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## Complex regionalism in Central Asia: Local, regional, and global factors

Regional cooperation initiatives within Central Asia and diversity of ultra-regionalism – looking forward: Central Asia in a broader partnership

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# Complex regionalism in Central Asia: Local, regional, and global factors

## Regional cooperation initiatives within Central Asia and diversity of ultra-regionalism – looking forward: Central Asia in a broader partnership

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### Abstract

Regional cooperation and integration are among the most important trends in contemporary international relations. The Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have joined pre-eminent international organizations and institutions, such as the UN and OSCE. However, there are challenges, similarities and contradictions within the multilateral relationships in Central Asia (such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Silk Road Economic Belt, Central Asia plus USA (C5+1), the EU strategy, Central Asia plus Japan, Central Asia–Republic of Korea and others). Moreover, there are link between local–regional–global processes in Central Asia. Descriptions and explanations must take into account particular local and regional situations, as well as internal and regional economies, cultures, and politics. Transformations are affected by the competitive international environment. Current and future Central Asian transformation will be prompted by interlinking local, regional, transregional, and global issues and challenges.

### Introduction

Since the 1950s, a variety of regional and global political and economic organizations have developed. The major analytical frameworks driving such intensive political and economic integration include functionalism, neofunctionalism, liberal intergovernmentalism, and economic theories of integration, among others. The functional view of regional cooperation emphasizes low-level economic and social planes. Economic unification will ultimately lead to political unification.<sup>1</sup> David Mitrany (1966), the main proponent of functionalism, suggested a solution that he called “the pragmatic functional approach and *working peace*”.<sup>2</sup> In neofunctionalism, common interests and supranational group dynamics drive integration.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, intergovernmentalism defines the critical role of governments and political leaders of the major states in regional integration.<sup>4</sup> Economists primarily emphasize market relationships within a region that is undergoing integration, and they are interested in the effect of welfare on integration.<sup>5</sup>

In contemporary international affairs there is no “one size fits all” methodology: different questions demand different methods.<sup>6</sup> Many issues of international and regional relations in Central Asia require a broader approach. For regional initiatives in Central Asia it might be appropriate to employ LeRoy Bennett’s definition of regional organization as a segment of the world bound together by a common set of objectives based on geographical, social, cultural, economic, or political ties and possessing a formal structure provided for in formal intergovernmental agreements.<sup>7</sup>

1 For more on functionalism see: David Mitrany, *A Working Peace* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1966); James Patrick Sewell, *Functionalism and World Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966).

2 David Mitrany, *A Working Peace* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1966), 25 and 92.

3 For more on neofunctionalism see: Ernst Haas, “International integration: The European and the universal process,” *International Organizations*, 1961, 366–392; “Technocracy, pluralism, and the new Europe” in *International Regionalism*, ed. Joseph Nye (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1966), 149–179; Walter Mattli, *The Logic of Regional Integration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 9–11.

4 Andrew Moravcsik, “Negotiating the Single European Act: National interests and conventional statecraft in the European Community,” *International Organization*, 1991, 45, 19–56.

5 Mattli, *The Logic of Regional Integration*, 11.

6 Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal, “Between utopia and reality: The practical discourses of international relations,” in *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, ed. C. Reus-Smit and D. Snidal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 9.

7 A. LeRoy Bennett, *International Organizations: Principles and Issues* (New Jersey, USA: Prentice Hall, 1995), 230.

There are limitations to the approaches for analyzing the last 25 years of complex processes the region has faced and is still facing in the post-Soviet space. There are challenges, similarities, and contradictions within multilateral relations in Central Asia: US (NATO, Central Asia plus USA (C5+1)), Russian and Chinese (Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Silk Road Economic Belt), EU (The Strategy toward Central Asia), as well as Central Asia plus Japan and Central Asia–Republic of Korea. This paper is an attempt, from a multidisciplinary perspective, to analyze the new geopolitics in Central Asia, the formation and challenges to regional cooperation initiatives in Eurasia, Central Asia from the perspective of open regionalism and broader partnership. Elaboration of formal multilateral relations in Central Asia will make a contribution to perspectives on future regional cooperation and international partnership.

## Post-Soviet geopolitics and security challenges in Central Asia

Independence allowed Central Asian republics to establish external links; however, there were some challenges and problems. First, the republics had no experience in managing international politics, because during the Soviet period, all external relations were conducted through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow. The Soviet republics were not directly engaged with the outside world and had very limited institutional capacity to manage these ties. In Uzbekistan, for example, there were less than ten individuals in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Second, the last years of the Soviet Union and the period after its dissolution created economic, political, social, and ethnic instability in Central Asia, revealing a number of significant problems. Third, the collapse of the USSR created a new geopolitical situation in Eurasia.

Since 1991, there are several factors shaping Central Asia's role in the world. They include:

- Central Asia's geographic location between Russia, China, Iran, India, and Pakistan.
- Resource abundance in the Central Asian and Caspian states. According to British Petroleum statistics,<sup>8</sup> Kazakhstan contains 30 billion tons in proven oil and 1.1 trillion cubic meters (tcm) in natural gas reserves. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan's resource base is primarily in gas reserves, with 19.5 tcm and 1.2 tcm, respectively. Kazakhstan is the largest producer oil in Central Asia, while Turkmenistan is the biggest exporter of natural gas. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan also export gas, gold, uranium, and other minerals of strategic importance, and Uzbekistan ranks fifth in the world in terms of cotton exports.
- Security challenges, including the situation in Afghanistan.

Major actors and international organizations demonstrated geopolitical interests in post-Soviet Central Asia.<sup>9</sup>

In 1993, at a meeting of the presidents of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan in Tashkent the term *Tsentrálnaya Aziya* (Central Asia) was adopted as joint designation.<sup>10</sup> At present Central Asia republics have a total population of over 70 million people with a total GDP of over USD 310 billion (Table 1).

Table 1: Contemporary Central Asian states<sup>11</sup>

| Country         | Population | GDP, US\$ billion in 2017 | GDP growth in 2017 (%) |
|-----------------|------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Kazakhstan      | 18.4 mln   | 158.2                     | 4.0                    |
| Kyrgyz Republic | 6.1 mln    | 7.5                       | 4.6                    |
| Tajikistan      | 9.1 mln    | 7.1                       | 4.2                    |
| Turkmenistan    | 5.8 mln    | 37                        | 6.5                    |
| Uzbekistan      | 32.4 mln   | 48.7                      | 5.3                    |

8 BP. *Statistical Review of World Energy*. June 2018. 67th edition, P.12, 26.

9 Mirzokhid Rakhimov, "Internal and external dynamics of regional cooperation in Central Asia," *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 2010, 1 (2): 96, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.euras.2010.04.002>.

