GAS AND THE FOREIGN POLICY OF CENTRAL ASIAN STATES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to study the interconnection between energy resources, gas in particular, and the foreign policy of Central Asian post-Soviet states. It is suggested that gas as an internal economic factor has an impact on the foreign policy formation of Central Asian states.

The comparison of five countries—Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan—leads to the conclusion that rich gas reserves together with profitable export opportunities have enabled Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to pursue "flexible" foreign policy, which in this article means the possibility to stay away from military alliances and economic/political international organizations created by Great Powers. Since independence, Turkmenistan has adhered to the "positive neutrality" strategy and pursued the "open door" policy, while Uzbekistan has affirmed its commitment to a self-reliant foreign policy.

These strategies exclude a close alignment to Great Powers and participation in the economic and military organizations created by them.

In contrast to Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, which do not possess gas, have directed their foreign policies towards the integration into the regional/international organizations led by a Great Power — Russia, and, therefore, remained heavily dependent on it. The leaders of these two countries believe that pro-Russian policy is the only way to survive. Therefore, both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan became parts of almost all of the Russian-led economic and military initiatives.

Kazakhstan represents an exception: on the one hand, this country sits atop the large reserves of gas but, on the other hand, it still stays aligned with Russia. The article offers the following explanation for this exception: Kazakhstan's gas sector is still immature, while the export is not as diversified as in other gas-rich states of Central Asia; Kazakhstan shares the largest border with Russia hosting the majority of ethnic Russians, who could create potential threats to Kazakhstan's national security.

Given these factors, Kazakhstan does not have the possibility to pursue "flexible" foreign policy as other gas-rich Central Asian states do.

KEYWORDS: ***Central Asia, energy resources, gas, foreign policy.***

Introduction

There are many studies that emphasize the role of domestic factors when analyzing the foreign policy of post-Soviet states. However, those works mainly discuss the formation of foreign policy in the domestic political context while often ignoring the economic factors. Only a few articles refer to the correlation between energy resources and foreign policy, but only in the context of the Great Powers.[1] This article instead aims to shed light on interconnection between energy resources, gas in particular, and foreign policies of Central Asian post-Soviet states, i.e. small/weak states—the ones whose leaders believe that they cannot impact the international system or secure their own national interests independently.[2]

The article focuses mainly on gas because the natural gas pipeline industry represents a natural monopoly for sovereign states. Unlike other fossil fuels, gas is mainly transported via pipelines[3] in sovereign states' territories and needs each government's approval. Therefore, gas transportation often becomes the subject of agreement/conflict between different states.

Central Asian states share many similarities, however, only some of them are rich in energy resources, which in this case means:

— Possessing significant gas reserves;

— Having different export possibilities.

Foreign policy of Central Asian states is analyzed based on the following factor:

— Participation in military alliances and regional/international organizations created by Great Powers.

The main question of this article can be stated as follows: *What is the role of gas resources in the foreign policy of Central Asian post-Soviet states*? The respective hypothesis states that rich gas resources enable some of the Central Asian (Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) countries to pursue "flexible" foreign policy, meaning that they have an option not to join the military alliances and regional/

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[1] See: H. Kjaernet, "Azerbaijani-Russian Relations and the Economization of Foreign Policy," in: *Caspian Energy Politics: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan*, ed. by I. Overland, H. Kjaernet, A. Kendall-Taylor, Routledge, London, 2010; G. Gvalia, "Thinking Outside the Bloc: Explaining the Foreign Policies of Small States," *Security Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1, February 2013, p. 100.

[2] See: R.O. Keohane, "'Lilliputians' Dilemma: Small States in International Politics," *International Organization*, Vol. 23, No. 2, 1969, pp. 291-310.

[3] Some amount of Liquified Natural Gas (LNG) is exported via tankers only by the littoral states.

international economic/political organizations created by Great Powers. Countries with poor gas recourses (Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan) do not have such possibility. This hypothesis is proven only partially because it is contradicted by an exception— the case of Kazakhstan, a country with rich gas reserves but less "flexible" foreign policy. This exception can be explained by the immaturity of the Kazakhstan gas sector, limited export opportunities and some special geographic and demographic factors that are unique to Kazakhstan.

