

COOPERATION AMONG THE SCO COUNTRIES IN THE HUMANITARIAN SPHERE: EXISTING PROBLEMS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

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Introduction

The humanitarian aspect is just as important as the economic and political components of the state's activity in terms of ensuring national interests at the international level. The concept "international humanitarian cooperation" includes interstate cooperation in cultural, scientific, information, sport, tourism, and other issues¹ and serves both individual and universal interests. No state can develop in an unfavorable environment without a high level of medical and educational development that guarantees people a dignified standard of living. Full-fledged humanitarian interaction can only develop in an atmosphere of trust and friendship among nations and helps, in turn, to gradually remove any negative perceptions of other national cultures from people's minds.

The culture of society as a whole and its tolerance toward other nationalities presuppose that a nation stands psychologically strong against such contemporary problems of mankind as terrorism and extremism and make it possible to resolve them by peaceful means.

Humanitarian cooperation is also of application-oriented relevance. For example, the

knowledge of language, culture, and traditions of another nation make it possible for states to interact more successfully in order to ensure security.

Recognizing the importance of humanitarian cooperation, national power structures and international organizations are investing large amounts of money in its development. Many states are practicing the policy of "cultural diplomacy," which envisages exporting their culture abroad, working with compatriots living in other countries, and hiring foreigners, thus pursuing the goal of creating a positive image for the country and raising its authority at the international level. For example, Germany allots impressive funds for this purpose—in 2008, 658.1 million euros, or 23% of the Foreign Ministry's budget, were spent to this end.²

Unfortunately, the Russian government underestimates the importance of this vector in the state's activity. When comparing the different approaches to the humanitarian sphere, we will take a look at the possible ways to raise efficiency and improve cultural cooperation within the framework of the SCO.

¹ See: *Tolkoviy entsiklopedicheskiy slovar'*, Norid, St. Petersburg, 2006, p. 485.

² See: N. Pavlov, "Kultura-tretye izmerenie vneshnei politiki," *Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn'*, Moscow, No. 8-9, 2008.

Cooperation among the SCO Member States in the Humanitarian Sphere

Cooperation in culture. Created in 2001, the SCO initially set itself the goal of developing cooperation among countries in the humanitarian sphere, which was set forth in its fundamental document—the Charter—and defined as one of its priority tasks. But no practical results were achieved in this vector until 2005. An expert group was created for cultural cooperation issues and a plan of multifaceted cultural cooperation between the Organization’s member states for 2005-2006 was adopted.

In December 2006, this group held its first meeting. The experts approved the cultural measures to be carried out during the year in celebration of the Organization’s fifth anniversary. Later, at a regular sitting of the ministers of culture, a plan of multifaceted cultural cooperation for 2007-2008 was passed that envisaged its further expansion.

The SCO Secretariat also makes a significant contribution to expanding humanitarian cooperation. In April 2007, at the summit in Bishkek, the agreement on cultural cooperation was signed. This event helped to bring the member states closer together. The number of undertakings carried out also increased. In particular, an album called “A Civilizational Dialogue” has been issued which contains an overview of the cultures of the SCO member states, and the Issyk Kul film festival and artistic forum in Hangchow were held.

In 2008, the ministers of culture adopted another cooperation plan for 2009-2011, and the expert group approved a unified Provision on Festivals, thus making this sphere of activity more streamlined and also improving its financial support.

Cooperation in education. On 26 October, 2005, the heads of government of the SCO states passed a decision to step up cooperation in education,³ which envisaged holding ministerial meetings and creating a permanent experts’ working group. According to this agreement, the SCO member states shall enhance the integration process in education, assist mutual exchange among students, academics, and professors, exchange information on education issues, and encourage study of the languages, history, and culture of the Organization’s states.⁴

At the 7th sitting of the Council of Heads of the SCO States, PRC Chairman Hu Jintao announced that 20 annual stipends for students studying in China had been instituted for each of the states. A Chinese-language study program has been launched in the Central Asian countries, which offers a teacher-training course at the Northwest University of China. Courses have opened at the University of Communications for training specialists from the SCO countries in telecommunications sponsored by the ZTE Company. On the PRC’s initiative, in December 2006, advanced training courses were organized for businessmen and high-ranking officials in electronic machine-building.

In 2006, consultations were held for personnel services, educational institutions, and diplomatic academies of the SCO’s foreign political departments. The Russian Foreign Ministry suggested creating a working group for jointly developing the Organization’s personnel support principles in cooperation with the SCO Council of National Coordinators and Secretariat.