10 Mirzokhid Rakhimov, "Historical transformations and regionalism in Central Eurasia," in *The 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference of the HK Russia-Eurasia Research Project "Beyond Russian and Becoming Eurasia"*, (Seoul, Korea: Hanyan University, June 17–18, 2010), 133.

11 Sources: Statistic Committee of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan. Statistic Committee of CIS. World Bank, "The impact of China on Europe and Central Asia," Europe and Central Asia Economic Update, April 2016. [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2016/05/03/090224b0842f1054/3\\_0/Rendered/PDF/TheimpactofChinaonEuropeandCentralAsia.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2016/05/03/090224b0842f1054/3_0/Rendered/PDF/TheimpactofChinaonEuropeandCentralAsia.pdf).

Central Asian republics formed bilateral and multilateral relations. More than a hundred countries formally recognized the Central Asian nations and established direct diplomatic relations with them. At the same time, the Central Asian republics started to confront threats and challenges, including terrorism, illegal human and drug trafficking, economic and environmental problems, and others.

With respect to security, two issues were particularly important: nuclear nonproliferation and the shrinking Aral Sea. The Central Asian states have managed to cooperate productively in mitigating these two issues. By 1991, the territory of Kazakhstan contained a huge arsenal of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), including 1,040 nuclear warheads for intercontinental ballistic missiles.<sup>12</sup> It was the world's largest nuclear arsenal after the USA, Russia, and China; however, the process of nuclear disarmament was uneasy with a lot of complications.<sup>13</sup> In 1993, at the 48th session of the UN General Assembly (GA) the Uzbek President Karimov proposed establishing a nuclear weapons-free-zone in Central Asia and it was supported by all Central Asian nations. After decades of joint work with UN, in September 2006, in Semipalatinsk, Kazakhstan, Central Asian foreign ministers signed the Central Asian Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone (CANWFZ) agreement on establishing the zone. Despite widespread support for the treaty, it still took eight years to draft, and only in April 2014 did the five nuclear countries – China, France, Russia, UK and the USA – sign a protocol pledging never use, threaten, or carry out a nuclear attack against the Central Asia countries. The signing of the treaty is a good example of how Central Asian collaboration and cooperation can result in mutual benefits and shared security. Beyond the region, the treaty is also a notable contribution to the “Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons” and global disarmament. On June 22, 2018, the UN General Assembly adopted the resolution “Strengthening regional and international cooperation to ensure peace, stability and sustainable development in the Central Asian Region”. The resolution calls on the international community, in particular the specialized agencies, funds and programs of the UN system, to support the priority areas of regional cooperation, integration and sustainable development in Central Asia, as determined by the countries of the region themselves.

Among the most important regional issues in Central Asia is the problem of the Aral Sea.<sup>14</sup> Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan started joint efforts in the discussion of the problems at a high-level meeting in 1993 in Kyzylorda (Kazakhstan); in 1994 in Nukus (Uzbekistan); and in 1995 in Dashauz (Turkmenistan). During the meetings, possible joint action on the Aral Sea issue was discussed. As a result, the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) was formed at the February 1997 meeting in Almaty, which included Central Asian presidents and representatives from the UN. At the 63rd session of the UN GA a resolution was adopted, “On granting IFAS observer status in the UN General Assembly.” Although future cooperation with respect to the Aral Sea and surrounding basin face considerable challenges, it is important that Central Asian states themselves initiated discussions and took measures to sustain engagement in the early 1990s. Currently, the Aral Sea is divided into Kazakh and Uzbek separate bodies of water and the problem has taken a truly global scale, so cooperation with the Central Asian states themselves and the involvement of the international community is particularly important in this regard.

Thus, national and regional security challenges in Central Asia are interdependent and interconnected. It is necessary for Central Asia nations to extend cooperation and create joint security systems, including political, economic, educational, ecological, and other aspects.

## Central Asian Cooperation Organization

Since the early 1990s, the Central Asian republics have formed a new model of interstate cooperation. They have a common historical development and culture of diversity, language and religion, and a secular form of government. It is necessary to take into account a number of factors in multilateral relations within Central Asia. First, the Central Asian republics have set as a priority the formation of the nation state identity over a regional one. Second, the republics were on the path to economic reform and these processes were of varying degrees of intensity.

In 1992, the Central Asia Regional Cooperation Organization was created. In 1993, in Tashkent, the protocol between Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan on the establishment of the common market was signed. Commitments were also taken for economic cooperation, for the coordination of environmental activities in the Aral Sea, the development of a common policy toward Tajikistan (as the country was at the time engulfed in a civil war), as well as the establishment of a regional newspaper in the capital of Kazakhstan, and a TV channel headquartered in Tashkent. However, due a number of objective

12 Nursultan Nazarbaev, *Kogda misl' – material'na* (Moskva: Hudojestvennaya literatura, 2012), 48–49.

13 For more see: Togzhan Kassenova, “Kazakhstan and the global nuclear order,” *Central Asian Affairs*, Brill, 2014, 1: 273–286.

14 The Aral Sea is a landlocked lake and was the fourth largest lake in the world in the mid-20th century. However, the Aral Sea has since lost more than three-quarters of its original area due to desertification and Soviet agricultural policy. Between 1960 and 2017, the Aral Sea's water level dropped by 15 meters.

and subjective reasons, including civil war in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan's neutrality policy, these two countries refrained from participating and complicated the implementation of these signed documents. The proposal for the establishment of regional newspapers and television were not met for a long time due to disputes between republics about which language should be used, but also because of disagreements about the freedom of the media. The countries preferred their sovereignty to unity for the sake of common regional policy.<sup>15</sup>

In January 1994 at a meeting in Nukus, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan signed a treaty on common economic space. Kyrgyzstan later joined. The agreement outlined the goals of allowing the free movement of goods, services, and capital between states, and involved coordination of fiscal, credit, tax, price, and customs policies. At the Almaty summit in July 1994, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan decided to set up the Inter-State Council, consisting of presidents and prime ministers. At summit in Bishkek on August 1994, the Central Asian Cooperation and Development Bank was founded with initial capital was US\$9 million from member countries. Soon after civil war ended in 1997, Tajikistan joined the common economic space of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. In 1998, the regional partnership platform was renamed the Central Asian Economic Community (CAEC). Due to several terrorist attacks on Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, in 2000, the republics plus Kazakhstan signed the treaty, "On Joint Actions in Fighting Terrorism, Political and Religious Extremism, and Transnational Organized Crime."<sup>16</sup>

In 2002, the Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO) was created and includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, but excluded Turkmenistan. The main objectives of CACO are:

- Rational use of water and energy resources and water facilities, taking into account the interests of all parties.
- Creation of a regional transportation infrastructure.
- Cooperation in industry, economy, and trade.
- Partnership in the humanitarian sphere and resolution of environmental problems.
- Enhanced cooperation in order to strengthen regional security.