Central Asian States: Common Characteristics

Each of the Central Asian countries can be characterized by some qualitative criteria of small states—inability to impact the international system and secure the national interests independently. In fact, all of the existing conflicts within the Central Asian region are influenced by third parties.[4] Moreover, all of the Central Asian states are parts of the same geographic region sharing common history and post-Soviet heritage—deteriorated political and economic situation.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian countries have become mainly authoritarian states. According to the Freedom in the World 2019 report, Kyrgyzstan is "partially free," while the other four states are "not free."[5] Each of the Central Asian states has faced problems with democracy building while struggling to tackle corruption. According to the Corruption Perceptions Index 2018 (CPI), Turkmenistan has only 20 points and is ranked 161st among 180 countries worldwide, while Kazakhstan has 31 points and holds 124th place; Kyrgyzstan—29 points, 132nd place; Tajikistan—25 points, 152nd place, Uzbekistan—23 points, 158th place.[6]

Distinguishing Factor—Energy (Gas) Resources

The states of Central Asian greatly differ in terms of energy resources, in particular, gas reserves and export possibilities, which, in turn, determine the flexibility of their foreign policies.

Gas Reserves

Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan consumes some 1.9 bcm of natural gas, 3% of which is produced domestically, the rest is imported.[7] The main donor of Kyrgyzstan is Uzbekistan, which supplies gas through the Bukhara-Tashkent-Bishkek-Almaty pipeline. In 2000-2013, Uzbekistan repeatedly cut off gas sup-

[4] See: Ya. Sari, "Identity-Conflict Relations: A Case Study of the Ferghana Valley," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Volume 14, Issue 4, 2013.

[5] Freedom in the World 2019, available at [https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2019/map], 15 August, 2019.

[6] See: CORRUPTION PERCEPTIONS INDEX 2018, Transparency International, available at [https://www.transparency.org/cpi2018], 30 July, 2019.

[7] See: J. Banks, "Kyrgyzstan: Problems, Opportunities," *Oil and Gas Journal*, 15 March, 1993, available at [https://www.ogj.com/articles/print/volume-91/issue-11/in-this-issue/general-interest/kyrgyzstan-problems-opportunities.html]. 12 July, 2019

plies to Kyrgyzstan mainly due to political reasons.[8] Kyrgyzstan's gas crisis was solved only through the involvement of Russian Gazprom which became an exclusive owner of the entire Kyrgyz gas system in 2014. Kyrgyz government sold the outdated gas infrastructure to Gazprom at a symbolic 1-dollar price. Moreover, Gazprom received licenses to carry out geological exploration works in the Kyrgyz territory.[9]

Tajikistan

Tajikistan does not possess any fossil fuels. Until 2012, gas was imported exclusively from Uzbekistan. However, similar to Kyrgyz case, Tashkent has repeatedly refused to supply gas to Tajikistan due to political issues. In 2012, the relations between two neighbors became particularly tense. As a result of this crisis, Tajikistan was left without Uzbek gas for 6 years. Gas supplies were resumed only in 2018. Similar to Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan was assisted by Gazprom replacing the Uzbek supplies. Russia together with Kazakhstan became main gas donor to Tajikistan during the period of 2012-2018.[10]

Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan sits atop huge gas reserves—19 trillion cu m. There are some 200 proven gas and oil deposits in the country. The biggest one is Galkynysh with the reserves of 4-14 tcm of gas. Galkynysh is listed among the 10 biggest deposits worldwide. It is planned to use the Galkynysh gas for the implementation of the Southern Gas Corridor projects designed to supply Caspian gas to Europe.[11]

Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan possesses some 1.2 tcm of gas. Tashkent signed important contracts with foreign companies including Russian Lukoil, American General Electric, Honeywell UOP, ExxonMobil, Chinese CNPR and others in order to develop gas deposits and further enhance the export potential.[12]

Kazakhstan

Another energy-rich Central Asian state is Kazakhstan (1.1 tcm). However, this country mainly focuses on oil deposits rather than gas development. Currently, Kazakhstan extracts some 27 bcm of gas per year, out of which 16 tcm is consumed domestically. Most of the Kazakh gas reserves are

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[8] See: F. Aminjonov, "Limitations of the Central Asian Energy Security Policy: Priorities and Prospects for Improvement," *CIGI Paper No. 103*, Series: CIGI Papers, 20 May, 2016, available at: [https://www.cigionline.org/sites/default/files/paper_no103web_0.pdf], 17 July, 2019.

[9] See: S. Peyrouse, "Kyrgyzstan's Membership in the Eurasian Economic Union: A Marriage of Convenience?" *Russian Political Digest*, No. 165, 2015, pp. 10-13; A. Jafarova, "Gazprom to Resume Exploration of Two Energy Fields in Kyrgyzstan," AzerNews, 3 May, 2013, available at [https://www.azernews.az/oil_and_gas/53353.html], 13 July, 2019.

