CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CAUCASUS English Edition Volume 20 Issue 2 2019

REGIONAL INTEGRATION

THE "CHINESE BOX": THE SILK ROAD ECONOMIC BELT INITIATIVE IN KAZAKHSTAN

Gulmira ILEUOVA

Ph.D. (Sociol.), Acting Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science and Political Technologies of the Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, President, Strategia Public Fund Center for Social and Political Studies (Almaty, Republic of Kazakhstan)

Imanbay ZHANDOS

Postgraduate student, Department of Political Science and Political Technologies of the Al-Farabi Kazakh National University (Almaty, Republic of Kazakhstan)

ABSTRACT

We have relied on the expert community poll to assess the prospects of Kazakhstan's involvement in the Silk Road Economic Belt initiative (SREB) as part of the global Belt and Road initiative (BRI) unveiled by Chairman of the PRC Xi Jinping in 2013. We have in mind the "five major goals" defined as political coordination, more efforts poured into the construction of a common highway network, closer trade contacts, bigger money flows and closer ties between peoples.

The quoted results of the opinion poll carried out in Kazakhstan in August-October 2018 among Sinologists, experts in international relations, security, economics and finances revealed what they thought about the realization of the SREB initiative in Ka-

zakhstan, its priorities being arranged into a pyramid with infrastructural development on the top followed by stronger political trust, economic, financial and investment cooperation, humanitarian cooperation.

On the whole, the expert community is fairly positively disposed to cooperation with China, even if expert assessments are gradually changing under the pressure of the project's implementation. The poll revealed the hierarchy of preferences in realizing the SREB initiative in Kazakhstan that allowed us to compare the list of priorities enumerated by Chinese officials, on the one hand, and Kazakhstan experts, on the other. This means that priorities should be selected according to the country's national interests. A discussion of whether this initiative should be further actively developed and supported in Central Asia as a whole, and in Kazakhstan in particular, has been carefully analyzed together with the prospects of a single road network; interconnected transport infrastructure and possible risks of a wider transit and investment dependence of Kazakhstan on China.

The "policy coordination" issue suggested an analysis of the role of the ruling elites of the countries involved and the related corruption risks. In this context, soft power boils down to the studies of the Chinese language and Chinese (ethnic) traditional culture; universal values are not mentioned.

KEYWORDS: ***the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) initiative, prospects, Belt and Road initiative (BRI), infrastructure, cooperation, transit.***

Introduction

Methodology

"Ask not what the SREB initiative can do for you—ask what you can do for it." This paraphrase of President Kennedy's famous dictum puts what experts think about the Silk Road Economic Belt initiative into a nutshell.

In 2013, only one week separated the SREB initiative that the Chairman of the PRC Xi Jinping formulated in September in Astana[1] and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road revealed in October during his Southeast Asian tour,[2] later integrated into a global strategic Belt and Road initiative.

The Chinese continental SREB initiative stirred a lot of interest in Central Asia as an impressive international multi-structural project that will change the future of Eurasian and Central Asian economies. In 2018, the countries involved marked the fifth anniversary of the Belt and Road initiative. The business forum in Astana attracted about 400 businessmen from China and Kazakhstan who discussed investment cooperation and continued interaction within the BRI.[3]

At the start of the Chinese initiative, its partners were looking forward to new opportunities in transit transportation, trade, economic and investment cooperation between the countries situated along the historical Silk Route, of which Kazakhstan was one. Despite the fairly optimistic assess-

[1] See: Strategia ekonomicheskogo razvitia "Odin poias—odin put," 14 May, 2017, available at [https://ria.ru/20170514/1494097368.html], 28 January, 2019.

[2] See: Ibidem.

[3] See: "Kazakhstansko-kitayskoe sotrudnichestvo v ramkakh programmy 'odin poias-odin put' obsudili v Astane," 7 September, 2018, available at [https://primeminister.kz/ru/news/all/17096], 28 January, 2019.

ments, however, the expert community of Kazakhstan has been asking itself more and more often whether the SREB priorities and goals correspond to the national interests of their country. Indeed, should Kazakhstan accept the lavish proposals of its rich neighbor or should it weigh the pros and cons to demonstrate a more cautious approach to the initiative's fairly vaguely formulated goals?

