REGIONAL SECURITY

STRUCTURAL FACTORS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE REGIONAL SECURITY SYSTEMS (*A Post-Soviet Central Eurasia Case Study*)

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Introduction

Anyone wishing to identify the regularities according to which regional security systems function and develop should first find out the main factor of their functioning and development. It must be said that, at all times, ethnic and religious contacts, economic interests, ideology, political survival, and rivalry over influence remain important determinants in interstate relations. At the same time, the present level of diversity and interdependence in the international political system makes it hard to identify a limited number of factors that apply to all cases; we should also bear in mind that each region has its own specific phenomena.

Here I will try to assess the relations among states from the viewpoint of corresponding regional political structures and, taking the regions of post-Soviet Central Eurasia as an example,[1] identify the degree to which political structure

[1] Here I rely on the Central Eurasia and Central Europe conception formulated by Eldar Ismailov, according to which Central Eurasia consists of three post-Soviet regions: Central Europe—Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine; the Central Caucasus—Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia; and Central Asia—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan (for more detail, see: E.M. Ismailov, "Central Eurasia: Its Geopolitical Function in the 21st Century," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 2 (50), 2008, pp. 7-29).

affects the regional security system. To do this, I will rely on the theoretical-methodological instruments of neorealism and the theory of regional security complexes (TRSC).

Structural Factors and Security Relations in Regional Political Systems

Structuralism of Kenneth N. Waltz and the Theory of Regional Security Complexes. At the theoretical level, neorealism offers the most detailed explanation of the structural factors of the conduct of states. According to Kenneth N. Waltz, who was the first to formulate this theory, the structure of the international political system, which stems from interaction of its elements (states), is responsible for its conduct.[2] The anarchical nature of the structure of the international system and the unevenness of power distribution have already created a situation in which survival is seen as the cornerstone of conduct in a world where the security of states remains highly vulnerable.[3] This means that in the neorealist context the conduct of states is mainly determined by the material structure of the international political system.

The classical conception of Regional Security Complexes (RSC) formulated by Barry Buzan[4] is based on a similar approach; it is political factors, or rather the pattern according to which power is spread among the elements, which determine the functionality of RSCs. Here, as well as in the neorealist approach, the conduct of states is determined by their strength/weakness. At the same time, the structuralism offered by Waltz and Buzan is not one and the same thing. Classical (Waltzian) neorealism looks at the structure of the international political system as the result of objective power differentiation among states (among the strongest of them) and ignores the factors at the regional and national level. In his initial RSC conception formulated within the essential structure of the security complex, Buzan, in addition to the principle of the "arrangement of the units" and the "distribution of power among them," envisages the "pattern of amity/enmity."[5] The latter allowed the author to assess the system-level stimulators together with the region-level and unit-level factors when assessing the functionality of an RSC. Later, the securitization conception underpinned this theory. On the whole, however, the political bias of the TRSC was preserved, while the range of functional factors was widened

[2] See: K.N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics,* McGraw-Hill, Boston, 1979, pp. 91-92.

[3] See: Ibid., p. 92.

[4] The concept of the regional security complex was first formulated in 1983 by Barry Buzan in: B. Buzan, *People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations,* Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, 1983. This work, as well as its second edition (B. Buzan, *People, States and Fear. An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era,* Second Edition, Lynne Rienner Publishers Boulder, Colorado, 1991), offered the classical approach to the security complex conception. In later works written by Buzan together with other authors (B. Buzan, O. Wæver, J. de Wilde, *Security. A New Framework for Analysis,* Lynne Rienner Publishers Boulder, London, 1998; B. Buzan, O. Wæver, *Regions and Powers,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003), an attempt was made to go beyond the limits of the classical conception of the security complex. To remedy the main disparities between their present approach and the classical conception of the security complex (concentration on the military and political spheres of interstate relations and insufficient attention to the non-state actors, the conduct of which creates additional vectors of intersectoral interdependence), the authors postulated two types of security complexes—homogeneous and heterogeneous—as well as the securitization conception.

[5] B. Buzan, People, *States and Fear. An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era,* p. 211; B. Buzan, O. Wæver, J. de Wilde, op. cit., p. 13.

and the dependence between them and the objective distribution of power in the international system was loosened.

In fact, the latest changes in the TRSC do not so much devalue the impact of structural factors on states' conduct as try to fit them into the limits of individual regions and study them with due account of their regional specifics (ethnicities, confessions, the history of their relations, etc.). The structure itself, which is no longer an international but a regional political system, preserves its role as an important endogenous assessment parameter. The pattern of power distribution among the members of an RSC directly affects the stability/instability of its political structure.

The evolution of any RSC is, among other things, a process of structural stabilization or, to put it differently, a transfer from an unstable to a stable political structure. For obvious reasons, the initial stages of RSC development presupposed the presence of an unstable political structure; this is where an assessment of their structural specifics should begin.

Stability/Instability of a Political Structure: The Key Parameters. What is implied by the "instability of a political structure?" Is it enough to associate this with any other description of participating states in a regional security system, such as aggregate national power or the sociopolitical cohesion level (which can be identified in the TRSC)? Both are correct, but they are not enough to completely understand the phenomenon.

I am convinced that when talking about instability of a political structure we should treat it as a sum-total of three aspects: first, inner weakness of the states inside the regional system; second, asymmetry of strength and vulnerability among these states (structural asymmetry); and third, undeveloped, or rather immature, relations among these states.

"Strong" and "weak" states. The RSC model presupposes a direct dependence between the functioning of weak and internally vulnerable states and the negative dynamics of their relations.[6] According to Buzan, the level of sociopolitical cohesion is the criterion of the state's strength/weakness.

What at first glance looks like a simplification in using the criterion of strength/weakness as the key one applied to the systems of postmodern states[7] does not depreciate its relevance to the regional systems of Central Eurasia (the subject of the present article), which are still far removed from postmodernity. This can be used as the central criterion in our assessment of the strength/weakness of the target regions of the present article; this mainly corresponds to the present level of their development.[8]

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[6] See: B. Buzan, *People, States and Fear. An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 106.

[7] When assessing the sociopolitical development of contemporary states, Buzan and Wæver have identified three types/ levels—pre-modern states (low development level of inner sociopolitical cohesion and state organization, weak governmental control over the territory and population); modern states (strong governmental control of society; limited openness, the sanctity of sovereignty and independence and its attributes, including territory and borders, placing the stakes on self-sufficiency, self-reliance, and national identity); and postmodern states with relatively moderate sanctity of sovereignty, independence and national identity, economic, political and cultural openness to the world (for more detail, see: B. Buzan, O. Wæver, op. cit., pp. 23-24).

[8] On the whole, the strength and weakness concepts are fairly abstract and too relative to provide a criterion of their assessment for all cases. What may be considered as a strength in one state could be felt as a weakness in another. This relativity rests on the objectively different development levels of states and regional interstate systems. The types of postmodern and modern states differ greatly. For example, in a postmodern state, decentralization of power and federalization are no longer its weaknesses, but rather a condition of domestic policy which feeds dynamic and balanced economic growth and, therefore, the state's inner strength. The same phenomena in a modern state might breed, at least in the short term, political fragmentation and separatism and, by the same token, make it weaker and more vulnerable. This means that Buzan's criterion looks somewhat oversimplified when applied to the postmodern standards, however, when applied to the states of Central Eurasia as the key one, it mainly fits their current social, political, economic, and cultural structure.

