE ADAPTIVE CAPACITY OF YOUNG MIGRANTS FROM KYRGYZSTAN IN MOSCOW

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ABSTRACT

The significant numbers of migrants from Kyrgyzstan in Moscow and the difficulties in adapting to the new conditions recorded by our research highlight the need to explore the adaptive capacity of young Kyrgyz. The lack of scientific knowl-

edge about the potential adaptive capacities of different groups of young Kyrgyz hinders the creation of optimal conditions that would allow them to internalize norms, values, and rules of behavior, increases the potential for conflict in the Moscow community, makes the

life of migrants less comfortable, and complicates integration processes in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). The purpose of this study is to characterize the adaptive capacity of young people from Kyrgyzstan in Moscow that helps them fit into the social environment, allows them to overcome the discomfort caused by the contradictory social context and unfamiliar living conditions, and influences their success in the host community and their attitudes to integration. The analysis presented in this article rests on empirical data obtained from a structured interview with 823 migrants, citizens of Kyrgyzstan aged 17 to 30 years, conducted in 2020. The novelty of the study lies in a systemic examination and comprehensive assessment of the social adaptation capacity of this social community, because up to now publications on this topic have considered only some aspects of the phenomenon.

In this article, "adaptive capacity" refers to the set of individual characteristics of migrants that ensures their inclusion into the host society, a change in previous norms and models of behavior, and the socialization of new behavior models emerging in the process of interaction between the individual and the new socio-cultural conditions of life and work as the synergistic effect of the relationship and interaction between the adaptive capacity of the individual and that of the environment. Its analysis is based on a description of expectations, perceptions, and social attitudes; the level of empathy, openness and complementarity with regard to the host community; and the degree of tolerance for people of other nationalities and identities. The article shows how migrants evaluate the adaptive

capacity of the environment as resulting from coordinated, concerted, and friendly action by all stakeholders: government, employers, and local population. It also analyzes the associations that arise in connection with Russia. The study reveals the impact of migrants' adaptive capacity on their attitudes to integration processes in the EAEU.

It was shown that notions about the nature of the interaction between Muscovites and migrants that is necessary to harmonize the individual and the environment (assimilation, bicultural adaptation or separation) determine the depth and direction of the activities of young migrants and their assessments of concrete social reality, while their strategic preferences with regard to the cultural norms and values of other peoples determine the adaptation attitudes and strategies that largely characterize their adaptive capacity. These strategies are as follows: marginalization of young Kyrgyz in the Moscow community, complementarity, and internalization of dominant norms.

The research conducted suggests the need for measures to improve interaction between migrants and the host society and provides grounds for the Eurasian Economic Commission and social institutions in Russia and Kyrgyzstan to develop measures designed to create conditions for adaptation, as well as to determine the appropriate instruments and mechanisms for this purpose. This research paves the way for developing a theory of social adaptation of migrants, for empirical research into migration processes in the post-Soviet space, and for a better understanding of the specific features of social adaptation of young people from Kyrgyzstan.

KEYWORDS: adaptation, adaptive capacity, young migrants, Kyrgyzstan.

Introduction

Our attention to the problem of the adaptive capacity of young migrants from Kyrgyzstan is due to larger migration flows from that country compared to other EAEU member states and more fre-

quent problems with their adaptation to the new conditions, as established by our research. The situation is contradictory because young people migrate to Moscow in order to improve their position and help their families, but they are not always ready to accept the new norms and conditions and may overestimate their own competencies and capabilities, which makes the life of migrants less comfortable, increases the potential for conflict in the Moscow community, and complicates integration processes in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).

The social adaptation of migrants from Kyrgyzstan in recent years has been analyzed in a number of articles, but all of them address specific problems: adaptation in particular regions of Russia, conditions for “acclimation” of migrants,¹ changes in social attitudes and value orientations, and ethno-cultural identification factors.² Articles on adaptation of migrants in Moscow also analyze its particular aspects: migrants’ “career trajectories” and accommodation models,³ infrastructure of migrant workers⁴ and diaspora,⁵ and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labor market and the position of migrants from CIS countries in general⁶ and Central Asia in particular.⁷

In recent years, the gender aspects of migration problems have been introduced into scientific discourse because of the increasing feminization of migration flows. A number of research papers consider the adaptation of migrant women,⁸ explore the trends and socio-demographic structure of labor migration in Russia and in the sending countries, and identify the key problems of female migrants in Russia.⁹ Thus, no systematic study has been made of the social adaptation capacity of young migrants from Kyrgyzstan living in Moscow.

Purpose and Methods of Research

The purpose of this study was to characterize the adaptive capacity of young people from Kyrgyzstan in Moscow that allows them to adapt to the new social reality, internalize the new norms, values, and rules of behavior, and overcome the discomfort caused by the contradictory social context and unfamiliar living conditions, influencing their success in the Moscow community and their attitudes to integration.

¹ See: E. Dzhambangulov, “Problema adaptatsii kyrgyzskikh trudovykh migrantov,” *Vestnik NGU*, Series: History, Philology, Vol. 5, Issue 3, 2006, pp. 93-97.

² See: E.A. Yagafova, V.V. Golovanov, “Samarskie kirgizy: osobennosti etnicheskoi identifikatsii i sotsiokulturnoi adaptatsii v politicheskom gorodskom prostranstve,” *Izvestia Samarskogo nauchnogo tsentra Rossiiskoi akademii nauk*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (2), 2018, pp. 553-556.

³ See: A.L. Rocheva, “Issledovanie pozitsiy ‘karyery kvartiroymshchika’ i modelei prozhivaniia v Moskve migrantov iz Kirgizii i Uzbekistana,” *Sotsiologicheskyy zhurnal*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 2015, pp. 31-50.

⁴ See: V.M. Peshkova, “Infrastruktura trudovykh migrantov v gorodakh sovremennoi Rossii (na primere migrantov iz Uzbekistana i Kirgizii v Moskve,” *Mir Rossii*, No. 2, 2015, pp. 129-151.

⁵ See: A.V. Shipilov, “Kirgizskaia diaspora v Rossii: novyi etap mezhkulturnogo vzaimodeistviia,” *Vestnik KGU*, No. 1, 2017, pp. 75-77.

⁶ See: S.V. Ryazantsev, I.N. Molodikova, A.D. Bragin, “Vliianie pandemii COVID-19 na polozhenie migrantov na rynkakh truda stran SNG,” *Baltiiskiy region*, Vol. 12, No. 4, 2020, pp. 10-38, available at [Doi: 10.5922/2079-8555-2020-3-2].

⁷ See: S. Ryazantsev, Z. Vazirov, M. Khramova, A. Smirnov, “The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Position of Labor Migrants from Central Asia in Russia,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus. English Edition*, Vol. 21, Issue 3, 2020.

⁸ See: E.S. Tarkhanova, “Spetsifika zhenskoi trudovoi migratsii v Rossii,” *Grazhdanskoe obshchestvo v Rossii: sotsiologiya, tendentsii, perspektivy*, No. 1 (4), 2015, pp. 187-193; D.V. Poletayev, “Feminizatsiia soobshchestva trudovykh migrantov iz Srednei Azii: novye sotsialnye roli tadhichek i kirgizok,” in: *Transnatsionalnye migratsii i sovremennyye gosudarstva v usloviakh ekonomicheskogo krizisa*, RSMD, Moscow, 2016, pp. 263-283; N.L. Mikidenko, S.P. Storozheva, “Zhenskaya trudovalnaya migratsiia: informatsionnye aspekty adaptatsii,” *Vestnik Kemerovskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, Series: Political, Sociological, and Economic Sciences, No. 2, 2016, pp. 35-42.

⁹ See: S.V. Ryazantsev, T.K. Rostovskaya, S.N. Peremyshlin, “Genderne aspekty trudovoi migratsii v Rossii: trendy, posledstviia, regulirovanie,” *Zhenshchina v rossiiskom obshchestve*, No. 4, 2019, pp. 53-65.

The methodological strategy included structured interviews with migrants from Kyrgyzstan in Moscow under the project *Monitoring of Integration Processes in the EAEU* (Project Manager G.I. Osadchaya). A total of 823 people were interviewed in 2020: citizens of Kyrgyzstan aged 17-30 years who had arrived in Moscow after 2015 and had lived there for more than a month. The sampling method employed was snowball sampling based on certain characteristics. Empirical subjects were selected using the socio-demographic characteristics of migrants from Kyrgyzstan, and the number of respondents was determined based on the need to identify statistically significant groups of young migrants from Kyrgyzstan in terms of the level of social adaptation.

The Concept of Adaptive Capacity of Migrants

By “adaptive capacity” of a migrant we mean the set of their individual characteristics that ensures their inclusion into the host society, a change in previous norms and models of behavior, and the socialization of new behavior models. It is formed in the process of interaction between the individual and the new socio-cultural conditions of life and work as the synergistic effect of the relationship and interaction between the adaptive capacity of the individual and that of the environment. An increase in human and social capital means an increase in adaptive capacity and successful integration of migrants and their children into the host community.

The adaptive capacity of migrants is determined by the dynamics of expectations, perceptions of their own possibilities in the form of subjective images, evaluation of their personal abilities, and opportunities to satisfy their needs, and can be described by value orientations and social attitudes; level of empathy, friendliness, and openness to the host community; degree of tolerance for people of other nationalities, complementarity with regard to the host community, positive attitudes towards acculturation of values, and perceptions of the host society’s adaptation policy. One must agree with I.B. Korotkova and N.O. Gavrilova, who suggest that the willingness of migrants to see Russia as their permanent place of residence, “the presence of positive and permanent contacts and ties with local residents and the lack of close ties and relations with the country of origin,” and a readiness for “marriage with a representative of the local community” could be used as an indicator of the seriousness of their intentions to integrate into the host environment.¹⁰

The adaptive capacity of the host community is characterized by how its social institutions ensure equal rights, opportunities, and responsibilities for all participants in socio-economic processes. The success of migrants’ social adaptation depends in large part on the level of complementarity/hostility of the host authorities and society, on the existence of well-established ties with a prosperous ethnic community.

As our analysis shows, notions about the nature of the host society’s policy for harmonizing the individual and the environment so as to bring their needs, interests, attitudes, and value orientations into accord are the main determinant of the social adaptation capacity of young migrants from Kyrgyzstan in the Moscow megalopolis. These notions can be regarded as the respondents’ need and readiness for certain activities or actions in concrete social reality, as well as a measure of successful integration into the Moscow community. For example, only 4 in 10 respondents say that the host society’s adaptation policy should be geared towards assimilation, about as many are oriented towards adaptation in accordance with the logic of biculturalism (bicultural adaptation), a small percentage prefer separation, and a relatively large percentage (13.2%) find it difficult to say (see Table 1).

¹⁰ I.B. Korotkova, N.O. Gavrilova, “Migrants in Russia: The Degree of Severity of the Problem and Solutions,” *Problemy nauki*, No. 4 (40), 2019.

Table 1

**Opinions of Young Migrants
from Kyrgyzstan about the Necessary Character of
Interaction of Muscovites and Russians
with Migrants from Kyrgyzstan**

Character of Interaction of Muscovites and Russians with Migrants from Kyrgyzstan	Number of Respondents	%	Adaptation Strategy
It is necessary to encourage migrants to “merge” into Russian society	310	37.7	Assimilation
It is necessary to engage migrants in the life of the local community while recognizing their national and cultural identity	359	43.6	Bicultural adaptation
Migrants should live in the greatest possible isolation	38	4.6	Separation
Other	7	0.9	
Undecided	109	13.2	

In each group, the shares of women and men, people with a secondary and a higher education, and urban and rural residents are roughly equal.

A Characterization of the Adaptive Capacity of Migrants

The adaptive capacity of migrants from Kyrgyzstan is characterized by relations between young Kyrgyz and the Moscow multiethnic host community and the degree of openness to it. This is very important, because a common mental-communication field with the host population increases migrants’ opportunities for entering the Russian socio-cultural space. According to our study, 7 in 10 respondents communicate with people of other nationalities with pleasure; 2 in 10 say it all depends on nationality: they like to communicate with some people, but not with others. A higher degree of complementarity with respect to representatives of other cultures is demonstrated by members of the group oriented towards assimilation into Russian society (see Fig. 1).

For about a third of respondents, their friends in Moscow are mostly representatives of the titular nationality (Russians); for another third they are Kyrgyz living in Russia after 2015; for about a fifth they are compatriots who arrived in Moscow after 1990; and for 12%, people of other nationalities. In other words, for more than half of all respondents, their compatriots remain the most important people in Moscow. And although a large percentage of respondents (36.8%) in the group oriented towards the deepest kind of adaptation—assimilation into Russian society—have Russian friends, 47% mix mostly with their compatriots (see Table 2).

Figure 1

Are There Any People of Other Nationalities Among Those with Whom You Constantly Communicate? % of respondents

