

REGIONAL POLITICS

**THE SHANGHAI
COOPERATION ORGANIZATION
(2001-2011):
TASKS, RESULTS,
AND PROSPECTS**

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Introduction

On 15 June, 2011, the tenth anniversary summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was held in Astana. The declaration adopted at the summit stated in particular that “the decision to create the SCO was a strategically calculated step,” while “the choice made by the SCO member states at the beginning of the 21st century to intensify good neighborly, friendly, and partner relations in the region was a commendable example for the world community. Its member states ... have laid a strong foundation for the organization’s efficient functioning

aimed at jointly ensuring peace, security, and stability, as well as developing multifaceted cooperation in the SCO expanse in the political, economic, humanitarian, and other spheres.”

The SCO has indeed become a phenomenon of global dimensions. During the first years of the organization’s existence, the necessary regulatory framework and relevant institutions for carrying out its activity were set up. Several dozen essential documents were signed, such as the SCO Charter, the Treaty on Long-Term Good-Neighborly Relations, Friendship, and Cooperation, the

Shanghai Convention on the Fight Against Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism, the Agreement on Cooperation in the Fight Against the Illicit Circulation of Drugs, Psychotropic Substances, and Their Precursors, the Agreement on Cooperation in the Fight against Crime, the Agreement on Cooperation in Ensuring International Information Security, and other intergovernmental agreements.

Over the past years, the system of SCO structures (which includes the Council of Heads of State, the Council of Heads of Government, the Council of Foreign Ministers, and the Council of National Coordinators) has been supplemented with annual meetings of the secretaries of the member states' security councils and regular sittings of the defense and internal affairs ministers and the heads of anti-drug departments.

The SCO Secretariat has been established in Beijing, while the SCO regional antiterrorist structure (RATS) functions in Tashkent. Mechanisms of interbranch cooperation (from the expert to the ministerial level) have been set up and a whole series of specific cooperation projects in various areas have been launched.

The international community's recognition of the SCO is proof of its growing significance; for example, the U.N. granted the organization the status of observer and signed a memorandum on cooperation with it. Such structures as ESCAPO and the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime, as well as many regional organizations, including the CSTO, EurAsEC, CIS, and ASEAN, have established official contacts with the SCO. As of today, India, Iran, Mongolia, and Pakistan are observers in the SCO, and Belarus and Sri Lanka are dialog partners; representatives of Afghanistan and Turkmenistan participate in some of the organization's undertakings.

The SCO's potential is not merely the arithmetic sum of the potential of its participating states, although the fact that China and Russia are members gives it enough of a name in itself. The SCO is an entity of qualitatively new dimensions; most experts think that its appearance in the region has given rise to a force capable of realistically opposing the challenges and threats to security and has become an important component of the geopolitical landscape (regional and even global).

At the same time, it is obvious that the evolution of the world situation, the events in Afghanistan and Central Asia (CA), and the economic integration and energy cooperation processes in the Eurasian expanse are making ever higher demands on the regional organizations functioning here. In this respect, very legitimate questions arise: "Does the SCO meet these demands? What is the real potential of this organization currently celebrating its anniversary? What vectors and forms could the organization's transformation take in the short and mid term, keeping in mind the forecasted development of events, and how will this affect the interests of its members, statutory goals, and practical capabilities?"

From the SCO's documents it follows that the organization has far-reaching plans to expand cooperation aimed at ensuring regional security (in the broadest sense of this word), building up economic interaction, expanding cultural and educational exchanges and contacts among people, and developing external ties in the spirit of network diplomacy. But there are several issues that the SCO will have to resolve in the next few years (whether it wants to or not) that are vital for guaranteeing the organization's viability and the validity of the tasks it is dealing with.

The SCO: Its Three Main Issues

It appears that the following three issues will be the most imperative and vital for the SCO in the next few years: Afghanistan, hydropower, and enlargement. The future of the SCO and the place it is

to occupy in the world community will largely depend on the position the organization's participating states take on each of these issues.

Afghanistan. It is said that withdrawal of part of the foreign military contingent from Afghanistan that has already begun should be complete by the end of 2014; this designates one of the vectors of the future development of events, but many unresolved problems remain. It is still not clear how the many different internal and external factors will affect the situation in Afghanistan, the countries next to it, and the region as a whole.