Since 1994, trade between the Central Asian states began to grow slowly, but it was less than a third of their total foreign trade turnover. There were some positive developments. For example, the Central Asian states joined several communications projects, in particular the partnership with Turkey and Iran to build railway link connecting Tejen–Serakhs–Meshkhed–Bandar–Abbas (1996).

Within the CACO framework there were several problems in implementing policies. Between 1994 and 2006, there were more than 200 documents signed, many of which were never realized, among them the creation of a single economic zone (1994) and a strategic economic development program (2000). Across national governments, there were disparities with respect to regional integration and prioritizing national interests over regional integration initiatives in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which were often contradictory. CACO failed to provide the structure where states could find joint solutions to regional security problems and water sharing issues. Some view integration among developing countries in most cases as a response to international and domestic challenges;<sup>17</sup> however, in Central Asia it was not so effective.

At the same time, multilateral relations between the states of Central Asia was strongly affected by regionalism in different countries. Since the early 1990s, Turkey has attempted to unite Central Asia, Azerbaijan, and other Turkic peoples in the CIS in its own interests. Following a strong Russian initiative in 2000, the Eurasian Economic Community (EEC) was founded. In October 2004, Russia became a member of CACO.<sup>18</sup> In November 2005 at a summit in St. Petersburg, it was decided to incorporate CACO into the EEC.<sup>19</sup> In January 2006, Uzbekistan became a new member of the EEC. From Uzbekistan's perspective, it was important that the EEC adopt critical documents of CACO, including on the use of water and energy. Uzbekistan declared its acceptance of the EEC's 65 treaties, while Moscow has not committed to signing the main documents of CACO, of which there are hundreds. If the integration of the EEC was one-way, the concept, structure, and interests of CACO (including its executive bodies) should have automatically been incorporated into the EEC, but this did not happen. Furthermore, the EEC and CACO documents were not synchronized.

15 Gulnoza Saidazimova, "Regional integration in Central Asia: Realities, challenges, and potentials," *Central Asia and Caucasus*, 2000, (3). <http://www.ca-c.org/journal/cac-09-2000/10.Saidazim.shtml>.

16 Farkhod Tolipov, "Multilateralism, bilateralism and unilateralism in fighting terrorism in the SCO area," *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, 2006, 4 (2): 154.

17 Timur Dadabaev, *Toward Post-Soviet Central Asian Regional Integration* (Tokyo: AKASHI SHOTEN Co. Ltd., 2004), 50.

18 Alisher Taksanov, "Интеграционное совокупление. Было ли объединение ОЦАС и ЕВРОАЗЭС?" [Integracionnoe sovokuplenie. Bilu li ob'edinenie OSAS i EvrAzES], *Литературный дневник* [Literature collection], 2008. <http://www.proza.ru/diary/alisher1966/2008-03-05>.

19 Here we should mention that after the Andijan tragic event in 2005, the EU imposed sanctions on Uzbekistan; however, Russia and China suggested extending relations with Uzbekistan.

Because of this, in October 2008, Uzbekistan withdrew its membership from the EEC. The republic also wanted to safeguard its independence. Uzbekistan resisted Russian-backed efforts to build new hydro-energy stations in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, which could have made downstream countries, including Uzbekistan, more dependent on its neighbors for water security. In 2009, Uzbekistan withdrew from the Unified Energy System of Central Asia.

Relations between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are probably the most important aspect of the interstate and multilateral relations in Central Asia. Countries that have hydrocarbon and other raw resources, take key geopolitical positions in Central Asia. In April 2008, in Astana, Nursultan Nazarbayev and Islam Karimov signed an agreement on the “free trade zone between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan”. In 2013, trade volume between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan reached over US\$3 billion, but in the following years it dropped and in 2016 decreased to US\$2.2 billion.

However, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are also competitors with tense political ties. For neighboring countries with common histories and structural similarities, it is striking that the two countries are not each other's primary political and economic partners. Relations between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are often issued in exaggerated form as “the struggle for leadership in the region,” although each of these states is leader in only a few parameters. However, in case of problems, both have active bilateral consultations and support on various international issues, for example, Uzbekistan, like other states, supported Kazakhstan's Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) chairmanship (2010) and UN Security Council (SC) nonpermanent membership (2017–2018).

In December 2016, the newly-elected President Mirziyoyev mentioned Central Asia as the priority of his foreign policy. His first two international visits were in March 2017, to Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. During the visit to Turkmenistan, from March 5–6, 2017, Presidents Berdimuhamedov and Mirziyoyev adopted a joint statement and signed an agreement on strategic partnership.<sup>20</sup> States signed documents on cooperation on the economy, agriculture, transport, communication, and in the cultural-humanitarian spheres. The presidents also participated in the opening ceremony of the Turkmenabad-Farab road and railway bridges over the Amudarya river between Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.<sup>21</sup>

From March 22–23, 2017, the president of Uzbekistan paid a state visit to Kazakhstan. Nursultan Nazarbayev and Shavkat Mirziyoyev signed the Joint Declaration on Further Deepening of the Strategic Partnership and Strengthening of Good-neighborliness.<sup>22</sup> As well as 13 documents related to parliamentary partnership, documents on cooperation on the economy, trade, industry, transport, and defense were also signed. Among them, the Strategy of Economic Cooperation for 2017–2019 and the Agreement on the Interregional Cooperation are of particular importance. Within the framework of the visit, the National Industrial Fair of Uzbekistan and a business forum with participation of more than 500 entrepreneurs from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan were held in Astana. As a result of these two events, trade contracts and investment agreements for a total of about US\$1 billion were signed.

Uzbekistan extended cooperation with Tajikistan as well. In 2017, 25 years after their termination flights between Tashkent and Dushanbe were reestablished.