This criterion is not the only one: when dealing with the modern state we should turn to some of its other classical parameters, viz. economic and military capabilities.[9] Today, all states, including those which have moved into post-modernity, still need the capability to support and defense themselves.

Buzan has extended the strength/weakness parameter to powers. According to his classification, a state can be

(1) weak/strong as a state, or

(2) weak/strong as a power.[10]

In the first case, the level of sociopolitical cohesion is the relevant criterion; in the second, it implies military and economic capabilities to extend its influence.[11] In other words, the state can be either strong as a state and a power (the U.S. is a good case in point), or it can be strong as a state and weak as a power (Switzerland), or strong as a power but weak as a state (Russia), or weak as a state and a power (Somalia). The strength/weakness of a state as a state is the key criterion of its impact on regional dynamics. Objectively, a state's weakness, caused by the low level of its sociopolitical cohesion and inadequate economic and defense capabilities, increases vulnerability perceptions in the process of securitization.

In fact, securitization of weak states is determined by the conceptualization of their vulnerabilities; the more numerous, deeper, and more obvious the vulnerabilities, the more they affect the security policy of the state. At the regional level, this adds to the negative dynamics in security relations: according to the logic of neorealism in the conditions of anarchy and self-reliance, the state, aware of its own weaknesses, tries to capitalize on the vulnerability of its neighbors to prevent them from becoming a threat to its own security. The neighbors reciprocate in kind, which inevitably causes conflicts.

There is also a domestic political context: weakness caused by the low level of sociopolitical cohesion means that there is no stability between political institutions and society: the political institutions are unable to rule effectively. In these conditions, the political elite has no choice but to use the state's objective vulnerabilities for political purposes at home to regulate, in particular, its relations with all sorts of political groups. In other words, by politicizing its vulnerabilities, the elite seeks the sociopolitical cohesion a weak state badly needs; this is accompanied by stronger securitization of these vulnerabilities.

It is important that the aims of sociopolitical consolidation do not presuppose that there are threats inside the state; therefore, external threats are used for this purpose. On the whole, attempts to achieve sociopolitical consolidation by identifying external enemies and shifting the burden of responsibility for domestic problems onto them are not new. One thing, however, merits our attention: this instrument is normally used by weak states—take North Korea, Iran, and Cuba, for example. Relations of this sort isolate the state or may even trigger a war. More likely than not, this situation creates a lot of tension in regions composed of weak states.

The stability/instability of the political structure of the regional security system is strongly affected by the way strength/weakness and vulnerability/invulnerability are distributed among the region's states.

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[9] The table in the next section of this article supplies economic and military parameters that are indispensable for assessing states' relative strength/weakness: GDP, per capita GDP, GDP growth rates, military budget, the size of military forces and the main type of military hardware.

[10] See: B. Buzan, *People, States and Fear. An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 97.

[11] See: Ibidem.

Like any other systemic organization, the regional security system is based on a close interconnection of its elements. In the classical TRSC, this interconnection (or rather interdependence) exists in the sphere of central (fundamental) interests of national security.[12] This is what distinguishes individual RSCs. In other words, here we are dealing with the regionally organized interdependence of states related to the key security issues generated both objectively and subjectively (perceptually). In classical conditions, the anarchic nature of the regional political system and geographic proximity of the states within it, as well as vulnerability/invulnerability, develop into the key security issues that incorporate states, both materially and perceptually, into the model now known as the regional security complex.

At the same time, our perception of these parameters through the prism of security is relative: any state assesses the level of its strength and vulnerability by comparing it to the same indices of its neighbors and acting accordingly, which, in compliance with a systemic approach and interdependence, stimulate neighbors' perceptions and conduct. In this context, the degree of instability of the region's political structure largely depends on the extent to which strength/weakness and vulnerability/invulnerability differ from state to state; in other words, instability depends on the degree of asymmetry of strength and vulnerability among the region's states. The higher the degree of symmetry among these parameters, the more stable the relations among the states and the more stable the regional political structure as a whole.

Symmetrical and asymmetrical regional security systems. It is easy to see how the dependence between the regional asymmetry of strength and vulnerability, on the one hand, and the instability of a RSC's political structure, on the other, can be further developed to demonstrate how the perception of a state's own relative weakness and vulnerability can affect its relations with its neighbors. For better results, this situation should be regarded within the framework of the four conventional models of regional security systems with different degrees of symmetry/asymmetry of strength and vulnerability of the corresponding states:

- *A positively symmetrical regional security system*—all states are equally strong while their mutual vulnerability is at more or less the same level.
- *A negatively symmetrical regional security system*—all states are more or less equally weak and exist at more or less the same level of mutual vulnerability.
- *A positively asymmetrical regional security system*—some states are strong and others are weak, while the degree of vulnerability of the former to the latter is much lower than the degree to which the latter are vulnerable to the former. Furthermore, the former prevail in the system both qualitatively and quantitatively (there are more strong states than weak ones).
- *A negatively asymmetrical regional security system*—some states are strong and others are weak, while the degree of vulnerability of the former to the latter is much lower than the degree to which the latter are vulnerable to the former. The weak states outnumber the strong ones, while the qualitative capabilities of the strong states are not sufficient to affect regional relations in any noticeable way.

The first model can be described as the most stable regional political structure, at least because its members are less exposed to the acute securitization of their own relative weakness. A strong state implies the low level of its security vulnerabilities, hence, the low capabilities for its neighbors to capitalize on them.

[12] See: B. Buzan, *People, States and Fear. An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 190.

On the regional scale, such states, or their majority, which allows them to dominate in the region (as in the positively asymmetrical regional system), create fewer opportunities to manipulate the vulnerability of others and, in this way, stabilize the system's political structure. Even if these states function at a high level of vulnerability, the very fact that their weaknesses are symmetrical decreases the chances of destabilization. Parallels are found in the sphere of international trade when "trade" or "tariff wars," were discontinued due to the economic phenomenon Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye described as "symmetrical interdependence."[13] States that depend on one another to an equal degree for their security are less inclined to capitalize on their vulnerabilities than those states that are unequally (asymmetrically) dependent. The logic is obvious: if you exploit the weaknesses of your neighbor, it may reciprocate by targeting the weak points of your security. The mutual damage will be almost identical.

The negatively asymmetrical regional security system is less favorable in terms of political structure stability. The arguments are the same: on the one hand, the weakness of most states leads to enhanced securitization of vulnerabilities and preventive aggressiveness; while on the other, the asymmetry of vulnerability among the states tempts the stronger states to exploit the vulnerability of their weaker neighbors. The second model—the negatively symmetrical regional system—also cannot be described as conducive to political structure stability. The equal (symmetrical) dependence of states on one another for their security restrains them, however their general weakness and individual high vulnerability level prevent them from establishing stable relations inside the region.

Maturity and immaturity of security relations. The immature relations among states are another factor of instability of a regional political structure. It basically arises from the absence of shared interests and cooperative practice in interstate relations.

In the absence of cooperative practice, regional relations become highly unstable for the simple reason that the response of the opponent(s) to any of the common problems is unpredictable. This situation can be viewed through the prism of a structuralistic interpretation of states' conduct (in particular through a mechanism of the security dilemma). The situation does not relate to the classical Waltzian formula[14]; it fits more to Buzan's structuralism, which looks at the anarchical nature of a structure and its impact on states' conduct, while anarchy develops from immature to mature one.[15] Though, this is an insufficient explanation at the theoretical level and calls for specification of the practice of inter-societal relations.

