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## CHINA AND KAZAKHSTAN: BELT AND ROAD COOPERATION

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### ABSTRACT

**T**hroughout its fairly short history, the Belt and Road initiative has demonstrated its good prospects, which explains why the government of Kazakhstan heeds a lot of attention to economic cooperation with China within this project. It has the greatest stake in the initiatives related to further development of cargo traffic routes and pipelines in different directions (primarily, Africa, the Middle East and Europe) and their potential impact on Kazakhstan's economic health. Comprehensive studies are especially necessary in the current time of crisis, when the active realization of the Chinese initiative has run into certain problems. The authors examine the key ideas of the

Chinese initiative to reveal the basic conceptual provisions and trends and analyze the problems and prospects of its realization. It is even more important to consider the ways to coordinate it with the projects of the Eurasian Economic Union and Kazakhstan's Nurlu Zhol (Bright Path) program. The possible threats and challenges that the Chinese initiative may create for Kazakhstan, or the positive effects that will help Kazakhstan realize its national interests should not be overlooked, either. The various processes related to the initiative and its numerous trends should be carefully studied against the background of the current dynamic changes in world politics.

**KEYWORDS:** *Belt and Road initiative, Nurlu Zhol, cooperation, China, Kazakhstan, national strategy, intergovernmental connectivity, national interests.*

## *Introduction*

This is an analysis of different aspects and trends of cooperation between Kazakhstan and China within the framework of the Belt and Road initiative (BRI). The following tasks have been formulated in the context of this analysis: to reveal BRI's content and potential and closely examine its main trends, problems and prospects of cooperation between the two countries. These are fairly topical issues rooted in the transformations of the system of international and regional relations unfolding in the world in the midst of a crisis, China's growing political and economic influence, new and varied ways and means of realization of the Chinese initiative and the need to assess the future of cooperation with China amid the pandemic.

### **Belt and Road Initiative and Its Importance for China and Central Asia**

As could be expected, the BRI megaproject has stirred up a lot of interest in the academic and expert communities throughout the world. The economic, financial, environmental, cultural, humanitarian, scientific, and educational components of cooperation between China and the countries involved are being actively discussed. Experts in Kazakhstan have identified three principal aspects in the realization of this initiative: opportunities and risks created by the initiative's connectivity with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU); positive and negative aspects of bilateral cooperation within the BRI framework; and common opportunities, as well as problems created by the BRI for Central Asia as a whole. Some experts emphasize the project's practical advantages for the countries along the revived Silk Route. Bulat Sultanov, Honored Scientist of the Republic of Kazakhstan, is convinced that all Central Asian countries demonstrate a lot of enthusiasm and support of the project, anticipating that Chinese investments will help them deal with their problems, primarily, develop their infrastructure.<sup>1</sup> Just as his Kazakh colleagues, he pays particular attention to the realization of the Chinese initiative and the role of his country in this global project.

Another group is interested in the economic and political challenges and risks that the project presents to the countries involved. Dina Malysheva, Head of the Sector of Central Asia of the Center for Post-Soviet Studies of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations, Russian Academy of Sciences, has pointed out that even if China credits the countries involved in its projects on favorable conditions, the projects are still realized by Chinese companies and Chinese workers. The states where these projects are realized find themselves in trap of a multi-million, if not multi-billion, debt, as well as economic and (possibly) political dependence.<sup>2</sup> These authors point out that the policy of cooperation with China should be carefully elaborated to minimize the risks created by infrastructural projects.

It is especially interesting to examine the materials on the realization of the Chinese initiative in the new realities, specifically, during the pandemic. These authors discuss potential options of this cooperation, Digital Silk Road among them. Joshua Kurlantzick, Fellow for Southeast Asia at the Council on Foreign Relations, states that Chinese firms bring technology and additional benefits to developing countries by establishing training centers and offering research and development pro-

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<sup>1</sup> See: B.K. Sultanov, "Initsiativa 'Odin poyas i odin put' i kazakhstanskiy proekt Bolshoy Evrazii: vozmozhnosti sopriazheniia," in: *Initsiativa "Odin poyas i odin put": vazhneishiy faktor vystraivania sovremennykh mezhdunarodnykh otnoшений. Sbornik materialov nauchnoy konferentsii*, Ekspertny klub "Odin poias i odin put", Almaty, 2019, pp. 16-34.