In 2016–2017, the Uzbek president had more than 20 official and working meetings with Central Asian counterparts and a number documents on economic, trade, transport, communication, and cultural cooperation were signed.

## Water sharing and boundary issues in Central Asia

Historically, questions over water sharing and availability were central to regional politics and economics. In Soviet Central Asia, thousand of miles of channels, dozens of water reservoirs, and hydro-power stations were built, including Charvaq (Uzbekistan), Nurek (Tajikistan), and Toktogul (Kyrgyzstan).<sup>23</sup> After the collapse of the USSR, the centrally-planned economy decisions on water usage no longer existed, leaving the independent Central Asian countries to determine water disposition. Despite the 1992 agreement where countries agreed to maintain the Soviet system of water distribution, in practice, each country pursued its own approach. In recent years, questions over transboundary water sharing has grown more controversial. Central Asian states can be divided into two groups; the first group upstream includes Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (as well as Afghanistan in perspective). The sources of the main rivers of the

20 Uzbekistan national news agency, “Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan: good neighborhood and fraternal relations are strengthening” March 8, 2017. <http://www.uza.uz/en/politics/uzbekistan-turkmenistan-good-neighborhood-and-fraternal-rela-08-03-2017>.

21 Ibid.

22 Uzbekistan MFA, “Uzbekistan - Kazakhstan: a new stage of cooperation based on historical friendship and strategic partnership” March 2017. <https://mfa.uz/en/press/news/2017/03/10505/?INVERT=N>; Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, “Head of State N. Nazarbayev and President of Uzbekistan S. Mirziyoyev hold negotiations” March 2017. <http://www.government.kz/en/novosti/1008174-head-of-state-n-nazarbayev-and-president-of-uzbekistan-s-mirziyoyev-hold-negotiations.html>.

23 Mirzokhid Rakhimov, “Historical transformations and regionalism in Central Eurasia,” in *The 2nd International Conference of the HK Russia-Eurasia Research Project “Beyond Russian and Becoming Eurasia”*, (Seoul, Korea: Hanyan University, June 17–18, 2010), 135.

region – Amudarya and Syrdarya – are located in the upstream republics. The second group includes Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, with scarce water resources and these republics need water during harvesting time. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have built new hydro-stations for internal use and to export electricity; however, such huge hydropower stations were viewed as harmful to Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The positions of the upstream and downstream countries are different. For instance, in September 2007, Tajikistan terminated the contract for the completion of the Rogun Hydropower Plant with Russian company Rusal. Largely driven by strong opposition from Uzbekistan, the company refused to build a dam to a height of 325 meters, which would have enabled Tajikistan to control the region's water resources. In turn, Uzbekistan requested an international investigation of Rogun and Kambarata.

In 2013, 2016, and 2017, during Nazarbayev's visit to Uzbekistan and in March 2017, President Mirziyoyev's visit to Astana states, agreements were reached, which emphasized that planned hydropower plant construction in the upper reaches of the rivers should be agreed upon by downstream countries.

The positions of Russia, China, Iran, and other neighboring countries on construction of a new hydro-station in Central Asia are also important. In September 2014, the World Bank issued "Final Reports Related to the Proposed Rogun HPP".<sup>24</sup> A few months later, Uzbekistan Deputy Prime Minister Rustam Azimov expressed strong objections from the republic to the World Bank study. Nevertheless, in September 2017 during his visit to Bishkek, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev expressed Uzbekistan's willingness to participate in the Kambarata cascade construction.

At present, it is necessary to develop bilateral and multilateral partnerships between Central Asian states on water-sharing issues that make use of international experiences in different parts of the world.

After 1991, Central Asian states' newfound sovereignty and territorial integrity forced them to prioritize security. In the Soviet period, there were no official lines boundaries between the Central Asia republics and in the post-Soviet period it is necessary to establish formal boundaries and to form national boundary institutions. Although, ensuring integrity was complicated by history of Soviet national delimitation, which left a number of territorial problems in Central Asian countries and became a source of debate and conflict.

Post-Soviet challenges and security threats have become a serious motivation in the process of constructing administrative barriers on Central Asian borderlines. For example, the Taliban coming across to Central Asian boundaries in 1997, terrorist and religious extremist groups, drug trafficking, and others.

The Central Asian republics, in order to maintain stability, they practically admitted the passage of their borders as they existed during the former USSR administrative boundary lines. In international relations, the process is determined by the concept of *uti possidetis*, expressing the immutability of borders in the process of succession and suggests that existing problems and disputes can be resolved in the future through peaceful interstate cooperation.<sup>25</sup> Despite some difficulties, the Central Asian states, on the whole, have managed to resolve the issue of delimitation. The border issue has been resolved between China and Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, as well as between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, Russia, and Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. However, a more complicated situation exists in delimitations in the Uzbek–Kyrgyz, Tajik–Uzbek, and Kyrgyz–Tajik boundaries due a large number of contentious plots of land located in the Fergana valley. Further examples are the Tajik enclave Vorukh in Kyrgyzstan and the Uzbek enclaves Sokh and Shakhimardan in Kyrgyzstan. The Fergana valley, with a population over 10 million, is the most densely populated area in Central Asia and administratively divided between Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.<sup>26</sup>

Newly elected President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, intensified Uzbek–Kyrgyz and Uzbek–Tajik dialogue, including on boundary commissions. In particular, in September 2017 in Bishkek, Shavkat Mirziyoyev and Almazbek Atambayev signed the agreement on the Uzbek–Kyrgyz state border.

The resolution of border disputes in Central Asia should be reached through a balanced approach, on the basis of mutual compromise, rather than raw emotion. Central Asian boundaries are interconnected with other aspects such as transborder trade, border crossing, ethnic relations, and intermarriage, which requires careful consideration and a balanced approach.

24 World Bank, "Final Reports Related to the Proposed Rogun HPP". September 2014. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/tajikistan/brief/final-reports-related-to-the-proposed-rogun-hpp>. British Petroleum. Statistical Review of World Energy. June 2018. 67th edition, <https://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/en/corporate/pdf/energy-economics/statistical-review/bp-stats-review-2018-full-report.pdf>, p.12, 26.