Many students from the SCO states study at MGIMO (Moscow State Institute of International Relations), the forging shop of the Russian Foreign Ministry. Other countries of the Organization have

³ Although practical cooperation was also realized earlier. For example, in May 2005, an Institute for the Study of the Chinese Language and Culture was opened in Tashkent. The same year, students from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan began studying at the Northwest University of China.

⁴ Official website of the SCO [http://www.sectSCO.org/redirect.asp?id=25&id_temp2=25&LanguageID=3].

taken the curriculum used at this higher educational institution as a basis for their educational programs. At present, Russia is aiming to bring its national educational standards into harmony with the European. But the orientation toward international standards should not undermine the national system of the Organization's member states.

It should also be noted that at first the SCO did not have any unified approaches regarding the export and import of educational services. Nor was there a single information center. In order to resolve these problems, in 2007 a special website was created and an information bulletin addressing cooperation in education began to be issued.

The SCO is also faced with the tasks of drawing up unified education standards and of ensuring the free movement of knowledge and specialists. According to Russian experts, "the resolution of these problems will provide greater opportunities for Russian higher educational institutions to render educational services to the citizens of SCO states, will make Russian education more competitive, and will increase the export of Russian educational services to the Asian mainland."⁵ Realizing the idea to create a SCO University expressed by Vladimir Putin in 2007 will also serve these goals.

On the whole, educational and cultural cooperation of the SCO countries is on the upward trend. In the Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation signed by the member states at the summit in Bishkek in 2007, the sides stated their intention to encourage and support the establishment of direct ties among cultural, educational, scientific, and research institutions, implement joint scientific research programs in personnel training, and carry out student, scientist, and specialist exchanges.⁶

China is the main recipient of the benefits of cultural cooperation being carried out within the framework of the Organization. Since 2005, targeted budget funds have been allotted to other member states for training 1,500 specialists in different spheres of cultural cooperation. More than 200 experts have already been trained for the SCO countries.⁷ Most of the cultural and art exhibitions organized by the SCO are held in the PRC. It has become the Organization's main concert and exhibition platform. International Chinese-language competitions are regularly held and the number of people wishing to study this language is growing.

Russia, on the other hand, is orienting itself more toward the CIS and EurAsEC with respect to cultural and humanitarian exchange since it has greater influence in these communities and can freely promulgate and spread the Russian culture there. The development of the SCO and its growing authority raise the question of the need to increase Russia's influence on the educational and cultural sphere of the Organization's member states.

Informational policy within the SCO. The Russian-Georgian war in August 2008 revealed serious shortcomings in the information coverage of these events within the SCO. At the summit in Dushanbe, Russian President Dmitri Medvedev had to explain the situation in the Caucasus to the leaders of the Organization's member states, as well as to observers. This shows that, first, not all the state leaders understood what was actually going on and, second, the level of Russian information policy leaves much to be desired. It is obvious that a unified information space has not been created yet within the framework of the SCO, neither with respect to television, nor to the press, nor to radio. And if the heads of states are not always sufficiently informed, we can see how much more difficult it is for the ordinary people to understand the gist of what is going on.

This is not only Russia's problem. Coverage of the events in Andijan, Tibet, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, as well as the situation involving Iran's nuclear program, has been distorted. Today, the

⁵ A. Vlasov, E. Poteeva, "Obrazovatel'nye reformy v stranakh ShOS," available at [<http://www.ia-centr.ru>].

⁶ See Art 19 of the Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation of the SCO Member States, Bishkek, 16 August, 2007.

⁷ [http://www.russian.xinhuanet.com/russian/2006-06/14/content_265844.htm].

interpretation of events aired by Western information services spreads much more quickly than the local version in the post-Soviet expanse.

A successful way to overcome this situation might be to create a unified information space, that is, open new television and radio channels (for example, Eurasia News along the lines of Euronews) or expand the broadcasting range of those channels already existing (Mir, the Golos Rossii radio station) in the SCO member and observer states. This requires adopting corresponding bilateral agreements that would provide information to Russian residents too. A press organ is also needed, for example, a daily newspaper covering social and business topics in all the languages of the Organization's countries.

So the creation of a unified information space should become one of the priority vectors in the SCO's activity.

Cooperation in public health. Since its establishment, the SCO has declared the need to cooperate in public health, but work in this area has been slow to get off the ground.