<sup>2</sup> See: D. Malysheva, "Postsovetskie gosudartsva Tsentralnoi Azii v politike Kitaia," *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia*, No. 5, 2019, pp. 101-108, available at [<https://doi.org/10.20542/0131-2227-2019-63-5-101-108>].

grams. This aims to boost cooperation between scientists and engineers in these countries and their Chinese colleagues, and to transfer technical knowledge to spheres connected with digital technologies.<sup>3</sup> Still, certain countries have voiced serious concerns about the Digital Silk Road. The key apprehension is that China will use the DSR to impose its model of tech-enabled authoritarianism on the recipient countries, to the detriment of personal freedoms and their sovereignty.

## Stages of Transformation of the Belt and Road Initiative

During his 2013 visit to Kazakhstan Chairman Xi Jinping formulated the idea of a Silk Road Economic Belt; later, in Indonesia, he offered the idea of the Maritime Silk Road of the 21st Century. In May 2017, the People's Republic of China initiated the Belt and Road initiative megaproject as a sum-total of both projects that immediately occupied one of the top lines on the world's political agenda. It radically changed the correlation of political and economic forces in international and regional relations.

Since 2013, the initiative has been transformed from a regional into a global project. Initially, its realization was limited to Central Asia, while today it has engaged many countries and continues to attract new supporters. In the first four years, this concept attracted over 100 states and international organizations as active participants. They coordinated the strategy of synergetic interaction with other projects realized in Russia (connectivity with the EAEU), ASEAN members (Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025), Kazakhstan (connectivity with Nurly Zhol), Turkey (Middle Corridor Project), Mongolia (Steppe Route), Vietnam (Two Corridors, One Belt), the U.K. (Northern Powerhouse strategy), Poland (Amber Road). Much is being done to coordinate the plans with Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, Hungary and other countries. According to many experts, the project clearly confirms that China has moved into a new development mode—the strategy of maximum openness and corresponding new strategic diplomacy.<sup>4</sup>

China's traditional political course and the aims it pursues in international cooperation have set it apart from other countries. There is a relatively common expert opinion that China prefers to stay away from its partners' internal affairs, which is not totally true.<sup>5</sup> It is not surprising that its partners are concerned.

The Silk Road Economic Belt is a component of the New Silk Road, the Chinese concept designed to modify the entire Eurasian trade and economic model. According to the Commerce Ministry of China, Beijing has already poured over \$90 billion in direct investments into the countries along the New Silk Road, with an average annual increase of 5.2%.<sup>6</sup> These investments will positively affect the member-countries' economic health and revive their integration with China.

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<sup>3</sup> See: J. Kurlantzick, *Assessing China's Digital Silk Road: A Transformative Approach to Technology Financing or a Danger to Freedoms?* available at [<https://www.cfr.org/blog/assessing-chinas-digital-silk-road-transformative-approach-technology-financing-or-danger>], 29 January, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> See: “‘Odin poias i odin put’ pomogaet v cozdanii otkrytoy mirovoy ekonomiki,” available at [<https://ria.ru/20190427/1553116035.html>], 29 January, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> See: G.U. Birimkulova, “‘Odin poias—odin put’: gorizonty sotrudnichestva Evropeiskogo soiuza, Kitaia i Kazakhstana,” in: *Sbornik statey XX Mezhdunaronoy nauchno-practicheskoy konferentsii “European Research”*, Penza, 2019, pp. 320-323.

<sup>6</sup> See: T. Tashimov, “‘Ekspertnoe mnenie: ‘Poias i put’ pozvoliat Kazakhstanu stat krupneyshim v regione tranzitnym khabom,’” available at [<https://zonakz.net/2019/04/29/ekspertnoe-mnenie-poyas-i-put-pozvoliat-kazaxstanu-stat-krupneyshim-v-regione-tranzitnym-xabom/>], 29 January, 2021.