25 For more on *uti possidetis* see: Malcolm Shaw, "The heritage of states: The principle of *uti possidetis juris* today," *The British Year Book of International Law*, 1997, 67 (1): 75–154; Malcolm Shaw, *International Law* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 525–530; Suzanne N. Lalonde, *Determining Boundaries in a Conflicted World: The Role of Uti Possidetis* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 360; Necati Polat, *Boundary Issues in Central Asia* (New York: Transnational Publishers, 2002), 46–48; Inomjon Bobokulov, "Mejdunarodno-pravovoe oformlenie granis kak uslovie regional'noy bezopasnosti v Sentral'noy Azii," *Sentral'naya Aziya I Kavkaz*, 2011, (2): 28–39.

26 Mirzokhid Rakhimov, The Pap-Angren Railway and Its Geoeconomic Implications for Central Asia. The CACI Analyst. John Hopkins University. USA. April 19, 2016, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13354-the-pap-angren-railway-and-its-geoeconomic-implications-for-central-asia.html>.

## Diversity of open-regionalism

### CIS-CSTO-EAEU

Since the beginning of the 21st century, a new stage of geopolitical transformation started in Eurasia and the main actors increasingly compete with each other. China activated relations in Central Asia and Russia has tried to extend its sphere of influence in Eurasia, as well as increase coordination between Russia and China, the USA has extended political dialogue and established a military presence in the region. In this regard, one of the main factors for providing regional security and stability in Central Asia is the maintenance of a geopolitical balance, especially between Russia, China, the USA and the EU, as well as the creation of a multilevel system of partnerships with different countries and international organizations.<sup>27</sup>

The Central Asian states were among the founding members of the CIS in Alma-Ata in December 1991. The CIS is a platform for coordination of member countries, but also an important tool for Russia to maintain its sphere of influence. Different economic, military, and political issues were discussed at summits of the CIS Council from 2009–2016, and several thousand documents and were signed, most of which only exist on paper. There are structural limitations within the CIS. For example, the nine member states, including the Central Asian states, signed Free Trade Zone Agreement within the CIS, which cancelled duties, taxes, and fees. However, in reality each country has upheld their respective customs procedures.

In the autumn of 2011, Vladimir Putin proposed the creation of a “Eurasian Union” and after his re-election in 2012, reformulated Russia’s foreign policy. It approved a “Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation” in 2013, in which the active support of Eurasian economic integration was defined as the main task of Russian foreign policy.<sup>28</sup> The concept aimed to extend and deepen Russian influence in Eurasia. In May 2013 in Astana, the presidents of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan held a meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council, the main body of the customs union.<sup>29</sup> The main outcome was the decision to start the Eurasian Economic Union from January 2015. In 2015, Armenia and the Kyrgyz Republic joined the Eurasian Economic Union, expecting economic support. In May 2015, during the 70th anniversary of the victory of the Great Patriotic War, President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping signed agreement on partnership between the Eurasian Economic Union and the Chinese initiative, the Silk Road Economic Belt. In the document, the two sides agreed to set up a dialogue mechanism for integration.<sup>30</sup> However, there was not any clear road map how the two initiatives will carry joint activity.

At present Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan are members of the Russian-led military alliance, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).<sup>31</sup> However, within the CSTO’s operations, a number of problems surfaced, member countries having expressed a variety of opinions and assessments of the status and prospects of cooperation. In particular, in 2008, when Uzbekistan secured its CSTO membership, it refused to sign a number of documents of the CSTO, including an agreement on the participation of the troops of CSTO countries in possible internal conflicts in member states. Uzbekistan also refused to participate in the creation of the Collective Rapid Reaction Forces, and has not signed the agreement on the participation of national military forces in the fight against possible internal conflicts in some of the CSTO member states. As a result, in 2012, Uzbekistan has officially announced its withdrawal from the CSTO, but it was suspended by the organization.

Russia’s policy toward Central Asia in general faces a number of problems. In particular, Russia lacks a clear strategy toward the region as a whole, as well as toward individual countries. There are different opinions and views on the Russian approach to Central Asia – varying from considering them as normal inter-state relations to characterizing them as imperial ambitions. Destabilization in Ukraine and especially Russia’s annexation of Crimea have caused concerns in Central Asia. For instance, with regard to the future of Kazakhstan’s multi-vectored foreign policy.<sup>32</sup>

27 See Alexander Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Great Power Contest in Central Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Marlene Laruelle and Sebastien Peyrouse, *Globalizing Central Asia. Geopolitics and the Challenges of Economic Development* (Routledge, 2013); S. Jonboboiev, M. Rakhimov, and R. Seidelmann (eds), *Central Asia. Issues, Problems, and Perspectives* (Göttingen: Cuvillier Verlag, 2015).

28 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, Approved by President of the Russian Federation V. Putin on 12 February 2013. IV. Regional Priorities. [http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/official\\_documents/-/asset\\_publisher/CptICk6BZ29/content/id/122186](http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICk6BZ29/content/id/122186).

29 The customs union was created in January 2010 by Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan with the aim of creating a single customs territory with common boundaries and customs tariffs; in the following years customs were eliminated between Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus.

30 Tian Shaohui, ed., “China, Russia agree to integrate Belt initiative with EAEU construction,” [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-05/09/c\\_134222936.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-05/09/c_134222936.htm).

31 CSTO was created on the basis of the Collective Security Treaty signed in May 1992 and includes Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Belarus joined later. The treaty entered into force in 1994, but in 1999, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Georgia have refused his prolongation membership. In 2006, Uzbekistan has restored its membership of the CSTO.

32 Frederick Starr, Bulat Sultanov, S. Enders Wimbush, Fatima Kukeyeva, Svante E. Cornell, Askar Nursha, “Looking forward: Kazakhstan and the United States,” *Silk Road Paper*, September (2014): 10.

Russian–Central Asian relations are increasingly stressed by Central Asian migration in Russia as well as the role of the millions of Russian citizens living as ethnic minorities in the states. In several publications and speeches<sup>33</sup> discrimination against the Russian language in the region is mentioned, despite the fact that Russian remains the most common language in Central Asia.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, there is a quite complex array of attitudes within the countries of Central Asia toward Russia, which leads to frequent perturbations in political and economic relations.

From 2014–2017, owing to the economic difficulties in Russia caused by international sanctions and falling oil prices, the escalation of the situation in Ukraine significantly reduced economic and trade relations between the CIS countries and Ukraine. In 2013, the trade turnover of Uzbekistan and Ukraine was more than US\$1 billion; from 2014–2016 it fell by several times. Foreign ministries of all Central Asian states were in favor of solving the crisis in Ukraine by peaceful means and within the framework of international law.