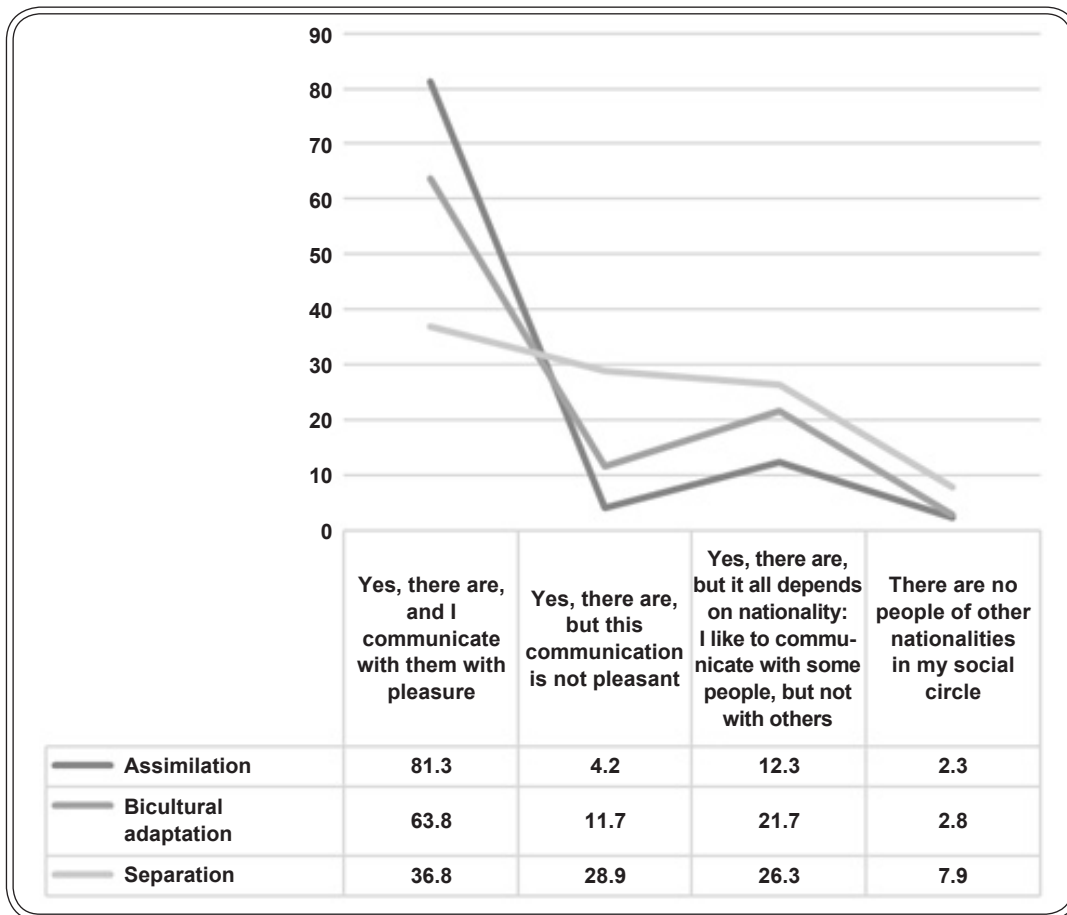


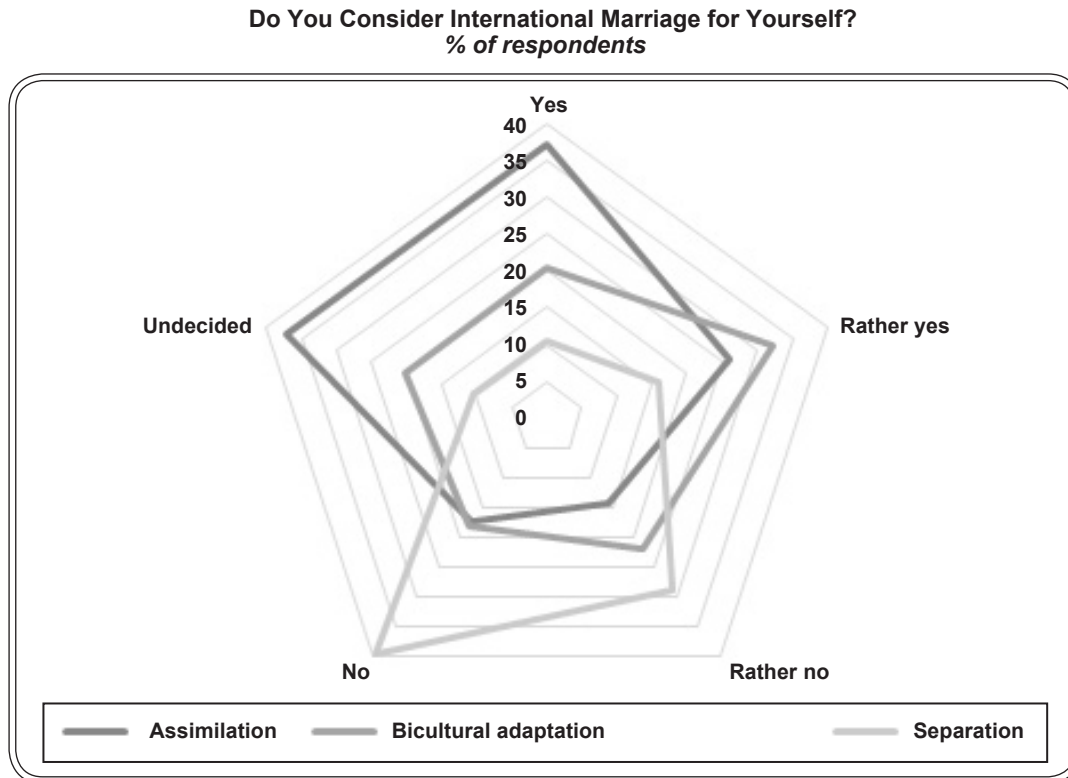
Table 2

Friends of Young Migrants from Kyrgyzstan in Moscow

	Notions about the Character of Interaction of Muscovites and Russians with Migrants from Kyrgyzstan, % of Group Total		
	Assimilation	Bicultural Adaptation	Separation
Compatriots from Kyrgyzstan who arrived in Moscow after 1990	18.4	18.9	21.1
Kyrgyz living in Russia after 2015	28.7	38.7	42.1
Russians	36.8	30.1	15.8
People of other nationalities	12.3	10.9	10.5
I have no friends in Moscow	3.9	1.4	10.5

It should be noted that 55% of respondents consider the possibility of international marriage, and 47.5% can imagine a situation where they would give their child a Russian name. Here, too, respondents in the group oriented towards “assimilation” demonstrate the highest level of agreement with these statements (see Figs. 2 and 3).

Figure 2

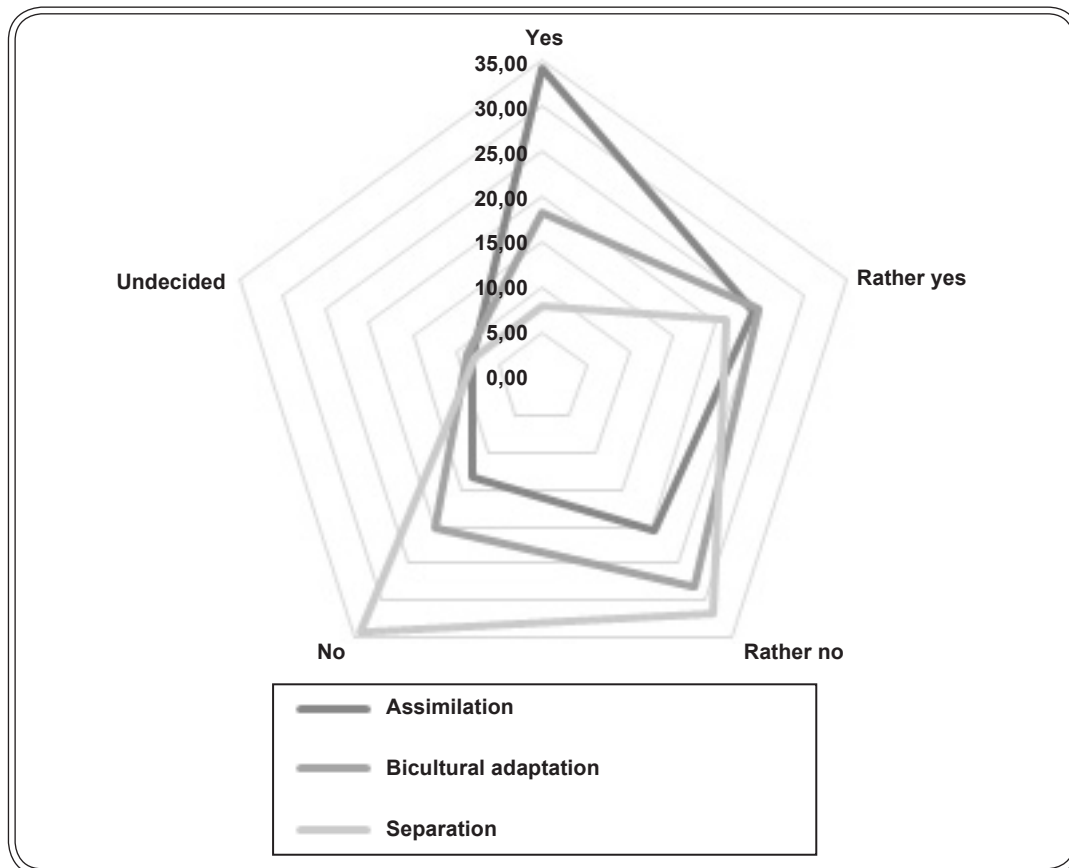


Respondents demonstrate different degrees of complementarity in relations between Kyrgyz and people of other nationalities. For example, about 9 in 10 respondents describe relations between Kyrgyz and Slavs, Kyrgyz and Tajiks, Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, and Kyrgyz and Kazakhs as friendly, warm, and peaceful. Relations between young Kyrgyz and Slavs are the most amicable: 52.5% of respondents evaluate them as friendly or warm. At the same time, the highest degree of conflict and tension is reported for relations with North and South Caucasians. Clearly, the nature of relations between Kyrgyz and other ethnic groups depends on many factors, including personal experience of communication, interethnic attitudes, religious preferences, and post-memory of historical events (see Fig. 4 on p. 120).

An important indicator of the adaptive capacity of migrants from Kyrgyzstan is identity, because it gives an idea of the extent to which they identify with the EAEU, as well as of the emotions experienced by young Kyrgyz and their willingness to act. Self-identification as a citizen of the Eurasian Union implies an awareness of its legal norms and fundamental values, solidarity with the citizens of the Union state, and loyalty to the Union. It includes a state, civic, and cultural-historical component. Eurasian identity is formed by social institutions—primarily family, school, and media—in the process of socialization. The formation of such an identity strengthens integration ties between the people of the Union, which is in the interest of the states and societies that are building a new integration community, a common economic space in Eurasia.

Figure 3

Can You Imagine Giving Your Child a Russian Name?
% of respondents



According to our data, respondents most frequently identify with their country of origin (about a third); 1 in 6 respondents identify with people of their own nationality or members of their own family; 1 in 8 see themselves as citizens of their home country and citizens of the Eurasian Union; and 1 in 10 as citizens of the world or residents of the city where they live (in the home country or in Moscow) (see Fig. 5).

From the perspective of assessing adaptive capacity, respondents' expectations about the possibility of intergroup contact and the degree of assimilation of the host society's culture by migrants are very important. Migrants' strategic preferences regarding the cultural norms and values of other peoples that were revealed in the course of research make it possible to identify the balance, as perceived by migrants, between acceptance of the dominant culture and maintenance of their own cultural traditions by identifying three types of integration attitudes that determine the adaptive capacity of young Kyrgyz.

The first type (18.7% of all respondents) characterizes an extremely low level of adaptive capacity or even its absence (see Table 3 on p. 121).

This integration attitude is oriented towards the migrants' own culture instead of adaptation to the new culture, to the new cultural environment. This strategy of marginalization in the Moscow community may lead to rejection of the host society's values by young Kyrgyz and, in the long term, will prevent them from adapting to the Moscow community and create a potential for conflict.

Figure 4

How Would You Describe Relations between You and Representatives of Other Nationalities in Your Area of Residence in Moscow? % of respondents

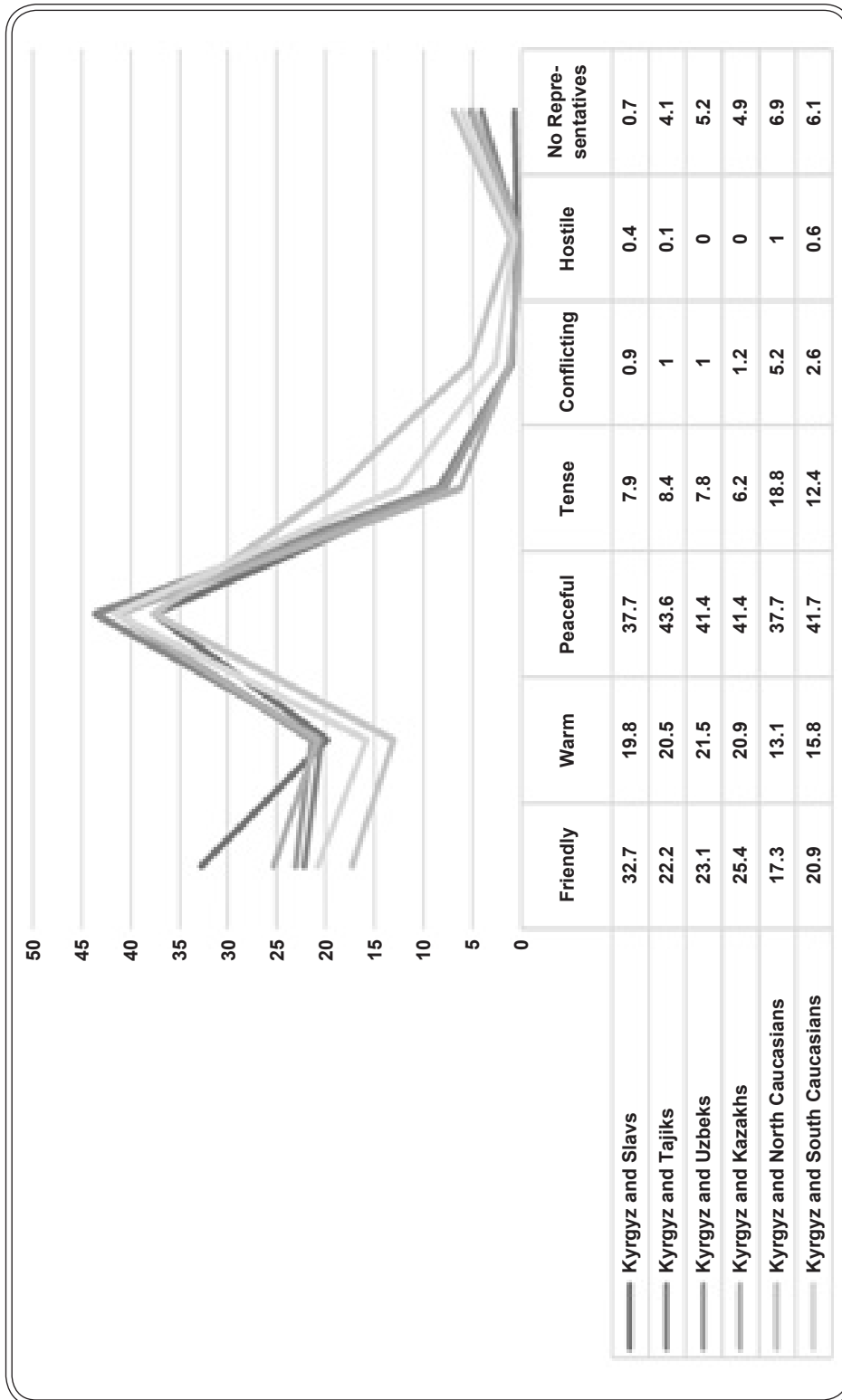


Figure 5

How Do You Primarily Identify Yourself (one answer)? % of respondents

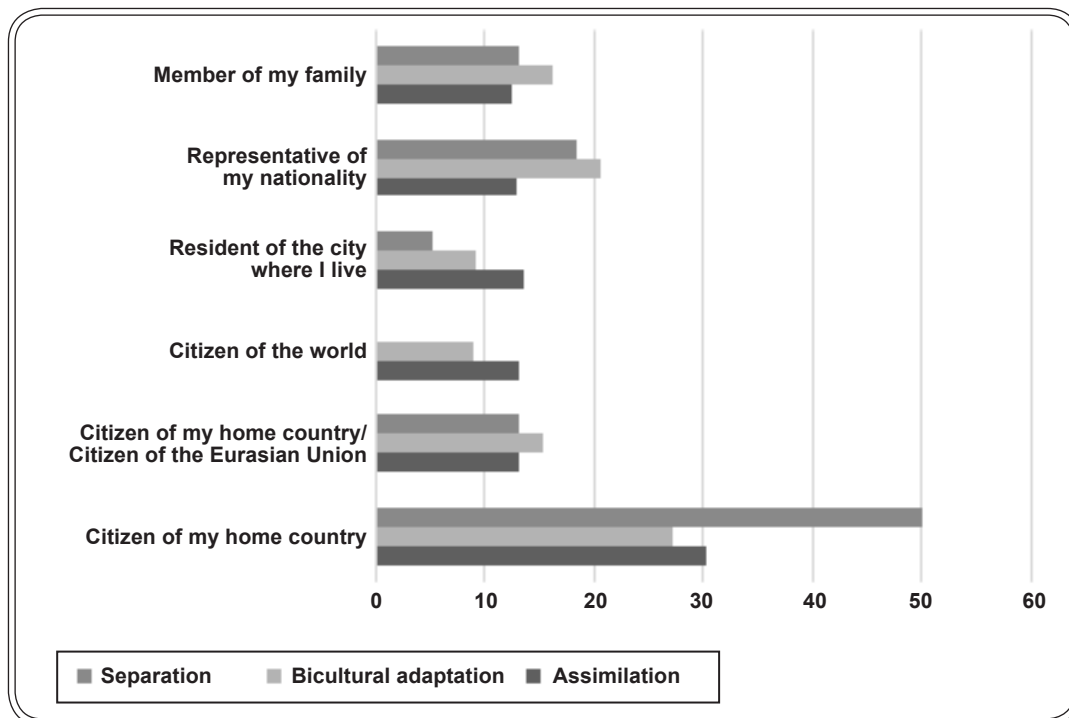


Table 3

Migrants' Strategic Preferences Regarding the Cultural Norms and Values of Other Peoples: Low Level of Adaptive Capacity

Low Adaptive Capacity	Agree/Rather Agree, %	Adaptation Strategy
I think that all people in the world share or should share the same values, the values accepted in my country	10.3	Strategy of marginalization in the Moscow community
I think that the values of a culture different from mine threaten the customary order of things and my way of life	8.4	

The second type of attitudes characterizes a medium or moderate level of adaptive capacity. It is represented by 43.1% of respondents and may be designated as a bicultural type of attitudes. It implies maintaining ties with one's native culture and assimilation of the fundamental values of the host culture. This strategy may be called a strategy of complementarity (see Table 4).