According to the Ministry of Commerce of China, between 2013 and 2019 the total trade turnover between China and the countries along the BRI exceeded \$7.8 trillion; the volume of non-financial direct investments from China in these countries reached \$110 billion.<sup>7</sup> This positively affects the living standards in these countries. The problem of the Great Silk Road as a system of international transport corridors is being discussed in detail at different levels.<sup>8</sup> As of this time, the routes are still unclear. The official Chinese concept of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road of the 21st Century offers a general approach. We should bear in mind that the ultimate choice will strongly affect the future of Central Asian transits.

Today, bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and China are developing within the connectivity of China's BRI and Kazakhstan's national Nurlu Zhol program. This has been one of the latest subjects of bilateral talks.<sup>9</sup>

Both initiatives are designed to develop infrastructure and further the industrialization of Kazakhstan. According to Kazakhstani experts, their joint realization may have a synergistic effect on the country's economic development. This is of great importance in the context of modernization of Kazakhstan's economy, and absolutely indispensable amidst the plunging global oil prices. Certain measures have already been adopted to achieve connectivity between these projects.

Kazakhstan is especially invested in the project that entails the construction of a channel between the Caspian and Black Seas; it will add a new lease of life to Aktau, which is a port on the Caspian. In recent years, the volumes of oil transshipment through Aktau have been decreasing: from 11 million tons of oil per year in 2009 to 1.4 million tons in 2017, 2 million tons in 2018, and 2.1 million tons in 2019. As could be expected, the port is losing docking payments and, therefore, revenue.<sup>10</sup> In the future, the channel will allow to move oil from the oilfields to any place in the world.

Kazakhstan is working hard to overcome its dependence on Russia by diversifying transit corridors to move its products throughout the world. The country is building BRI infrastructure, with over 1,300 km of highways already built, i.e., the Zhetygen-Khorgos railway and the Altynkol-Khorgos railway crossing at the Chinese border.<sup>11</sup> New highways and railways will increase Kazakhstan's export to international markets, relying on a new program of acceleration of customs procedures and removal of administrative barriers.

The ice-free Aktau International Sea Trade Port plays a great role in the realization of the BRI and its connectivity with the EAEU; it is used by Ural and Siberian regions for certain export-import operations. It is one of the points of the TRACECA transport corridor, and the only land corridor outside Russia that connects European countries with the Asia Pacific Region and transports cargo between Western and Central Europe and Central and South Eastern Asia.<sup>12</sup>

Within the EAEU freight traffic crosses the customs territory unified with Russia; the Eastern Beam (known in Kazakhstan as the Great Bridge), an international transport corridor, is a special issue. The Zhezkazgan-Saksaulskaia and Shalkar-Beyneu railways, built within this project, significantly shortened the distance between Dostyk and Aktau port. The Dostyk-Aktogay-Atasu-Zhezkazgan-Saksaulskaia-Aktobe-Saratov railway offers access to the infrastructure of the North-South In-

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<sup>7</sup> See: "Kitay narashchivaet torgovliu so stranami vdol 'Poiasa i puty'," available at [[http://russian.news.cn/2020-05/19/c\\_139068812.htm](http://russian.news.cn/2020-05/19/c_139068812.htm)], 29 January, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> See: D.A. Gorbunova, "Proekt novogo Velikogo Shelkovogo puti: vliianie na ekonomiki stran Tsentralnoi Azii, Evropy, Rossii," *E-Scio*, No. 6 (33), 2019, pp. 408-418.

<sup>9</sup> See: K. Gasparian, "Uchastie Kazakhstana v initsiative Kitaia 'Odin poyas—odin put'," *Postsovetkie issledovania*, No. 5, 2019, pp. 1280-1291.

<sup>10</sup> See: "V Kazakhstane deregulirovany uslugi sudozakhoda tankerov," available at [<https://kursiv.kz/news/otraslevyety/2021-01/v-kazakhstane-deregulirovany-uslugi-sudozakhoda-tankerov>], 29 January, 2021

<sup>11</sup> See: K. Gasparian, op. cit.