The social constructivist approach supplies an important contribution: it concentrates on practice that creates "social structures," the security dilemma being one of them. According to Alexander Wendt, the entire process of interaction between societies produce and reproduce social structures either into cooperative or conflicting ones, which, in turn, is responsible for the actors' identities and interests.[16]

Even though the maturity of interstate relations is connected with strength/weakness, it remains a very specific parameter of structural (in)stability. (Im)maturity of relations is not a direct product of states' strength or weakness; it is determined by a socially and practically confirmed bias toward exploiting (manipulating) the weaknesses (vulnerabilities) of the opponents for the sake of its own polit-

[13] The "asymmetry" and "symmetry" parameters are used along with others to assess the stabilizing effect of economic interdependence between states (see: R.O. Keohane, J. Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, Third Edition, Longman, Boston, 2001, p. 157).

[14] Waltz treats the anarchic nature of the structure of the international political system (its maturity levels, in particular) as universalist, that is, he does not distinguish between the maturity levels of anarchy and the specifics of the impact of different maturity levels on the way states behave.

[15] See: B. Buzan, *People, States and Fear. An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, pp. 174-181.

[16] See: A. Wendt, "Constructing International Politics," *International Security*, Vol. 20, Issue 1, Summer 1995, p. 81.

ical interests. Maturity is, therefore, a quality of the state duads (systems), in which the level of confidence is sufficient for cooperation among states, at least in the solution of common security issues. The highest degree of maturity is reached when a state is prepared to sacrifice its sovereignty for the sake of a common political entity, that is, for political integration.

Mature relations are not necessarily limited to strong states. States can have different degrees of sociopolitical cohesion and be at the same time close allies. It should be said that today mature relations between strong states are much more frequent than between weak states. Two main factors come into play here: the social affinity/diversity between states and the practice of their relations. The former is ensured by ethnic, linguistic, and confessional specifics and shared or not shared political values (institutions and ideologies). The latter is created by the states' history: what prevails in the history of their relations—amity or enmity. In other words, confidential relations among states, the predictability of their conduct and, therefore, their cooperative relations depend on their social affinity, friendly relations, and the absence of conflicts in the past.

Regions of Post-Soviet Central Eurasia under the Impact of Structural Factors

The Central Eurasian Segments of the Political System of the Post-Soviet Space. Central Europe, the Central Caucasus, and Central Asia belong to negatively asymmetric regional security systems. However, this is true of the entire post-Soviet space.

In my previous works, I tried to specify the post-Soviet regional security system. In my opinion, if we exclude the transformational trends, today the three regions (Central Europe, the Central Caucasus, and Central Asia) can be treated as regional security complexes. Together with Russia as the system's only pole of power, they form the Post-Soviet Security Macrocomplex (PSM).[17]

The PSM is obviously asymmetrical in terms of the strengths/weaknesses, threats, and vulnerabilities; it is created mainly by the states with weak sociopolitical cohesion and inadequate cooperative experience in regulating the security dilemmas present in their relations. The numerous conflicts still broiling in this space are the best evidence of the above.

Even if we disengage ourselves from any common macro system and contemplate the Central European, Central Caucasian, and Central Asian RSCs as individual and independent units, we cannot miss the fact that they are mainly unstable political structures. The degree of this instability differs from one RSC to another because of the different parameters described above. The table (on pp. 86-91) offers a glimpse of some of the qualitative and quantitative descriptions of the countries on which the regional specifics of post- Soviet Central Eurasia depend.

The Regions' Political Structure at the Initial Development Stage and the Role of the Exogenous Factors. The figures quoted below vividly illustrate the current specifics of the political structure of the three RSCs. In order to gain an authentic idea of their structures' development, we need to return to the period of their restoration, that is, the early 1990s.

[17] For more detail, see: J. Eyvazov, "Some Aspects of the Theory of Regional Security Complexes as Applied to Studies of the Political System in the Post-Soviet Space," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 12, Issue 2, 2011, pp. 17-24; J. Eyvazov, "Central Eurasia through the Prism of Security: A Regional System or a Sub-System?" *The Caucasus & Globalization*, Vol. 5, Issue 1-2, 2011, pp. 6-15.

Table

Certain Economic, Military, and Sociopolitical Descriptions of the States of the Central European, Central Caucasian, and Central Asian RSCs (2010)

No.	State	GDP ($b)	GDP Growth Rates (%)	Per Capita GDP ($)	Military Budget ($m)	Population	Numerical Strength of Armed Forces	Main Type of Military Hardware					The Most Serious Challenges to Sociopolitical Cohesion
								Main Battle Tanks	Infantry Fighting Vehicles/Armed Vehicles	Guns	Air Forces (aircraft/ helicopters)	Navy (warships/ submarines)	
1	Armenia	9.23	1.2	2,987	434.0	3,090,379	48,570	110	104/136	239	16/33	—	Territorial claims which cause open and latent conflicts in relations with neighbors—Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh), Turkey (Eastern Anatolia), Georgia (Javakhetia)—and the resultant isolation from the main economically profitable regional energy and transportation projects (BTC, BTE, KATB); dependence on external actors (Russia, the diaspora).
2	Azerbaijan	52.2	2.3	5,846	1,590.0	8,933,928	66,940	339	111/357	425	41/35	18/ -	Conflict with Armenia, occupation of southwestern regions and related sociopolitical and economic problems; potential threat of separatism in the areas where ethnic minorities live in compact communities,

Table (continued)

No.	State	GDP ($b)	GDP Growth Rates (%)	Per Capita GDP ($)	Military Budget ($m)	Population	Numerical Strength of Armed Forces	Main Type of Military Hardware					The Most Serious Challenges to Sociopolitical Cohesion
								Main Battle Tanks	Infantry Fighting Vehicles/Armed Vehicles	Guns	Air Forces (aircraft/ helicopters)	Navy (warships/ submarines)	
													tension with some of the neighboring powers caused by their regional and ethnic policy (Iran, Russia).
3	Belarus	53.8	2.4	5,608	716.0	9,587,940	72,940	515	1,078/280	1003	133/238	—	Inflexible (Soviet-style) regime, repressive methods of governance which caused international isolation (mainly by the U.S. and EU) and pro-Russian orientation, resulting in considerable economic dependence on Russia for export of consumer goods and energy resources.
4	Georgia	11.3	4.5	2,690	420.0	4,219,191	20,655	93	63/137	185	12/29	17/ -	Conflict in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which Tbilisi no longer controls; forced migrants; separatist threats in other places where ethnic minorities live in compact communities; continued tension with Russia and its military,

Table (continued)

No.	State	GDP ($b)	GDP Growth Rates (%)	Per Capita GDP ($)	Military Budget ($m)	Population	Numerical Strength of Armed Forces	Main Type of Military Hardware					The Most Serious Challenges to Sociopolitical Cohesion
								Main Battle Tanks	Infantry Fighting Vehicles/Armed Vehicles	Guns	Air Forces (aircraft/ helicopters)	Navy (warships/ submarines)	
													political, and economic repercussions (the August 2008 war; recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Russia; the increase and legalization of Russian military presence in these regions and the loss of the Russian market for Georgian products).
5	Kazakhstan	127.0	6.0	8,081	1,120.0	15,753,460	49,000	980	1,520/370	1,460	162/116	17/ -	Still unregulated legal status of the Caspian; dependence on external actors (Russia) when it comes to transporting energy resources to the world markets; latent conflicts with Uzbekistan—border issues and rivalry for regional leadership.
6	Kyrgyzstan	4.53	2.2	815	96.0	5,550,239	10,900	150	320/35	246	52/32	—	Weak system of state governance, political