Obviously the first issue requiring attention is the military-political vacuum that will inevitably form when the U.S. and NATO withdraw from Afghanistan—how and with what should it be filled? There are very few serious analysts who think that in three years contingents of the Afghan National Army will be a reliable substitute for the professionally trained and armed American GIs and NATO servicemen who, as we know, have a well-regulated intelligence service and air support. In other words, it can safely be said that the Taliban, or local ethnic leaders, who do not wish to knuckle down to Kabul, will return to power in some regions of Afghanistan. Even if the key U.S. bases are retained and fortified in Afghanistan (there is no doubt that the agreement on strategic partnership being drawn up between Washington and Kabul will contain a corresponding provision), the Americans will no longer be able to rid entire provinces of insurgents as they used to.

It is doubtful that Hamid Karzai's government will be able to maintain control over the territory in its power and guarantee smooth running of the wheels of state from top to bottom.

The low efficiency of the state machine, corruption, the insufficient number and low qualification of trained staff, the weakness of the national army, the inadequate level of police organization and training, as well as several other systemic defects will make it impossible in the near future (even with significant financial and material assistance from the West and the large number of foreign advisors) to count on any considerable progress in Afghanistan's state- and military-building.

The main unknown quantities in the Afghan equation are the conditions and parameters of national conciliation between the oppositionist Islamists and America's protégé Hamid Karzai (if this were even possible). It seems clear that even if divvying up political power in Afghanistan with the participation of all the main forces is successful, the newly baked regime will be far from the democratic ideal the U.S. and its allies hoped for when they began the Afghan campaign, which is part of the Greater Central Asia mega project.

Moreover, it is highly doubtful that Afghanistan can be restored as a united multinational country.

In these conditions, it seems that the opportunistic undertaking and mistakes made by George Bush's administration will legitimately end in the regionalization of Afghan settlement. This trend is already being seen, which can be judged both from Hamid Karzai's behavior and from the diverse regional-level political and economic initiatives being put forward recently. Nor does Washington have any objections; what is more, the Americans are essentially overtly looking for a candidate that could act as "nanny" for Kabul and take on responsibility for ensuring Afghanistan's security and socio-economic development (but in so doing not object to American retaining its patronage and military presence as a whole in Afghanistan), thus ridding the U.S. and NATO of a burden they have clearly been unable to deal with. It came to light that the SCO is also being considered as a candidate for this role.

Theoretically, recognizing that the SCO has a central role to play in regional security might meet the common interests of the organization's countries. In particular, it will advance Russia's initiative to form a consultation mechanism under the SCO's auspices with the participation of the member states, observers, and Afghanistan (since the special conference on Afghanistan in March 2009 in Moscow, three rounds of such consultations have already been held). In addition to diplomats, representatives of the defense and security departments and, consequently, of the special services of the organization's participating states should also take part in discussing regional security. It is desirable that such

multilateral discussions lead to the elaboration of specific coordinated steps aimed at strengthening security in Afghanistan and around it. Other interested countries could also be invited to participate in this dialog, for example, Turkey and Turkmenistan, representatives of the U.N. and other regional organizations and forums, and at some point states from outside the region too.

It can be presumed that the SCO will have to briskly step up its efforts to assist the Afghan government. This could be expressed in augmenting cooperation in the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking, in developing and implementing economic assistance programs for Afghanistan in building and restoring facilities that are important for reviving the country's economy and social sphere, and in coordinated training of military and civilian personnel. The SCO member states could use their capabilities (in particular, levers of influence on several ethnicities of Afghanistan) to incline the Afghans toward national conciliation. According to several experts, the organization could become an arena for an inter-Afghan dialog.

And, finally, Afghanistan needs to be granted the status of observer in the SCO (Hamid Karzai made an official request to the SCO regarding this at the beginning of June 2011) and drawn into cooperation in all vectors.

As for passing on the baton of responsibility for security in Afghanistan, most researchers participating in the scientific conferences held in May-July in Beijing and Shanghai on SCO issues recommend showing caution in this issue. Their opinion is also reflected in the reserved approaches of the governments of the SCO countries. Of all the organization's members, only Kazakhstan said it was ready to provide a small number of servicemen for the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) (as we know, however, Kazakhstan's parliament did not approve of this idea). Neither Russia, nor China, nor any other SCO member state is willing at present to send large military contingents to Afghanistan. Nor is it clear just how much and in what way the SCO will assist the Kabul authorities.

However, experts are unanimous in their opinion that, no matter what, the situation in Afghanistan will remain one of the SCO's main issues.

Hydropower. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, it has been impossible to establish rational and fair use of water and energy resources in CA; this is precisely why this issue is one of the most urgent in terms of the region's socioeconomic development and economic security. Moreover, the tight knot of mutual contradictions has given rise to an acute political standoff.