The third, high level of adaptive capacity is represented by 38.1% of respondents. These young migrants from Kyrgyzstan are willing to adapt to the host society and adopt the attributes of the new identity. This probably means a lessening of ethnic divisions, a reduction of social and cultural differences, and internalization of the dominant norms and values of Russian culture by migrants, that is, the construction of their own system they can accept (see Table 5).

Table 4

**Migrants' Strategic Preferences Regarding
the Cultural Norms and Values of Other Peoples:
Medium or Moderate Level of Adaptive Capacity**

Medium or Moderate Adaptive Capacity	Agree/Rather Agree, %	Adaptation Strategy
I think that every culture has something in common with other cultures and it is always necessary to look for features that unify different cultures	23.9	Strategy of complementarity
I can say that I know Russian culture well and am willing to accept its fundamental values	19.2	

Table 5

**Migrants' Strategic Preferences Regarding
the Cultural Norms and Values of Other Peoples:
High Level of Adaptive Capacity**

High Adaptive Capacity	Agree/Rather Agree, %	Adaptation Strategy
I can live comfortably in compliance with the rules, norms, and values of Russian culture	23.7	Strategy of internalizing dominant norms
I make no distinction between Kyrgyz and Russian culture, and one might say that I myself am already a representative of Russian culture	14.4	

Migrants' Assessment of the Adaptive Capacity of the Environment

The formation of the adaptive capacity of young migrants from Kyrgyzstan is an interactive process that implies interaction between migrants and the host society. This is why it is so important for the latter to foster goodwill and create the necessary conditions for integrating the new arrivals. In Russia, these conditions are ensured by all levels of government (federal, regional, and local) in order to accommodate those who need such help. The importance of “coordinating the activities of federal bodies of government, bodies of government of subjects of the Russian Federation, and local government bodies in the sphere of migration”¹¹ is highlighted by the new State Migration Policy Concept of the Russian Federation for 2019-2025, approved on 31 October, 2018. The results of the activities of the authorities and the local population are evaluated by respondents as follows: 46.9% say that people are friendly or very friendly towards migrants arriving from Kyrgyzstan, and 46.7% say that people are indifferent. As for government attitudes, they are evaluated less positively: 30% think that the authorities are very friendly or friendly, and 54.7% that they are indifferent (see Fig. 6).

¹¹ *Kontseptsiya gosudarstvennoi migratsionnoi politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii na 2019-2025 gody* (approved by the President of the Russian Federation on 31 October, 2018), Art 20 (g).

Figure 6

What is the Usual Attitude towards You on the Part of Government Officials and Members of the Public in Moscow?
% of respondents

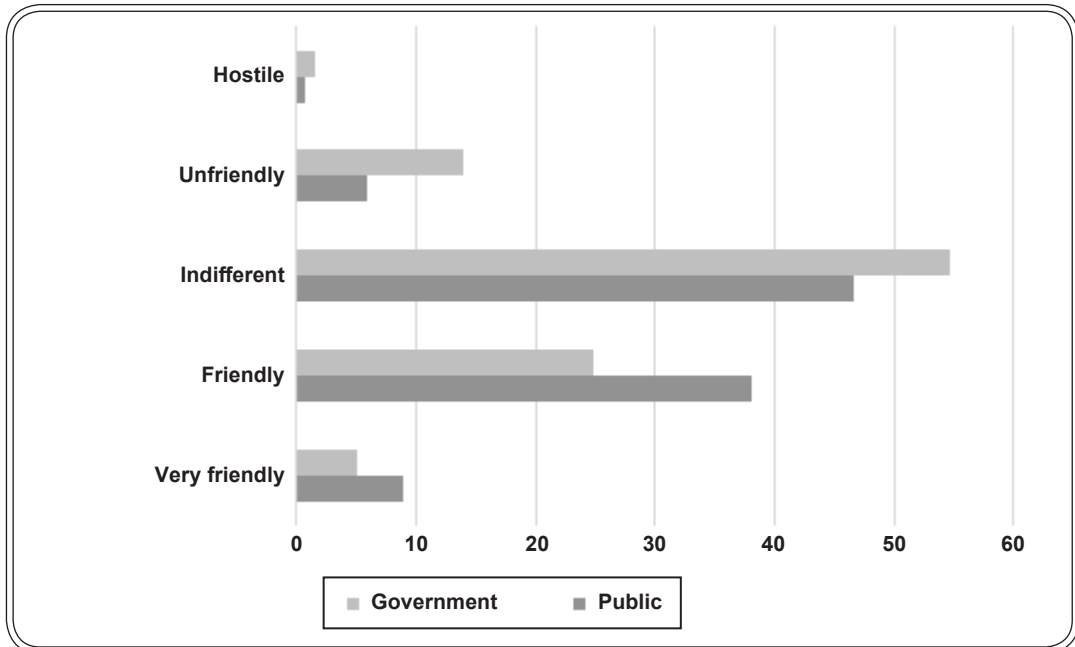
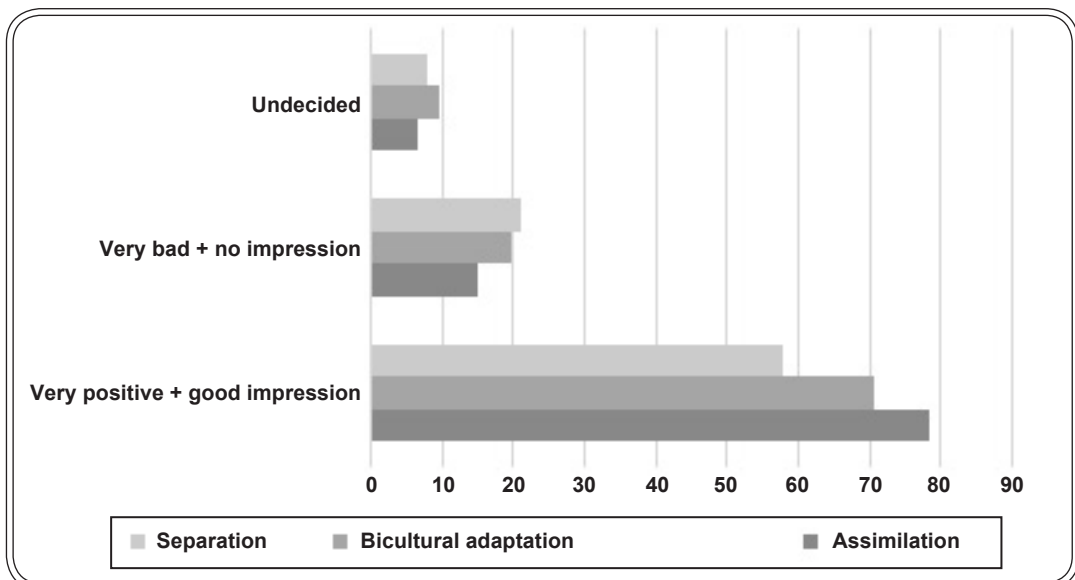


Figure 7

What Is Your General Impression of Young Muscovites Based on Your Experience in Moscow?
% of respondents



About a third of respondents feel a sense of danger during their stay in Moscow. Members of the group oriented towards deeper integration into the Moscow community experience such feelings less frequently. In explaining the reasons for their anxiety, most respondents say that “*Muscovites don’t like migrant workers*” (47.6%), “*Muscovites don’t like foreigners*” (25.2%), and “*Muscovites don’t like Kyrgyz*” (21.7%). For example, 47.4% of respondents state that during their current stay in Moscow they have been subjected to insults, 9.7% to threats, and 6.4% to physical assault.

Most young migrants from Kyrgyzstan have positive impressions of young Muscovites, especially respondents from the group who believe that the nature of interaction of Muscovites and Russians with migrants from Kyrgyzstan should encourage them to merge into Russian society, to learn the Russian language and Russian culture. For them, Russia is primarily associated with opportunities for good earnings (50.2%), a comfortable life for them and their family members (22.1%), and high-quality education (11.9%).

The attitude to integration processes, while characterizing the adaptive capacity of migrants, also gives an idea of the success of their integration into the Moscow community. For example, 7 in 10 respondents approve the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union in the post-Soviet space and think that Kyrgyzstan’s accession to the EAEU was voluntary and mutually beneficial, and more than half say that the creation of the EAEU has led to positive changes in their life. All these assessments are more frequent in the group that supports the assimilation strategy in the adaptation of migrants from Kyrgyzstan to the Moscow community.

Conclusion

The adaptive capacity of young migrants from Kyrgyzstan in Moscow is characterized by a high degree of openness of most respondents to the Moscow multiethnic host community. Seven in 10 respondents communicate with people of other nationalities with pleasure. For about a third of respondents, their friends in Moscow are mostly representatives of the titular nationality (Russians), and for every other respondent they are compatriots from Kyrgyzstan. About half of all respondents consider the possibility of international marriage and can imagine a situation where they would give their child a Russian name. An overwhelming majority of respondents (9 in 10) demonstrate a high degree of complementarity in relations between Kyrgyz and people of other nationalities, with the exception of relations with North and South Caucasians. Respondents most frequently identify with their country of origin (about a third); 1 in 6 respondents identify with people of their own nationality or members of their families; 1 in 8 see themselves as citizens of their home country and citizens of the Eurasian Union; and 1 in 10 as citizens of the world or residents of the city where they live.

Migrants’ strategic preferences regarding the socialization of the cultural norms and values of other peoples that were revealed in the course of research make it possible to identify the balance, as perceived by migrants, between acceptance of the dominant culture and maintenance of their own cultural traditions by identifying three types of integration attitudes that form the adaptation strategies of young Kyrgyz and ultimately determine their adaptive capacity: marginalization (about 19%), complementarity (about 43%), and internalization of dominant norms (38%). In evaluating the adaptive capacity of Moscow and Muscovites, migrants spoke of goodwill on the part of the public more frequently (about half of all respondents) than on the part of government (about a third). Most young migrants from Kyrgyzstan have positive impressions of Muscovites. For about half of respondents, Russia is associated primarily with opportunities to earn a good income (50.2%), and for another 22.1% with opportunities for a comfortable life for them and their family members. Seven in 10 respondents have a positive view of integration processes in the Eurasian Economic Union.

An analysis of the results obtained shows that the direction of the activities of young migrants from Kyrgyzstan in the Moscow megalopolis and their assessments of social reality are determined by their notions about the necessary character of interaction of Muscovites and Russians with migrants from Kyrgyzstan (assimilation, bicultural adaptation or separation), which can be seen as the respondents' need and readiness for certain activities or actions in the concrete social reality, as well as a measure of successful integration into the Moscow community. In fact, the deeper their orientation towards integration, the more positive are all characteristics of their personal adaptive capacity, the adaptive capacity of the environment, and integration processes between them. The research conducted shows the need for measures to improve interaction between migrants and the host society, as well as to upgrade the latter's adaptation policy. This policy should be geared towards developing migrants' qualities and competencies that would enable them to take part in the host country's economic, social, political, and spiritual life and would ensure civil unity and accord.

Our findings expand the explanatory power of the specifics of social adaptation of young migrants from Kyrgyzstan, contributing to the development of migrants' social adaptation theory and methodology for empirical research into the social adaptation of migrants from EAEU member states in Russia. And an evaluation of migrants' adaptive capacity with a characterization of groups of migrants based on this criterion will allow social institutions in Kyrgyzstan and Russia and the Eurasian Economic Commission to ensure a differentiated approach to creating enabling conditions and developing adequate tools and mechanisms for social adaptation.

RELIGION IN SOCIETY

MOSQUES IN POST-SOVIET KAZAKHSTAN: DISCOURSE INTERPRETATION AND REGULATORY PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

The authors have analyzed the dynamics of the growth of number of mosques built by religious associations in post-Soviet Kazakhstan and noted a transition from their unregulated and chaotic construction (proliferation) to their precise

association with specific maddhabs, and their construction norms conceptualized by religious institutions represented by the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan (DUMK).

The types of cultic facilities and the actors are discussed and ranked according to the type of their involvement and partnership. We should note that the participation of various actors adds weight to the

status of mosques as important public facilities.

The authors have paid particular attention to the religious communities' revised registration realized under the Law of the RK on Religious Activities and Religious Associations of 2011, which optimized the religious space, consolidated the positions of traditional Islam and, hence, standardized the rules related to mosque construction.

KEYWORDS: mosque, public space, post-Soviet realities, re-Islamization, re-appropriation, "mosque diplomacy," religious communities, traditional Islam, DUMK.

Introduction

The steadily growing number of mosques for the last thirty years noted by everyone living in Muslim states and confirmed by statistics is not a phenomenon specific to Kazakhstan. It testifies to global Islamic revival,¹ post-Soviet reanimation of cultural and historical (religious) memory,² and investments in the reputational capital.³ This article presents a model of local Kazakhstani discussions about the role of mosques in the social, political, cultural and emotional agenda of tripartite relations between the state, communities and the religious Islamic institutions in Kazakhstan.

We have paid particular attention to a paradox: during the years of independence the number of mosques increased by 58 times or even more,⁴ while the intellectual, analytical and expert accompaniment of this chaotic phenomenon is lagging behind. Few researchers have risked to analyze the appearance of newly built mosques, while the authors who seek to do so point at the scarcity of theoretical works and mostly focus on the concept of identity as an epistemological phenomenon. The growing number of mosques is treated as a result of deeply rooted spiritual processes unfolding in Kazakhstan.⁵ This aspect deserves detailed analysis; the same fully applies to the studies of mosques and places of

¹ See: F. Asadullin, "Urban Islam kak novy etnokulturny fenomen sovremennogo evropeyskogo megapolisa: ot retrospektivy k perspektivnomr videniiu problemy," *Islamology*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2018, pp. 43-56; G. Vainnsteyn, "Islam v gorodskom prostranstve i v obshchestvennom soznanii Evropy," *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnoshenia*, No. 6, 2013, pp. 29-37; O. Trofimova, "Musulmane i islam v Zapadnoy Evrope," *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnoshenia*, No. 10, 2009, pp. 52-62.