Table (continued)

Table (continued)

No.	State	GDP ($b)	GDP Growth Rates (%)	Per Capita GDP ($)	Military Budget ($m)	Population	Numerical Strength of Armed Forces	Main Type of Military Hardware					The Most Serious Challenges to Sociopolitical Cohesion
								Main Battle Tanks	Infantry Fighting Vehicles/Armed Vehicles	Guns	Air Forces (aircraft/ helicopters)	Navy (warships/ submarines)	
													instability inside the country responsible for the violent regime changes in 2005 and 2010; this and relatively poor natural resources are responsible for the country's poorly developed economy. Unsettled contradictions with Uzbekistan—border in the Ferghana Valley, water resources, trans-border activity of radical Islamic structures; economic and security dependence on external actors (Russia, China, and Kazakhstan).
7	Moldova	5.38	2.5	1,505	16.0	3,575,574	5,354	—	44/164	148	- /6	—	Continued division of the country because of the Transnistrian conflict; economic decline and dependence on external actors (Russia and the EU) caused by the conflict and lack of natural resources.

Table (continued)

No.	State	GDP ($b)	GDP Growth Rates (%)	Per Capita GDP ($)	Military Budget ($m)	Population	Numerical Strength of Armed Forces	Main Type of Military Hardware					The Most Serious Challenges to Sociopolitical Cohesion
								Main Battle Tanks	Infantry Fighting Vehicles/Armed Vehicles	Guns	Air Forces (aircraft/ helicopters)	Navy (warships/ submarines)	
8	Tajikistan	5.72	5.5	808	84.0	7,074,845	8,800	37	23/23	23	- /16	—	The still unresolved repercussions of the civil war of 1992-1997; weak state governance, political instability, economic decline; continued economic (labor migration and investments) and security dependence on Russia; weak control of the Afghan border and destructive impact of Afghan instability—radical Islamic groups and drug trafficking; continued tension with Uzbekistan caused by the unsettled border and water-use issues, trans-border activities of radical Islamic organizations.
9	Turkmenistan	19.9	11.0	3,849	261.0	5,176,502	22,000	680	942/829	564	94/18	6/ -	Inflexible closed political regime; continued tension with Uzbekistan over the use of water of the Amu Darya and with the Caspian

Table (continued)

No.	State	GDP ($b)	GDP Growth Rates (%)	Per Capita GDP ($)	Military Budget ($m)	Population	Numerical Strength of Armed Forces	Main Type of Military Hardware					The Most Serious Challenges to Sociopolitical Cohesion
								Main Battle Tanks	Infantry Fighting Vehicles/Armed Vehicles	Guns	Air Forces (aircraft/ helicopters)	Navy (warships/ submarines)	
													states over offshore oil and gas fields.
10	Ukraine	137.0	3.0	3,005	1,430.0	45,433,415	129,925	2,988	3,028/1,432	3,351	221/292	48/1	Internal instability, which in 2004 took the form of the Orange Revolution, society split over political and church identity, the Crimea issue, tension with Russia, on which the country depends for energy resources.
11	Uzbekistan	37.6	8.2	1,352	1,420.0	27,794,296	67,000	340	399/309	487+	135/110	—	Inflexible closed repressive political regime which found itself in political isolation (maintained mainly by the U.S. and EU); economic problems; active radical Islamic organizations and tension with neighbors over water use, borders, radical Islamic groups, and refugees.

Source: *The Military Balance 2011*, The International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 2011.

On the whole, the entire PSM was engulfed by a wave of armed conflicts among the states or inside them with a greater or lesser degree of external intervention. This can be described as a point of reckoning, the beginning of the development of this political structure, and an important stability/instability indicator. In the early 1990s, the vehemence of the conflicts and their dynamics differed from one post-Soviet region to another.

Ethnopolitical conflicts unfolded dynamically in the Central Caucasus, much faster than in the two other Central Eurasian RSCs, that allow us to detect their more precise ties with the inner weaknesses of the regional states and, as a result, with the instability of the region's political structure.[18]

The early period of post-Soviet independence of the Central Caucasian states (1991-1994) can be described as a period of their greatest inner weakness. This was when regional security relations reached their peak of negativity. Inner weakness and political instability were largely the product of specific objective features of the sociopolitical, economic, ideological, and axiological context created by the Soviet Union's unexpectedly rapid disintegration. At the beginning of the long road of post-Soviet development the states had to deal with the social and economic difficulties created by the need to transfer to a market economy; considerable shortcomings in distribution of economic resources inside society; the quest for national identity; the exacerbation of ethnopolitical conflicts; inadequate legitimacy and de facto impotent central governments; and the lack of necessary political skills of the new generation of political leaders.

It was at this stage of post-Soviet independence in the Central Caucasus that the Armenian-Azeri war reached its peak, as well as the civil war and armed ethnopolitical conflicts in Georgia (South Ossetia and Abkhazia).

Only one of the conflicts in Central Europe, in Moldova, developed into armed clashes. The latent confrontation in the Crimea and the inner weakness of Ukraine remain functionally interconnected. In the first and second cases, the conflicts reflected, among other things, the low level of sociopolitical cohesion. In both cases, there were endogenous political factors together with an exogenous factor, Russia's indirect presence.[19]

Irrespective of the answer to the question of whether the conflicts in these regional systems were caused by endogenous factors or developed under the impact of external forces, one thing is clear: weakness and the low level of sociopolitical cohesion of the regional states made the external geopolitical impact effective. This is true of the entire post-Soviet space and is amply confirmed by the comparison between the Central Caucasus and Central Europe and the Baltic states, another post-Soviet area.

The three Baltic states are fairly heterogeneous in the ethnic and confessional respect; their numerous communities are tied ethnically and linguistically to Russia.[20] All the newly independent states felt the impact of the economic and sociocultural disintegration of the Union state; Russia's geopolitical interest in retaining its domination in the Baltic region was as strong as, for instance, in Central Europe. This means that if we regard the exogenous political factors as the most important,

[18] Some authors have investigated the links between ethnopolitical conflicts in the post-Soviet Caucasus and the region's structural instability (see, for example: N. MacFarlane, "The Structure of Instability in the Caucasus," *Internationale Politik und Geselschaft—International Politics and Society*, No. 4, 1995, p. 385; R. Sokolsky, T. Charlick-Paley, *NATO and Caspian Security. A Mission Too Far?* Rand Corporation, Washington, 1999, pp. 9, 13-14; S.E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers. A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus*, Curzon Press, U.K., 2001, p. 52).

[19] Russia is part of the PSM along with the Central Eurasian RSCs. The term "exogenous" as applied to Russia's impact on these RSCs should take into account their interconnection in the unified PSM structure.

[20] In 2009, ethnic Russians in Estonia comprised about 26% of the total population; in 1989, on the eve of the Soviet Union's disintegration, Russians made up 30% of the population. The figures for Latvia are about 30% in 2009 and 34% in 1989; and about 6% in 2009 and 9.4% in 1989 in Lithuania.

along with the ethnic and confessional structure of the post-Soviet space, the Baltic states were more prone to conflicts than Central European. Things proved different in reality. The three Baltic states sailed through the transition period without conflicts; in 2004, they acceded the EU and joined NATO; in Central Europe, meanwhile, external factors are still actively manipulating the conflict potential of the regional states.