Not until the Shanghai summit in 2006 did the SCO express its willingness to make use of its opportunities in this sphere and take the situation under control. This was prompted by the disturbing statistics. For example, between 1990 and 2002, the use of opiates in the Central Asian countries rose 17-fold, which is a direct threat to the region's security.⁸ This was noted in the U.N. 2004 Report, which states that the cities located along the drug trafficking routes from Afghanistan to Russia account for the highest morbidity rate with respect to cases of HIV infection.

The prevalence of tuberculosis is growing, the number of victims doubled between 1990 and 2003. The situation is complicated even more by the low level of medical assistance and shortage of specialists, and in some rural areas of Central Asia it is simply impossible to receive any medical help at all. According to U.N. data, in 2006, 160,000 residents of the region required treatment, but only 21,000 actually received help,⁹ which requires the SCO's immediate intervention.

This state of affairs prompted examination of the question of cooperation in public health at the meeting of the Council of SCO Heads of State in 2006. The SCO Secretariat and experts were instructed to draw up a plan of further cooperation among the health care ministries and departments, as well as to form a permanent experts' group.

In the fall of 2007, Russian medical mobile groups stepped up their activity in the region, since statistics revealed that 40% of the population of Central Asian countries had no medical services. Teams of specialists were sent to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and a mobile rail consultation-diagnostic center has been operating in Kazakhstan and will subsequently travel to each of the Central Asian countries in turn.

But the problem is that the country to which assistance is sent decides itself whether to accept this help or not. For example, Uzbekistan has not once shown an interest in this. So the measures carried out are not systematic.

In order to solve this task, Russia put forward the initiative to create a Shanghai Health Organization (SHO) along the lines of the World Health Organization (WHO). It is to be aimed at uniting the efforts of all the SCO countries to raise the quality of medical assistance. Within the framework of the SHO, there are also plans to provide practical courses and training for specialists and exchange advanced experience.

Another valuable contribution to raising the quality of health care could be implementing the proposal put forward by Russian expert E. Safronova to use the experience of international organiza-

⁸ Information from an international conference held on 5 October, 2005, Kazakhstan Institute of Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Almaty.

⁹ U.N. news website [<http://www.un.org/russian/news/fullstorynews.asp?newsID=5636>].

tions to carry out anti-epidemic training exercises.¹⁰ Similar maneuvers involving twenty-one countries have already been carried out by APEC. In Russia they were carried out in March 2006.

Keeping in mind that Asia has already been inflicted by a bird flu epidemic, the SCO countries could create a unified research center for developing vaccines against various viruses. National programs for their development already exist, but it is difficult to resolve this problem independently. Moreover, not one of the Central Asian countries, apart from Kazakhstan, is doing anything to rectify this problem.

Joint projects should also be drawn up that envisage the creation of a unified medical assistance and insurance system ensuring that citizens of the SCO countries, regardless of their whereabouts, receive high-quality medical services. Particular attention should be given to preventing and treating diseases that threaten to become pandemic, preventing new outbreaks of epidemics in the region, carrying out joint research studies under the guidance of the SCO, and disseminating advanced experience aimed at fighting infections. The people should also be provided with timely information about the danger of various infections.

Cooperation in dealing with emergencies. It is a well-known fact that the Central Asian region is periodically inflicted by natural disasters. The less developed countries of the region suffer the most from this. For example, Tajikistan periodically experiences earthquakes and extremely cold temperatures. In the winter of 2008, the country could not cope with the growing volumes of electricity consumption and found itself on the brink of disaster, plants and factories ground to a halt.

In 2002, the first meeting of the heads of the SCO countries' emergency ministries was held, within the framework of which a protocol was signed that envisaged developing cooperation to prevent and liquidate emergencies. In 2005, an Agreement on Cooperation and Assistance in Liquidating Emergencies was signed among the states' governments. The document envisages joint efforts for ensuring efficient and coordinated assistance to the people of the afflicted state.

However, the sides did not examine the question of establishing a permanent emergency control center in one of the SCO countries. Without such a center, the countries of the region have to ask for help from neighbors each time, which not only fails to resolve the problem, but also interferes with the development of national emergency services, the specialists of which do not receive the necessary training in the Central Asian countries and cannot appropriately deal with natural disasters, including technogenic catastrophes. The situation in this area is also complicated by climatic changes.

The second meeting of leaders of these departments of the SCO states was held in November 2006. It passed the Action Plan for Cooperation and Assistance in Emergencies for 2007-2008. Later, comprehensive exercises were held organized by the PRC Civil Administration Ministry, which again confirmed the need for a unified SCO center for natural disaster prevention and liquidation. This would help to better provide the region with technical means and raise the level of specialist training in this area. Keeping in mind the immense experience of the Russian Emergency Ministry, Russia could help to launch such a center and possibly head it.