² See: K.A. Medeuova, Y.M. Sandybaeva, Z.Zh. Naurzbaeva, D.T. Tolgambaeva, K.S. Ermanganbetova, D.N. Melnikov, M.Zh. Kikimbaev, A.Ch. Ramazanova, A.B. Tlepbergen, E.Zh. Zhetibaev, D.E. Orazbaeva, K.A. Potavets, *Praktiki i mesta pamiati v Kazakhstane*, Lev Gumilyov ENU, Astana, 2017, 320 pp.

³ See: A. Bissenova, "Building a Muslim Nation: The Role of the Central Mosque of Astana," in: *Kazakhstan in the Making: Legitimacy, Symbols, and Social Changes*, ed. by M. Laruelle, Lexington Books, 2016, p. 211.

⁴ See: *List of Registered Religious Associations and their Branches*, Site of the Committee for Religious Affairs, Ministry of Information and Social Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan, available in Russian at [<http://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/din/documents/details/113255?lang=ru>], 29 June, 2021.

⁵ See: M. Zhuzey, N. Seitakhmetova, M. Beketova, Sh. Zhandossova, "The Mosque in Post-Soviet Central Asia: Sacral and Spiritual Contexts," *Central Asia and the Caucasus. English Edition*, Issue 3, Vol. 21, 2020, available at [https://www.ca-c.org/online/2020/journal_eng/cac-03/09.shtml], 29 June, 2021.

worship inherited from the pre-Soviet past.⁶ We would like to rely on these studies to move to the next analytical level and to discuss the role of mosques for cities, communities and the state.

We have proceeded from the following formula: the current state of “Islam in Central Asia can be comprehended only in the context of Soviet history.”⁷ Historian and social anthropologist Adib Khalid argues that since the Soviet regime promoted secularization, today Central Asia has been drawn into re-Islamization, the phenomenon, which, “being not completely natural in character, remains, however, connected, contextually and institutionally, with the structures inherited from Soviet epoch and, at the same time, with the worldwide context of the early 21st century.”⁸

This quote has summed up the legacy of the past and the trends of the present in post-Soviet Central Asia that determined the specifics of state ideology and the Islamic social spaces created by local populations. In his article Khalid relies not only on the concept of re-Islamization (Islamic revival) but also on re-appropriation.⁹ We have accepted it as a context within which we will disclose the very meaning of our studies.

In this article we will try to answer the following question: which prerequisites and trends contributed to the process of institutionalization of “traditional Islam” and which actors are responsible for the surge in mosque construction as important public facilities.

Re-appropriation of Islamic values as an important part of historical heritage and the social identity of the Central Asian countries mercilessly uprooted by colonial authorities have contributed to the development of communication spaces that are absolutely indispensable for new actors and religious communities. They consolidated the demand for the confirmation of visual and material identity in public spaces. Restoration of pre-Soviet and construction of huge numbers of new mosques are one of the symbols of this confirmation. Everything that has been said in this regard became an inalienable part of the authorities’ stance on the historical possibility of independent national construction and overcoming the negative repercussions of the rule of czars and Bolsheviks. These processes varied in different Central Asian countries; their historical prerequisites and political collisions were likewise different, yet it became clear that the first heads of newly-independent states eventually had to take into account the unfolding Islamic discourse and use it as part of their ideological agenda.

In this article mosques are not merely considered as places of religious practice, but, first and foremost, public spaces built by interested sides. In our discussion we rely on the term “participation,” which explains not only the concerted actions of religious communities (umma and jamaat), but also their partnership with the authorities and religious institutions, the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan being one of them, as active creators of new mosques.

Research Methods

When writing this article, we relied on various materials produced by the state structures working in the religious sphere, scientific and analytical studies, the Internet and the programmed documents of the DUMK, Internet publications related to mosque construction.

⁶ See: S. Azhigali, *Monuments of Mankystau and Ustyurt. Album*, Oner Printshop, Almaty, 2014, 504 pp. (in Kazakh, Russian and English).

⁷ A. Khalid, “Postsovetskie sudby sredneaziatskogo Islama,” in: *Konfessia, imperia, natsia: religia i problema raznoobrazia v istorii postsovetskogo prostranstva*, Novoe izdatelstvo, Moscow, 2012, pp. 316-344.

⁸ See: *Ibid.*, p. 319.

⁹ Unlike re-Islamization which the author used several times in his article, the term re-appropriation is used once yet the author has written a lot about the processes of return of Islamic values within the process of re-appropriation of cultural heritage.

Chronologically, our studies of the dynamics of the growing number of Islamic associations in Kazakhstan cover the period between 1990 and 2020. Qualitative information was obtained from official sources; the missing figures were taken from scholarly studies and international reports. Our tables and the diagram are based on information recovered from the official site of the authorized structures working in the religious sphere (for the year 2020),¹⁰ information and methodological handbooks *Religioznaia situatsia v Respublike Kazakhstan: prognozy i tendentsii* (1990-2010),¹¹ *Religia v sisteme dukhovnosti Kazakhstana* (2007),¹² analytical report *Tsentralnaia Azia: prostranstvo "shelkovoy demokratii"*. *Islam i gosudarstvo* (2011-2016),¹³ scholarly reports *Konfessionalny portret Kazakhstana* (2001),¹⁴ *Mechet v postsovetskoy Tsentralnoy Azii: sakralno-dukhovnye konteksty* (2017-2018).¹⁵

We should note that different sources may contain different figures related to religious associations in general and mosques in particular. They require verification and clarification from completely reliable official sources.

The Past: Religious Structures

The history of religious organizations and administration of religious activities is extensive and varied: it stretched from the colonial (1713-1917) to Soviet periods (1917-1990) and included the stages of administration and co-administration by religious centers and an absence of administrative structures. We did not include in our study either the Middle Ages, when Islam arrived in the area now known as Central Asia from other regions, or the rather protracted period of its modification in different states, since administration of religious activity, the appearance of the cleric corps, and the cultic activity of mosques in Kazakhstan began not earlier than the establishment of colonial czarist power. The history of administrative subordination of the local clergy to one of several structures or their complete independence can be divided into three periods:

- (a) subordination to the Orenburg Mahometan Spiritual Assembly (OMDS) and the local civil administrations in czarist Russia;
- (b) relative independence of representation in the structure of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM) under Soviet power;
- (c) independent Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan (DUMK).

In czarist Russia, the Muslims of Kazakhstan took orders from the spiritual and civilian structures of the colonial administration. Until the 1860s, the Muslims of Turkestan and the Steppe Territory were supervised by the SADUM located in Ufa, the power of which was not absolute: it was limited severely by czarist authorities. Later, when the Russian Empire had practically integrated the

¹⁰ See: *List of Registered Religious Associations and their Branches*.

¹¹ See: A.K. Omarov, *Religioznaia situatsia v Respublike Kazakhstan: prognozy i tendentsii. Metodicheskoe posobie*, Astana, 2011, p. 49.

¹² See: *Religia v sisteme dukhovnosti Kazakhstana. Spravochno-metodicheskoe posobie*, Zhibek zholy, Almaty, 2007, p. 80.

¹³ See: *Tsentralnaia Azia: prostranstvo "shelkovoy demokratii"*. *Islam i gosudarstvo*, ed. by E. Nogoibaeva, Almaty, 2017, p. 8.

¹⁴ See: M. Tul'skiy, "Konfessionalny portret Kazakhstana. Part 1—Statistika," available at [<http://tul'skiy.livejournal.com/50629.html>], 29 June, 2021.

¹⁵ See: M. Zhuzey, N. Seitakhmetova, M. Beketova, Sh. Zhandossova, op. cit.

territory of contemporary Kazakhstan with its own land, it tried to sort out and systematize the traditional (adat) and Muslim laws (the Shari'a) in order to adjust them to the interests of the colonial administration. At that time, the empire had no centers of religious administration; czarist officials were not positively disposed towards Islam, therefore the Shari'a and its stronger influence were interpreted as a threat to the mother country.¹⁶ Finally it was decided to remove the local umma from the OMDS in order to cease the gradual consolidation of Tatar imams' power. According to the Temporal Provisions of 1868 and 1885 adopted by the Administration of Spiritual Affairs of the Kirghiz of the Steppe General Governorship, control over the religious sphere was transferred to civilian authorities.

Despite the attempts to suppress the influence of Islam in the colonial territories, big-city mosques (which formed a line of outposts of colonial power in Kazakhstan—Petropavlovsk, Semipalatinsk, Uralsk, Akmolinsk, etc.) remained important public facilities. Early in the 19th century, merchants and other rich Petropavlovsk residents built five stone mosques.¹⁷ Between the late 18th and the late 19th centuries Semipalatinsk acquired eight Tatar mosques. Built for different reasons, they became important centers of public life by the efforts of local merchants, religious figures, and the local umma.¹⁸

The next stage was marked by radical changes in the relations between the state and the religious communities: the gradually developing Soviet atheism was superimposed on the traditional colonial administrative practices. Religious freedom survived partially between 1917 and 1929; the decision On Religious Associations adopted in 1929, limited the freedom of religious service, confiscated mosques and closed religious educational establishments.¹⁹

New official religious structures that coordinated religious activities of the Central Asian Muslims were banned. It was in 1943 that the Muslim leaders finally met at a conference that resolved to establish the SADUM in Uzbekistan. Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan acquired kaziats; their heads were appointed by the SADUM Mufti. The first Mufti of Kazakhstan elected in 1946 was Abdulgafar Shamsutdinov (1946-1952) followed by Saduakas Gylmani (1952-1972), Zhakia Beysenbaev (1972-1979) and Ratbek Nysanbaev (1979-1990).

The kaziat of Soviet Kazakhstan was an autonomous structure with certain powers to regulate the religious life of the local umma. The SADUM was responsible for the key issues in religious life—appointment of the chief imams, lists of those permitted to perform haj, organization of spiritual education and publication of religious literature. Each of the kaziats was expected to transfer monetary donations to Tashkent. Under the czars, religious power belonged to the Tatar mullahs, while members of Uzbek clergy dominated during the SADUM period.²⁰

Despite the existence of regional spiritual administrations, Soviet authorities remained vigilant; in particular, they pushed out religious practices to the periphery of public life by limiting the number of mosques. Until the mid-1980s, religious activities were controlled and mercilessly restricted: “The authorities did not allow to build new mosques. In the 1960s-1980s, their number in Kazakhstan re-

¹⁶ See: P. Sartory, P. Shabley, *Eksperty imperii: adat, shariat i proizvodstvo znaniy v Kazakhskoy stepi*, Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, Moscow, 2019, 280 pp.: illustrated (Series *Historia Rossica*).

¹⁷ See: Zh.E. Nurbaev, “Istoki formirovaniya institutov Islama v Severnom Kazakhstane (na materialakh Petropavlovskogo uezda Akmolinskoy oblasti),” *Elektronny nauchny zhurnal “edu.e-history.kz,”* No. 1 (05), 2016, available at [<http://edu.e-history.kz/ru/publications/view/360>], 29 June, 2021.

¹⁸ See: P.S. Shabley, “Istoria tatarskoy obshchiny Semipalatinska,” *Istoricheskaya etnologia*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2020, pp. 75-94, available at [DOI: 10.22378/he.2020-5- 1.75—94], 29 June, 2021.

¹⁹ See: Z. Saktaganova, Zh. Mazhitova, E. Aimakhov, “Gosudarstvo i religia v sovetskoy istorii: etapy i osobennosti vzaimnosheniy v Kazakhstane,” *Vestnik KazNPU im. Abaia*, Series *Istoricheskie i sotsialno-politicheskie nauki*, No. 2 (53), 2017, pp. 191=200, available at [http://sp.kaznpu.kz/docs/jurnal_file/file20190506024941.pdf], 29 June, 2021.

²⁰ See: A. Verkhovsky, S. Jukeeva, V. Ponomarev, “Religiozny faktor v politike i v ideologii natsionalnykh dvizheniy v Rossii i Kazakhstane. 1989-1997,” available at Internet resource Panorama.ru [<http://www.panorama.ru/works/rk/k1.html#1a>], 29 June, 2021.

mained between 22 and 28. In 1961, for example, there were 25 registered Muslim associations with mosques of their own... The phenomenon of so-called wandering (unregistered) mullahs was widely accepted: they performed all sorts of rituals (weddings, burials, etc.). According to official information, there were 521 wandering mullahs in Kazakhstan in 1961. By the time of the republic's independence, there were 68 mosques in its territory."²¹

At the third stage, the kaziat of Kazakhstan withdrew from the SADUM and set up its own muftiat. The DUMK was set up on 12 January, 1990 at the first kurultai of the Muslims of Kazakhstan. It elected Ratbek Nysanbaev supreme mufti; later this post was filled by Absattar Derbisali (2000-2013), Erzhan Maiamerov (2013-2017), and Serikbay Oraz (2017-2020). Nauryzbay Otpenov elected in 2020.²²

Today, the DUMK is, to a great extent, the heir to the Soviet kaziats; during the years of independence it created its own corps of imams and a wide network of regional mosques. Ratbek Nysanbaev, the last leader of the Soviet kaziat and the first head of the independent muftiat, laid the foundations of cooperation with secular authorities of Kazakhstan. Those who came after him have to cope with the increasingly more complex confessional life strongly affected by globalization, i.e. regulation of confessional activities, development of Islamic educational establishments and standardization of mosque construction.

From Mass Production to Conceptualizing Requirements

The Republic of Kazakhstan presents itself as a polyconfessional state that recognizes “the historical role of Hanafi Islam and Orthodox Christianity in people’s cultural and spiritual life.”²³

According to the List of Officially Registered Religious Associations, in 2020 there were 18 registered confessions in Kazakhstan (3,826 religious associations): 2,691 of them (over 70% of the total number) were Islamic.

While in 1990 there were 46 officially functioning mosques, in 2020 their number increased to 2,689 (the buildings of the DUMK in Almaty and Nur-Sultan registered as religious associations do not function as mosques). This means that in the last three decades the number of mosques in Kazakhstan increased by more than 58 times (see Table 1).

The largest number of mosques is registered in the Turkestan Region; the smallest, in Nur-Sultan—13 associations (12 mosques and the DUMK building). The majority of the mosques are situated in the republic’s south: apart from the Turkestan Region, over 100 mosques were opened in Almaty, Jambyl and Kyzylorda regions and in the city of Shymkent (see Table 2). The large number of mosques in the East-Kazakhstan Region is explained by its integration with the Semipalatinsk Region. A considerable number of mosques in the Karaganda Region is explained by its size—it is the biggest administrative unit in Kazakhstan. At the same time, the republic’s capital Nur-Sultan, with its spreading urban space and growing population, has the greatest mosque construction potential

²¹ A.P. Abuov, E.M. Smagulov, “*Religia v Kazakhstane*,” Mezhdunarodny tsentr kultur i religiy, Astana, 2013, available at [<http://textarchive.ru/c-1483988.html>], 29 June, 2021.