[10] See: "Gazprom Reportedly Continues Work on Exploring New Gas Fields in Tajikistan," *Asia-Plus*, 2018, available at [https://www.news.tj/en/news/tajikistan/economic/20180720/gazprom-reportedly-continues-work-on-exploring-new-gas-fields-in-tajikistan], 17 July, 2019.

[11] See: K. Aliyeva, "New Promising Oil and Gas Structures Discovered in Turkmenistan," *Azernews*, 2018, available at [https://www.azernews.az/region/121747.html], 19 July, 2019.

[12] See: Chen Aizhu, "China, Uzbek Joint Gas Field Ready to Pump," edited by Richard Pullin, Reuters, 5 December, 2017, available at [https://www.reuters.com/article/china-uzbekistan-gas-idAFL3N1O5205], 1 February, 2019; "Russia's Lukoil Increases Gas Production at South-West Gissar Project in Uzbekistan," *The Tashkent Times*, 22 August, 2017, available at [http://tashkenttimes.uz/economy/1333-russia-s-lukoil-increases-gas-production-at-south-west-gissar-project-in-uzbekistan], 26 July, 2019.

located in the Caspian Sea region. The biggest deposits are Kashagan (1 tcm of gas), Karachaganak (1.2 tcm of gas) and Tengiz (1 tcm of gas).[13]

Export Possibilities

Turkmenistan

Throughout the history, Turkmenistan has exported gas to Iran, Russia, and China. However, the main end-user of Turkmen gas at the moment is China. Gas is transported to Chinese Western regions through the Central Asia-China pipeline.[14] Recently, two parties agreed to transport some 65 bcm by 2020.[15] However, even the increased export will not be enough for Turkmenistan to make a significant profit, given the fact that half of these revenues will cover billions of Chinese loans provided to Ashghabad earlier.

In the past, Russia was the main importer of Turkmen gas (via Central Asia-Center pipeline). However, throughout the years, gas supplies were held off due to the strained relations between the two countries over the unpaid bills, pipeline explosion, etc. Turkmenistan resumed gas export to Russia only in 2019.[16]

Similar issues arose with Iran. Iran was importing about 8-9 bcm of gas from Turkmenistan annually. However, exports were cut off due to the unpaid bill allegations against Tehran.[17]

There are some potential buyers for Turkmen gas too. EU may become one of them in case of successful realization of the Trans-Caspian Gas (TCG) pipeline project (TCG is a part of the Southern Gas Corridor initiative providing Europe with alternative gas supplies). The initiated pipeline will be 300 km long, transporting gas from Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan to Europe through Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey. In 2017, Turkmenistan completed the construction of the East-West Pipeline connecting Galkynysh field to Turkmenistan's Western regions. This pipeline will be later connected to TCG.[18]

Turkmenistan is also involved in the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) project. It is planned to build a 1,814 km long pipeline with the capacity of 33 bcm per year transporting Galkynysh gas to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. As a result of the TAPI realization, Turkmenistan will be able to export 5 bcm gas per year to Afghanistan, and to Pakistan and India 14 bcm each.[19] In

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[13] See: R. Nurshayeva, "Kazakhs, Chevron-Led Group Approve $37 Billion Tengiz Field Expansion," Reuters, 5 July, 2016, available at [https://www.reuters.com/article/us-chevron-kazakhstan/kazakhs-chevron-led-group-approve-37-billion-tengiz-field-expansion-idUSKCN0ZL0X4], 29 July, 2019.

[14] See: Chen Xiangming, F. Fazilov, "Re-centering Central Asia: China's 'New Great Game' in the Old Eurasian Heartland," *Palgrave Communications*, Vol. 4, No. 71, 2018, available at [https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-018-0125-5], 2 July, 2019.

[15] See: F. Aminjonov, "Natural Gas Pipeline Infrastructure in Central Asia," *Eurasian Research Institute*, No. 67, 2016, available at [http://www.ayu.edu.tr/static/aae_haftalik/aae_bulten_en_67.pdf], 31 July, 2019.

[16] See: I. Slav, "Why Gazprom Just Resumed Purchases of Turkmen Gas," Oilprice.com, 16 April, 2019, available at [https://oilprice.com/Latest-Energy-News/World-News/Why-Gazprom-Just-Resumed-Purchases-Of-Turkmen-Gas.html], 18 July, 2019.

[17] See: O. Hryniuk, "The Escalation of Iran-Turkmenistan Gas Dispute: Will the Battle Begin?" CIS Arbitration Forum, 6 March, 2018, available at [http://www.cisarbitration.com/2018/03/06/the-escalation-of-iran-turkmenistan-gas-dispute-will-the-battle-begin/], 2 July 2019.