This shows that the inner strength/weakness factor plays an important role in the dynamics of security relations within the corresponding RSCs. At the same time, this factor alone, as well as all the other factors (ethnic, confessional, and economic) taken separately, are insufficient for a complete understanding of the functionality and development of these RSCs. We should also bear in mind the specifics of their combinations in these spaces, as well as the impact produced by exogenous political impulses (relating to the activity of the other PSM elements and to external poles of power).

The high instability level of the political structure is not necessarily accompanied by obviously dominating conflict dynamics of interstate relations. This parameter depends more on exogenous political rather than endogenous factors. Indeed, despite their far from simple ethnoterritorial specifics, the Baltic states can be described as a relatively stable political structure. The region's geopolitical openness, caused in particular by the centers of influence in the West and their interest in the region, has balanced out the impact applied by its political environment. This promoted their relatively rapid, painless, and symmetrical transformation, as well as their strengthening; their relations became mature, which added stability to the Baltic political structure of the Baltic region.

The above-mentioned logic is confirmed by the empirics of the political structure in the Central Asian RSC. Here too, the transfer to anarchy (caused by the rapid disintegration of the U.S.S.R.) was also accompanied by the weakening of its political units. Still, its influence on security relations in this RSC and the level of conflict potential differed greatly from what took place in Central Europe and the Central Caucasus.

The events in Uzbekistan of the late 1980s (in Ferghana) and the civil war in Tajikistan in the early 1990s were the most obvious outbursts of conflict in post-Soviet Central Asia. At the same time, the former and, to a great extent, the latter were much more localized than the events in the Central Caucasus. They did not develop into sustainable and open seats of interstate conflict in the region. As distinct from the conflicts in the other two RSCs, they were finally settled with the active involvement of other states/powers (especially in the case of the domestic conflict in Tajikistan). The role of neighbors and external powers took different forms (for example, Uzbekistan latently supported the northern Khujand (Leninabad) group,[21] while Russia openly helped to stabilize the situation by transferring power to Imomali Rakhmon[22]).

The situation around Tajikistan or, to be more exact, its inner weakness threatened to undermine stability of the developing regional political structure of Central Asian RSC. The importance of this destabilizing effect along with Tajikistan's inner weakness is explained by the republic's

[21] The northern part of Tajikistan (Khujand, formerly the Leninabad region) with a predominantly Uzbek population was much more advanced economically (during Soviet power) than the rest of the republic. This part of Tajikistan was ethnically and economically closer to Uzbekistan. Under Soviet power, the republic was ruled mainly by people from Khujand. In post-Soviet times, the South tried to remove people from the North from their commanding posts. Along with other reasons, this contributed to the confrontation in the republic. In fact, the advent to power of Imomali Rakhmon, who was from Kulob, meant that the Khujand groups suffered a political defeat (see: K. Martin, "Dobro pozhalovat v Leninabadskuiu Respubliku?" *Tsentralnaia Azia*, No. 10, 1997; Ch. Fairbanks, C.R. Nelson, S.F. Starr, K. Weisbrode, *Strategic Assessment of Central Eurasia*, The Atlantic Council of the United States, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Johns Hopkins University, Washington D.C., 2001, pp. 14, 21).

[22] See: L. Jonson, "Russian Policy and Tajikistan," *Central Asia*, No. 8, 1997, available at [http://www.ca-c.org/dataeng/st_03_jonson.shtml].

geographic location, its strategic importance for Russia as the southern frontier of the so-called Near Abroad.

The republic's weakness bordering on its potentially complete collapse as a state would have attracted stronger states willing to fill the political vacuum. As was mentioned above the powers (or the countries willing to acquire this status) looked at control over Tajikistan as a strategic advantage created by the country's geographic location.

In fact, since the early 1990s, this Central Asian state has been developing into an arena of rivalry among external forces seeking domination in Tajikistan's political space. This could have destabilized relations among the external actors. In particular, the conflicting political interests in Tajikistan caused tension, to say the least, between Russia and Uzbekistan in the mid- and late 1990s[23]; Uzbekistan was seeking closer relations with and support of the West.

Moreover, these specifics of Tajikistan's inner development made it the main corridor between Central Asia and instability in Afghanistan. From the very beginning, the states of the Central Asian RSC regarded Afghanistan as a source of existential threats to their security. It became a transit territory through which drugs and religious radicalism spread across the post-Soviet space. Accordingly, when dealing with Tajikistan, external actors never lose sight of the Afghan factor; this is particularly true of Russia and Uzbekistan.

The republic's weakness created conditions for Russia's continued military presence in its territory.[24] Russia's military presence is explained, to an equal extent, by its regional geopolitical approaches and its conduct and by Tajikistan's political weakness and vulnerability. Whereas we may wish to disregard the possibility that Russia, while seeking control over the Near Abroad, provoked confrontation inside Tajikistan, we have to admit that Russia's military presence stemmed the conflict. At the same time, the meaning of this involvement (in the context of the (un)stable political structure in the Central Asian RSC) is highly ambiguous, to say the least.

On the one hand, Russia's military contingent, first, helped to concentrate political power in the country, which was rapidly falling apart; and second, the country became less vulnerable to the negative activity of external forces (not only neighboring states, but also all sorts of criminal and radical religious groups which used Tajikistan to move drugs across its territory and spread political Islam). This stabilized the region's political structure, but we cannot help but wonder how long Russia's military presence will stabilize the situation inside the country and around it.

The political elite of Tajikistan cannot be described as the product of a sociopolitical decision achieved by Tajik society itself. It is a product of the competing external players (Russia and Uzbekistan, in particular) or, rather, the victory of the former over the latter. Russia's continued military presence does not guarantee that this model of Tajikistan's national-state development will lead to sociopolitical and economic strengthening of the country. In fact, the opposite is true: from the very beginning Russia's military presence protected the pro-Russian regime of President Rakhmon. It is intended to stem all forces and processes (both inside and outside the country) that might distort the present political orientation and guarantee this protection in full accordance with Realpolitik.

Since Russia's military presence is primarily explained by Tajikistan's internal weakness and vulnerability, we can conclude that Russia's continued and sustainable military presence is explained by the fact that the state remains weak and vulnerable. When Tajikistan becomes stronger and less vulnerable, it will no longer need external guarantors of its security; this will deprive any foreign state of convincing arguments for its military presence in Tajikistan. In other words, Russia will preserve its military contingents in Tajikistan because of its geopolitical interests in Central Asia,[25] if, first, the

[23] This was when Uzbekistan left the CSTO and joined GUAM (1999).

[24] This brings to mind the situation in Georgia in the early 1990s.

[25] In October 2004 the Russian 201st motor rifle division deployed in Tajikistan was transformed into a military base.

country's inner sociopolitical cohesion remains weak, while society and political institutions remain loosely connected, and its economy remains inadequate and the country remains dependent on Russia; second, if tension in its relations with neighbors, particularly Uzbekistan, continues. It should be said that the above fully describes the situation.

This means that just as in the conflicts in Central Europe and the Central Caucasus, external actors were also actively involved in Central Asia (the civil war in Tajikistan). The conflicts in the regions' states were conditioned by the combination of the following factors: the state's inner weakness + its geopolitical importance + external political activity. This brings to mind the situation in Moldova and Georgia. In the case of Tajikistan, the conflict was officially settled; it is believed that the tragic situation in Tajikistan has become history. The situations in Moldova and Georgia have not been settled. Does this mean that the coefficient of sociopolitical cohesion in Tajikistan, plus other parameters of its national strength, is higher than in Moldova and Georgia? The answer is "No" rather than "Yes." The three countries are more or less similar in terms of their levels of inner strength/weakness. The situations are different because of the different level of external political activity and its specifics.