²² See: Z. Jalilov, B. Batyrkhan, “Islam in Kazakhstan: History of Revival under Conditions of Independence,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus. English Edition*, Issue 3, Vol. 20, 2019, available at [https://www.ca-c.org/online/2019/journal_eng/cac-03/00.shtml], 29 June, 2021; Official site of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan. Concise history, available at [<http://www.muftyat.kz/ru/kmdb/>], 29 June, 2021.

²³ *The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 11 October, 2011, No. 483-IV On Religious Activity and Religious Associations*, available in Russian at [<http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/Z1100000483>], 29 June, 2021.

in comparison with similar administrative units—Almaty (52 mosques) and Shymkent (106)—two cities with republican statuses.

Table 1

Dynamics of the Growth of Number of Islamic Associations in Kazakhstan (1990-2020)

Year	Number of Islamic Associations	Year	Number of Islamic Associations
1990	46	2007	2,334
1991	68	2008	2,337
1993	296	2009	2,634
1995	483	2010	2,697
1996	679	2011	2,756
1997	826	2012	2,228
1999	1,003	2015	2,458
2001	1,282	2016	2,516
2003	1,652	2017	2,592
2005	1,766	2018	2,598
2006	1,853	2020	2,691

Table 2

Islamic Associations by Region (in decreasing order, 2020)

No.	Regions	Number of Islamic Associations
Total		2,691
1	Turkestan Region	750
2	Almaty Region	474
3	Jambyl Region	313
4	East-Kazakhstan Region	208
5	Kyzylorda Region	174
6	Karaganda Region	145
7	Shymkent	106
8	Pavlodar Region	94
9	Akmola Region	90
10	Aktobe Region	68
11	North-Kazakhstan Region	63
12	Almaty	52

Table 2 (continued)

No.	Regions	Number of Islamic Associations
13	West-Kazakhstan Region	47
14	Mangystau Region	33
15	Atyrau Region	31
16	Kostanay Region	30
17	Nur-Sultan	13

Sources: The table is based on the *List of Registered Religious Associations in Kazakhstan and their Branches*, available at [<https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/din/documents/details/113255?lang=ru>].

In 2012, there was a dramatic decline in the number of Muslim associations: their number dropped to the 2007 level (see Fig. 1) due to the Law on Religious Activities and Religious Associations adopted on 11 October, 2011, under which all religious associations had to be re-registered by corresponding state structures. Those who did not fit the new requirements were either merged with others or closed down. Elena Burova presented a table for 2011-2014, which clearly shows that the number of religious communities dropped from 4,551 to 3,008. About 40% of the closed religious communities (1,463) were Islamic associations. Others were Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, etc.²⁴

The DUMK mosques with small attendance or those unable to hire the required number of clerics did not submit their documents for registration and were closed. Those that did not fit the standards for a mosque were registered as praying rooms (namazkhans). Despite strict optimization and standardization of mosque activities, their number continued to grow after re-registration, and in 2020, almost reached the 2011 level.

Shi'a, Sufi and Ahmadiya associations were not re-registered; their previous existence is confirmed by different sources. Russian political scientist Mikhail Tulsy, for example, relied on official information provided by the judicial authorities of Kazakhstan for 2001 when he wrote that there had been 1,277 Sunni, 1 Shi'a, 1 Sufi and 3 Ahmadiya associations.²⁵ According to official information published in 2007, out of 2,334 Muslim associations, 2,322 were Sunni, 4—Shi'a, 5—Sufi and 3—Ahmadiya.²⁶

The mosques, whose construction was funded by national diasporas—Uyghurs, Uzbeks, Chechens, Ingushes, Dungans, etc. (the majority of them belong to Hanafi maddhab), are registered as DUMK branches. Those ethnic groups that belong to different maddhabs (such as some Chechens and Ingushes) are allowed to worship individually according to their religious practices in Hanafi mosques if they obey common rules.

Some of the researchers state that the authorities are putting much effort into moving traditional Islam into the center of the republic's religious life. For instance, Elena Burova and Anatoly Kosichenko, who have analyzed the results of registration carried out in conformity with the new law, agreed that only Hanafi Islam had proved its compliance with the new normative requirements.²⁷

²⁴ See: E.E. Burova, *Trendy novoy religioznosti v sovremennom Kazakhstane (opyt sotsiologicheskogo izmereniya)*, Monograph, Institute of Philosophy, Political Science, and Religious Studies, KN MON RK, Almaty, 2014, p. 30.

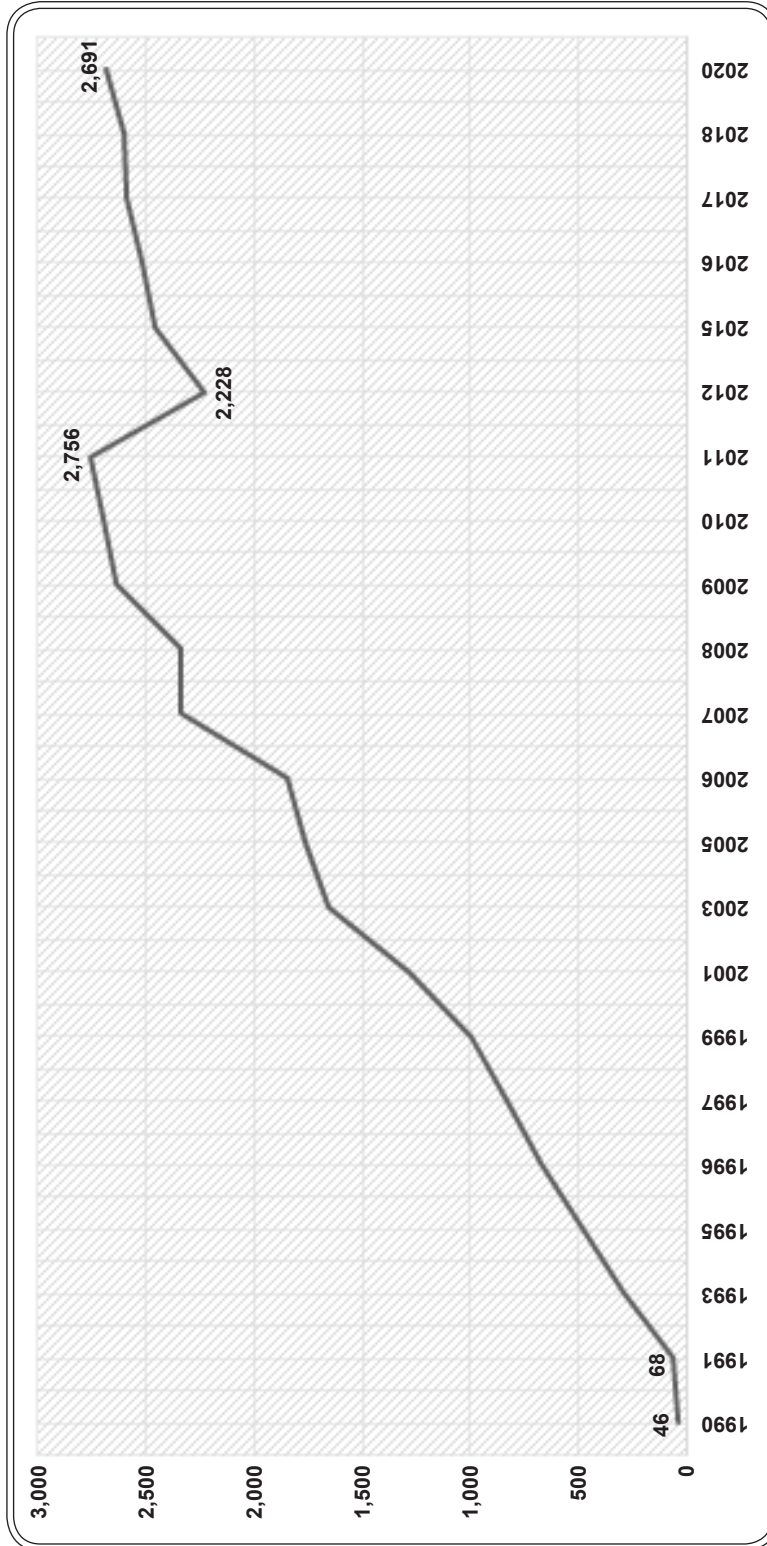
²⁵ See: M. Tulsy, op. cit.

²⁶ See: *Religia v sisteme dukhovnosti Kazakhstana. Spravochno-metodicheskoe posobie*, p. 27.

²⁷ See: E. Burova, A. Kosichenko, *Aktualnye problemy razvitiya religioznoy situatsii v Respublike Kazakstan*, ed. by Z.K. Shaukenova, IFPR KN MON RK, Almaty, 2013, p. 74.

Figure 1

Dynamics of the Growth of Number of Mosques in Kazakhstan (1990-2020)



Anthropologist Alima Bissenova, likewise, wrote about the specifics of the new status of religious power: "...re-registration carried out on 19 June, 2012 transformed the DUMK into a social Islamic religious association, while, in fact, it is not an ordinary social structure. Administratively, it copies state structures and covers the entire territory of Kazakhstan."²⁸ At the same time, she deemed it necessary to point out that the state and the religious communities predictably had common interests, hence their drawing closer together. While the state has to move closer to religion in order to establish and consolidate official Islam so as to suppress the wave of chaotic Islamization of society to acceptable limits, the Muslim community draws closer to the state to be involved in the national modernist development projects.²⁹

Despite the storm of criticism from human rights activists outside Kazakhstan, the state has considerably optimized the situation in the religious sphere. Traditional Islam consolidated the religious administration structure through a unified system of propaganda among the members of the umma; the country acquired a centralized administration of religious buildings and ongoing activities, which made it easier to cooperate at the highest and local levels.

Today, the DUMK has practically all the subdivisions typical of any state power structure: the mufti, his deputies, a chancellery, the staff, press secretary, counselors, departments dealing with related spheres of activity; associated organizations, i.e., a publishing house, halal and licensing centers, charity funds, centers of ritual services, etc.³⁰ Future religious officials are educated at the Nur-Mubarak University, the Institute of Advanced Training and at nine madrassahs (colleges).³¹ The supreme mufti has the right to appoint the chief imams in regions and federal cities.

Following re-registration, the DUMK developed and adopted several programmed documents to regulate the religious life of the umma:

1. The platform of the Muslims of Kazakhstan (2015);
2. Ethics of the DUMK officials (2015);
3. Personal image of an imam (2015);
4. Personal image of a Muslim (2015);
5. "Seven Spiritual Pillars" as a platform of the Muslims of Kazakhstan (2019);
6. List of rites performed by religious ministers (2019);
7. List of religious posts (2019);
8. Standards of mosque construction in the Republic of Kazakhstan (2019);
9. Culture of memorial services (2020);
10. Culture of pilgrimage and cemetery attendance (2020).

All of these documents (except No. 8, which is related to mosque construction) can be found on the official DUMK website.³² The construction rules contain unified standards expected to ensure

²⁸ A. Bissenova, "Vozrozhdenie islama v postsovetskoy Tsentralnoy Azii: otsenivaia proshloe, zaglyadyvaia v budushchee," in: *Tsentralnaia Azia—25: mysli o proshlom, proektia budushchego*, Collection of essays from Central Asia, p. 88, available at [http://www.centralasiaprogram.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/25-Years_Russian.pdf], 29 June, 2021.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 89.

³⁰ See: Official site of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan. Departments, available at [<http://www.muftiyat.kz/ru/kmdb/sections/>], 29 June, 2021.

³¹ See: *List of Registered Religious Associations and their Branches*.

³² See Official site of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan. Library and documents, available in Russian at [<http://www.muftiyat.kz/kk/books/>], 29 June, 2021.

mosques' efficiency as public spaces.³³ According to Paragraphs 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 of the Rules, mosques will be built in full accordance with the number of people living in a specific settlement: the mosques in settlements with 300-5,000 residents should have an attendance capacity of 70-500; district centers and districts of cities with population of 5,000 to 15,000 should have larger mosques for 500-1,500 people; mosques in regional centers and major cities with population of over 100,000 should fit between 1,000 and 5,000 people. Paragraphs 1.4 and 1.5 state that religious and national styles should be harmonized, and the decorations of the cupolas, the minaret, internal and external decorations should correspond to local traditions. Paragraphs 3.1, 3.5 and 3.11 state that, prior to being presented to corresponding state structures, the project should be approved by the DUMK. It is also responsible for registration and the name of the already built mosque and the appointment of an imam. Those who commission these mosques and those who participate in funding construction should take fire safety rules into account; the mosques should be accessible to transport and pedestrians, parking spaces should be available; the surrounding area should be green and brightly lit, with benches around it. Paragraph 3.8 demands that each mosque have a house for the imam nearby and a canteen for the umma.

Contributors to Mosque Construction

The mosque-building boom demanded an answer to a very reasonable question: who are the main actors in the process of construction of new mosques?

In 2007, speaking at the seminar "Islam and Central Asia" held at one of the colleges of Oxford University, Kazakhstani architect Alim Sabitov defined the main actors of cultic construction in Kazakhstan:

1. The state that commissions cultic facilities;
2. Professional architects who realize these projects;
3. Local architects;
4. Foreigners.³⁴

Those who study the culture of mosques in Kazakhstan added one more category of mosque builders to Sabitov's four: ethnic diasporas that realize their own projects of cultic buildings.³⁵

According to Sabitov, an architect who is commissioned by the state is limited by its demands; his project passes bureaucratic formalities, which takes a lot of time. The central Almaty mosque is one of the pertinent examples: it took the state seven years to complete the project intended to replace the old city mosque. This mainly happened in the initial years of independence, when the mosques acted as symbols of post-Soviet sovereignty. The first central mosque in Nur-Sultan, the capital of

³³ See: "Pravilo stroitelstva mecheti v tipovom proekte v Respublike Kazakhstan, Approved on 18 April, 2018 at the 19th sitting of the Council of the Ulema Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan," 3 pages (document from personal archive of M. Kikimbayev, in Kazakh); "Spiritual Administration Approved the Rules of Building Mosques," *Informatsionny portal Zakon.kz*, available at [<http://www.zakon.kz/4954141-dumk-utverdilo-pravila-stroitelstva.html>], 29 June, 2021.

³⁴ See: A. Sabitov, "Novoe kultovoe stroitelstvo v Kazakhstane," The author's personal site, available at [<http://www.sabitvalim.com/%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D1%82%D1%8C%D0%B8>], 29 June, 2021.

³⁵ See: N.L. Seitachmetova, M.K. Bektenova, "Garmonia eticheskogo i esteticheskogo v fenomene mecheti: na primere g. Almaty," in: *Almaty—stolitsa islamskoy kultury 2015 goda: materialy Mezhdunarodnoy konferentsii*, Almaty, 2015, p. 61.