[18] See: C. Putz,"'Turkmenistan Completes East-West Pipeline: What's Next?" *The Diplomat*, 29 December, 2015, available at [https://thediplomat.com/2015/12/turkmenistan-completes-east-west-pipeline-whats-next/], 2 July 2019.

[19] See: D. Jorgic, "China Interested in Joining TAPI Pipeline Project—Pakistan Official," Reuters, 8 August, 2018, available at [https://www.reuters.com/article/pakistan-china-tapi/china-interested-in-joining-tapi-pipeline-project-pakistan-official-idUSL5N1UY1GR], 2 July, 2019.

2015, Turkmenistan began the construction of TAPI. However, there are still some unresolved problems related to this project, namely, funding and the security situation in the territory of participant states.[20]

Uzbekistan

Currently about 20% of Uzbek gas is exported. The main buyers of Uzbek gas are Russia and China. Uzbekistan supplies its gas to Russia through Bukhara-Ural and Central Asia-Center pipelines. As per the 2017 deal, Russian Gazprom shall buy 4 bcm of Uzbek gas every year.[21]

Another destination for Uzbek gas is China. Currently Tashkent exports more than 5 bcm of gas to China via the Central Asia-China pipeline. It is planned to increase the export volume up to 10 bcm. The additional "D" link of the Central Asia-China pipeline will provide Uzbekistan with the possibility to increase the export volume.[22]

Uzbekistan also exports gas to neighboring Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan through Bukhara-Tashkent-Bishkek-Almaty pipeline. Gas supplies have been resumed to Tajikistan via Muzrabad-Dushanbe pipeline as well.[23]

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan exports gas to China and Russia. The latter receives Kazakh gas through the Central Asia-Center pipeline. For a long time, Russia was the sole importer of Kazakh gas, however, in 2017, Kazakhstan started exporting its gas to China through the Central Asia-China pipeline. At present, the export volumes are low but Kazakhstan plans to increase them up to 10 bcm by 2019 as per the agreement between the state-owned companies of two countries—KazTransGas and PetroChina.[24]

Different Result—
Different Foreign Policy

As mentioned above, this article discusses foreign policy choices of Central Asian states in the context of gas resources. It is argued that the gas-rich countries pursue more "flexible" policy, which in this case means staying away from the participation in military alliances and regional/international organizations created by Great Powers, while gas-poor states remain aligned with a historic "patron"—Russia. Analysis of each country's foreign policy is given below.

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[20] See: E. Najafizada, "$7.5 Billion Pipeline Has Surprise Patrons: Taliban Militants," *Bloomberg*, 9 March, 2018, available at [https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-03-08/a-7-5-billion-pipeline-has-surprise-patrons-taliban- militants], 12 July, 2019.

[21] A. Gorokhov, "Golubaia mechta: kuda poidet uzbekskii gaz," *SputnikNews*, 8 June, 2017, available at [https://uz.sputniknews.ru/analytics/20170608/5583119/Kuda-poidet-uzbekskii-gaz.html], 12 July, 2019.

[22] See: C. Michel "Line D of the Central Asia-China Gas Pipeline Delayed," *The Diplomat*, 31 May, 2016, available at [https://thediplomat.com/2016/05/line-d-of-the-central-asia-china-gas-pipeline-delayed/], 14 July, 2019.

[23] See: F. Aminjonov, "Limitations of the Central Asian Energy Security Policy: Priorities and Prospects for Improvement," *CIGI Paper*, 20 May, 2016, No. 103, available at [https://www.cigionline.org/sites/default/files/paper_no103web_0.pdf], 17 July, 2019.

[24] N. Rodova, "Kazakhstan to Double Natural Gas Exports to China to 10 Bcm/year in 2019," *S&P Global, Natural Gas,* 15 October, 2018, available at [https://www.spglobal.com/platts/en/market-insights/latest-news/natural-gas/101518-kazakhstan-to-double-natural-gas-exports-to-china-to-10-bcmyear-in-2019], 20 July, 2019.

Tajikistan

Tajikistan has always been dependent on Russia in terms of military and economic security. The country is a member of every Russian-led international organization. In 1992, Tajikistan was one of the first parties signing the treaty of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).[25] Moreover, Tajikistan joined the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in 1991. Participation in multilateral organizations is also included in the state's official documents, such as Foreign Policy Concept.[26]

Tajikistan was a member of Russian-led Eurasian Economic Community, which ceased to exist in 2014. Now Dushanbe is invited to join the successor of this organization—Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Even though the membership of any Russian-led organization threatens the sovereignty of Tajikistan, almost 70% of Tajik population have already expressed the willingness to join EAEU.[27]

The readiness and willingness of Tajikistan to join the EAEU can be related to the gas factor. The membership of EAEU could mean the energy security for Tajikistan. As already mentioned, the country is heavily dependent on Uzbek gas supplies, which, in often cases can be unpredictable. Therefore, there is always a chance that Uzbekistan cuts off gas supplies to the neighbor due to political reasons. Under such conditions, Russia remains the only alternative to provide gas (mainly LNG). Even today, when the import of Uzbek gas have been resumed, Tajik population still receives Russian gas; Uzbek supplies are provided only to business entities.