In all three cases, Russia is the main and strongest source of exogenous influence; the three countries—Tajikistan, Moldova, and Georgia—are more or less equally important for Russia. External powers exert a different influence in each of these regions. In the case of Central Asia as a whole (and Tajikistan in particular), Russia is the dominant force; its domination has been achieved and is being stabilized. In the second and third cases, there is no external domination. Today, we are seeing a geopolitical clash in which the conflicts are being used to preserve or even increase external influence in the region. The overlay mechanism within the TRSC can be helpful in the assessment of differences between the cases of Tajikistan, Moldova, and Georgia. In the first case, the inner conflicting dynamics were overlaid by Russia as the dominant force; in the other two cases, this external power is present and competes with the others.

Specifics of (A)Symmetry of Strength and Vulnerability in the Regions. The table shows that the three RSCs consist of states with a low level of sociopolitical cohesion; there is also an obvious asymmetry of strength/weakness among them.

In the Central European RSC, Belarus has the highest coefficient of sociopolitical cohesion. Compared with the other two states, it is more stable internally; its post-Soviet development has been relatively free from conflict.

Ukraine follows suit with a much lower level of sociopolitical cohesion; Moldova is even less cohesive. One can draw this conclusion relying on the dynamics and sociopolitical results of the conflicts in each of them. In both countries, society is obviously split, albeit to different degrees. In Moldova, the Transnistrian conflict de facto detached part of the territory (about 12%), together with people who live in it, from the rest of the republic. This can hardly be described as an ethnic conflict since about 30% of the breakaway Transnistria is composed of ethnic Moldavians, the titular nation of the Republic of Moldova.

All the territories in Ukraine remain under control, however continued tension in the Crimea might detonate the situation. The country could be divided along the west-east line. As in Moldova, the "Ukrainian split" is not a purely ethnic phenomenon; it has political and Church dimensions.

It should be said that the predominantly political nature of the inner social split is confirmed by the fact that those who disagree with the official policy (in Ukraine this disagreement cropped up under President Yushchenko in 2005-2010, who looked to the West and wanted integration with NATO and the EU) want closer cooperation with Russia up to and including reintegration. This is another case of an obvious connection between political structure (in)stability and exogenous political factors. The Church crisis in Ukraine, which has been dragging on for a long time (caused by

the split between the supporters of the Kiev and Moscow patriarchates), also demonstrates obvious political hues.[26]

It seems that in the future, too, Moldova and Ukraine will remain less cohesive socially and politically than Belarus. Despite the highly specific regime of President Lukashenko and the related internal and external pressure, the challenges to Belarusian cohesion are less dangerous for the country's security than in the other two countries of the Central European RSC. Different combinations of endogenous and exogenous factors produce different effects. In the case of Belarus, even more or less considerable destabilization of the regime will not add either an ethnic (as in Moldova) or an ethnic and Church (as in Ukraine) split to the sociopolitical dissent.

The exogenous political factor is manifested differently in these states. In view of the relatively stable pro-Russian social and political identity in Belarus,[27] destabilization will urge Russia to help preserve the country. This is not the case in Ukraine and Moldova, which seek European integration.

The structural asymmetry of the Central European RSC is demonstrated in economic and military parameters: the table shows that Ukraine is much stronger in these respects than Belarus and Moldova. At the same time, the military-political configuration in this RSC is largely determined from the outside. According to the logic of regional interdependence formulated by the TRSC, Ukraine and Belarus, the two strongest states, should be the main rivals. In fact, the rivalry in the duad hinges on their relations with the Russian Federation. The sum-total of the indices of its national strength makes Ukraine Russia's most important rival in the post-Soviet space. Ukraine and Moldova perceive Russia as a threat to their security, which forced them to draw closer together. This confirms that the PSM idea is highly topical and that the Central European, Central Caucasian, and Central Asian RSCs should be regarded as PSM sub-systems.

Structural asymmetry is no less obvious in the other two RSCs; their different levels of sociopolitical cohesion add to the regions' structural instability caused by different levels of military and economic parameters.

It is much harder to assess the degree to which structural specifics affect the situation in the Central Caucasus. Though, as distinct from Central Europe, in the Central Caucasian RSC security dynamics are more localized, which calls, in particular, for a more precise definition of the political structure proper. However, in view of the region's far more complicated ethnic and confessional specifics, relations among the individual elements of the political structure are strongly affected by non-political factors. This makes it harder to identify the interconnection between the political structure and the conduct of states (its elements).

The three states of the Central Caucasian RSC are fairly vulnerable in terms of their sociopolitical cohesion. From time to time their vulnerability is obviously associated with what their neighbors do. In the early 1990s, armed conflicts deprived two of the states (Azerbaijan and Georgia) of control over parts of their territory populated by ethnic minorities. The inner tension in Georgia is fed by the continued tension with Russia. In August 2008, it developed into a war. Georgia's relatively weak economic potential allows us to describe the challenges to its sociopolitical cohesion as much more obvious than in the case of Azerbaijan and Armenia.

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[26] The Ukrainian authorities tried to detach Ukrainian Orthodoxy from Russia to play down the impact of the Russian Orthodox Church and increase the religious distance between Ukraine and Russia by setting up a single local Orthodox Church. President Yushchenko spoke in June 2008 during the celebration of the 1020th anniversary of the introduction of Christianity into Russia about the necessity of setting up a single local Orthodox Church in Ukraine.

[27] In the post-Soviet period, Belarus has been much more oriented toward Russia than the other Soviet successor states. It is a member of all the major Kremlin-initiated post-Soviet reintegration alliances—the CIS, the CSTO, the Union State of Russia and Belarus, the EurAsEC, the Customs Union, and the Common Economic Space.

In the Armenia-Azerbaijan duad the former is less vulnerable because of its ethnic and religious homogeneity, among other things. At the same time, these countries' negative interdependence due to their involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Armenia's weak economy, as well as its dependence on external actors, equalizes risks to the sociopolitical instability in both states.

As a result of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan lost about one fifth of its territory (the part very important in the cultural-civilizational respect). During the war of 1991-1993, each of Armenia's military successes plunged Azerbaijan into a grave political crisis and regime change. Today, the Nagorno-Karabakh issue remains the most important factor of the split/unity of Azerbaijani society.

Armenia, which won the war and established its control over this part of Azerbaijan populated by Armenians, has to spend more on the arms race; the logic of the security dilemma has made it dependent on external actors (Russia) for its security; it was excluded from the economically advantageous regional transportation and energy projects and must be prepared to confront its economically stronger opponent. This can hardly be described as a positive factor when assessing the sociopolitical situation in Armenia. The political crisis during the last presidential election of February 2008 demonstrated that society was split and there was no agreement on the issues described above.[28]

The Nagorno-Karabakh issue, which ties the two countries together, determines the dynamics of their military and political rivalry in the region. This also explains the asymmetry of strength between them.

Both Armenia and Azerbaijan regard this territory as a vitally important component of their national security. Azerbaijan treats it as part of its territory according to international law; its loss might weaken its position in the regional balance of power. Given the military-strategic specifics of Azerbaijan's central and western parts and Armenia's military-technical capabilities, Armenia's continued military control of Nagorno-Karabakh (even if Azerbaijan restored its sovereignty over the valley regions of Karabakh) will threaten a large part of Azerbaijan's territory (crisscrossed by the Baku-Supsa and Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipelines and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline—the main sources of the republic's income).