Problems associated with the conflict of interests between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (countries on the upper reaches of the Central Asian rivers), on the one hand, and Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan (countries on the lower reaches), on the other, and with disruption of the balance maintained since Soviet times between use of the water resources of the Pamir and Tian Shan (for generating electricity and irrigation) have been added to the long-standing territorial contradictions, ethnic tension, and personal ambitions of the leaders.

All of the above-mentioned conflict-prone factors put together have led to serious discord in the relations between Tashkent and Dushanbe (manifested in particular in the transport and economic blockade of Tajikistan), an increase in tension on the border, the exchange of hostile rhetoric in the spring of 2009, and aggravation of Uzbek-Kyrgyz relations due to the outburst of the ethnic conflict in the south of Kyrgyzstan in the spring and summer of 2010.

The existence of a knot of conflict in the very heart of the SCO contradicts the spirit of mutual respect and trust and undermines the principles the capitals of the organization's participating countries are so proud of. We are essentially dealing with a delayed-action mine that is capable of both blowing open the situation in CA and reducing the SCO's activity to naught.

The damage internal troubles are inflicting on the SCO is obvious. For example, the unsettled nature of Uzbek-Tajik and Uzbek-Kyrgyz relations concerning the building of new and reconstruction of existing hydropower plants is one of the reasons why Tashkent has been obstructing the establishment of cooperation in energy and environmental issues for many years, in which all the

countries of the region are objectively interested. The organization, however, is still loath to mediate in the settlement of the hydropower contradictions among its members and is steering clear of Uzbekistan's conflicts with its neighbors Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Whereby such players outside the region as the EU, OSCE, and Japan are actively offering their services to resolve the hydropower disputes among the CA countries. Western nongovernmental organizations are also showing a similar initiative.

So, by ignoring the presence of a serious regional-level problem in CA (and essentially within itself), the SCO is risking losing control of the situation directly in the zone of its own responsibility, whereby in such a priority sphere as energy security.

At the SCO summit held on 15 June, 2011 in Astana, Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbaev came forward with an initiative to create a Water and Food Committee within the organization and form a unified energy space. PRC Chairman Hu Jintao also supported creating mechanisms for ensuring energy and food safety at the summit meeting. The idea of developing a unified Development Strategy for the Eurasian Expanse for the next ten years was also supported by Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon.

All of this shows that the SCO countries are re-examining their attitude toward including hydropower issues on the organization's agenda. The SCO will possibly be faced with proving its efficiency when resolving this problem in particular.

Enlargement of the SCO. The SCO will have to face another challenge in the next few years—defining a coordinated procedure regarding its membership. Art 13 of the SCO Charter unambiguously states that “the SCO is open to membership in it of other states of the region that pledge to observe the goals and principles of its Charter, as well as the provisions of other international agreements and documents adopted within the framework of the SCO.”¹

In 2006, Pakistan made an official application to join the SCO, in 2007 and 2008, Iran did the same, and in 2010, the leaders of India began showing an interest in acquiring full-fledged membership in the organization. In other words, there is now a waiting list of countries wishing to join the SCO that must be dealt with.

Putting the principle of the SCO's openness into practice required developing a regulatory base for enlargement; in June 2010, a Resolution on the Procedure for Receiving New Members into the organization was adopted at the summit in Tashkent. A year later in Astana, this document was developed further when the leaders of the organization's member countries approved a Memorandum on the Obligations of Candidate States for obtaining the status of a SCO member state. However, even this proved insufficient. As the Information Statement on the results of the sitting of the Council of Heads of SCO Member States held on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the organization notes: “The Council of National Coordinators and working group of experts will continue to examine all the issues regarding enlargement of the SCO, including coordination of the legal, administrative, and financial conditions for receiving new members.”²

Despite the fact that the above-mentioned issues are technical in nature, they are extremely important. It is enough to look at the EU's experience, which made long and careful preparations for its own enlargement. However, the SCO has one significant drawback: there is no unified political will among its member states. Opinions differ both regarding whether the SCO should enlarge at all and regarding the specific candidates for membership. Judging by everything, there are very good reasons for these differences in opinion.

¹ Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (7 June, 2002), available at [<http://www.infoshos.ru/ru/?id=33>].

² Information Statement on the Results of the Sitting of the Council of Heads of Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on the Occasion of the SCO's Tenth Anniversary (15 June, 2011), available in Russian at: [http://news.kremlin.ru/ref_notes/965].