There are a whole range of common challenges and threats to regional and international security. Russia needs to develop an open and long-term new approach toward Central Asia, which contains political dialogue as well as cultural aspects and public diplomacy.

## Shanghai Cooperation Organization

China is one of the largest neighbors of the region and its policy in Central Asia prioritizes the expansion of political and economic contacts with the states. China strongly supported multilateral cooperation. In particular, in 1996 Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan established the “Shanghai Five.” In 2001, with Uzbekistan’s participation, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was founded. The SCO passed through a number of interesting phases in its institutional and political evolution and at present represents an international instrument to coordinate areas of multilateral cooperation. My survey among Central Asian experts on regional organization showed that the SCO is the most successful organization in Eurasia.<sup>35</sup>

At present, Mongolia, Iran, Afghanistan, and Belarus have observer status, while Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, and Nepal are dialogue-country partners. India and Pakistan started the membership process at the SCO summit in June 2016 in Tashkent and in June 2017 at the meeting in Astana received full membership, which significantly expanded the organization. However, the existence of differences between the SCO member states on a number of political and economic aspects should be noted, in addition to the expansion of the organization, resulting in new challenges and problems for the SCO. It is obvious that the SCO needs to develop cooperative relationships with leading European, Asian (including Japan and Republic of Korea), and American countries, as well as extend relations with international institutions.

In 2013, in Astana, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced the creation of “The Silk Road Economic Belt,” in 2014 the Silk Road Fund (US\$50 billion) was established, and in 2016 the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) (more than US\$100 billion) was founded, which aimed at providing investment and financial support toward cooperation in infrastructure, resources, industry, and the finance sector, as well as other transport communication projects. This involved various countries in the economic framework “One road, one belt” initiative. Central Asian countries support China’s “Belt and road” project and current republics of the AIIB’s 87 member states.

On May 2017, together with more than 30 state and government leaders, the presidents of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan took part in the ‘Belt and Road’ international forum in Beijing. Today there are many challenges to the stability and sustainable development of partner countries in the Belt and Road Initiative, which requires comprehensive bilateral and multilateral cooperation on economic, political, and security matters. In Central Asia, realization of the regional and international projects is not only needed, but also inciting connectivity and technological developments, as well as essential active implementation of the diverse range of cooperation between ‘Belt and Road’ participating countries, including high-tech innovations, education, public diplomacy, and tourism.

33 Y. Nikiforov, V. Shapovalov, “Россия и современный мир” [Russia and modern world], Учебное пособие. Московский Педагогический Государственный Университет, Москва, [Moscow State University of Education, Moscow] 2018, pp. 27–28; S. Pantelev, “Во всех государствах Центральной Азии идет дискриминация русских” [Discrimination of Russian citizens in the countries of Central Asia], Информационный портал «Русские в Казахстане» [Informational portal ‘Russians in Kazakhstan’] 13 June 2014 <http://russianskz.info/politics/5752-sergey-pantelev-vo-vseh-gosudarstvahcentralnoy-azii-idet-diskriminaciya-russkih.html>.

34 In particular, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, Deputy Speaker of the Russian Duma and Sergey Belokonev, First Deputy on the Committee on Young Issues of the Russian Duma, June 2008, CIS Young Elite Forum Meeting at the Russian Duma in Moscow.

35 Mirzokhid Rakhimov, “Transformation of SCO in the context of geopolitical changes in Central Asia,” in *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Eurasian Geopolitics: New Directions and New Perspectives* (Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Press, University of Copenhagen, 2013), 72.

## The EU strategy in Central Asia

During its EU presidency in 2007, Germany initiated increasing bilateral and multilateral partnerships with Central Asian states as result of a new EU strategy toward Central Asia from 2007–2013.<sup>36</sup> In 2014, the EU decided to extend the strategy for the next five years with the volume of financing reaching 1 billion euros, the same as for 2007–2013. At present, along with Russia and China, the EU is the main trading partner of the Central Asian states, especially Kazakhstan. The EU has expressed an interest in the energy supplies of Central Asia. In the coming decades, the EU will extend its dependence on external energy supplies.<sup>37</sup> From 2014–2015, events in Ukraine and EU–Russia, Russia–Ukraine tensions could be an additional issue for intensification of EU approaches to energy in the Central Asian and Caspian region. Central Asian states have also tried to find alternative corridors for exporting resources. In this context the Transport Corridor Europe–Caucasus–Asia (TRACECA) is a trade corridor between Asia and Europe;<sup>38</sup> however, for the complete realization of this idea, there are certain difficulties in formulating a common policy between the states through which the route passes, and the positions of various countries to be overcome.

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) has different relations with Central Asian republics. In particular, for number of years, Uzbekistan and the EBRD had extremely low-level relations. On March 16, 2017, EBRD President Chakrabarti visited Uzbekistan and was hosted by President Mirziyoyev; negotiations were held at the Senate, the Cabinet of Ministers and other agencies. Discussions focused on the priorities of the economic development in Uzbekistan and potential areas of partnership. The Memorandum of Cooperation between Uzbekistan and the EBRD was signed and it sets out areas for cooperation, including financing for small- and medium-sized enterprises, cross-border trade and cooperation, and measures to improve the competitiveness of the Uzbek economy and others.<sup>39</sup>

In general, EU–Central Asia relations have been through several transformations with some shortcomings.<sup>40</sup> Thus, for instance, the EU criticizes the processes of democratization and economic transformation. In turn, the republics have criticized the EU for ignoring regional conditions and for using a double-standard approach. The EU and Central Asia needs to develop long-term approaches each other.

## Central Asia plus USA (C5+1)

For the Central Asian states relations with the USA are important in the context of cooperation with the developed countries of the West. In 1992, the US Congress passed the “Freedom Support Act,”<sup>41</sup> aimed at providing multifaceted assistance to the Central Asian republics, focusing on democratization and transition to market economies. In March 1999, the US Congress passed the “Silk Road Act.”<sup>42</sup> From 2001 until now, security and anti-terrorism have become important aspects of the relations between the Central Asian countries and the USA. In 2011, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton unveiled the “New Silk Road” policy, which involves the creation of infrastructure linking Central Asia and South Asia through Afghanistan, and trade liberalization between the two regions. However, according some views, neither private US organizations nor the US government are investing nearly enough to reckon with those economic and political challenges. Talk of the Silk Road remains just that – talk, since the funding for it is not being allocated.<sup>43</sup>

Since 1992, the USA was the only major external actor in Central Asia without a regular multilateral consultative mechanism. In November 2015, US Secretary of State John Kerry made a visit to the countries of Central Asia and met with the presidents of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan to discuss bilateral relations and regional stability issues. In Samarkand, Secretary Kerry and the foreign ministers of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan had meeting within the new cooperation format “C5+1,” pledged in New York in September 2015. In his remarks, Kerry reconfirmed that the USA does support the sovereignty, the territorial integrity, and the independence of each country that is represented in Samarkand.<sup>44</sup> The

36 Council of the European Union, “The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New partnership”, 31 May 2007. [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/st\\_10113\\_2007\\_init\\_en.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/st_10113_2007_init_en.pdf).