<sup>12</sup> See: C. Zheng, Q. WenyiTs. Wenyi, "Odin poias-odin put", in: *Sbornik konferentsii "Sotrudnichestvo Kitaia so stranami s perekhodnoi ekonomikoi v ramkakh proekta 'Odin poias-odin put'"*, Moscow, 2018, pp. 92-102.

ternational Transport Corridor, which may become a true Great Bridge between China and Europe. The North-South Corridor, a multimodal route with the total length of 7,200 km between St. Petersburg and the port of Mumbai (Bombay) is used for passengers and cargo transport. It was created to attract transit freight flows from India, Iran and the Gulf countries to Russia (across the Caspian) and further on to Northern and Western Europe. The corridor has several branches.<sup>13</sup>

Table 1 is based on information supplied by the Chinese Embassy in Kazakhstan to the inform.kz news portal.<sup>14</sup>

Table 1

**Results of Cooperation between China and Kazakhstan within the BRI**

| Cooperation Trends  | Results   |
|---|---|
| Deeper political cooperation  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Bilateral visits</li> <li>(2) Interstate connectivity of strategic development projects</li> </ol>   |
| Reducing trade barriers, trade and economic structure optimization                  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Bilateral turnover 2013-2018— \$28,6 billion</li> <li>(2) Trade turnover 2018—\$18 billion</li> <li>(3) Increase in comparable indices in 2018—37,4%.</li> <li>(4) China's grain import—500 thousand tons</li> </ol>   |
| Greater infrastructure connectivity, creation of logistic networks                  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Establishment of direct communication between six Chinese and Kazakhstani cities</li> <li>(2) 5 permanent check points</li> <li>(3) 5 transborder pipelines</li> <li>(4) 2 transborder railway branches and 1 international center of border cooperation</li> <li>(5) Chinese and Kazakhstani stretches of the Western Europe-Western China highway and 72 routes of international freight and passenger traffic, including numerous Chinese-European routes</li> <li>(6) By 2020 the share of China-Europe-China transit cargos increased by 61.6%.* In the first 10 months of 2020, transit across Kazakhstan along the above-mentioned route exceeded 407.6 thousand TEU, an increase of 65% against 2019"</li> </ol> |
| Improvement of financial operations and joint counteraction against financial risks | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) An intergovernmental agreement on mutual exchange of national currencies in the total amount of 14 billion yuans was signed</li> <li>(2) Active development of payment transactions in national currencies, joint counteraction against the global financial crisis</li> <li>(3) Joint bilateral financial protection of operations in joint construction of facilities within the BRI based on financial platforms—Asian Bank of Infrastructure Investments, China-Eurasia Economic Cooperation Fund and tied credits to promote industrial cooperation</li> </ol>  |

<sup>13</sup> See: R.K. Zhakupov, "Kazakhstanskaia mnogostoronniaia diplomatiia v ramkakh ShOS," in: *Sbornik konferentsii "International Scientific Review of the Problems and Prospects of Modern Science and Education,"* 2019, pp. 86-89.

<sup>14</sup> See: "'Odin poias-odin put'—put vzaimovyygodnogo razvitiia i sovmešnogo protsvetaniia Kitaia i Kazakhstana," available at [[https://www.inform.kz/ru/odin-poyas-odin-put-put-vzaimovyygodnogo-razvitiia-i-sovmešnogo-prosvetaniia-kitaya-i-kazakhstana\\_a3381924](https://www.inform.kz/ru/odin-poyas-odin-put-put-vzaimovyygodnogo-razvitiia-i-sovmešnogo-prosvetaniia-kitaya-i-kazakhstana_a3381924)], 29 January, 2021.

Table 1 (continued)

| Cooperation Trends  | Results  |
|---|--|
| Stimulation of rapprochement between the two peoples  | <p>(1) Expanding the teaching of Chinese at 5 Confucius Institutes in Kazakhstan, establishing 5 Kazakhstani cultural linguistic centers in China, more than in any other Central Asian country</p> <p>(2) Today, about 14,000 Kazakhstani students are studying in China, about 1,400 Chinese students are studying in Kazakhstan</p> |
| <p>* See: "President Received Minister of Industry and Infrastructure Development Beybut Atamkulov," available at [<a href="https://www.akorda.kz/en/events/akorda_news/meetings_and_receptions/the-president-receives-minister-of-industry-and-infrastructure-development-beibut-atamkulov-1">https://www.akorda.kz/en/events/akorda_news/meetings_and_receptions/the-president-receives-minister-of-industry-and-infrastructure-development-beibut-atamkulov-1</a>], 22 April, 2021</p> <p>** See: "The Volume of Transit between China and the RF across Kazakhstan Reached 36 thousand TEU in 10 Months," available in Russian at [<a href="https://www.rzd-partner.ru/zhd-transport/news/obem-tranzita-mezhdu-kitaem-i-rf-cherez-kazakhstan-za-10-mesyatsev-sostavil-36-tys-teu/">https://www.rzd-partner.ru/zhd-transport/news/obem-tranzita-mezhdu-kitaem-i-rf-cherez-kazakhstan-za-10-mesyatsev-sostavil-36-tys-teu/</a>], 22 April, 2021</p> |  |