According to the 2003 contract, Gazprom promised to secure Tajikistan's energy security improving gas infrastructure and carrying out exploration works throughout the country. However, in the end of the works, Gazprom officially announced that there was no gas in Tajikistan. Apparently, it is not in geopolitical interests of Russia to discover new deposits in Tajikistan. This would lead Dushanbe to enhance export possibilities and closely cooperate with foreign companies, which would eventually free Tajikistan from Russia's patronage. Tajik experts believe that "if Tajikistan had been more accommodating, if it had not resisted joining the [Russian-led] Eurasian Economic Union [EAEU], there would be oil and gas."[28]

Finally, the membership of EAEU would make gas more affordable and accessible for Tajikistan due to the fact that it is planned to create common energy market between the EAEU member states by 2025.[29] This means harmonization of standards, competitive price setting and equal access to gas throughout EAEU. Thus, it will make Russian gas more accessible to Tajikistan.

Kyrgyzstan

Similar to Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan does not possess significant gas reserves. At the same time, the country is heavily dependent on Russia both in terms of economy and security. Since 1991, Kyrgyzstan has been an active member of the CIS. In 1992, the country signed the CSTO treaty too. Russian influence became especially strong after Kyrgyzstan joined the Customs Union and EAEU.

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[25] See: "About 2,500 CSTO Troops to Take Part in Rubezh Exercise in Tajikistan," TASS, 9 August, 2018, available at [http://tass.com/defense/1016624], 21 July, 2019.

[26] See: Foreign Policy Concept of Tajikistan (2015), available at [http://mfa.tj/?l=ru&art=1072].

[27] See: "Tajikistan: Feeling the Eurasian Union's Gravitational Pull," Eurasianet, 31 January, 2017, available at [https://eurasianet.org/tajikistan-feeling-eurasian-unions-gravitational-pull], 23 July, 2019.

[28] N. Mirsaidov, "Gazprom Dashes Tajikistan's Hopes for Resource Wealth," *Central-Asia-News,* 10 August, 2018, available at [http://central.asia-news.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_ca/features/2018/08/10/feature-01], 6 July, 2019.

[29] See: M. Russell, "Eurasian Economic Union: The Rocky Road to Integration," EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service, PE 599.432, 2017, available at http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/599432/EPRS_BRI(2017)599432_EN.pdf], 25 July, 2019.

Bishkek's decision to be part of the Russian-led international organizations is related to the energy security issues. Similar to Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan has been dependent on Uzbek gas supplies, which, given the past experience, can be unreliable. Moreover, in 2014, Kyrgyz government sold the entire gas sector to Russian Gazprom at a one-dollar price. Given the fact that Russia often uses gas as a political leverage against post-Soviet states, the Russia-Kyrgyzstan gas deal was more of a geopolitical importance for Moscow.

In exchange for giving up the entire gas sector, Kyrgyzstan received Gazprom's guarantee to ensure the supply security. This would be achieved through bilateral talks between Gazprom and Uzbekistan, i.e. Kyrgyzstan as a party would be replaced Russia, which could have more political weight against Uzbekistan. Thus, it could secure Kyrgyzstan's energy security. In fact, Gazprom managed to reduce the imported gas price to 150 dollar per 1,000 cu m in 2016. Moreover, Russia paid more than 40 million dollars of Kyrgyzstan's gas debt to neighboring states. In exchange for that, Gazprom received an exclusive gas import rights and absolute independence from the Kyrgyz government in dealing with suppliers.[30]

The 2014 deal between Gazprom and Kyrgyzstan posed an imminent threat to Kyrgyzstan's sovereignty. Kyrgyz government let Russia acquire serious geopolitical leverage on Kyrgyzstan, which, in turn, was a long-standing goal of the Russian government. Since the 1990s, Moscow has been trying to acquire control over Kyrgyz economy, which was impossible until 2014 due to the political instability in Kyrgyzstan. Russia's mission was finally accomplished in 2014 with the "help" of Kyrgyz government. On the one hand, Kyrgyzstan made a choice to align with Russia in order to solve the gas-related problems with Uzbekistan, but, on the other hand, the country fell into more serious trouble sacrificing the sovereignty.