This means that the country should go back to the initial goals to find out how Kazakhstan experts assess the initiative's future today.

We relied on the results of the poll and expert consultations; the questionnaire used certain elements of the Delphi method of expert prognostication. The poll was carried out in two stages: in August 2018 and September-October of the same year. Seventeen experts were involved in the first stage and 14 of their colleagues in the second; they were Sinologists, experts in international relations, security, economics and finances.

During the first stage, the experts answered the questions formulated in the questionnaire, which consisted of two blocks:

(1) the tasks, challenges and prospects of the realization of the SREB initiative and

(2) their assessment of Kazakhstan's transit potential and the correlation between the initiative, the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Nurly zhol state program.

The questionnaire was based on a 5-point assessment scale, where 1 meant very low and 5—very high with a possibility of commenting. The first stage with the results summarized and the participants informed about them was followed by the second stage that included 8 key questions. The participants were invited to either confirm their earlier opinions or adjust them to those of the majority. Their comments supplied us with arguments for and against the results of the first stage. Time did not allow us to go beyond the first two stages.

The vast high-quality material provided by the poll allowed us to delve deeper into the problem.

The preliminary results were tested at the International Scientific-Practical Conference "The Dialog between Researchers and Experts—Possibilities of Integration Development of the CIS countries" that took place in Bishkek on 18-21 September, 2018. The contributions were formulated as the Report *The Problem of Correspondence between the EAEU and SREB as Assessed by the Expert Communities of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan*.[4]

This article sums up the results of the poll.

The SREB Prospects and National Interests

In the speech he delivered at the Nazarbayev University on 7 September, 2013, General Secretary of the CC Communist Party of China Xi Jinping enumerated the five priorities that would consolidate economic ties, deepen cooperation and expand the development space of the Eurasian countries from which "all countries along the Great Silk Road will profit." This means more emphasis on political coordination, more efforts poured into the construction of a common highway network, closer trade contacts, bigger money flows and closer ties between peoples.[5] On the whole, the initia-

[4] For the information about the conference, see [http: //www.naskr.kg/index.php/ru/news/1401-v-bishkeke-proshla-ezhegodnaya-nauchno-prakticheskaya-konferentsiya-dialog-issledovatelej-i-ekspertov-vozmozhnosti-integrirovannogo-razvitiya-stran-sng], 28 January, 2019.

[5] See: "Vystuplenie Predsedatelia KNR Xi Jinpina v Nazarbayev universitete (full text)," 16 September, 2013, available at [http: //kz.chineseembassy.org/rus/zhgx/t1077192.html], 28 January, 2019.

tive was accepted and approved because, as experts have pointed out, "*generally, China, Kazakhstan and their neighbors share ideas about the future of the processes unfolding in Eurasia, which creates fertile soil for their cooperation*."[6]

According to the results of the poll, the experts paid particular attention to the integrated highway network and infrastructure connectivity: 65% of the polled agreed that SREB members would improve regional infrastructure, build up a network of safe and highly efficient transportation routes on land, at sea and in the air and would work on a new-generation means of communication.

Why did the experts in Kazakhstan prioritize the infrastructural component? In their commentaries they specified that while the SREB initiative was fairly vague as a belt of transportation and logistics corridors from China to Europe, an assessment of any of its elements as a priority was purely pragmatic. The infrastructure projects should be implemented with the help of Chinese funds because the present state of infrastructure in Kazakhstan was unacceptable and should, therefore, be improved and developed. "*So far, the main hopes of the SREB and, on the whole, the Belt and Road members are fed by an access to Chinese money poured into infrastructure projects in their territories. In the past they had been either on the agenda or had been pushed back because there had been neither investors nor budget money*."

The results of cooperation in the infrastructure sphere are impressive enough, something that the Chinese side never fails to mention. In Almaty, Zhang Wei, Consul General of the PRC, illustrated the efficient cooperation of the two countries with the following: "We have acquired a vast structure of over ten interconnected routes of container trains moving between China and Europe, China and Central Asia, the main Western Europe-West China railway and direct air flights between six cities of the two countries. The port of Lianyungang, one of the starting points of these container trains, is highly important for Kazakhstan as a land-locked country. The volume of passenger and goods traffic is growing by 30% every year. Grain, soya beans and other high-quality agricultural products from Kazakhstan are moved, on a permanent basis, to China and further on to Southeast Asia."[7]

An analysis of expert opinions on the relationship between Kazakhstan and China reveals that they are generally very positive about the prospects of cooperation with China in infrastructural development. Ruslan Izimov and Zamira Muratalieva have written: "Construction of new transportation arteries and modernization of the old ones in the vast territory of Kazakhstan fully correspond to the republic's interests. Close cooperation with China 'under the flag' of the Silk Road initiative gives us a chance to increase the Kazakhstan's transit potential.