37 British Petroleum, “Energy Outlook 2035”. January 2014. <https://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/en/corporate/pdf/energy-economics/energy-outlook/bp-energy-outlook-2014.pdf>

38 The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership; The Permanent Representatives Committee. May 31, 2007, 10.

39 EBRD, “The Memorandum of understanding between Republic of Uzbekistan and The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development regarding cooperation in the Republic of Uzbekistan and the EBRD”. March 2017. <https://www.ebrd.com/news/2017/ebd-president-concludes-visit-to-uzbekistan-.html>

40 Neil Melvin, “The EU needs a new values-based realism for its central asia strategy,” *EU CAM*, www.eucentralasia.eu No. 28, October 2012 [www.eucentralasia.eu](http://www.eucentralasia.eu).

41 US Congress. ‘Freedom Support Act’ 1992. <https://www.congress.gov/bills/102nd-congress/senate-bill/2532>.

42 Silk Road Strategy Act of 1999, 106th Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 1–5, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/106/hr1152/text> (June 1, 2015).

43 Stephen Blank, “Introduction,” in *Central Asia after 2014*, ed. Stephen Blank (The US Army War College, 2013), 7.

44 U.S. Department of States, John Kerry, Remarks at the Opening of the C5+1 Ministerial Meeting. <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2015/11/249046.htm> (September 1, 2016).

“C5+1” Joint Declaration of Partnership and Cooperation was accepted, which included regional trade, transport and communication, business climate in the region, environmental sustainability challenges, cooperation to prevent and counter transboundary threats and challenges, support Afghanistan, educational, cultural, and business exchanges, and others.<sup>45</sup> Shortly after the Samarkand meeting the US Assistance Programs to Central Asia was announced, which included competitiveness, training, and jobs; Central Asia Trade Forum; Climate Adaptation and Mitigation Program for the Aral Sea Basin; Smart Waters, and others.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, the success of C5+1 requires concrete and long-term project and program implementation in economy, trade, energy, communication, tourism, education, and other fields between the USA and Central Asian republics.

## Central Asia plus Japan

In the beginning of new century, there is an evident activation of bilateral and multilateral approaches by Japan in Eurasia. In 1997, Japan formulated the “Silk Road” diplomacy policy toward the region and in more two decades, Japan and Central Asian bilateral political, economic and multilateral relations increased considerably. Japan’s Official Development Assistance (ODA) program is one of the largest assistances to Central Asian investments and social programs. Japan’s soft loans and commercial credits were allotted and totaled more than US\$3.5 billion. They were aimed at projects for the development of telecommunication networks, for renovation of the repair and construction plants, for the modernization of airports and railways systems, and energy. Japanese Prime Ministers Koizumi and Abe, in 2006 and 2015 respectively, visited the Central Asian states to enhance Japan’s relations with region. In particular, during visits to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, several economic and energy-related agreements were signed, as well as the commitment of both sides to launch a partnership on education and cultural programs.

In 2004, Japan and Central Asia established a multilateral framework, “Central Asia plus Japan” and its main concepts were coordination and cooperation. However, it needs constant dialogue meetings, full-scale implementation of projects as well as expanding the range of cooperation, including academic partnerships between the participating countries, which is essential. It should be noted that Central Asian republics constantly express their support for Japan’s seat for permanent membership in the UN SC.

## Republic of Korea – Central Asia

Another leading Asian economy, that of the Republic of Korea, is one of the most important partners with of Central Asia countries, especially Uzbekistan.<sup>47</sup> In 2007, the “Republic of Korea – Central Asia” discussion forum has been organized. From 2007–2016, within the framework of the “Republic of Korea – Central Asia”, meetings were held in Korea and in Central Asian republics to discuss issues for strengthening and further development of cooperation in various spheres, including the IT sector, agriculture, medicine, and health, implementing a system of “E-government,” increasing energy efficiency and natural resources, construction and infrastructure, science and technologies, finances, and textiles. It should be noted that due similarities between the national identities of Koreans and Central Asians, Korean cinema, cartoons, and music has become very popular in the region.

## Looking forward: Central Asia in a broader partnership

### Connectivity as factor of regional and international integration

Contemporary Central Asian states consider it important to develop communication networks to the east, west, south, and north. The Central Asian republics are involved in new transport arteries connecting Europe and Asia, including TRACECA. In 2007, the EU Commission launched “The reorganisation of transport networks by advanced rail freight concepts (RETRACK)”<sup>48</sup> to identify main competing overland railway corridor between Europe and China.

China actively developed new communications links in Eurasia, in particular, communication with Europe via Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Iran. Its branches go in a to north-west and south-west

45 U.S. Department of States, Joint Declaration of Partnership and Cooperation by the Five Countries of Central Asia and The United States of America, Samarkand, Uzbekistan. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/11/249050.htm>. (November 1, 2015).

46 New U.S. Assistance Programs in Central Asia. <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/11/249051.htm> (November 1, 2015).

47 Mirzokhid Rakhimov, Sung Dong Ki, “Uzbekistan and South Korea: Towards a special relationship,” The CACI Analyst, John Hopkins University, USA, June 10, 2016. <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13369-uzbekistan-and-south-korea-towards-a-special-relationship.html>.