Environmental cooperation. The drying up of the Aral Sea is one of the biggest contemporary environmental disasters and it has caused an abrupt drop in the standard of living of the people residing in the Aral Region. As of today, hundreds of thousands of people need help. The burial of radioactive wastes in the region of the Ferghana Valley is extremely dangerous. International organizations such as the UNDP, OSCE, EU, International Aral Sea Rehabilitation Fund, and others are en-

¹⁰ See: E. Safronova, *ShOS: k novym rubezham razvitiia*, RAS Institute for Far Eastern Studies, Moscow, 2008, pp. 161-184.

gaged in these and other environmental problems, as well as the countries of the region that are trying to carry out their own measures.¹¹

In 2004, an agreement was reached on developing cooperation with respect to enhancing environmental protection and preserving the environmental balance in the region, ensuring the rational use of hydropower resources, and preventing the desertification of land, as well as stopping other degrading processes.¹²

But cooperation in this sphere did not undergo further development until 2006 when regular meetings of the corresponding SCO expert groups began to be held. In 2007, two projects were approved: “Forecasting the Water Level of Cross-Border Rivers of the Aral Sea Basin” and “Expanding Cooperation in Environmental Protection and Environmental Rehabilitation of the Aral Sea Basin.”¹³

According to Nursultan Nazarbaev, in addition to the Aral, the SCO could also solve other pertinent tasks of environmental safety, for example, rational use of the water resources of the Irtysh, Amu Darya, and Syr Darya, rivers.¹⁴ But it is still not possible to resolve all of these problems independently.

SCO Secretary General B. Nurgaliev has repeatedly noted that “only if U.N. institutions—the WHO, UNICEF, UPFPA, the World Bank, the Asia Bank, and other international institutions—join the efforts of the Central Asian States, as well as the SCO and EurAsEC, can progress be achieved in resolving the most acute social-environmental problems, in implementing projects to restore beneficial conditions for the vital activity of the people living in the Aral Region, and in protecting the health of the people and environment...”¹⁵ In this area the SCO is trying to establish regular cooperation with international structures, in particular with the U.N. Center for Preventive Diplomacy. Keeping in mind the SCO’s growing authority, it is possible that in the near future, when cooperation with other organizations and countries develops, international projects could be carried out to improve the environment in Central Asia.

Basic principles need to be drawn up in natural disaster prevention and liquidation for carrying out joint rescue operations, as well as for training personnel in a unified method, keeping in mind the entire complex of necessary technical means. The SCO still does not have a separate structure responsible for preventing emergencies and providing urgent humanitarian aid.

Problems of Humanitarian Cooperation between Russia and Central Asian Countries and Possible Solutions

After re-examining and changing its foreign policy, Russia began actively focusing its attention on cooperation with the Central Asian countries. Integration projects related to this region began

¹¹ Kazakhstan is exerting efforts to rehabilitate the Small Aral, Uzbekistan, in order to rehabilitate the ecosystem in order to fixate the moving sands of the Aral’s coastal plain.

¹² Joint communiqué of the Council of Heads of Government (Prime Ministers) of the SCO Member States. 2004.

¹³ Speech by B. Nurgaliev at a conference on the problems of the Aral Sea, Tashkent, 11-12 March, 2008, available at [<http://www.sectesco.org>].

¹⁴ Nursultan Nazarbaev’s speech at the Bishkek summit, 16 August, 2007, available at [<http://www.sectesco.org/redirect.asp?id>].

¹⁵ Speech by B. Nurgaliev at a conference on the problems of the Aral Sea, Tashkent, 12 March, 2008.

to be put forward more frequently and Russian centers of science and culture are opening. In 2007, the Russkiy Mir (Russian World) Foundation was created that is called upon to promote the development of the Russian language. Cooperation is expanding with medical professionals, cinematographers, and artists.

A Kyrgyz-Russian university was opened in Bishkek, and a Tajik-Russian one in Dushanbe. The branches of some Russian higher educational establishments are being created in the countries of the region. The common history and traditional cultural ties between Russia and the Central Asian countries are having a positive influence on the further development of this cooperation. In order to further improve the above-mentioned statistics, broader use must be made of the possibilities of a unified SCO information sphere. This is also being enhanced by organizing seminars, conferences, Internet forums, and so on, which does not require much financing.