At the same time, as most other multinational states, Azerbaijan cannot relinquish part of its territory in order to avoid a possible domino effect; other compact ethnic communities might try to detach themselves from Azerbaijan. In 1993, the country found itself on the brink of similar developments when there were attempts to set up a Talysh-Mugan Republic in the southeast of Azerbaijan.

Armenia, in turn, is seeking control of Nagorno-Karabakh because of its mainly Armenian population, which fears continued Azeri sovereignty over this territory.[29] There is another, structural-political explanation of Armenia's continued occupation of the southwest of Azerbaijan. According to the aggregate indices of its national power (territory, population, and resources), Armenia is much weaker than Azerbaijan. To compensate for the imbalance and in view of the far from simple previous relations, Armenia needed military-strategic advantages in the form of control over the strategically important Nagorno-Karabakh with its predominantly Armenian population.

Today, the Armenia-Azerbaijan duad presents the greatest source of instability in the Central Caucasian RSC and is responsible for the regional arms race. The military and economic inequality of

[28] During the presidential election in Armenia, the bulk of the protesting electorate supported Levon Ter-Petrossian, who wanted integration with the West, less dependence on the Russian Federation, and better relations with neighbors. According to the official figures, he gained 21.5% of the votes against 52.8% gained by Serzh Sargsyan, who represented the ruling party. The opposition accused the country's leaders of falsifications and started mass protest actions; about 10 people died in the armed clashes; a state of emergency was introduced.

[29] See, for example: H. Tchlingirian, "Nagorno-Karabagh: Transition and the Elite," *Central Asian Survey*, No. 18 (4), 1999, p. 445.

the two countries is behind the asymmetry of strength. According to official declarations, the armed forces of Azerbaijan outstrip Armenia (see the Table). However, to assess the real correlation of forces, we should take into account the capabilities of Armenia's armed forces in Nagorno-Karabakh and around it.[30] This presents a different picture: Armenia has many more tanks, infantry fighting and armored vehicles, and guns, while the numerical strength of both sides is more or less the same. For geographical reasons, these components of the armed forces are critically important for establishing a real military balance between the two states.

Azerbaijan is much stronger economically; its military budget is three times larger than that of Armenia. The gap will increase in the course of time because of Azerbaijan's much faster economic growth. However, in the future, the reliance of Azerbaijan's economy on the revenues from the export and transportation of energy resources might develop into a problem.[31]

The obvious signs of military and economic asymmetry bring to mind the Waltzian formula: the "vicious circle" of the security dilemma. The asymmetries are mutually stimulating: Azerbaijan's better economic situation urges Armenia to build up its military capabilities, while Azerbaijan is steadily expanding its economic capabilities to respond to Armenia's efforts in the military sphere. The future for both countries looks sad: large-scale and ineffective economic investments in the military sphere in Azerbaijan vs. still greater military-technical and economic dependence on external actors for Armenia.

Georgia, which has its share of economic problems, tends to spend more on defense. Very much as in the case of the states of the Central European RSC, this is suggested not so much by its relations with its Central Caucasian neighbors as by its relations with Russia or, rather, with the separatist regimes in South Ossetia and Abkhazia supported by the Russian Federation. At the same time, Georgia, as member of other duads, may become involved in other structural asymmetries. Tension in the Georgia-Armenia duad might increase in view of the still burning contradictions over Javakhetia populated by Armenians and the development of mutually advantageous economic cooperation with Azerbaijan.

The table shows that Kazakhstan holds the best position in the Central Asian RSC. This country is more heterogeneous in the ethnic and confessional respect than other regional states, however this is balanced out by the economic factor and cooperative relations with the external centers of power. The challenges are mainly exogenous and are created by the still unresolved legal status of the Caspian; the five coastal states (Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan) have not delineated the sea. There are also problems in relations with Uzbekistan (transborder issues and rivalry over regional leadership).

The global economic crisis of 2008 hit Kazakhstan, which means that economic growth might slow down to deprive Astana of economic instruments for smoothing out objective social problems; this might extend the range of real threats to the country's sociopolitical stability.

Some other states of the Central Asian RSC, too, have economic instruments for smoothing out domestic problems. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan could make use of oil and gas exports as the simplest and fastest way to do this.[32] However, the fairly rigid and relatively isolated political regimes

[30] There are informal military units on the occupied Azeri lands presented as "self-defense forces of Nagorno-Karabakh": there are about 18,000 people, 316 tanks, 324 infantry fighting and armored vehicles, and 322 guns. They should be regarded as part of Armenian's real military capabilities.

[31] According to the official statistics, in 2009 the share of Azerbaijan's oil and gas industry was 44.8% (see: *Azerbaijan in Figures 2010*, State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, available at [http://www.azstat.org/publications/azfigures/2010/en/010.shtml]).

[32] According to certain sources, the proven natural gas reserves in Turkmenistan amount to 4.3% of the world's total; Uzbekistan's share is 0.9% (figures at the end of 2009) (see: *BP Statistical Review of World Energy*, June 2010, p. 22,

and corruption in both countries, which make it difficult to ensure a fair distribution of economic wealth, complicated the situation. Both states (and Tajikistan for that matter) border on Afghanistan, which makes them vulnerable to Afghan instability.

Turkmenistan has much more favorable internal and external conditions.

- First, along with the Russian Federation and Uzbekistan, it is one of the leaders among the former Soviet republics in terms of gas production and export volumes. It has the smallest population in the region, while Uzbekistan has the region's largest population (five times higher than that of Turkmenistan), which limits its chances to resolve the country's problems by exporting energy resources.
- Second, Ashghabad's foreign policy is more consistent; in 1995, the international community recognized its status of permanent neutrality. Its relations with the strong powers are balanced and relatively stable. Uzbekistan, on the other hand, performed several foreign policy U-turns: in 1999, it switched from a pro-Russian to a pro-Western orientation only to beat a retreat in 2005, which does not recommend it as a reliable ally. Uzbekistan is the region's only country with security problems with all of Central Asian neighbors.

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have not moved far enough toward sociopolitical cohesion; they have survived serious upheavals: the civil war in Tajikistan and the two revolutions in Kyrgyzstan (in 2005 and 2010) are the most serious outcrops of the crises of statehood. There are other internal and external factors which do nothing to improve the situation.

- First, as distinct from Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, they have much fewer natural resources to be developed with minimum investments in a maximally short period of time.[33]
- Second, radical religious movements are much stronger in these two countries than in their neighbors; they have already lived through several armed conflicts—the civil war in Tajikistan with obvious religious hues and the Batken events in Kyrgyzstan.
- Third, they are more open to external influence than the other countries: the specific features described above make them dependent on external factors in the political, economic, and military respects.

The structural asymmetry in the Central Asian RSC is further increased by the fairly different military and economic capabilities of its members. Accordingly, the functionality of security dilemma becomes apparent in a varying degree in all the duads of the RSC. At the same time, the states are demonstrating more restraint in their conduct than the countries of the Central Caucasian RSC. One can connect this with their much more homogenous ethnic, linguistic, and confessional structure,[34] which keeps enmities at bay. This is also explained by exogenous political factors: their relative geopolitical affinity, that is, domination of the only external power (Russia) which, in the absence of rivals, tries to consolidate the RSC even though it does not always suppress the negative dynamics of the security dilemma among the region's actors.