As for the potential candidates, they have more or less been determined; clarity in this issue was introduced by the Resolution on the Procedure for Receiving New Members mentioned above, which envisages the following criteria for membership in the SCO: countries seeking membership in the organization must belong to the Eurasian region, have diplomatic relations with all the SCO member states, have the status of an observer state or dialog partner of the SCO, not be in a state of armed conflict with another state or states, conscientiously perform its obligations under the U.N. Charter, and observe the generally recognized principles of international law. Moreover, the international obligations of the candidate countries with respect to security should not contradict the corresponding international agreements and other documents adopted within the SCO; and, finally, there must be no U.N. Security Council sanctions in effect against them.

In keeping with the above-listed criteria, at the present stage Iran can be excluded from the list of possible candidates, which has U.N. Security Council sanctions in effect against it, and Turkmenistan, which does not have the status of an observer or dialog partner of the SCO (it has still not declared its intention to acquire the first or the second). Mongolia could theoretically join the SCO, but it does not want to; which leaves India and Pakistan.

When analyzing the possible consequences of the SCO's enlargement, experts usually give the following arguments against this process: the necessary conditions for enlargement, which requires consolidation, have not matured, it could make the organization difficult to control, the consensus principle will become a very serious challenge, while India and Pakistan will complicate the situation with their bilateral contradictions.

At the same time, the supporters of enlargement put forward hefty counter arguments; they believe that enlargement raises the political clout and increases the practical capabilities of any international association (India's membership in the SCO will immediately turn the organization into a global structure with enormous potential); all regional organizations (for example, the EU, NATO, ASEAN, and so on) are striving for enlargement in order to increase their influence within their geographical space, and the obligations India and Pakistan assume when joining the organization will prevent them from bringing their bilateral conflicts into the SCO (that is, involving Delhi and Islamabad in the SCO's activity could help to establish cooperation between them).

It is also understood that official applications to join the SCO cannot be examined forever; like any requests, they require a response. What is more, the rise in geopolitical competition should be kept in mind, particularly in such promising regions as Asia and the Pacific Ocean; being slow and indecisive in fighting for allies could turn into any of the major players losing its initiative and appeal.

Key Decade: Scenarios of the SCO's Development

In the next few years, the SCO will have to solve several extremely important tasks; the organization will have to pump new energy into a mechanism that was established in the first decade of its existence, consolidate its ranks by settling internal contradictions, and develop a clear unified policy regarding all the issues on its agenda.

But even more important are those inevitable decisions relating to the setting of priorities in the SCO's activity that the member states will have to make as they adapt to the changing external and internal realities. This, in turn, will set new tasks for the organization, the main one being harmonizing national interests.

An analysis of the situation in the SCO and throughout its expanse shows that the present day is opening up the most diverse opportunities for the organization, and the choice of a particular vector of development for the Eurasian six will have the most direct effect on the formation of the regional security and cooperation architecture.

What scenarios of the SCO's further development can be construed? It appears there are at least five, and we will attempt to give a brief description of each of them.

The SCO could continue to evolve as a regional organization, the main tasks of which are "to develop multifaceted cooperation aimed at maintaining and strengthening peace, security, and stability in the region..., to jointly oppose terrorism, separatism, and extremism in all of their manifestations, and to fight the illicit circulation of drugs and weapons, as well as other types of cross-border criminal activity and illegal migration."³ In this case, events could develop according to two scenarios; we will provisionally call them "conservative" and "radical."

Priority on Security Issues—the Conservative Scenario. The SCO will concentrate on implementing what was designated by the previous decisions of the leaders in keeping with the approved priorities.

The main emphasis will be placed on raising the efficiency of measures to ensure regional security and significantly strengthen the SCO's capabilities in fighting terrorism. Within the framework of China's proposal, which envisages creating an improved cooperation system in regional security based on enhancing the rapid response potential, the SCO will form rapid response forces that perform counter-terrorist functions at the request of member states by closely coordinating their actions with the CSTO. The combat-readiness of the SCO's rapid response forces will be ensured by regular training sessions and targeted exercises carried out in cooperation with the defense ministries of the participating states (including along with Peace Mission military exercises).

The material base will be reinforced and the legal base and practical mechanisms of the activity of SCO RATS enhanced. Thanks to the involvement of observers and dialog partners and the establishment of rapid response with partner antiterrorist centers in the post-Soviet expanse and in the Asia Pacific Region (APR), RATS will become an efficient entity capable of providing the SCO countries and other partners with the necessary information for taking prompt action to eliminate terrorists and prevent their possible acts, as well as methodize antiterrorist activity and coordinate staff training.