All these components of humanitarian cooperation are helping to strengthen comprehensive relations between the Russian Federation and Central Asian countries, raise mutual understanding among nations, and prevent intentional distortion of the contents of the SCO's policy by the press.

At the same time, several aspects should be noted that are making it difficult to create Russia's positive image in Central Asia and are preventing the establishment of relations between them.

One of the most important problems for Russia is **the drop in level of the use of the Russian language and Russian education** in the Central Asian republics. Many schools where the Russian language was previously taught have been closed and those remaining have as many as 50 students per class, which is a clear overload. This has been caused by objective difficulties involving their maintenance, so Russia must help to open new Russian schools. Moreover, keeping in mind the current migration situation, we should also think about opening Asian schools in Russia. But funding is so far lacking for this.

The shortage of Russian schools is aggravated by the shortage of teachers and their low qualification level. Schoolchildren who receive a secondary education in the Central Asian republics cannot compete with the graduates of local schools when applying to Russian higher educational institutions since they simply do not have the required level of knowledge. The introduction of the unified state exam (EGE) in Russian schools in 2009 and the need for students to present their results when applying to higher educational institutions are also creating an obstacle for applicants from other countries. There are not enough special Russian-language teaching centers in the Central Asian republics, they are not even always available in the large cities. Nevertheless, interest in Russian education is still high (see Table 1).

Table 1

**Would You Like to Receive an Education Abroad and
in What Country?**

Country	Yes, in Russia	Yes, in the EU	Yes, in the U.S.
Kazakhstan	18%	17%	14%
Kyrgyzstan	32%	17%	14%
Uzbekistan	—	—	—
Tajikistan	37%	12%	14%

Source: Non-commercial Partnership Eurasian Monitor, and Eurasia Heritage Foundation, October 2007.

And although the number of Central Asian students studying in Russian higher education institutions (apart from Kyrgyzstan) has not decreased over the past 12 years (see Table 2), the number of graduate students going to other countries, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, and Japan, has significantly increased. For example, whereas there are 2,300 Tajiks studying in Islamic countries,¹⁶ their numbers are much lower in Russia. This is explained by the fact that the governments of many of the indicated countries provide free education at their higher educational institutions.

However, as the Bolashak state program to assist Kazakh students wishing to study abroad shows, most applicants, given the choice, prefer to study at U.S. and European universities. For example, among those who received a Bolashak stipend in 2007-2008, 46.6% chose European countries, 29% the U.S., and 9.5% Russia.

Table 2

**Number of Students of
Central Asian Countries Studying
in Russian State and
Municipal Higher Educational Institutions**

Country	1995/96		2000/01		2006/07		2007/08	
	Total	inc. full-time	Total	inc. full-time	Total	inc. full-time	Total	inc. full-time
Kazakhstan	11,644	8,921	16,665	11,724	18,036	12,441	18,970	11,553
Kyrgyzstan	1,700	1,524	1,230	519	712	583	830	634
Tajikistan	738	642	324	221	1,135	647	1,234	742
Uzbekistan	3,176	2,735	3,221	1,162	5,287	2,092	4,614	2,088

Source: Russian Federal State Statistics Service.

Nevertheless, the Russian language is still a “ticket” to membership in the national elite in the Central Asian countries, as well as one of the main conditions for joining the middle class. The trends toward a cutback in Russian-language teaching caused by the desire to obtain a higher education in Western higher educational institutions are creating the need to improve study of the Russian language and prompting Russia to step up formation of its policy in this area. But Russia’s initiatives often come up against problems created by the local legislation and are sometimes perceived in certain circles as attempts to return to the educational traditions that existed in the Soviet Union.

Nevertheless, the experience of the work of branches of Russian universities in the region’s states shows an urgent need for expanding the network of secondary schools based on a Russian curriculum. The initial stage of this process could be offering Russian classes at national schools. The possibilities of extramural study in Russia should also be developed, as well as other mechanisms aimed at integrating schoolchildren from Central Asian countries into the Russian educational space. This will all make it possible to interest the most promising young people in studying in Russia. In so doing, the funds allotted for teaching students will be invested in Russian higher educational institutions and so

¹⁶ In Pakistan and Saudi Arabia there are approximately 1,500 students, in Egypt around 600, and in Iran around 70.

remain inside the country. In addition, by attracting students from the Central Asian countries, Russian universities raise their international rating and, consequently, the number of students from foreign countries will increase.

For those who study in their own countries, on the other hand, it is expedient to ensure the possibility of listening to lectures by Russian professors who are invited on sabbatical for several months (semesters). This could be resolved by special programs using grants or other state funds.