Kazakhstan, belongs to the same category. The Saduakas kazhy Gylmani was erected in 1991-1996 in the place of the old mosque.³⁶

Local administrations and rich businessmen may, likewise, commission mosques and build them using their own money, which allows architects to demonstrate their personal ideas of contemporary Islamic culture. According to Sabitov, large mausoleums rather than mosques are being commissioned. Much has changed, however, since the time Alim Sabitov proposed his typology in 2007. Today, political elite and rich people do not hesitate to commission fairly futuristic projects. For example, the eco-friendly mosque Yrskeldi Kazhy in Nur-Sultan commonly known as God's Flower, decorated with skillfully altered ethnic Kazakh ornaments, is one of the most vivid examples of a post-modernist design project.³⁷ In 2018, The Austrian Green Planet Building international organization awarded this mosque a prize for being the first mosque in the world with a positive energy balance and an extremely low heat demand.

According to Sabitov, the biggest number of cultic structures in the regions of Kazakhstan (mainly mosques and mazars) were erected by local builders in villages out of locally available materials with the use of primitive construction instruments and machines. Some of them are former clubs, shops or other buildings altered for cultic purposes. Such projects are mainly realized in cooperation with local builders. Sabitov did not specify how it was organized: whether the brigades are paid for their services or may be implementing the traditional Kazakh practice of mutual assistance (*asar*).

Construction of places of worship using monetary donations from abroad is a rare occurrence, according to Sabitov. One of the examples is the University of Islamic Culture and its mosque in Almaty presented by former President of Egypt Hosni Mubarak. International relations experts consider the projects of this sort part of so-called "mosque diplomacy": Islamic world leaders fund mosque construction in the countries where they have geopolitical and economic interests. Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar, Egypt, the UAE and others rely, to different extents, on this instrument in Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan is involved in the process more than its neighbors who, likewise, are putting a lot of effort into becoming a part of "mosque diplomacy." In Kazakhstan, for example, Arab countries have realized several projects—the Nur-Astana mosque with the capacity of 5,000 in the republic's capital presented by the emir of Qatar³⁸ and the central mosque of Shymkent with a capacity of 3,000 presented by the Zaid ben Sultan Al-Nakhaian Charity of the UAE.³⁹

The above-mentioned Sabitov's classification remains the main instrument when it comes to classifying mosques in Kazakhstan. There are certain additions, yet the definitions of the groups of actors and the criteria of their classifications have not been challenged.⁴⁰ It seems, however, that the author applies the term "cultic facility" without due specification: he has bundled together mosques, mausoleums, mazars and even facilities with no cultic characteristics. The latter include several buildings of the late Soviet period—the museum of history and the Arasan Wellness and SPA complex in Almaty. Contrary to the logic of his typology, its items 2 and 3 indicate the authors of the projects rather than its sponsors.

³⁶ See Official site of the mosque Saduakas kazhy Gylmani. O mecheti, available at [<http://old.sunna.kz/ru/page/view?id=37>], 29 June, 2021.

³⁷ See: G. Abenova, "'Tsvetok Vsevyshnego' s imenem ottsa Jaksybekova," available at [<http://rus.azattyq.org/a/kazakhstan-astana-novaya-mechet/29231555.html>], 29 June, 2021.

³⁸ See: Sh. Ikromov, *Diplomatia mechetey v Tsentralnoy Azii: geopolitika, nachinaiushchaisia s mikhraba*, Central Asian Analytical Network, available at [<http://www.caa-network.org/archives/21135>], 29 June, 2021.

³⁹ See: "V Shymkente torzhestvenno otkryta samaia bolshaya v IuKO mechet," *otyrar.kz*, available at [<http://otyrar.kz/2013/05/v-shymkente-torzhestvenno-otkryta-samaya-bolshaya-v-yuko-mechet/>], 29 June, 2021.

⁴⁰ See: N.L. Seitachmetova, M.K. Bektenova, op. cit., pp. 54-66; M. Zhuzey, N. Seitakhmetova, M. Beketova, Sh. Zhandosova, op. cit.

At the same time, Sabitov pointed out the prerequisites of a new trend in Kazakhstan: foreign states involved in the process of construction of Islamic complexes. It seems, however, that the Nur-Mubarak University can be hardly defined as a cultic facility, since the university and not the mosque is at the core. We think that the very narrow interpretation of the actors of the fourth group limits researchers to the Arab countries and makes it impossible to include certain other actors that differ from the usual Arab countries and local communities.

In Kazakhstan, for example, certain states commonly uninvolved in “mosque diplomacy” contributed to mosque construction. In 2011, the Zharimbet ata mosque with a capacity of 400 was opened at the entrance to Baikonur with Russia’s involvement. The construction controlled by the head of Baikonur was realized by the Vozrozhdenie Charity, which accumulated donations from Roskosmos, local enterprises and regular people. The administration of the Kyzylorda Region in the territory of which the city is situated also contributed to the common effort.⁴¹ Uzbekistan funded the construction of a cathedral mosque with a capacity of 3,000 in the city of Turkestan in Kazakhstan, which began in 2019 with active involvement of Uzbek architects. The complex will include a building for conducting religious rites, a congress hall, madrassah, library, canteen, sport facilities, parking spare and a fountain.⁴²

The limits of the fourth group should be widened with regard to recent information. It should no longer be limited by Arab (Sabitov’s system) or Islamic countries (according to those who analyze the international aspects of “mosque diplomacy”), but include all countries which order, independently or in cooperation with other actors, new mosques outside of their borders and extend considerable financial assistance.

We offer the following typology of the main actors, which is free from the contradictions of the original typology and which takes into account the above specifications:

1. “Mosque diplomacy” projects;
2. State-commissioned projects;
3. Projects commissioned by the affluent and the political elite;
4. Projects commissioned by ethnic diasporas;
5. Projects commissioned by countryside communities.

Today, the above-mentioned groups are the main actors in mosque construction in Kazakhstan; they realize different scenarios of their involvement and help consolidate the status of mosques as important public facilities.

Conclusion

We have analyzed certain specifics of institutionalization and consolidation of Hanafi Islam in Kazakhstan, demonstrated that the number of mosques increased during the period of independence and explained the situation in which the number of mosques decreased and became optimized in 2012 by the state policy of re-registering religious associations. It allowed the DUMK to consolidate the power vertical, set up a network of associated mosques and, in 2018, adopt the construction rules

⁴¹ See: “Na Baikonure otkrylas novaia mechet,” Official site of the administration of Baikonur, available at [<http://www.baikonuradm.ru/index.php?mod=all/news&ID=1595>], 29 June, 2021.

⁴² See: “Kazakhstan i Uzbekistan postroiut unikalnuiu mechet v Turkestane,” News website platform Sputnik, available at [<http://ru.sputnik.kz/regions/20191206/12228123/mechet-turkestan-uzbekistan.html>], 29 June, 2021.

binding for all newly built mosques. Their capacities should correspond to the numerical strengths of local communities; their architecture should blend the religious and national styles; their territories should be well organized and comfortable; canteens, houses for the imams and other facilities are mandatory. The new rules conceptualized the requirements of construction and functioning of mosques as important public facilities.

We have analyzed the typology of cultic facilities in Kazakhstan and offered a new classification of the actors of mosque production: foreign states; the state itself; members of big business communities and the establishment, national diasporas, countryside communities and even private persons with an average income. This typology is open for specifications and additions if new actors of mosque construction appear in Kazakhstan.

ENVIRONMENT

TRANSBOUNDARY ENVIRONMENTAL COOPERATION OF KAZAKHSTAN AND RUSSIA: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

The article examines interstate cooperation between Kazakhstan and Russia on transboundary environmental issues. An analysis of the environmental policy of Kazakhstan and Russia is carried out, and the key norms of the two countries' environmental legislation are examined to determine the foundations and mechanisms for

solving shared environmental problems. The role and ongoing policy of Kazakhstan's central state body in the environmental protection sphere as a tool for solving environmental problems is determined. The main reasons for the environmental problems of the Ural and Ishim river basins and the biological diversity of the border areas of Russia and

Kazakhstan are discussed. Priority prospects for environmental cooperation are highlighted in relation to the countries' common trans-boundary environmental problems, including cooperation potential within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Space.

KEYWORDS: *transboundary environmental cooperation, environmental policy, transboundary rivers, biological diversity, Kazakhstan, Russia, EAEU.*

Introduction

The natural environment cannot be divided along administrative, state or national boundaries. Any negative impact on the environment will sooner or later come back to us in the form of atmospheric pollution and associated climate change, water pollution and the resulting deterioration of human health. For this reason, it is important to study this problem with a systems approach based on a systemic analysis of environmental issues and relevant solutions.¹ It is important to understand that environmental issues, including those in transboundary areas, require systemic answers. Theoretical research and comparative analysis methods were also applied in the study of this topic.

Due to the existing environmental problems in the border area between Kazakhstan and Russia, efficient joint measures to resolve transboundary environmental issues on an ongoing basis are gaining significance. Since 2018, thanks to the efforts of the heads of both states, the annual Interregional Cooperation Forum, which is a new interaction format, has been functioning within the framework of a bilateral agreement.² The next forum is expected to focus on cooperation in the field of environment and green development.³ A number of joint environmental programs for 2021-2025 are slated to be signed at this forum. However, the forum has not been implemented since 2019 due to various associated difficulties.

The environmental issues of the two states are being discussed not only at the state level, but also among scientists, expert, media and business communities and public organizations. Expert clubs, where environmental issues of the two countries are often discussed, are operating on an ongoing basis in a number of border regions of both states. For example, the Siberia-Eurasia Expert Club has held five international round tables between 2018 and 2021. They were devoted to various aspects of environmental issues. The North-South Political Science Center, the Ural-Eurasia Expert Club, and others are successfully operating in this field.⁴ However, expert opinions regarding the issues in question do not go beyond these platforms; they are merely advisory and not binding.

It is important not only to comprehend environmental problems both at the state and expert levels of the two countries, but also to sit down at the negotiating table and take joint effective measures to preserve and protect the environment.

¹ See: A.G. Shmal, "Natsionalnaia sistema ekologicheskoy bezopasnosti (metodologiya sozdaniia)," MUP "IKTS BNTV", Bronnitsy, 2004, pp. 69, 101.

² See: "O Programme mezhhregionalnogo i prigranichnogo sotrudnichestva mezhdru Rossiiy i Kazakhstanom," 8 November, 2017, available at [<http://government.ru/docs/30069/>], 18 June, 2021.

³ See: "Glava gosudarstva Kassym-Zhomart Tokayev priniyal uchastie v XVI Forume mezhhregionalnogo sotrudnichestva Kazakhstana i Rossii," Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 7 November, 2019, available at [http://www.akorda.kz/ru/events/international_community/foreign_visits/glava-gosudarstva-kasym-zhomart-tokayev-prinyal-uchastie-v-xvi-forume-mezhhregionalnogo-sotrudnichestva-kazakhstan-i-rossii#/upload/announces/5ca2674737c7ea0525e07a9e39e92c1c.jpg], 17 June, 2021.

⁴ See: "Ekspertnyi klub 'Sibir-Evrazia'," available at [<http://sibir-eurasia.ru/events?page=5/>], 26 June, 2021.

On the other hand, there was hardly any interregional environmental cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan, specific mechanisms for the implementation of their obligations, a developed regulatory framework or an environmental cooperation system in the past. Since the establishment of Kazakhstan's independence, only a few agreements have been signed with the Russian Federation on environment and environmental management, including those on the Baikonur cosmodrome (2005), cooperation in the field of environmental protection (2004) and the joint use and protection of transboundary water bodies (2010).⁵

Moreover, a common strategic vision for transboundary environmental cooperation has not been generated by Kazakhstan and Russia to this day. Very few of the 300 treaties and agreements concluded by the countries are related to the environmental protection sphere.⁶

A review of literature (N.S. Musiraly, A.N. Porokh, G.S. Rosenberg, A.A. Chibilev, etc.) had revealed that the issue of pollution in the transboundary areas in Russia and Kazakhstan is relatively well-researched, yet researchers cannot provide specific reasons for the lack of functional cooperation mechanisms. Most of the studies reviewed are devoted to the problems of transboundary rivers, while the current issues of transboundary biological diversity of the two countries are not sufficiently discussed.⁷

The purpose of this article is to identify the existing environmental problems of border areas and determine the prospects for transboundary environmental cooperation for the sake of favorable life conditions and sustainable development of the Kazakhstani and Russian economies. The following tasks must be resolved for this purpose:

- analysis of the fundamental environmental legislation of both Kazakhstan and Russia;
- determination of the presence of state structures for the execution of environmental policy;
- examination of the transboundary environmental problems of the Ural and Irtysh river basins and the biological diversity of the border area;
- identification of the potential for transboundary environmental cooperation between the two countries.

Current State of Environmental Policy in Kazakhstan and Russia

Both Kazakhstan and Russia have signed the U.N. 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Both states support the green economy principles that ensure sustainable development, and are con-

⁵ See: *International Treaties and Agreements with the Participation of the Ministry of Natural Resources of Russia*, available in Russian at [http://www.mnr.gov.ru/activity/international_agreements/], 18 June, 2021.

⁶ See: *Kazakhstan and Russia Adopted Programs of Joint Measures for the Preservation and Restoration of the Ecosystem Determination of the Basins of the Transboundary Rivers Ural and Irtysh*, 4 December, 2020, available in Russian at [http://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/mfa_kazan/press/news/details/131994?lang=ru], 18 June, 2021.

⁷ See: "On the State of Cooperation on the Rational Use and Protection of Transboundary Rivers between Kazakhstan and Russia," available in Russian at [<http://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/o-sostoyanii-sotrudnichestva-po-ratsionalnomu-ispolzovaniyu-i-ohrane-transgranichnyh-rek-mezhdu-kazahstanom-i-rossiye>], 26 June, 2021; "Rossia i Kazakhstan v reshenii transgranichnykh vodnykh problem," available at [<http://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/rossiya-i-kazahstan-v-reshenii-transgranichnyh-vodnykh-problem>], 26 June, 2021; *Rossiysko-kazahstanskiy transgranichnyi region: istoria, geoekologia i ustoychivoe razvitie*, UrO Run, Ekaterinburg, 2011, 216 pp., available at [<http://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/rossiysko-kazahstanskiy-transgranichnyy-region-istoriya-geoekologiya-i-ustoychivoe-razvitie-ekaterinburg-uro-ran-2011-216-s>], 26 June, 2021; "Perspektivy razvitiya prirodno-zapovednogo fonda v stepnoy zone Severnoy Evrazii: novye formy zapovednykh rezervatov," available at [<http://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/perspektivy-razvitiya-prirodno-zapovednogo-fonda-v-stepnoy-zone-severnoy-evrazii-novye-formy-zapovednykh-rezervatov>], 26 June, 2021.

cerned with stimulating the motivation of both the business community and their populations to improve the state of the environment.⁸ The expansion of international cooperation in the environmental protection sphere is outlined in the Foreign Policy Concept of Kazakhstan as one of the key priorities of Kazakhstan's foreign policy (Para 3.16).⁹ The Foreign Policy Concept of Russia outlines the expansion of international cooperation for the sake of ensuring environmental safety and counteracting climate change on the planet (Para 41).¹⁰ These two concepts designate environmental issues as international cooperation priorities.