The alignment with Russia was explained by the former president Atambayev in the following way: "Kyrgyzstan does not have future without Russia,"[31] which means that the Customs Union/EAEU membership was not really a choice for Kyrgyzstan. The country simply did not have other option rather than to "bandwagon" with Moscow. After the closure of a U.S. base in Manas airport, U.S. influence on Central Asian region significantly decreased, while Russia still seemed interested in its "near abroad". Thus, there was only one choice for Kyrgyzstan. In 2014, former President Atambayev stated: "We need to join the Customs Union because we don't have any other choice and we have to do that as soon as possible while we can still do it ourselves."[32]

Uzbekistan

Since independence, Uzbekistan's foreign policy has been oriented towards enhancing sovereignty and increasing its role as a regional leader. "Mustaqillik" has been Uzbekistan's main motto, which generally means self-reliance. Even in the 1990s, President Karimov believed that the relationship with Russia should have been based on a principle of equality preventing Moscow to play a role of a "big brother."[33] Uzbekistan's first president publicly spoke against Russia's involvement in internal affairs of the Central Asian states and condemned Moscow's participation in Tajik civil war as well.[34] Moreover, Karimov decided to leave CSTO and join the anti-Russian GUAM in 1999-2005.

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[30] See: S. Peyrouse, "Kyrgyzstan's Membership in the Eurasian Economic Union: A Marriage of Convenience?" *Russian Political Digest*, No. 165, 2015, pp. 10-13.

[31] "Almazbek Atambayev: 'Bez Rossii u nas net otdelnogo budushchego'," *Knews*, 20 September, 2012, available at [https://knews.kg/2012/09/20/almazbek-atambaev-bez-rossii-u-nas-net-otdelnogo-buduschego/], 4 July, 2019.

[32] "No Option for Kyrgyzstan but to Join Customs Union — Kyrgyzstan President," TASS.ru, 27 October, 2014, available at [http://tass.ru/en/economy/756666l], 23 July, 2019 (see: also: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_jEPjW-1KGw]).

[33] I. Karimov, *Uzbekistan—The Road of Independence and Progress*, Uzbekiston, Tashkent, 1992.

[34] See: I. Rotar, "Moscow and Tashkent Battle for Supremacy in Central Asia," Jamestown Foundation Prism, Vol. 5, Issue 4, 1999, available at [https://jamestown.org/program/moscow-and-tashkent-battle-for-supremacy-in-central-asia/].

It meant that Tashkent was willing to stay away from Russia's "protection" even in times when Uzbekistan was facing terrorism threats (1999 and 2004 terrorist attacks in Tashkent) and could greatly benefit from CSTO—an antiterrorist organization.

Karimov only got closer to Russia in 2005 when the survival of his own regime became questionable: after the Andijan massacre (an anti-government rally with more than a thousand casualties), Uzbekistan's government was harshly criticized by U.S. and EU. Karimov could use Moscow's support to balance the Western pressure. This explains Uzbekistan's temporary membership in CSTO and Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), which ended right after the U.S.-EU sanctions were released. It should also be noted that Karimov never considered participation in the Russian-led Customs Union as he thought that this would hurt Uzbekistan's national interests and jeopardize its sovereignty.

The self-reliant foreign policy of Uzbekistan is greatly supported by the energy independence of the country. According to the former President Karimov, "a country can be regarded as really independent once it gains the energy independence."[35] Unlike Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, Uzbekistan would never face the necessity to become a part of the Russian-led EAEU. Russia lacks the main political leverage on Uzbekistan, which Moscow has with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan—gas dependence. Uzbekistan is able not only to meet the domestic demand but also to export gas and, thus, have some political influence on other countries (gas as a political weapon against neighboring Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan).

Uzbekistan does not allow any foreign influence on its foreign policy but the country uses the relations with foreign energy companies for strengthening the sovereignty. Rich gas reserves of Uzbekistan attract Russian, U.S., EU, and Chinese companies. Their involvement in the Uzbek economy enables Tashkent not to depend on any Great Power and, thus, stay away from alignment with Russia. Also, Uzbekistan receives significant revenues from gas exports. For example, in the first half of 2018, gas revenues equaled to more than $1 billion.[36]

Uzbek government understands the importance of gas resources and, thus, envisages to further develop the sector. According to the current President Mirziyoyev, it is planned to increase the production up to 70 bcm by 2025. Moreover, there is a possibility for Uzbekistan to join the TAPI project too.[37] As a result, the more diversified the export, the less dependency on a single customer. This, in turn, ensures Uzbekistan's economic independence and more "flexible" foreign policy.