In order for the Central Asian population to study Russian in every large city of the region special courses should be offered as well as methods and tools applied for its independent study. It would be expedient to open retraining and advanced training centers in the capital of each republic for teachers at schools where the Russian language is taught. In this way, students will be able to continue their education at Russian higher educational institutions. This is shown by the data of a survey of residents of the Central Asian republics (see Table 3).

Table 3

**Should the Study of
the Russian Language be Expanded
in Your Country?**

Countries	Expand	Leave As Is	Cut Back
Kazakhstan	32%	53%	7%
Kyrgyzstan	61%	28%	4%
Uzbekistan	—	—	—
Tajikistan	89%	8%	1%

S o u r c e: Non-commercial Partnership Eurasian Monitor, and Eurasia Heritage Foundation, October 2007.

The level of **scientific cooperation** is still low. Moreover, the economic crisis has had a very negative impact on this sphere. State and private organizations are cutting back financing in this area. For example, exploration of uranium deposits in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan has been stopped. Apart from joint space projects with Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, no other noticeable shifts are observed.

Joint developments in the humanitarian sciences are also few and far between. Russian funds are not showing much interest in developing scientific cooperation with the Central Asian countries. Only Russian-Kazakh scientific conferences are being systematically held, while such undertakings with other countries are episodic.

In order to correct the situation in this sphere, it would be expedient to:

- Ensure the creation of interstate research centers or mixed scientific groups for developing large joint projects in energy, transport construction, medicine, biology, and the environment;
- Interest Russian governmental and nongovernmental funds in helping to develop cooperation with Central Asian scientists, both in priority scientific spheres and in industry, and attracting funds from state corporations for this.

Systemize the holding of international scientific forums, conferences, and seminars on different scientific problems.

The SCO Forum created in 2006 has been called upon to play an important role in developing humanitarian cooperation. It carries out expert-analytical studies, draws up recommendations, and compiles forecasts. It primarily focuses on energy cooperation issues and defines the general criteria for accepting new members and determining the vectors of cooperation with other organizations.

Russia's opportunities in scientific development could be realized within the framework of the SCO University mentioned above with a unified curriculum for students from the member countries. Such higher educational institutions as Moscow State University, the Academy of the National Economy under the Russian Government, the Academy of Foreign Trade, and MGIMO have confirmed their interest in creating this University. At the initial stage, it could function as an advanced training center for state officials and representatives of commercial companies interested in accelerating the development of the six countries. In the future, study could be organized in such priority fields of specialization as transnational project management, international law, the fundamental principles of foreign economic activity in the region, and so on. As already noted, several scientific centers and groups could be created on the basis of the SCO University.

The expansion of scientific cooperation could also be promoted by the Kyrgyz idea of creating an Inter-Academic Scientific Council, which would help to intensify integration and promote more precise coordination of the intellectual efforts of scientific circles that are of practical interest for all the SCO countries.

Russia has very few **special support foundations of humanitarian cooperation with the Central Asian countries**. Although Roszarubezhstentr exists, and in 2008 the Russkiy Mir Foundation appeared, this is clearly not enough.

The U.S., for example, has a multitude of such educational support mechanisms—scientific contacts, practical study courses, English courses, and so on. But in Russia neither the Russian Humanitarian Science Foundation nor Russkiy Ir can assist in this. Nor are there nongovernmental organizations (NGO) in Russia that could function exclusively in the Central Asian region. On the other hand, the Conrad Adenauer, F. Ebert, McArthur, Carnegie, and Soros foundations are active there.... While Western and Eastern actors are pursuing their interests in Central Asia, Russia, lagging seriously behind them in level of activity, could lose its influence in the region in the future.

So it is necessary to promote the creation of domestic foundations and organizations, whereby especially for working in the Central Asian countries. Our own projects must be advanced, particularly in the humanitarian and social spheres. In addition, when drawing up and allotting grants it is expedient to involve experts from these countries and use the funds for Central Asian specialists to take practical study courses in Russia's scientific and state structures.

The problem of supporting Russian compatriots living in Central Asia consists primarily in the fact that their status in their countries of residence and the conditions for their entry into the Russian Federation have not been legally regulated and they are essentially equated with foreigners. The problem of dual citizenship has not been resolved yet, there is only a corresponding agreement with Tajikistan. This is making trips to Russia and entering various types of transactions very difficult. Adopting agreements on dual citizenship would make it possible to incorporate compatriots into the Russian legal field, as well as act as their guarantee in the event of emergencies.