48 Reorganisation of transport networks by advanced rail freight concepts. [http://www.retrack.eu/site/en/about\\_secondary\\_objectives.php](http://www.retrack.eu/site/en/about_secondary_objectives.php).

direction, first passing through Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Poland, and other countries and the second passing through Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Turkey, and Europe. The construction of the Tashkent–Andizhan–Osh–Sarytash–Irkeshtam motor highway and the Kashgar–Osh–Andizhan railway project are regarded as part of an intensive economic exchange between China and Central Asia. However, for more than ten years, the implementation of the China–Kyrgyzstan–Uzbekistan rail project has faced certain difficulties in its realization mainly due to the position of Russia. The logic of its continuity is the new railroad in Pap (Namangan region in Ferghana valley) – Angren (Tashkent region), which was built in 2016 in the territory of Uzbekistan. Traditionally, the Uzbek part of the Ferghana Valley was linked with the rest of the republic via neighboring countries; however, today, there are considerable needs for whole Ferghana Valley to use all transit potentials of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.<sup>49</sup> From this perspective, strong transport communication between China and Central Asian countries raises the possibility of opening new transregional routes.

The importance of transportation of hydrocarbons from Central Asia and the Caspian region to external markets should be noted. In 2005, an oil pipeline from Atasu (Kazakhstan) to Alashankou (China) was completed. In 2009, the first gas pipeline (A line) between Central Asia–China was constructed; in the following years, B and C lines, which pass through the territories of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, were completed. Further, an intergovernmental agreement on the construction of the pipeline between Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India (TAPI) was signed. The Afghan transit corridors will contribute toward future economic recovery of Afghanistan and extend Central Asian links with south and east Asia.

### Externality: From conflicting to cooperating approaches

The leading external actors in contemporary Central Asia declared their support for stability and regional cooperation. However, Russia traditionally views the region as being within its sphere of influence and China has considerably extended its economic presence in the region. The EU achieved some progress in the region, but still has limitations. Russia and China from one side and the USA and EU from another have different institutional security approaches in Central Asia. Several Central Asian's member of Russia lead military alliance CSTO. At the same time Central Asian participated at the NATO's Partnership for Peace Program (PfP).

The end of the 20th century was characterized by significant geopolitical changes and transformations in the Asian continent. Central Asian states voiced their interest in developing mutually beneficial relations with different Asian regions and leading countries such as Japan, the Republic of Korea, India, Turkey, Iran, and others. Today, Central Asian and South Asian cooperation is important. In particular, India could play a special role in it due its high interest in realizing the North–South trade corridor initiative, which includes Central Asia as well. India also expressed interest in trade and ensuring energy security.<sup>50</sup> Improvements in relations between of India–Pakistan and Afghan–Pakistan would be an important factor in connecting South and Central Asia. In June 2017, India and Pakistan became members of the SCO and it is first time since 2001 that the organization has extended its membership. Central Asia supported China's calls for the Global Silk Road Initiative “One Belt, One Road.” There are challenges, but also the potential for Central Asia to cooperate with other regions of the world.

For wider international cooperation an active dialogue and cooperation between the main actors is necessary. Central Asia's partnership with leading nations and international institutions is important for transforming and internationalizing the region. Strong regional and transregional cooperation will considerably contribute to the development of trade, the economy, and investment.

### Conclusion

Throughout its history and up to the present day, Central Asia has gone through complex transformations. It is well known that there have been multiple paths to the modern world and it is accepted that there is no single development path to it.<sup>51</sup> It is essential for Central Asian republics to continue economic reforms, political liberalization, and development of civic institutions with support from the international community.

49 Mirzokhid Rakhimov, “The Pap-Angren railway and its geoeconomic implications for Central Asia,” The CACI Analyst, John Hopkins University, USA, April 19, 2016. <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13354-the-pap-angren-railway-and-its-geoeconomic-implications-for-central-asia.html>.

50 See: Gulshan Sachdeva, *India in Reconnecting Eurasia* (Washington DC: CISS, 2016). p 2-3, 38-40.

51 J. Kopstein and M. Lichbach, “What is comparative politics?,” in *Comparative Politics. Interests. Identities and Institutions in a Changing Global Order* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 30.

Central Asian regionalism is defined by a geographical, historical, and identical coexistence and through partnership and cooperation in economic and security matters. Post-Soviet Central Asia has sought a new model of interstate relations, but Central Asian cooperation has had very weak institutional frameworks and has gone through several regional integration initiatives. Prospects for cooperation and integration in Central Asia will depend on the ability to work together to carry out the proper reforms and common projects.

One of the main challenges for providing security and stability in Central Asia is the maintenance of the geopolitical balance, as well as the creation of a multilevel system of partnerships with different countries and international organizations. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, at different levels and in different situations, took part at CIS, SCO, CSTO, NATO (PfP programme), and others, where their interests were different but needed cooperation. In 25 years, the Central Asian states have created a more or less efficient system of checks and balances, in that none of the external actors is in a dominant position that would allow them to shape the countries' fates. Current and future transformation in Central Asia will depend on interlinks between regional and global issues and challenges.

Central Asia participated in the development of new links to the east, west, south, and north. There is the potential for regional and transregional trade development that will facilitate foreign investment. Strong regional communication networks will strongly contribute to global interdependence.

For widening intra- and extra-cooperation in Central Asia the following are necessary:

- First, the need to enlarge strong educational partnerships, academic cooperation, and joint projects in Central Asia, which include joint lecture courses, textbooks, seminars, and publications. It is very important to extend public diplomacy, cultural links, people to people, and NGOs as well as virtual partnerships in the region.
- Second, strong political and economic dialogue in Central Asia, the gradual development of an institutional framework of regional cooperation (including inter-parliamentary dialogue) concentrating on different projects, including economic zones in interstate boundary regions, which will automatically diminish conflict and increase transboundary mobility.
- Third, joint concentration on and solutions to regional challenges and issues, including water sharing. For example, the need to accept the framework of the UN resolution on cross-regional status for the biggest Central Asian rivers – Amu Darya, Syr Darya, and Zeravshan.
- Fourth, development of regional and international transport communications in Central Asia is interlinked with the growth of the economy and international tourism in the region. For progress in this field, it is necessary to establish new routes with attendant infrastructure and services.
- Fifth, stabilization of Afghanistan is important for Central Asia. The international community needs to have joint projects in Afghanistan and Central Asia that partner with neighboring countries.

In conclusion, positive transformation and development in Central Asia affected patterns of regional cooperation. There are global and regional challenges today and, in addition, to a very large extent, the interests of external states in Eurasia are driven by their contradictory interests. However, strong international partnerships with Central Asian states is needed for democratic and economic reforms, new technology, innovation, and attracting foreign investment. The international community's support for Central Asian republics will contribute to the maintenance of stability and modernization of the region.

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## Competing interests

Mirzokhid Rakhimov declares that he has no conflict of interest.