Turkmenistan

The main concepts of Turkmenistan's foreign policy are "positive neutrality" and the "open door" policy. Positive Neutrality means Turkmenistan's non-involvement in international conflicts, while Open Door Policy mainly supports the foreign investment inflow and boosts export potential.

Positive Neutrality excludes Turkmenistan being a member of any military and economic multinational organization. Therefore, Turkmenistan did not become Russia's close ally within the post-Soviet regional organizations. The country did sign the CIS treaty but never ratified it as Turkmenistan's neutrality was officially recognized by the U.N. in 1995. Accordingly, Turkmenistan has never been a member of CSTO or Customs Union/EAEU.

[35] Ja. Omorov, Th. Lynch, "Energy Demand/Supply Balance and Infrastructure Constraints Diagnostics Study," RETA-6488: CAREC Energy Sector Action Plan, Asian Development Bank, October 2010, p. 24.

[36] See: "Uzbekistan za polgoda eksportiroval gaz na $1.1 mlrd," *Gazeta.uz*, 27 July, 2018, available at [https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2018/07/27/export/], 2 July, 2019.

[37] See: "Uzbekistan to Join TAPI Pipeline Project," Interfax Global Energy, 24 April, 2018, available at [http://interfaxenergy.com/article/30566/uzbekistan-to-join-tapi-pipeline-project], 5 July, 2019.

Turkmenistan's Open Door Policy is mainly based on successful exploitation of the country's energy potential. According to the President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, rational utilization of energy resources, attraction of investors and, thus, increasing economic potential of the country are the main strategic priorities of the Turkmen government.[38] Indeed, Turkmenistan's energy sector is attractive for many international companies representing different states. The U.S. and EU consider Turkmenistan to be an alternative supplier for Europe—the planned TCG should enable the transportation of Turkmen gas to the EU and replace Russian supplies. Moreover, the importance of Turkmenistan is vital in terms of TAPI project, which is a pure American initiative, as many experts believe. TAPI is regarded as a political project with nothing to do with economic benefits;[39] it should strengthen U.S. influence on Turkmenistan and on the region, in general.

The increase of U.S. influence on Central and South Asian regions contradicts the interests of Russia, in turn. This explains an eager intention of Moscow to participate in TAPI project, which was successfully blocked by Ashghabad.[40] By becoming a TAPI shareholder, Moscow could control the project and balance the U.S. influence.

Russia is also against Turkmenistan's plan to export gas to Europe. This would threat Gazprom's current supplies, which currently form almost 40% of Europe's gas import. Declining gas export opportunities, in turn, would mean Moscow's limited political leverage on European states. Therefore, it is Russia's geopolitical interest to block Turkmen gas exports to Europe.

China is another reason why Russia sees Turkmenistan as a competitor. Gazprom is building a 4,000 km Power of Siberia pipeline to Chinese border which would enable the export of 38 bcm of Russian gas to China. The current main supplier of China is Turkmenistan. It is in Gazprom's interests to somehow block the future increase in export of Turkmen gas to China. This could even be one of the reasons why Russia resumed the imports of Turkmen gas in 2019.[41] Moscow prefers to be the main importer of Turkmen gas so that Ashghabad does not look for other consumers. This could also explain Russia's position in the Caspian Status negotiations in 2018 when Moscow allowed Caspian littoral states, including Turkmenistan, to build undersea pipelines in the Caspian Sea. With the Russian import resumed, Ashghabad probably would not have enough gas to supply TCG, which is what Russia is striving for.

From the Turkmen perspective, resuming gas exports to Russia could be quite beneficial. The country faces a severe economic downturn which can be mitigated by receiving some immediate revenues (given the fact that 70% of Turkmenistan's income is generated from gas exports[42]) rather than waiting for realization of less realistic projects—TAPI (related to security and funding issues) or TCG (infrastructure and political problems).

Turkmenistan greatly benefits from the interests of different international players in the country's gas sector. However, Ashghabad does not allow any foreign party to have significant impact on the country. Moreover, Turkmenistan imposed some restrictions on international investors: according to the Turkmen legislation, foreign companies are allowed to work only on offshore fields cooperating only with the state-owned TurkmenGaz.

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[38] See: "Berdymukhamedov obratilsia s privetstviem k uchastnikam foruma 'Neft i gaz Turkmenistana-2018'," Turkmenportal, 20 November, 2018, available at [https://turkmenportal.com/blog/16504/berdymuhamedov-obratilsya-s-privetstviem-k-uchastnikam-foruma-neft-i-gaz-turkmenistana2018], 4 July 2019.