"High technologies have already allowed us to shorten the road between the Pacific ports and European countries along the land corridors to move goods and passengers twice as fast."[8]

The expert community is gradually moving towards a conclusion that the national interests of the Central Asian countries (including Kazakhstan) are not taken fully into account within big international projects with integrative components ("*Kazakhstan and its neighbors do not have a long-term perspective when it comes to the implementation of certain projects and possible advantages which each of them, rather than China, will acquire with their implementation*"). The initial euphoria of the Chinese project's grandiose possibilities is going away under the pressure of more sober assessments. Izinov and Muratalieva have pointed out that in the long-term perspective "the prospect of becoming totally dependent on the eastern neighbor's trade, economic and migration expansion"

---

[6] Here and elsewhere expert commentaries are in italics.

[7] Zhang Wei, Consul General of the PRC in Almaty, "Vystuplenie na otkrytii kruglogo stola 'Ekonomicheskiy poyas Shelkovogo puti v kontekste regionalnoy bezopasnosti,'" in: *Sbornik materialov kruglogo stola,* Almaty, 15 March, 2017, p. 12.

[8] R.Iu. Izimov, Z.T. Muratalieva, "Tsentralnoaziatskiy trek initsiativy 'Poyas i put: vozmozhnosti i riski,'" *Vestnik mezhdunarodnykh organizatsiy,* Vol. 13, No. 3, 2018, p. 132.

is growing clearer.[9] This is indirectly confirmed by the fact that the countries that have already established close economic ties with China are trying to wriggle out from the trap of its influence or, at least, trim it: "*The experience of Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and other partners of the PRC that have already received Chinese loans on infrastructure and have already begun using them promptly discovered that the projects were overestimated, that the volume of investments was overstated while the value of the projects exaggerated*."

The experts are convinced that SREB is not "*an integration project in its pure form*" and that China is not interested in the development of infrastructure in any of the countries involved. It pours money,

- first, "*to move Chinese goods to the countries of Europe and the Middle East hence an accent on the transport-logistical infrastructure and simplified customs and visa processes*" and,
- second, "*to get access to raw materials and create the infrastructure required to transport them to China*."

Our poll has demonstrated that the experts are less impressed by the prospects of "closer political coordination" than by the problems of infrastructural development: only 41% deemed it necessary to point out that SREB would deepen political trust between the member countries.

What is meant by "closer political coordination"? Beijing considers it a means of coordinating the development strategies of the two countries in the form of synchronized presentation of two infrastructure projects: the Chinese Belt and Road initiative and the New Economic Nurly Zhol Policy of Kazakhstan. Coordinated state strategies deepened their bilateral ties; widened the sphere of cooperation and mutual trust between their top crusts (that is, elites).[10] Russian economist Elena Kuzmina has pointed out: "Today, all bilateral transportation and all other important investment projects are subjected to political assessment within SREB" even though "they would have been implemented without SREB on the strength of mutual economic and strategic interests."[11]

Experts in Kazakhstan agree that the SREB initiative is appreciated and supported by the elites of the countries (Kazakhstan being no exception in this respect) in which it will be realized. Indeed, this is an indispensable condition of the implementation of this multisided project as closely associated with the "*political situation in the corresponding countries*."

This connectivity is highly problematic: experts point to the high level of corruption potential of the projects partly implemented with Chinese money since no balanced analysis is carried out; their impact on Kazakhstan's national economy is not assessed and no exact and objective calculation of the debt level and the country's ability to service it was offered. This can be explained by the comprador nature of central and local elites that proceed "*from their own mercantile interests*," rather than from the country's strategic interests.