The Uzbekistan-Tajikistan duad is one of the best examples of this even though both countries are involved in the same regional organizations (including the security-related CSTO and SCO).

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available at [http://www.bp.com/liveassets/bp_internet/globalbp/globalbp_uk_english/reports_and_publications/statistical_energy_review_2008/STAGING/local_assets/2010_downloads/statistical_review_of_world_energy_full_report_2010.pdf]).

[33] Hydropower engineering is the main energy source in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, although its export is less profitable than the export of oil and gas.

[34] Sunni Islam is the predominant confession in all five states; they are all populated by Turks (with the exception of Tajikistan).

The U-turn Uzbekistan performed in the mid-2000s when it turned to Russia did not improve its relations with Tajikistan.

This prompted Tajikistan, which is much weaker than Uzbekistan in all respects, to seek Russia's protection, which alerted Uzbekistan. The agreement on the legal status of Russia's armed units in Tajik territory the sides signed in April 1999 prompted President of Uzbekistan Karimov to accuse Moscow of failing to consult the region's other countries.[35] In 1999, Uzbekistan left the CSTO and started moving closer to the West, probably because of the Russian-Tajik agreement, among other things.

Ethnic and territorial issues as well as the problem of water use and trans-border activity of radical Islamic organizations (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Hizb ut-Tahrir)[36] add to the destabilizing potential of the power asymmetry in the Uzbekistan-Tajikistan duad.

Relations in the Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan duad are less obvious, but they play an important role in the region's structural (in)stability. The aggregate national power indices of the two countries make them the most probable regional leaders. Within the context of the Central Asian RSC, security relations within the Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan duad are best described by the Waltzian "vicious circle."

Its oil and gas transformed Kazakhstan into the region's economic leader with much stronger military components of its national power. Despite the fact that Uzbekistan is lagging behind in the economic sphere, it has important advantages over the other countries. First, it is the only state with land borders with all the other states of the Central Asian RSC. Second, its population, which is ethnically more homogenous than in the other states, is also the largest. It is twice as large as that of Kazakhstan, while the correlation between the titular and non-titular ethnicities is much more favorable (the region's best) than that of Kazakhstan (the region's worst).

This has inevitably stirred up a lot of concern in Uzbekistan's neighbors in the post-Soviet era. In fact, in the course of time, Uzbekistan's conduct supplied its neighbors with even more obvious cause for worry. On top of this, there is a large number of still unsettled problems in its relations with neighbors (from border conflicts to water use problems).

While Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (the two poorest countries) had to accept Russia's protection and the deployment of its military contingents in their territories in response to their weakness compared with Uzbekistan, the richer countries (Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan) placed the stakes on a qualitative and quantitative improvement of their military capabilities.

(Im)Mature Relations between the Regional States. The conditions in which the political system has been developing in the post-Soviet space (in the three Central Eurasian regions in particular) are hardly conducive to a more or less rapid enhancement of the maturity of interstate relations. This is best confirmed by the armed conflicts of the late 1980s-early 1990s, which have not yet been resolved.

The entire space (including Russia and other post-Soviet areas) is a conglomerate of ethnicities and religions. Samuel Huntington wrote that the line of clashes of civilizations (Orthodoxy, Western Christianity, and Islam) runs across these and similar areas.

The social factor is more conducive to mature interstate relations in Central Europe and Central Asia than in the Central Caucasus; indeed, their ethnic, linguistic, and confessional structures are more homogeneous than in the latter. Central Europe is populated mainly by Slavs, who are Orthodox Christian, and Central Asia has a predominantly Turkic population, which follows Sunni Islam. The picture is different in the Central Caucasus, which is populated by three major ethnic groups—Azeris, Armenians, and Georgians—each with a religion of its own: Shi'a Islam among the Azeris; Gregorian

[35] See: R. Burnashev, "Regional Security in Central Asia: Military Aspects," in: *Central Asia. A Gathering Storm?* ed. by B. Rumer, M.E. Sharpe, 2002, p. 157.

[36] The fact that radical religious groups penetrate Uzbekistan from Tajikistan remains one of the main bones of contention in the two countries' bilateral relations.

Christianity among the Armenians; and Orthodox Christianity among the Georgians. This may be helpful in explaining why conflicts as outcrops of immature relations have become especially vehement in the Caucasus.

The relations among the political units in these regions have not contributed to the maturity of political relations. The history of independence of all political units (states) is very short: for long periods these ethnicities were parts of external imperial systems. Their Heartland location (to borrow the term from Halford Mackinder) made them the coveted targets of external actors (Russia, Turkey, Iran, the West, and China). In fact, the mechanisms the external actors used to achieve their aims—resettlement, pushing ethnic borders at will, and manipulations with ethnicities in the "divide and rule" style—never contributed to good neighborly relations in these regions. The problems inherited from the imperial past still cast a pall over the relations among the newly independent states. Besides, in the post-Soviet era, Central Eurasia remained geopolitically attractive to the great powers.

In fact, economic factors, in particular regional energy and transportation projects, brought the regions' states closer together, although this has not helped resolve the security dilemmas so far and has not been conducive to regional cooperation on the basis of economic interdependence.

Conclusion

The specifics of the region's political structure remain one of the key endogenous factors of the regional security systems. The post-Cold War world has so far failed to move away from the positivist interpretations of international politics; in most cases, interstate relations are developing under the impact of structural factors. At the same time, one needs to reassess their impact in the context of the regions' social specifics.

Any regional political structure can stimulate either moderation or conflicts in the relations of the regional states. This makes it important to identify such a parameter as the stability/instability of political structure of a regional security system not only from the theoretical point of view, but also for purely practical purposes. Though, this parameter cannot be the only explanation of amity/enmity. (In)stability of a political structure is determined by three factors: *inner strength/weakness of the states in a regional system; (a)symmetry of strength and (a)symmetry of vulnerability among them; and (im)maturity of their mutual relations*.

The political structure of the Central Eurasian RSCs discussed here, as well as the entire PSM, is unstable; the sociopolitical cohesion of states can hardly be described as high. Their independent development, especially in the early and mid-1990s, was aggravated by serious internal problems and an acute feeling of vulnerability.

At the same time, different countries have different ideas about their vulnerabilities and threats; the levels of their weakness are likewise different, which points to the system's structural asymmetry. This means that out of the four types of regional security systems—*positively symmetrical, positively asymmetrical, negatively symmetrical, and negatively asymmetrical*—the RSCs functioning in Central Europe, the Central Caucasus, and Central Asia belong to the latter; the same is true of the entire PSM.

The relations among the states in each of the regions have not become mature and cooperative enough to play down the negative impact of their weakness, vulnerability, and structural asymmetry.

The stability/instability of a political structure can be described as an independent endogenous variable of any RSC, if the latter does not belong to a large system (in this case, it follows the development pattern of the larger system).

The above analysis of the political structure of the post-Soviet regions of Central Eurasia has demonstrated that the RSCs of Central Europe, the Central Caucasus, and Central Asia belong to the PSM. For the time being, any adequate assessment of security relations within these RSCs is possible only within the web of interdependencies of the regional system in the post-Soviet space. These RSCs are functioning and developing under the strong influence of Russia, the only power pole in the PSM which sometimes overshadows the relations between the member states of these regional complexes. Ukraine, Belarus, and Georgia can serve as the most pertinent examples of this. This means that the entire range of impacts of the structural factors on the development of the Central European, Central Caucasian, and Central Asian RSCs can be revealed only if we bear in mind the specifics of the PSM political structure.