The main document in the sphere of environment in Kazakhstan is the Environmental Code, dated 2 January, 2021, No. 400-VI ZRK, which replaced the Environmental Code No. 212-III dated 9 January, 2007. In Russia, the main document that regulates the environmental sphere is the Federal Law No. 7-FZ On Environmental Protection dated 10 January, 2002. A wide range of principles is laid down in the legislative acts of both states, which form the basis for the activities of all entities that impact the environment. At the same time, the main goal of Kazakhstan's new code is to promote the country's sustainable development, and the transition to a green economy to ensure favorable life conditions. Meanwhile, Russia's environmental law mainly aims to ensure people's environmental safety.

Another distinctive feature of Kazakhstan's Code is the "polluter pays" principle. It toughens the liability of the polluting parties, and entails stricter sanctions for environmental violations. For example, the size of the fine for excess and unauthorized emissions into the environment has increased 10-fold, and for other offenses—2-fold on the average. However, it is important to note that the nature of this principle initially implies that the polluter, whether a legal entity or an individual, must reimburse all costs, rather than just a portion of the costs of prevention and elimination of environmental damage caused by them, as in the current code.¹¹

The fact that all the environment-related tax revenues to the local budget will now be fully allocated to environmental initiatives in the same region is an important economic lever. Previously, this mechanism had functioned at the discretion of the heads of the local administration and at times no more than 10% of all environmental tax revenues were spent on environmental issues. It is too early to examine the effectiveness of this mechanism, but it is a significant incentive for solving regional environmental issues.¹²

A brief summary of the two countries' key legislation reveals that the Russian legal norms are generally focused on the individual, as well as the interests of the state and society, environmental education, upbringing and culture, and ensuring general environmental safety. Meanwhile, Kazakhstan's environmental code is more focused on external factors—coordination of actions by authorities, observance of national interests and sustainable development.¹³

⁸ See: "Predvaritelnye rezultaty issledovaniy po r. Zhayyk (Ural)," *Астана*, 2017, available at [http://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/water/meetings/Water_Convention/2016/Projects_in_Central_Asia/Transboundary_Rivers_Study_in_Kazakhstan_Ural_River_Feb_2017.pdf], 26 June, 2021.

⁹ See: "On the Concept of Foreign Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020-2030 dated 9 March, 2020," available in Russian at [http://www.akorda.kz/ru/legal_acts/decrees/o-koncepcii-vneshnei-politiki-respubliki-kazahstan-na-020-2030-gody], 20 June, 2021.

¹⁰ See: *Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of 30 November, 2016 No. 640 On Approval of the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, available in Russian at [<https://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/41451/page/1>], 20 June, 2021.

¹¹ See: I. Malysheva, F. Anufriev, "Printsip "Zagryaznitel platit": pravovye aspekty," *Voronezh*, 2015, available at [<http://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/printsip-zagryaznitel-platit-pravovye-aspekty/viewer>], 22 June, 2021.

¹² See: "V Kazakhstane prinyat novyi Ekologicheskii kodeks ot 2 ianvaria 2021," *Kapital—tsentr delovoy informatsii*, available at [<https://kapital.kz/gosudarstvo/92377/v-kazakhstane-prinyat-novyy-ekologicheskii-kodeks.html>], 20 June, 2021.

¹³ See: G. Artykbayeva, "Sravnitelnyi analiz normativno-pravovykh osnov v ekologicheskoy politike Rossiyskoy Federatsii i Respubliki Kazakhstan," *Bulletin of Omsk University, Series Historical Sciences*, No. 3 (7), 2015, pp. 110-114, available at [<http://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/sravnitelnyy-analiz-normativno-pravovykh-osnov-ekologicheskoy-politiki-v-rossiyskoy-federatsii-i-respublike-kazahstan/viewer>], 20 June, 2021.

Another new mechanism of resolving environmental issues in Russia was the adoption of an ambitious, expensive, and resounding national Ecology project. In 2018, by order of Russian President Vladimir Putin, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment has developed the Ecology national project with a budget of over 4 trillion rubles in order to improve the state of environmental protection. The project will be implemented until 2024, and encompass five key areas (water, air, waste, biodiversity and the best available technologies) within 11 federal projects. The project is expected to improve the country's environmental situation and positively affect the health of Russian population.¹⁴ Of course, this lays comprehensive groundwork in environmental policy; however, the term of its implementation is limited, and only time will show how effective this project is.

Apparently, there is a certain environmental regulatory framework in the countries being examined. However, environmental issues have not become any less poignant, and the mechanism for the implementation of legal norms is not efficient enough. In the Russian Federation, this is reflected in the weakly elaborated legislative framework in the environmental sphere, as well as the absence of an Environmental Code regulating important systemic environmental relations. In Kazakhstan, the new version of the environmental code was adopted relatively recently, and it is too early to assess its effectiveness. Also, the introduction of tougher punitive measures for environmental offenses is relevant today.

A new central state body was created in Kazakhstan in 2019 to resolve organizational issues. It is the Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources, formerly the Ecology Committee. This transformation allowed to strengthen and empower the state body in the field of environmental protection, both in the domestic and foreign state policy. As a result, a new environmental code and a number of legal documents regulating the environmental sphere have been adopted; moreover, the work on transboundary environmental cooperation with neighboring states has intensified.¹⁵

Thus, a brief analysis of the environmental policy of Kazakhstan and Russia demonstrates that certain environmental institutions are present, pertinent national legislation has been adopted, environmental policy principles have been outlined, relevant state bodies are functioning, scientific and expert community are conducting certain appropriate activities, etc. However, environmental problems remain poignant both within the states and in the border areas of Russia and Kazakhstan.

Transboundary Environmental Problems of Kazakhstan and Russia

Ural River

Russia and Kazakhstan have the world's longest continuous land border that spans 7,500 km. Over the years, the transboundary area has faced a number of environmental problems. Hugely resonant issues are still present along the Ural and Irtysh rivers, including their basin zones; the biological diversity issues should be considered as a whole. These two areas will be examined in this section as the main transboundary environmental problems of Russia and Kazakhstan.

At the international level, the 1992 U.N. Economic Commission for Europe Convention on Transboundary Waters forms the legal basis for regional cooperation in the sphere of shared water resources. The convention's objective is to reinforce the local, national and regional measures aimed

¹⁴ See: "Passport of the National Project 'Ecology' dated 24 December, 2018, No. 16," Website of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation, available in Russian at [http://www.mnr.gov.ru/activity/directions/natsionalnyy_proekt_ekologiya/], 20 June, 2021.

¹⁵ See: M. Mirzagaliev, "Reshenie ekologicheskikh problem Kazakhstana: chto ostanetsia posle nas," The Eurasian, No. 30-31, 2019, pp. 58-64.

to protect and ensure the environmentally sustainable use of transboundary surface and ground waters. In order to implement this convention, in 2010 an agreement was reached between the governments of Russia and Kazakhstan on the joint use and protection of transboundary water bodies. The regulatory framework is clearly in place, yet over the past 10 years not only has the situation in the river and basin area not improved, it has actually resulted in serious environmental problems due to shallowing and pollution.

For several years, a number of scientists, experts and statesmen have noted the river's environmental problems, and moreover, the potential threats born by their consequences. Thus, for example, experts of one of the international expert platforms of the Siberia-Eurasia club noticed a negative trend affecting the ecosystem of the Ural River. During certain drought years, only 6-8% of water has reached Kazakhstan, with all the water being used up by agriculture and production in Russian territory. In addition, waste dumping in the Chelyabinsk industrial region results in the deterioration of the flora and fauna in the river basin. In 2019, an international geodetic organization assigned the river the 5th pollution level, which is the highest and designates water that is unsuitable for human use.¹⁶

Doctor of Geographical Sciences Alexander Chibilev, who has been studying the Ural basin for over 30 years, noted that negative consequences stem from the river's overregulation, that is, the construction of dams and reservoirs, which is beneficial to those in the upper reaches of the river, but creates a water deficit in the lower reaches. In addition, deputy of the Mazhilis of the Parliament of Kazakhstan Елена Tarasenko noted that the problems of the Ural River should be considered as part of the issue complex that plagues the entire ecosystem, rather than an isolated river. A joint interstate document with an appropriate mechanism is required.¹⁷

In addition to the scientific and expert community, the Minister of Ecology of Kazakhstan Magzum Mirzagaliyev notes his concern about the Ural River, namely, the fact that in recent years the decreased water flow has led to the degradation of floodplain spawning grounds, affecting the reproduction of sturgeon in the Caspian Sea. This situation had a negative impact on the flora and fauna in the river basin.¹⁸

In general, ineffective management of water resources is apparent. According to the results of a journalistic investigation in 2019, the mass death of fish in the Ural River at the end of 2018 resulted from the negligence of Atyrau Su Arnasy, a local communal enterprise that had discharged excessively concentrated chloride into the river. In addition, Galina Chernova, Director of the Globus Environmental and Legal Initiative Center, is concerned about the current lack of modern standards and regulations for determining the maximum permissible concentration of hazardous substances in the Ural River.¹⁹

Irtysk River

The Irtysk River is also a site of environmental problems for the neighboring states. Unlike the Ural River, due to its geographical trajectory, the Irtysk River affects the interests of three states:

¹⁶ See: "Rol regionalnoy NPO v uluchshenii ekologicheskoy situatsii," Expert Club Siberia-Eurasia, Novosibirsk, 28 September, 2020, available at [<http://sibir-eurasia.ru/events/miezhdunarodnaia-ekspiertnaia-ploshchadka-ekologichieskaia-poviestka-tsentralno-aziatskogho-makrorieghiona-viektory-razvitiia>], 22 June, 2021.

¹⁷ See: "Dvazhdy v odnu reku. Povtorit li Ural sudbu Arala?" *Vlast*, Internet magazine with its own opinion, 19 January, 2016, available at [<http://vlast.kz/obsshestvo/15292-dvazdy-v-odnu-reku-povtorit-li-ural-sudbu-arala.html>], 20 June, 2021.

¹⁸ See: *Kazakhstan and Russia Adopted the Programs of Joint Measures for the Preservation and Restoration of the Ecosystem of the Basins of the Ural and Irtysk Transboundary Rivers dated 4 December, 2021*. Consulate General of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Kazan (RF), available in Russian at [<http://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/mfa-kazan/press/news/details/131994?lang=ru>], 22 June, 2021.

¹⁹ See: M. Melnikova, "Gibel ryby v Urale. Novye fakty i 'sporny' sud," 24 December, 2019, Environment, Azattyq Radio, available at [<http://rus.azattyq.org/a/kazakhstan-ural-atyrau-fish/30341746.html>], 22 June, 2021.

China, Kazakhstan and Russia. The difficulty lies in the fact that the three states are still unable to resolve the river division issues, thus, the shallowing of the Irtysh River both in Kazakhstan and Russia is only a matter of time. At present, the Chinese government is intensively pursuing a Go West resettlement policy, which aims to increase the population of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region 5-fold to about 40 million people.²⁰

Population growth in western China, the construction of various hydraulic facilities and the extraction of water to oil-bearing regions in this area will lead to an environmental disaster in the near future. For Russia, this is a question of the shallowing of the Irtysh and a water shortage in the Omsk region. For Kazakhstan, it is an issue of water vulnerability of its Eastern and Central regions. An analysis of the studies revealed that the runoff of the Irtysh has already decreased 3-fold in comparison with 1990.²¹

According to experts, an increase in China's water intake is already affecting the region's environment. In particular, the lack of water supply to Lake Zaisan, the resulting decrease in its level, the drop in the water level in the Irtysh-Karaganda canal, and shallowing is also noticeable in Russia's shipping and agricultural sector.²²

Kazakhstan's repeated attempts to resolve the issue of river division were unsuccessful. At a meeting of the Kazakh-Chinese joint commission on the use and protection of transboundary rivers, Kazakhstan had voiced a proposal to divide the water proportionally, with 30% allotted to Russia and 35% each—to Kazakhstan and China, but China did not extend its support. In addition, acting out of its own state interests, China has not signed the basic water convention of 1992 on the delimitation and use of waters, which is not beneficial to it. Despite the fact that China has recently tempered its water policy, partly due to the construction of the Belt and Road project, the Irtysh issue remains open.²³

Transboundary Biological Diversity

Sustainable conservation of flora and fauna, both globally and locally, is a prerequisite for preserving life on earth. It is very important to preserve biodiversity, which is very fragile. The characteristic that distinguishes biodiversity from other environmental issues is its lack of specific boundaries. Despite the fact that the state border between Russia and Kazakhstan has been recently closed, restricting the movement of the saigas, roe deer and various kinds of birds across the border is not the states' prerogative. Cooperation in the sphere of biological diversity in the transboundary areas of Kazakhstan and Russia is necessary.²⁴

In 1994, Kazakhstan signed the International Convention on Biological Diversity, taking on legal obligations to preserve the living environment. The number of national parks as of 2020 has

²⁰ See: "Zapadnyi vektor," *Forbes*, No. 13, March 2021, available at [http://forbes.kz/process/expertise/zapadnyiy_vektor], 22 June, 2021.

²¹ See: O. Boyarkina, "Rossiysko-kazakhsko-kitayskie vzaimootnosheniia na transgranichnykh rekakh," *Bulletin of Irkutsk State University*, Vol. 22, 2017, Series *Political Science. Religion Studies*, pp. 211-216, available at [<http://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/rossiysko-kazahsko-kitayskie-vzaimootnosheniya-na-transgranichnyh-rekah/viewer>], 22 June, 2021.

²² See: I. Zonn, "Transgranichnye reki Kazakhstana i Kitaia," *Bulletin of the S.Yu. Witte Moscow University*, Series 1, *Economics and Management*, No. 4 (27), 2018, available at [<http://ecogofond.kz/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/CA.D.366-Transgranichnye-reki-Kazahstana-i-Kitaja.pdf>], 22 June, 2021.

²³ See: O. Boyarkina, op. cit.

²⁴ See: "Chto skazal pro ekologiiu i zashchitu bioraznoobraziia Prezident Kazakhstana v poslanii narodu?" Website of the Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2 September, 2020, available at [<http://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/ecogeo/press/news/details/94322?lang=ru>], 22 June, 2021.

increased to 14, bringing the total number of natural areas of republican significance under special protection to over 25.²⁵ In comparison, there are over 50 national parks in Russia.²⁶

However, despite both states' success in adopting a legislative basis for the preservation of the living environment, the actual situation is rather ambiguous. In the global context, the 2020 environmental efficiency index places Kazakhstan in the 85th place, and Russia—in the 58th out of 180 countries. The biodiversity and habitat index rates Kazakhstan as #128, and Russia—#111.²⁷

Matters of current concern include the thinning forests in the northeast of Kazakhstan, illegal felling of unique pine forests in the Irtysh region, and forest fires in Kazakhstan's Kostanay region. Environmental threats in Russia's Orenburg region and Kazakhstan's Aktobe region include poaching, as well as forest and steppe fires, which impair and destroy biological diversity. The populations of elk, roe deer and numerous birds have significantly decreased.²⁸

In September 2020, at an expert meeting of the Siberia-Eurasia Expert Club, the director of the Institute of Biology and Biotechnology of Altai State University Marina Silantyeva noted a positive trend in regional environmental cooperation between the Orenburg region of the Russian Federation and the Aktobe region of the Republic of Kazakhstan. She emphasized the importance of the commission on bilateral cooperation, which makes joint decisions. On the other hand, she stated that the resolution of numerous environmental issues still remains theoretical. For instance, in the past, the two countries held expert interregional conferences biennially to discuss biological diversity, plants and fauna. However, there is currently no such consolidated joint action.²⁹

In addition, the Ministry of Natural Resources of the Altai Territory is not involved in cooperation on transboundary environmental issues related to steppe fires, forest protection, etc. There is an agreement on the conservation of saigas and steppe eagles, however, there are no scientific reports or analysis of the efficiency of this work or this type of agreements.³⁰

In 2015, Kazakhstan signed the Nagoya Protocol, while Russia did not. This precedent created a problem for the use of plant genetic resources by Russian scientists. In the past this work could be carried out in Kazakhstan, and the genetic material of plants and seeds could be subsequently exported to Russia for research, however, no such option is presently available.³¹ The international integration of one state, and lack of such integration in another, neighboring state creates a negative precedent for joint decisions regarding the scientific study of environmental issues in the adjacent territory.