Another problem for compatriots living in Central Asia is applying to Russian higher educational institutions, which is not supported by the Russian government free education quotas. In this sphere too they are equated with foreigners. They can study at Russian higher educational institutions on general terms, but, as already noted, students from Central Asia do not have the required level of knowledge for this. The only solution is paid education, and not everyone can afford it, so it is extremely important to allot funds for free education.

Another problem for compatriots is their low level of interaction at the interregional level. Insufficient information makes it more difficult for them to participate in various undertakings, so it is

important to create coordination councils that will join all or most organizations of compatriots in each country and consolidate their efforts to resolve the existing problems. Kyrgyzstan is a positive example where 63 organizations have joined to create this kind of council.

Corresponding information support is also needed, for example, the creation of a separate internet page or press organ, which will require the support of Russian state structures or foundations.

The difficult situation of migrants from Asian countries in Russia is one of the most important problems of cooperation in the humanitarian sphere. As we know, qualified personnel with a diverse range of skills is required to develop the Russian economy, but such personnel rarely comes from the Central Asian countries, mainly it is people without the proper training and education. They often do not even know where work hands are needed and if they are needed at all. They usually receive their information through friends and relatives who have already been in Russia. This provokes illegal migration and, consequently, no legal protection against employers who may wish to exploit them. Migrants usually choose large Russian cities, they are practically non-existent in medium and small towns. They usually go for any kind of work, so they often find themselves in criminal environment.

Legal relations with migrants contribute to the future of harmonious relations between Russia and the Central Asian countries. This requires creating favorable conditions. The workforce comes mainly from Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, where there are not even any special Russian-language training centers, or the legal knowledge needed for Russia.

With knowledge of the Russian language and laws, it is easier for migrants to obtain legal protection. It would also be expedient to create a unified labor exchange, which would help them to find better jobs in Russia on a legal basis.

Central Asia's cooperation with other states and organizations is having both a positive and negative influence on Russia's interests. The humanitarian activity of states that are interested in the region is growing. The influence of the EU, NATO, OSCE, U.S., Iran, Turkey, and Japan is strengthening, which in some areas contradicts Russia's national interests. It should be noted that cooperation between the Central Asian countries and the indicated actors is being built exclusively on a bilateral basis. The region's countries act in most joint projects as sides receiving some kind of aid, which is largely carried out along "donor-recipient" lines, thus determining their interest, but on the other hand it increases their dependence on the donors.

The European Union countries are carrying out a more balanced and soft policy in Central Asia. Such EU programs as TACIS (a technical assistance program), TEMPUS (cooperation in higher education), COPERNICUS (exchange of scientific personnel), INTAS (cooperation among scientists), and Food Safety DIPECHO (disaster preparedness training) operate in the region. Bilateral cooperation programs are also being developed. Great Britain and Sweden are financing environmental protection, public health, the social sphere, and agrarian reforms; the Netherlands are helping to fight tuberculosis, and Switzerland is assisting in carrying out several water use projects.

In addition, in 2000, with the assistance of the EU, a Regional Environmental Center and a Coordination Center for Climatic Changes opened in Kazakhstan.

It should be noted that, when drawing up strategy with respect to Central Asia, the European Union countries take Russia's interests into account, clearly appreciating its traditionally high role in the region and drawing up their policy with this in mind.

The OSCE, which appeared in the region at the beginning of the 1990s,¹⁷ has made attempts to resolve several of the Central Asian states' environmental and health care problems, but a precise plan of action was not drawn up until 2000-2001. The OSCE Academy has opened and is functioning successfully in Bishkek.¹⁸

¹⁷ An OSCE center opened in Dushanbe in 1993, in Tashkent in 1995, and in Almaty and Bishkek in 1998.

¹⁸ In June 2003, it was transformed into the American University of Central Asia (AUCA).

Islamic organizations are also interested in the Central Asian countries. For example, in 2007, the International Islamic Organization for Education, Science, and Culture (ISESCO) of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) declared Tashkent to be the world's capital of Islamic culture.

The U.S., in contrast to the European Union, is trying to neutralize Russia's traditional influence in Central Asia, as well as the growing influence of the PRC, which it regards as its main strategic rival. The NATO countries are aiming to expand relations with the Central Asian states within the Partnership for Peace program (they began joining this program in the mid-1990s), designed to carry out joint work in different spheres. In 1998, Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Center (EADRCC) was created for better coordinating activity, the purpose of which was to join efforts to render help during natural disasters to the member states of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council.