Kazakhstan's Central Asian neighbors demonstrate the ruling elites' far from disinterested support of the Chinese projects. Tajik sociologist Saodat Olimova has written: "The political and financial elite of Tajikistan worked hard to let China into the Republic. The Tajik side has been attracted by the 'limitless' generosity, the Chinese obliging and highly unobtrusive style, the absence of obvious political and economic demands and the fact that this ensures political longevity for people in

[9] Ibid., p. 135.

[10] See: Zhang Xiao, Ambassador of the PRC in the RK, "Odin poyas-odin put": vzaimovygodnoe razvitie i sovmestnoe protsvetanie Kitaia i Kazakhstana," available at [https://www.kazpravda.kz/fresh/view/odin-poyas--odin-put-vzaimovigodnoe-razvitie-i-sovmestnoe-protsvetanie-kitaya-i-kazahstana], 28 January, 2019.

[11] E.M. Kuzmina, "Tsentralnaia Azia mezhdu Rossiyey i Kitaem (ekonomicheskiy aspekt)," in: *Sbornik materialov nauchnoy konferentsii "Integratsionnye proekty v Evrazii: problemy sotsialno-ekonomicheskogo razvitia,"* Almaty, 2016, p. 69.

power in Tajikistan."[12] Kubat Rakhimov, economist and expert in infrastructural development of Kyrgyzstan, has written: "The local elites cannot grasp the fact that economy does not serve the railway, rather, the railway serves the economy. Any railway is a part of the infrastructure; a branch that produces nothing, yet may strongly affect territorial development."[13] This "failure to grasp" explains why the Kyrgyz elite is actively lobbying the project of a railway from China to Uzbekistan via Kyrgyzstan that may, according to Rakhimov, divide the country into two loosely connected parts.

Today, Chinese financial institutions have already extended financial support of the projects in Kazakhstan to the total sum of over $50 billion,[14] which is a lot. At the same time the issues of economic and financial cooperation received much less attention (3rd place) than infrastructural development and political interaction. Indeed, only 35% of the polled agreed that SREB would simplify the investment and trade procedure, promote a basic network of free trade zones and consolidate economic ties. One out of four experts (24%) believed that the Silk Road Economic Belt would encourage free yet organized movement of means of production.

The above figures mean that the experts doubted the economic value of the project for the Republic of Kazakhstan and were concerned about the implementation of the Chinese economic projects in Kazakhstan ("*the program is designed to consolidate the PRC's positions in the region and its economic colonization*"). The majority of the polled were convinced that China had its own ideas about the project and was persistently promoting it ("*SREB will ensure China's security and economic flourishing*"). This means that China is interested in the transit potential of Kazakhstan and its resources; this makes it abundantly clear that because of the active implementation of Chinese projects "*China will do away with all modernization and diversification projects in Kazakhstan*." Indeed, SREB's future will completely depend on China's investment potential. As the main sponsor, it will not be interested in what Kazakhstan really wants or which tasks it has already formulated if they do not fit the Chinese image of the future.

This has been confirmed by Ekaterina Sadovskaia on the example of the East Kazakhstan Region: "Two versions of the railway's project's feasibility study have been proposed, both with a multiplicative effect. The first stipulates for the construction of a Maykapchagay-Zyrianovsk railway. The choice of the terminal is explained by the mineral riches of the Zyrianovsk, Kurchum and Katon-Karagay regions that remain undeveloped because of the absence of transportation lines and roads. The Zaysan District is rich in shale (about 4 billion tons) which is a good source of energy that remains undeveloped because of high production costs. A railway will open access to all the resources."[15] The author says nothing about who will gain access, yet it is obvious that it presumably is China, since the railway will be extended to the Chinese border. The author was probably correct when she wrote that "the railway will give an impetus to the development of these areas of EKR."[16] At the same time it seems highly important that this and other regional projects were substantiated and well-balanced in all respects in view of the risks of "resource development." The well-known practices of economic activities of companies with Chinese participation (for example, buying raw materials and products only from "their own" companies, pernicious exploitation of land, removal of all types of resources, such as timber and metals, to China) stir up no optimism among Kazakhstan experts.

---

[12] See: S.K. Olimova, "Sopriazhenie EAES i proekta Shelkovogo poiasa: budushchee dlia Tadzhikistana," in: *Sbornik materailov nauchnoy konferentsii "Integratsionnye proekty v Evrazii: problemy sotsialno-ekonomicheskogo razvitia",* p. 81.