The work within the framework of the UNDP GEF project on the steppe eagle, carried out between 2010 and 2015, has demonstrated its questionable effectiveness. Program funding has been

²⁵ See: *Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated 26 September, 2017 No. 593 On Approval of the List of Specially Protected Natural Areas of Republican Significance*, available in Russian at [<http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/P1700000593>], 22 June, 2021.

²⁶ See: "Osobo okhraniaemye prirodnye territorii i ob'ekty Rossii," Website of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology of the Russian Federation, available at [<http://www.mnr.gov.ru/activity/oopt/>], 22 June, 2021.

²⁷ See: "Environmental Performance Index," available at [<http://epi.yale.edu/epi-results/2020/component/bdh>], 22 June, 2021.

²⁸ See: V. Chibileva, "Ecological State of Border Natural Objects and the Solution of the Problem of Preserving Natural Diversity in the Zone of the Russian-Kazakhstani Subregion," *News of the Orenburg Agrarian University*, 2017, pp. 198-201, available in Russian at [<http://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/ekologicheskoe-sostoyanie-prigranichnyh-prirodnih-obektov-i-reshenie-problemy-sohraneniya-prirodnogo-raznoobraziya-v-zone-rossiysko/viewer>], 22 June, 2021.

²⁹ See: "International Expert Platform 'Environmental Agenda of the Central Asian Macroeconomy: Vectors of Development'," Expert Club Siberia-Eurasia, 28 September, 2020, available at [<http://sibir-eurasia.ru/events/miezhdunarodnaia-ekspertnaia-ploshchadka-ekologichieskaia-poviestka-tsientralno-aziatskogho-makrorieghiona-viektry-ravitiia>], 22 June, 2021.

³⁰ See: *Ibidem*.

³¹ See: "Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Application to the Convention on Biological Diversity," 2010, available in Russian at [https://online.zakon.kz/document/?doc_id=31501114#pos=3;-108/], 22 June, 2021.

terminated and, accordingly, the work in this area has been discontinued. The steppe eagle, listed in the Red Book of Russia, is a key species in the steppe biome of the Orenburg region of Russia and the northern regions of Kazakhstan. It is important that studies of this rare and endangered species are carried out systematically and continuously by the two states.³²

Another issue is the decreasing population of the Caspian seals, the only mammals in the Caspian Sea. According to the Ministry of Ecology of Kazakhstan, its population is currently under 100,000, and still declining. According to scientists from the Caspian countries, its decline may be caused by both anthropogenic and other factors. For this purpose, in 2021, Kazakhstan and Russia are planning to sign a joint action plan for the conservation of the Caspian seal population in 2021-2026.³³

The ecological problems of the rivers of the Ural and Irtysh basins, as well as the unresolved issues of border biodiversity are evident. Overregulated rivers, reduced water runoff and ineffective water management, insufficient measures in the biodiversity conservation sphere protection of rare species of birds, seals, etc. There are no specific mechanisms for systemic monitoring of environmental problems. However, common efforts in transboundary environmental cooperation both at the interstate and the expert level have recently intensified in Russia and Kazakhstan. If the cooperation trend does continue, there are ostensible prospects for joint environmental activities.

Prospects of Transboundary Environmental Cooperation between Kazakhstan and Russia

Historically, Kazakhstan and Russia have been reliable partners in the post-Soviet space. The fundamental document that forms the basis of partnership of the two states is the 1992 Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between Kazakhstan and Russia. Since that time, bilateral relations have stepped up to a new level. A specific step in the framework of environmental cooperation was the signing of the Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Environmental Protection in 2004, and the Agreement on the Joint Use and Protection of Transboundary Water Bodies in 2010.³⁴

The basic principles of cooperation between the two countries in the environmental protection sphere have been distinctly outlined. However, the agreements do not delineate cooperation mechanisms with a specific algorithm of action. Moreover, due to the burden on the border rivers, which increased as a result of economic activities, joint decisions on the protection and use of the transboundary river basin are required. There is a platform for resolving such issues, namely, the Kazakh-Russian Commission on the joint use and protection of transboundary water bodies, as well as working groups on the Ural, Irtysh, Ishim, Tobol, Bolshoi Uzen and Maly Uzen river basins, etc. However, their work results in declarations and protocols, rather than real actions. There are no mechanisms for control and monitoring of joint actions.

³² See: I. Karyakin, "Modern Status of the Steppe Eagle Population in the Orenburg Region. Russia," 2016, available in Russian at [<http://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/sovremennoe-sostoyanie-populyatsii-stepnogo-orla-v-orenburgskoy-oblasti-rossiya/viewer>], 23 June, 2021.

³³ See: "Kaspiyskiy tiulen budet zanesen v Krasnuiu knigu Kazakhstana," 27 July, 2020, Site of the Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Management of the Mangystau Region, available at [<https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/mangystau-eco/press/news/details/kaspiyskiy-tyulen-budet-zanesen-v-krasnuyu-knigu-kazakhstan?lang=ru>], 23 June, 2021.

³⁴ See: "International Treaties and Agreements with the Participation of the Ministry of Natural Resources of Russia," available at [http://www.mnr.gov.ru/activity/international_agreements/], 23 June, 2021.

The state leaders' level of involvement is vital for the prospects of bilateral relations. The First President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev made a significant contribution to the development of cooperation between the two countries in the environment sphere. Currently, the head of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev heeds great attention to environmental issues, both at the national and interstate levels. The issues of transboundary environmental cooperation play a significant role in the policy pursued by the President. Thus, at the initiative of Tokayev, the next interregional cooperation forum of Russia and Kazakhstan will be devoted to the issues of environment and green growth.³⁵

After the establishment of a new department, the Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources, on the Kazakh side, cooperation between the two countries has intensified. An intermediate indicator in the transboundary sphere was the signing of three joint environmental programs for 2021-2025, namely, on the Ural and Ishim rivers, and on biodiversity issues.

The Russian-Kazakh cooperation program for the preservation and restoration of the ecosystem of the transboundary Ural river basin for 2021-2024 includes a phased algorithm of specific measures for a four-year period aimed at improving the environment situation in river basins in the future. The document provides for an environmental assessment of the consequences of runoff regulation in the river basin, as well as measures for the development of science-based proposals for ecosystem restoration, reconstruction of culverts, cleaning and restoration of water bodies in the basin, etc.³⁶ Despite the algorithms of joint efforts outlined in the program, the parties should carry out environmental measures in their territories independently, without notifying each other. There is no unified approach to inventory and identification of pollution sources in the transboundary river basin. The program is a short-term project. A strategic concept for building a river-related transboundary water policy is required.

A similar approach is noted in the Program for the Conservation and Restoration of the Transboundary Irtysh River Basin Ecosystem for 2021-2024. The program envisages joint research activities aimed at the conservation and restoration of the river basin ecosystem, inventory and identification of pollution sources in the river basin, and provides for the joint work of experts from the two countries on the hydrochemical and hydrological status of the river basin, education, fostering volunteer work and other measures.³⁷ A mechanism has been laid down for joint implementation of environmental measures in the Ishim River basin between Russia and Kazakhstan. However, the potential effectiveness of its implementation also depends on agreements, including those with the People's Republic of China. The geography of the Ishim River should also be taken into account when solving joint environmental issues.

Another promising event in the resolution of wildlife protection issues was the signing by Russia and Kazakhstan of a bilateral cooperation program on the expansion of specially protected natural areas for 2021-2024. This mechanism includes the sharing of experience between specially protected natural areas of Russia and Kazakhstan to strengthen their potential and foster the development of partnerships and international cooperation. For example, the Markakolsky (Kazakhstan) and Katunsky (Russia) state nature reserves will cooperate as "sister reserves." The program includes annual field training on the theory and practice of nature reserve management in the Bolshoi Altai transboundary biosphere reserve. The program provides the basis for the signing of an agreement between the Altyn-Emel National Park and other Russian reserves.

³⁵ Head of State Kassym-Jomart Tokayev took part in the XVI Forum of Interregional Cooperation between Kazakhstan and Russia.

³⁶ See: Website of the Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 4 December, 2020, available at [<http://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/ecogeo/press/news/details/131672?lang=ru>], 23 June, 2021.

³⁷ See: *Kazakhstan and Russia Adopted Programs of Joint Measures for the Preservation and Restoration of the Ecosystem of the Basins of the Ural and Irtysh Transboundary Rivers*, Website of the Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 4 December, 2020, available at [<http://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/ecogeo/press/news/details/131672?lang=ru>], 22 June, 2021.

A positive trend offered by this program is the inherent mechanism of joint research and monitoring of migratory bird populations in the northern part of the Caspian Sea. There have been no such measures carried out jointly by the two states in the past. In addition, a mechanism for systemic environmental monitoring has been established, which implies a jointly conducted census of the number of migratory animal species within the Altai transboundary reserve. At the same time, the program provides for the development of cross-border environment tourism and environmental education. Thus, over the past year, three significant programs (on the Ural and Ishim rivers and on biological diversity) have been adopted in the context of transboundary environmental cooperation.³⁸

Currently, Kazakhstan and Russia have a large number of transboundary environmental issues to address. Thus, the Ministry of Ecology of Kazakhstan is negotiating the signing of a number of documents, including a new agreement on the protection, reproduction and use of transboundary saiga populations, a joint action plan for the conservation of the Caspian seal population for 2021-2026, and a number of other issues.³⁹

In order to address local cross-border issues, it is important to develop regional cooperation between countries. Each administrative unit on the border of Russia and Kazakhstan has its own regional administration specifics. Few regional leaders are aware of the importance of environmental problems and are making joint efforts to solve such problems. Thus, in 2020, the head of the Western Kazakhstan region of Kazakhstan and the governors of the Orenburg and Saratov regions of Russia outlined the importance of joint work to save the Ural River. The parties agreed to cooperate on an ongoing basis and provide access to the emission sensors at a gas field in the Tashlinsky district of Russia's Orenburg region⁴⁰ for specialists from the Western Kazakhstan region. In general, a number of Russian and Kazakhstani regions alike adhere to their states' respective general environmental policies that are based on common target and program indicators, but lack a clearly formulated regional environmental policy.

There is a number of gaps in addressing joint environmental issues. One of the weaknesses of interregional environmental cooperation is the lack of information and analytical support on the Ural and Ishim rivers, comprehensive systemic monitoring of environmental problems in the border area, and strategic environmental documents that propose an environmental risk management system. The adoption of joint agreements that delineate preventive measures, rather than situational response methods, is relevant for transboundary environmental issues. The implementation of existing agreements on environmental issues are delayed, the programs adopted are short- and medium-term. A more authoritative platform is required for addressing environmental issues by taking ambitious measures.

The supranational platform of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) can give a completely new impetus to solving joint environmental issues. The participating countries, including Russia and Kazakhstan, are already aware of the synchronization of environmental issues with economic indicators. For instance, the plan of measures for the development of Eurasian integration until 2025 contains certain fragments regarding the interaction of member states in the spheres of energy conservation and efficiency, use of renewable energy sources and environmental protection, and exchange of

³⁸ See: *Kazakhstan and Russia signed the Program of Bilateral Cooperation in the Development of Specially Protected Natural Areas*, Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the Russian Federation, 31 March, 2021, available at [http://www.kazembassy.ru/rus/press_cent/novosti?cid=0&rid=4465], 21 June, 2021.

³⁹ See: "Rossia i Kazakhstan prodolzhat razvivat dvustoronnee sotrudnichestvo po voprosam okhrany okruzhaiushchey sredy," 8 October, 2020, available at [http://www.mnr.gov.ru/press/news/rossiya_i_kazakhstan_prodolzhat_razvivat_dvustoronnee_sotrudnichestvo_po_voprosam_okhrany_okruzhayushch/?sphrase_id=366835/], 18 June, 2021.

⁴⁰ See: "Videoconferences with the Governors of the Orenburg and Saratov Regions were Held by the Head of Western Kazakhstan Gali Iskaliev," Sputnik, 21 November, 2020, available in Russian at [<http://ru.sputnik.kz/regions/20201121/15533858/spasenie-reka-ural.html>], 18 June, 2021.

experience and information in these areas.⁴¹ A number of experts from both states also note the importance of the EAEU in the future in matters of environment and green economy. The environmental empowerment of the agreement will mark the beginning of cooperation in the field of environmental protection.⁴²

Conclusion

In order to determine the prospects for transboundary environmental cooperation, the article analyzes the main environmental legal acts of Russia and Kazakhstan, considers the organizational aspects for the implementation of environmental policy, and discusses the main transboundary environmental problems of the Ural and Ishim rivers and biological diversity issues.

An analysis of the environmental legislation of Russia and Kazakhstan demonstrated that the two states are pursuing similar environmental policies. At the same time, the goal of Kazakhstan's new code is to promote the country's sustainable development and the transition to a green economy to ensure a favorable living environment. Russia's environmental law aims mainly to ensure the people's environmental safety.

In Kazakhstan, with the formation of the Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources, actions in interstate environmental cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan have intensified, and a new environmental code, which contains the main measures of environmental responsibility both in the public and private sectors, has been adopted.

A review of the key transboundary environmental problems revealed that the economic activities of the two states damages transboundary rivers, forest plantations, and flora and fauna of the border areas of both states, and appropriate measures to solve these problems are needed. In practice, states begin to resolve environmental problems when the deterioration processes have already been launched, and halting or slowing them down requires significant financial costs and resources. It is important to focus the attention of transboundary states on prevention of potential environmental risks and threats, as well as to work out a mechanism of holding states responsible for non-compliance with environmental standards.

Despite a certain success achieved in signing of joint environmental agreements and programs related to the Ural and Irtysh river basins, a global strategic document with guidelines for ensuring environmental safety both at the state level and in the regional context is necessary. The importance of environmental issues is unambiguous, and in order to resolve them, states must work together on an ongoing and systematic basis, possibly within the EAEU.

⁴¹ See: Eurasian Economic Commission, 2021, available at [<http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/act/finpol/dobd/strategy-2025/Pages/default.aspx>], 23 June, 2021.

⁴² See: "Ekologicheskoe sotrudnichestvo na Evraziyskom prostranstve obeshchayet byt produktivnym (Internet-Portal SNG)," 4 October, 2020, available at [<http://e-cis.info/news/568/88832/>], 23 June, 2021.

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