Over five years, beginning in 2003, financial aid to the Central Asian countries has increased 2.5-fold. Uzbekistan has received 266 million dollars from the Pentagon budget, Kyrgyzstan 146 million, and Tajikistan and Turkmenistan around 36 million each.

Turkey's humanitarian cooperation with the Central Asian countries is ambiguous. On the one hand, it upholds the geo-strategy of the West, striving to graphically show its loyalty to it and the expediency of its intermediary role in Central Asia while, on the other, it is promoting its own interests in the region.

The historical, cultural, and linguistic commonality with the Central Asian states and the pro-Western sentiments of this economically successful secular Muslim country, as well as U.S. support, are helping to expand Turkey's influence in the region. In the humanitarian sphere, Turkey's policy is directed at actively introducing a special educational system there.

As for Iran, there can be no doubt that it is tied by deep cultural and historical roots to Central Asia, which is an important region in the political and economic respect.¹⁹

At the beginning of the 21st century, Iran dropped the practice of exporting the idea of Islam to the Central Asian Region, since it understood that these states were interested in developing their own relations with other countries, primarily in the economic sphere, particularly when this cooperation promises investments. So contacts are primarily being established in this area.

Iran is also well aware that its presence in the region is closely tied to Russia's interests.

On the whole, the image of a country of "militant Islam" with claims to leadership among the Muslim states, excessive ideologization of foreign policy, and weak economic potential does not promote Iran's popularity in Central Asia.

Japan appeared in Central Asia's humanitarian space in 1991. It was precisely on its initiative that the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) included the Central Asian countries on the list for receiving official aid aimed at improving and accelerating their development.

Since 1996, Japan has been holding culture days of its country in Central Asia, since 1999 it began granting stipends to Uzbek students studying at Japanese universities. More and more Japanese have begun visiting the region's countries.

In 2002, the Japanese government opened a Japanese Human Resource Development Center in Almaty which holds various cultural undertakings, organizes Japanese-language and management courses, and so on. The Japanese government has begun issuing grants aimed at developing cultural-educational and sporting institutions.

When analyzing the humanitarian cooperation of the Central Asian countries with third countries on the whole, the conclusion can be drawn that Russia's interests will be threatened (see, Table 4) if other countries, unfriendly toward Russia and pursuing goals that do not coincide with its interests, continue to increase the amount of their humanitarian aid to the Central Asian countries.

¹⁹ See: P. Goncharov, "Iran vozvrashchaetsia v Tsentral'nuiu Aziju," RIA Novosti, 25 August, 2006.

Table 4

**Influence on Russian Interests of
Humanitarian Cooperation between the Central Asian Countries and
Other States and Organizations²⁰**

Country/Actor in CA	Influence on Russia's Interests in Central Asia
EU	<i>positive influence</i>
NATO	<i>negative influence</i>
OSCE	<i>weak positive influence</i>
OIC, Iran	<i>weak positive influence</i>
U.S.	<i>negative influence</i>
Turkey	<i>negative influence</i>
Japan	<i>weak positive influence</i>

In order to avoid this Russia must increase its influence in all areas, including in the humanitarian sphere. This is all the more necessary if we keep in mind the willingness and greater inclination of almost all the Central Asian countries to cooperate with Russia than with Iran, Turkey, or the U.S.

Conclusion

On the whole, humanitarian cooperation within the SCO is developing in all vectors with varying success. It has become “one of the most important factors guaranteeing the Organization’s viability and could well play the role of a catalyst and example for inter-civilizational communication in the search for solutions to problems that are preventing harmonization of relations in the world.”²¹

The Russian Federation is trying to carry out a policy within the SCO aimed at strengthening all those cooperation vectors not receiving the proper development within the CIS. In so doing, the people of the Central Asian countries consider the Russian language and Russian culture to be part of their national history, continuing to use them for their further development. Quite a few Russians live in most of the region’s countries—approximately 20% of the population.

On the whole, the development of Russia’s humanitarian cooperation with the Central Asian countries is quite harmonious, the authority and influence of Russia and the Russian world have been preserved, and the region also keeps close tabs on its actions on the international arena.

So, by preserving the impressive results that have already been achieved, a strategy designed to intensify Russia’s influence in Central Asia must be continued.

²⁰ This scale does not reflect all the specifics of the factors of influence on Russia’s national interests, but it presents a general review of the influence of each of the countries.

²¹ Declaration of the Fifth Anniversary of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Shanghai, 15 March, 2006.