Anti-drug cooperation in the SCO will be raised to the level of cooperation in fighting terrorism. An independent SCO Anti-Drug Center will be created for establishing partner relations with observer states, dialog partners, the Afghanistan and U.S. governments, the International Security Assistance Force or NATO, and the national and regional anti-drug structures operating in CA and APR. In cooperation with the CSTO, the SCO Anti-Drug Center will initiate the development of a network cooperation program with CA to counteract the Afghan drug threat, which will be coordinated by the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

Practical cooperation in the fight against transnational organized crime and ensuring cyber security and emergency response will be developed.

On the initiative of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, an Assembly on Settling Territorial and Regional Conflicts (Council on Border Security) will be founded within the SCO. This structure will be engaged in settling the conflicts existing in the SCO's zone of responsibility, as well as implementing confidence measures and advancing preventive diplomacy methods.

Cooperation in other vectors of the SCO's activity (primarily in the economic and humanitarian spheres) will develop in parallel, and the organization's foreign political cooperation and external

³ Art 1 of the Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (7 June, 2002), available in Russian at: [<http://www.infoshos.ru/ru/?id=33>].

relations will be expanded. All of this will help the SCO to gradually become a strong and efficient regional organization. At the same time, the CSTO will continue to be the champion in regional security issues in CA, while the Customs Union and EurAsEC will take priority in economic integration issues.

Priority on Security Issues—the Radical Scenario. With the consent of the CA countries, Russia and China will decide to take full control over security in the region after coming to terms with the CSTO on how to share responsibility. A contractual base will be drawn up for this purpose aimed at jointly ensuring security. Mechanisms will be reinforced for making political decisions (including emergency) on issues concerning peacekeeping and stability in the SCO's zone of responsibility. The role and place of cooperation among the defense departments will grow and SCO peacekeeping forces and a base for their deployment in the territory of the organization's member countries will be created.

Counterterrorism cooperation will be stepped up by introducing systematic implementation of joint special operations aimed at doing away with the terrorist underground in the SCO member states and primarily in the CA countries. A terrorism prevention system will be created; the SCO member countries will carry out joint special operations against al-Qa'eda in Afghanistan at the request of the Afghan government. Effective steps will be taken to intercept drug flows from Afghanistan to Russia and China through the CA countries; special attention will be paid to rendering Tajikistan assistance in fortifying protection of the Tajik-Afghan border and strengthening border control.

U.S. and NATO military contingents will gradually be removed from CA. Steps will be coordinated between the SCO and ISAF in Afghanistan and, after 2014, between the SCO and the U.S. International assistance regarding regional security with countries outside the region will be rendered on conditions set by the SCO.

Implementation of this scenario will give the SCO many attributes of a military-political alliance with all the ensuing consequences, one of which is the predicted aggravation of relations between the organization's countries, on the one hand, and the West, on the other.

At the SCO summit held on 15 June, 2011 in Astana, it was stressed that today economic cooperation is coming to the fore on the agenda as the SCO's "second image." There is nothing surprising in this, keeping in mind the priority nature of the indicated problems being resolved by all the organization's member countries without exception.

We will note that this vector also figures on the list of the SCO's statutory goals and tasks, which envisage "encouraging efficient regional cooperation in trade and economic, ... scientific-technical, ... energy, transport, credit and financial, and other areas of common interest; assisting comprehensive and balanced economic growth and social and cultural development by means of joint action on the basis of equal partnership in order to steadily raise and improve the standard of living of the people of the member states; coordinating approaches for integration into the world economy."⁴

Let us take a look at the possible scenarios of SCO development keeping in mind the above-mentioned tasks.

Priority on Economic Issues—the Conservative Scenario. The economic component of the SCO will become increasingly significant on the organization's agenda, while remaining subordinate to the main priority—security.

The SCO will adopt the Road Map for implementing the Program of Trade and Economic Cooperation until 2020 and begin to carry out specific projects. A Special Account (SCO Development Fund) will be created to support them, the resources of which will be used to pay for compilation of the feasibility reports for the proposed projects. The SCO Interbank Association, or one of the author-

⁴ Art 1 of the Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (7 June, 2002).

ized banks, will mobilize investments, while the organization's Business Council will coordinate implementation.