The above demonstrates that cooperation is evident in five elements of the initiative: political coordination, infrastructure interaction, uninterrupted trade, free movement of capitals, and stimulating rapprochement between peoples.

## Problems and Prospects of the Development of the Relationships between China and Kazakhstan within the BRI

The Republic of Kazakhstan treats its participation in the realization of the BRI as more than mere cooperation with China; it is a chance to improve relationships with other countries involved in the same project. In particular, plans are in place to develop cooperation in agricultural production and related spheres, in energy production, space and digital technologies. According to experts, Central Asian and East Asian countries may acquire access to African markets, while the EU countries may revise their foreign policy priorities.

The connectivity between the BRI and Nurlı Zhol in Kazakhstan, officially presented to the nation in November 2014 by the then President Nursultan Nazarbayev, has already brought several important results that improved the country's economic situation. Dynamic changes in world economy mean that the situation should be carefully studied to avoid any damage to national interests. In Kazakhstan, experts point to uncertainties caused by closer connectivity of Nurlı Zhol and the Chinese BRI and possible challenges and threats. Uncertainty is growing stronger: China has not formulated the clear targets of the BRI, while the number of questions within the expert community is growing.

- First, the purpose of the BRI is still unclear: whether it is a geopolitical concept of the 5th-generation leaders or a project of purely economic integration, realized with China's funds and under its aegis, remains to be seen.<sup>15</sup> Taking into account the recent statements made by the Chinese leaders and the recent assessments by Chinese experts, the BRI is a geopolitical concept with an economic component. It was launched to consolidate economic co-

<sup>15</sup> See: E.D. Shamshiev, "'Initsiativa poiasa i puti' kak faktor formirovaniya Tsentralnoi Evrazii: mesto i rol Kazakhstana," *Vestnik Instituta ekonomiki Rossiiskoi akademii nauk*, No. 3, 2019, pp. 137-151.

operation with Eurasia, create a new international cooperation and global management model. This means that Kazakhstan and other regional countries should clarify their foreign policy priorities.

- Second, will the realized project allow China to dominate in the region, both economically and politically?
- Third, it is still unclear which actors in China will realize the super-project—either a state structure or non-governmental structures (the Silk Road Foundation, for instance), and which structures will be responsible for contacts with foreign partners.

The main question about the correlation between this initiative and the EAEU project remains unanswered. This vagueness is created by the projects' different aims. The BRI is devised to transport Chinese products to the Central Asian and Russian markets and further, to Europe and the Middle East. A free trade zone in Central Asia is slated to be set up later, contradicting the main aim of the EAEU at the present stage of its development. It has become extremely important to identify the real common points of the EAEU and the BRI, yet the signed document has not yet clarified the issue.<sup>16</sup>

In Kazakhstan and Central Asia as a whole, the realization of the BRI project may encounter the following threats and challenges:

- (1) Mental and cultural specifics of China and the Central Asian countries' mainly Turkic populations may cause conflicts between representatives of these two very different cultures.
- (2) The principles of mutual advantages and fairness should be observed by all means. The concept should not contain any hints of a possible Chinese expansion. So far, the BRI and its practical realization are considered from the viewpoint of China and its interests, while the logical question about possible profits and interests of the region's countries remains unanswered. The same is true of Russia's role in the initiative's practical realization and possible projects.
- (3) Chinese industrial enterprises of all types (big, medium and small) may move to the Central Asian markets.<sup>17</sup> According to experts, China has never considered the region's countries a potential element of its own economy: it was a market for Chinese goods, a source of natural resources and a transit territory. Chinese investments in the region were funneled to infrastructure, rather than the real sector, with the exception of hydrocarbon extraction for China's own needs. Today, there is still no clear answer to the question of whether this will change within the BRI.<sup>18</sup> The currently unequal cooperation between China and Kazakhstan makes future modifications highly unlikely. If China plans to move certain enterprises to Kazakhstan, it is very important to be aware of these companies well in advance. Their environmental safety, the nature of their products, the prospects of their distribution, etc., as well as possible massive migration of Chinese workforce to Kazakhstan should all be clearly delineated.
- (4) Labor migration from China may increase; this is an expected or even inevitable result of the realization of the BRI project and of transfer to Kazakhstan of excess industrial capacities. Today, China's presence in Central Asia stirs up a lot of concerns: the local governments want to acquire detailed substantiation of the prospects of moving Chinese compa-

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<sup>16</sup> See: E. Tan, "Izucheniye Tsentralnoi Azii v Kitae: istoria, sovremennoe sostoianie, osnovnye issledovatel'skie tsentry," *Mezhdunarofniye otnosheniya*, No. 1, 2019, pp. 26-38.

<sup>17</sup> See: K. Gasparian, op. cit.

<sup>18</sup> See: R. Izimov, "China's Changing Strategy in the Central Asian Region (Based on the Silk Road Economic Belt Initiative)," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 17, Issue 1, 2016, pp. 44-54.

nies abroad, with regard to the interests of enterprises and their Central Asian partners.<sup>19</sup> To be prepared, we should start the joint training of personnel for the BRI according to the demands of all sides involved. This is implemented within the SCO: there is a SCO University that trains specialists for the member states on the basis of common programs.

- (5) China plans to set up a free trade zone in Central Asia.
- (6) There are potential problems in China's development. A possible economic decline may cut down China's funding of the BRI. This means that possible stakes on Chinese investments may create risks for Kazakhstan.
- (7) A possible growth of anti-Chinese feelings in Kazakhstan and the rest of the region, stirred up by realization of certain projects within the BRI. This is primarily related to the move of excess industrial capacities from China to Central Asian countries and usage of agricultural lands by Chinese companies.
- (8) Possible competition between the EAEU and the BRI; nothing has been done so far to link (as promised) these projects in practical terms. In Kazakhstan much is being done to link Nurly Zhol and the BRI without regard for the EAEU. The Initiative's greater competitiveness as compared with the EAEU cannot but raise concerns, even if both projects have no firm conceptual basis and survive thanks to the political will of the political leaders. It seems that the EAEU will lose in this competition, especially in case of radical changes in the political elites in the region's countries.<sup>20</sup>

Potential advantages of realization of the BRI and its connectivity with the EAEU for Kazakhstan are listed in Fig. 1.

The Chinese initiative will help the region to get out of its transport isolation trap. Today, the resources extracted in Central Asian countries are moved across one or, more frequently, two or three countries to be delivered to the consumers, which is neither an easy nor a cheap task.

Today, the so-called transportation curse forces the countries that became politically independent over twenty years ago to use the networks inherited from the Soviet Union, even if their political course presupposes limited relations with Russia.

Once realized, the BRI will open new vistas of cooperation between Kazakhstan and China. However, many projects within it are realized in bilateral, rather than multilateral formats. For this reason, an increase or decrease in China's trade with the countries along the BRI does not directly affect Kazakhstan. At the same time, the routes laid within this initiative improve the transport and logistics network in Kazakhstan and increase the volume of transit. Europe is one of the most important markets for Chinese products, which means that Kazakhstan has a good chance of becoming Central Asia's leading transit hub.

Despite the fairly fast development of economic contacts between the two countries, the volume of bilateral trade shrank twofold in the last years.<sup>21</sup> This is explained primarily by the socio-economic problems of Kazakhstan and China, Kazakhstan's decreased purchasing power and lower volumes of products exported from Kazakhstan to China. However, China remains the biggest importing and the second biggest exporting partner of Kazakhstan.