[13] K. Rakhimov, "Stroitelstvo 'koridora razvitia' Chui-Ferghana—istoricheskii shans dlia biznesa v Kirghizii: Kubat Rakhimov," Interview to the Regnum agency, 23 May, 2012.

[14] See: Zhang Xiao, op. cit.

[15] E.Iu. Sadovskaia, *Kitayskaia migratsia v Respubliku Kazakhstan: traditsii Shelkovogo puti i novye vektory sotrudnichestva*, Raritet, Almaty, 2014, p. 149.

[16] Ibid., p. 150.

The expert community of Kazakhstan is very skeptical about the prospect of a better understanding between peoples ("closer ties between peoples"); only 12% of experts believe that SREB will broaden humanitarian exchanges and contribute to the mutual cultural enrichment and only 6% expect that it will promote cultural exchanges and contacts between different civilizations and peace on Earth.

Academics and experts in Kazakhstan have not yet reached an agreement on China's soft power: some believe that it is fairly developed, while others insist that it is being formed. During the poll some of the experts insisted that "*China has not yet learned how to create soft power instruments, let alone use them*" and doubted that cultural and humanitarian priorities can be achieved. Konstantin Syroezhkin, on the other hand, believes that "China is known to use its soft power (*ruan shili*) as an instrument of its foreign policy."[17] Widely different opinions are rooted in the inadequate understanding of Chinese-style soft power. "Harmony" or "social harmony" is one of its elements that Syroezhkin interprets as the desire to minimize the damage created by the relationships between people, society and the environment, and between states.

According to political scientist Aydar Amrebaev, "in the context of philosophy, the Chinese dream means promoting harmony based on the Confucian idea of attaining harmony first within oneself, then in the family and society; today it includes the promotion of harmony outside China. Put in a different way, this is the task of 'civilizing' the world, making it more global and more universal in the Chinese sense of the word."[18] The author has pointed out that the content of the Chinese soft power concept and the operating style of the Chinese think tanks expected to enrich it are changing to a great extent: they modernize and optimize this concept to catch up with the expansion of the country's impact on the global scale.

Here is what the Chinese side has to say. According to the assessments of Zhang Xiao, Ambassador of the PRC to the Republic of Kazakhstan, "in recent years the interest in the studies of Chinese has reached its highest in Kazakhstan in the same way as the interest in Kazakhstan has become one of the permanent features of Chinese life. Today five Institutes of Confucius are launching courses of the Chinese language in Kazakhstan, while five Kazakhstan's cultural-and-language centers of Kazakhstan (the biggest number among the Central Asian countries) have found their place in China. Today, about 14,000 students from Kazakhstan are studying in China and about 1,400 Chinese students—in Kazakhstan. Last June, during his third state visit to Kazakhstan, Chairman Xi Jinping responded to the request of Kazakhstan with a promise to add 200 state grants for the students from Kazakhstan in the next five years."[19] The ambassador did not, however, specify which side of Kazakhstan stirred up an interest that "has become one of the permanent features of Chinese life."

By inviting to develop cooperation in the humanitarian sphere China means, first and foremost, all types of activities—exchanges, teaching, meetings and cultural centers—without discussing the content of such cooperation, at best it is vaguely formulated. So far, China offers studies of the Chinese language and Chinese (ethnic) traditional culture, something that does not necessarily attract people of other cultures.

The results of the poll helped us identify the following hierarchy of prospects offered to Kazakhstan: infrastructural development at the top, followed by deeper political trust, economic, financial and investment cooperation at the lower levels and humanitarian cooperation at the bottom.

---

[17] K.L. Syroezhkin, *Nuzhno li Kazakhstanu boiatsia Kitaia: mify i fobii dvustoronnikh otnosheniy*, Astana, Almaty, 2014, p. 121.

[18] A.M. Amrebaev, "Mozgovye tresty Kitaia obnovliaiutsia," available at [http: //www.exclusive.kz/expertiza/politika/115532/?fbclid=IwAR10wgDNajbrBZFUWrf3r2b_J-k6qGwimgmr3CszzX1dndGcr5RLNglqpll, 24.01.2019], 28 January, 2019.

[19] Zhang Xiao, op. cit.