Large projects, which not all of the member countries are interested in at the first stage, will be carried out, according to Art 16 of the SCO Charter, with limited participation. Observer states and dialog partners will be actively drawn into economic cooperation. Attracting private business and creating a SCO Business Association and Venture Fund will help to intensify economic cooperation.

A SCO Energy Club will be founded, in the format of which a unified energy strategy for development of the Eurasian region will be drawn up. Special attention will be focused on building transport corridors that meet the SCO's interests. Wide-scale cooperation will be enhanced in such spheres as high technology, supply lines, agriculture, tourism, and interregional relations.

A mechanism will also be created within the SCO for monitoring the economic situation in the region, which will make it possible to follow the negative trends that arise and carry out early prevention of economic crises. The SCO Rating Agency created on Russia's initiative will also serve these goals. A set of measures will be drawn up for helping the most vulnerable economies of the Central Asian states in order to modernize them and instill dynamism in economic cooperation within the SCO.

The SCO's economic policy will be pursued in close coordination with the Customs Union and EurAsEC, which play a key role in the integration processes in the Eurasian expanse.

Priority on Economic Issues—the Radical Scenario. The SCO member states will strive for integration that envisages creating conditions for the free movement of goods, capital, and services, introducing payment of transactions in national currency (and in the future also introducing a supranational currency), and instituting a mechanism of monetary cooperation and privileged lending. For this purpose, a SCO Development Bank will be established for financing economic projects, an arena created for regional electronic trade, and mechanisms improved for exchanging information on the potential of the enterprises and companies of the SCO countries. Efforts will be stepped up to harmonize the trade and investment legislation of the SCO member states and unify customs regulations and procedures. Conditions will be formed for signing Agreements on Free Trade.

A supranational forecasting institute will be established for drawing up a single vision of the SCO's development on Kazakhstan's initiative. A unified Development Strategy for the Eurasian Expanse and a forecast of the development of the SCO region until 2030 will be elaborated.

A Committee on Infrastructural Integration of the organization's member states will be founded that will be responsible for coordinating energy and transport policy, developing and monitoring the implementation of investment programs for prospecting and operating oil and gas fields, building and modernizing power stations, power transmission lines, oil and gas pipelines, and road, rail, and air routes, creating contemporary logistics centers and other infrastructure facilities, as well as ensuring the SCO's participation in forming international East-West and North-South energy and transport corridors.

Cooperation mechanisms will be elaborated for ensuring food safety. The SCO will begin to implement cooperation programs in growing, processing, storing, and selling grain and food. An SCO Grain Bank will be established.

Border and interregional cooperation among the SCO countries will increase in significance. Preferential trade and economic growth zones will be created in border areas.

The problems associated with reinforcing the economic potential of the SCO's Central Asian member states will be raised to an organization-wide level. Russia and the PRC will render them extensive financial and technical assistance through the SCO, as well as help to train personnel for the national economies.

Rendering Afghanistan assistance in its economic restoration will be a separate vector of the SCO's activity. The SCO will dispatch assistance to Kabul through bilateral channels and draw member countries and observers into participating in the implementation of economic and social projects. The

SCO will primarily take responsibility for satisfying Afghanistan's most urgent needs, as well as for restoring and modernizing facilities built with the assistance of the former Soviet Union. This work will be carried out in cooperation with the U.S., EU, and other donor countries, including at their expense.

Putting this scenario into practice will make it possible to ensure economic security in the mid term and accelerate development of the CA countries, fortify the SCO's position and actively draw observer countries, and also Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, into its orbit.

However, this could also lead to the agreements reached within the Customs Union being corroded and to the SCO becoming a rival of the Customs Union and EurAsEC, whereby the latter, keeping in mind China's growing economic might, will clearly not benefit from this.

Marginalization of the SCO. If the SCO proves incapable of adapting to the demands of the times, consolidating its ranks, resolving the urgent problems, and adjusting its strategy and tactics on time, it will gradually have to yield its initiative within CA. Political declarations will not be translated into the language of practical actions, while the SCO's statutory goals and tasks will not be duly implemented. As a result, the member states, while formally retaining their membership in the SCO, will look for other collective or individual means for ensuring their interests.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

The SCO's tenth anniversary is a good excuse for its members to try and sum up the accumulated experience, look beyond the horizon, draw up a renewed strategy that meets the dynamically changing reality, and make the necessary decisions. At stake are Russia's global and regional interests, peace and security in CA, the fate of energy cooperation and transport routes, the political stability and economic prosperity of the states located in the region, and Eurasia's image in the foreseeable future.