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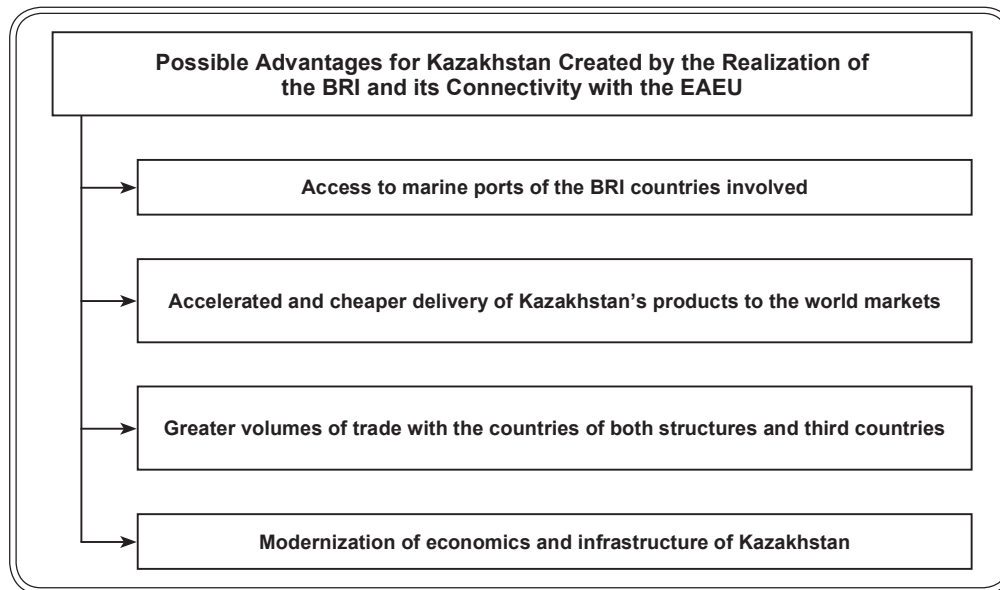
<sup>19</sup> See: E. Tan, op. cit.

<sup>20</sup> See: N. Li, "Initsiativy sotrudnichestva 'Odin poias-odin put' kak novaia model sotrudnichestva KNR s Rossiei i stranami Tsentralnoi Azii", *Vestnik Rossiiskogo universiteta druzhby narodov*, Series: *Vseobshchaia istoria*, No. 4, 2018, pp. 382-392.

<sup>21</sup> See: "Kazakhstan i Kitai: analiz poslednikh dogovorennosti," available at [<https://time.kz/articles/ugol/2016/11/07/kazahstan-i-kitaj-analiz-poslednih-dogovorennosti>], 29 January, 2021.



**Possible Consequences for Kazakhstan Created by  
the Realization of the BRI Initiative**



### *Conclusion*

An analysis of theoretical and ideological aspects of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative and Kazakhstan's Nuryly Zhol program identified possible challenges and problems created by the realization of BRI as a global project and revealed its content and potential. This initiative was devised to revive infrastructure construction, build up production investments, develop natural resources and trade, increase economic and financial cooperation, boost humanitarian exchanges, environmental protection and interaction in the sea. The authors have outlined the risks and threats on the path towards complete realization of the BRI in Central Asia and Kazakhstan: mental and cultural differences between China and the region's countries, possible violations of the principles of mutual advantages and fairness, prospects of Chinese expansion and China's domination on the Central Asian markets to the detriment of local production and financial stability of the importing countries, vagueness of prospects in view of the unclear aims of Beijing's policies, etc.

The authors have identified certain advantages of cooperation with China within this initiative, such as access to member countries' ports, faster and cheaper goods delivery from Kazakhstan to the world markets, increased volumes of trade with member- and third countries, modernization of Kazakhstan's economy and infrastructure.

Much has already been done, yet the scope of the initiative, the number of participants and the project's huge cost stir up certain doubts in its realization. It is currently too early to assess the project's real scope and expected results more or less adequately. This means that more studies are required.

The world crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic became a significant obstacle to the project's complete realization. On the other hand, the online communication regime and other events

across the world have revealed new potentials, specifically, the Digital Silk Road, and prompted the development of mechanisms based on the latest digital technologies.

Well-balanced policies, implemented by the Republic of Kazakhstan as one of the participants in the Chinese initiative, can achieve certain positive shifts in its social and economic situation.