It is highly interesting to compare the hierarchy of Kazakhstan's SREB priorities with the priorities set by the Chinese side. In his article devoted to the fifth anniversary of realization of the Belt and Road initiative, Zhang Xiao has identified the "five connecting elements" that bring together the Belt and Road initiative and the Nurly Zhol New Economic Policy.[20]

- First of all, deeper political coordination; connectivity of development strategies;
- second, promotion of barrier-free trade, optimization of the trade and economic structure;
- third, acceleration of building integrated infrastructure, creation of logistic networks;
- fourth, encouraging money flows, joint counteraction of financial risks;
- fifth, moving people's hopes closer and promoting friendship in consecutive generations.

Table 1

The Hierarchy of Realization of the SREB Initiative: Kazakh and Chinese Approaches

SREB Prospects (Expert Poll in Kazakhstan)	SREB: Connecting Elements (Chinese Position, 2018)
Infrastructural development	Deeper political coordination
Consolidation of political confidence	Optimized trade and economic structure
Economic cooperation	Accelerated infrastructural interconnections, logistic network setup
Cooperation in the financial and investment sphere	Promoted currency circulation and joint counteraction of financial risks
Humanitarian cooperation	Moving people's hopes closer and promoting friendship in consecutive generations

The above clearly demonstrates how the ideas of Kazakhstan experts about SREB priorities differ from China's official position on the same issue. The term "interest" was and remains the key one for both sides that intend to meet their national interests in the course of SREB realization. It remains to establish the degree to which both sides comprehend these interests and take them into account.

Kazakhstan experts point to the fact that the interests of their country are underestimated in the projects implemented as component parts of the SREB initiative. It should be said, however, that "*SREB is not a charity project*," and that China, which is pouring huge amounts of money into it, is determined to achieve very specific economic gains for itself at any price, including bribes. This means that Kazakhstan should assess all prospects from the point of view of its national interests, while the society should control the process.

China, in turn, demonstrates flexibility when formulating priorities and realizing the initiative. In 2013, for example, Chairman Xi Jinping had described infrastructural development as one of the top priorities; five years later it slid to the third place in the list of priorities. It is difficult to understand whether the priorities were changed because the 5-year stage had been completed or it was a response to the changed regional context. The experts assert that this is another argument in favor of "*much closer studies of the decision-making mechanism in China and the reasons for which projects are*

[20] See: Zhang Xiao, op. cit.

suggested in the first place. The experience of other countries and regions that attract Chinese investments is worth closer attention."

Economics or Politics?

The polled experts described the SREB initiative as the Chinese "ideological product" designed for external and internal consumption "*with no specific financial and time limits*." Deprived of any specific content, the SREB project ("*the projects implemented and planned within SREB are vaguely formulated*") tolerates any definition.

The project is useful for Kazakhstan's economy, primarily because it inspires economic growth, creates new jobs and increases budget proceeds. This means that "*the cultural dialogue between civilizations should be left for high-flown statements*." In the face of what looks as Chinese expansion and challenge to national identity to certain parts of Kazakhstan society, Kazakhstan will hardly appreciate the declared "*abstract gains*" of the humanitarian nature.

To what extent can this axiological concept be accepted by the countries within the SREB initiative (Kazakhstan, in particular), which are absorbing the values of Western democracy: individualism, freedom and the rights of man? It should be said that the polled experts were negatively impressed by the fact that the rhetoric that accompanied the project "replaces the course for liberal democratic values and reforms with myths about economic wellbeing through infrastructural projects."

They deemed it necessary to point out that China that lacks information openness was not ready for civilizational approaches and contacts. Its treatment of national minorities in the XUAR and the policy of acculturation and assimilation are not quite understandable and have not yet been adequately explained. This creates a negative background for its economic projects in Central Asia: "*So far, China cannot be open or it can be open on its own conditions, and this interferes with exchange and contacts between different civilizations*" and does nothing good to "*the planet's peaceful development*."

Conclusion

All in all, the polled experts pointed out that the opaque nature of the SREB initiative "*makes its prospects vague; the initiative is not transparent enough economically and lacks clear arguments in favor of future advantages of transit, future changes in infrastructure, etc*." This means that a high-quality and objective analysis of trends and scales of bilateral cooperation within the SREB initiative will remain impossible as long as information remains one-sided and the fundamental studies of the subject are absent.