[39] See: V. Panfilova, "Turkmenskiy gaz—pod kontrolem SShA," Nezavisimaia gazeta, 15 December, 2015, available at [http://www.ng.ru/cis/2015-12-15/1_turkmen.html], 5 July, 2019.

[40] See: St. Blank, "Russia and the TAPI Pipeline," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 12, Issue 227, 2018.

[41] See: A. Batyrov, "Gazprom Resumes Gas Imports from Turkmenistan after 3-Year Break," *Caspian News*, 17 April, 2019, available at [https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/gazprom-resumes-gas-imports-from-turkmenistan-after-3-year-break-2019-4-17-27/], 2 August, 2019.

[42] See: R. Gente, "Причины для беспокойства по поводу поставок туркменского газа в Китай', *Chronicles of Turkmenistan*, 10 December, 2018, available at [https://www.hronikatm.com/2018/12/prichinyi-dlya-bespokoystva-po-povodu-postavok-turkmenskogo-gaza-v-kitay/], 12 July, 2019.

Kazakhstan—An Exception

Unlike other gas-rich Central Asian states, Kazakhstan has not been able to pursue "flexible" foreign policy and stay away from the Russian influence. The country is a part of all Russian-led international organizations including CSTO, EurAsEC, Customs Union/EAEU. However, the membership of these organizations has not been quite beneficial for Kazakhstan in terms of higher tariffs (in the trade with the third countries), currency devaluation, etc.[43] Despite the negative results, Kazakhstan still remains a member of the Russian-led organizations, even though, at the first glance, the country has the same opportunities to become economically independent as other gas-rich Central Asian states.

Since the 1990s, Kazakhstan has begun to attract Western investments in its economy, especially in the energy sector. President Nazarbayev thought that "in today's world weapons cannot do anything to protect a country," therefore, "security will be a powerful Western business presence in Kazakhstan."[44] The same position was confirmed by Kasymzhomart Tokayev, the former Minister of the Foreign Affairs stating that U.S. economic involvement in the region was "in the Kazakh interest as regards national security."[45] The Kazakh government believed that Western energy companies could bring important diplomatic support from their parent countries.[46] This, as a result, could balance the Russian influence on Kazakhstan.

The possibility to attract Western investors in Kazakh gas sector seemed even more realistic in 2018 when the problem of the Caspian Sea status was resolved. Prior to that event, the Kazakh parliament decided to grant U.S. access to Aktau and Kuryk ports providing the U.S. military with logistical support for the Afghanistan operations.[47] This decision was quite alarming for Moscow as it literally meant Washington's progress in cementing its influence and military presence in Central Asia. Therefore, the Caspian Sea status decision could be a result of this event—Kazakhstan promised Moscow not to allow the U.S. military presence in the region and received the solution (i.e. possibility to construct undersea gas pipelines) of the Caspian Sea problem in exchange.

Given the above-mentioned, it is interesting to pose a question on why Kazakhstan cannot pursue more "flexible" foreign policy even if there is a possibility to balance Russian influence through implementation of international gas projects. The immediate answer to this question would be the immaturity of Kazakh gas sector (especially in comparison to Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan). Kazakhstan focuses more on oil than on gas as it is the second largest post-Soviet country in terms of oil reserves and its production. The annual oil revenues are almost 40 billion dollars, while the gas income is less than 2 billion. Also, the oil share in the entire export is more than 52%, while the gas share remains only 5%.[48] That is why oil remains the main focus of Kazakhstan.

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[43] See: A.E. Kramer, "Russia and 2 Neighbors Form Economic Union," *The New York Times*, 5 July, 2010, available at [https://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/06/business/global/06customs.html], 24 July 2019.

[44] E.M. Lederer, "Western Business Will Be Kazakhstan's Main Security Guarantee," 22 March, 1994, available at [http://www.apnewsarchive.com/1994/Western-Business-Will-Be-Kazakhstan-sMain-Security-Guarantee/id-fff025b-c745b6f628fb56a6e35802048], 5 August, 2019.

[45] "Caution Ahead of Caspian Summit," BBC News, 23 April, 2002, available at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1946236.stm], 4 August, 2019.

[46] See: M.B. Olcott, *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., 2002.

[47] See: N. Aliyev, "U.S.-Kazakhstan Transit Agreement Faces Challenges from Russia," *The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 20 September, 2018, available at [https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13534-us-kazakhstan-transit-agreement-faces-challenges-from-russia.html], 3 August, 2019.

[48] A. Nikonorov, "V 2018 godu eksport nefti sostavil 2/3 dokhodov ot zarubezhnykh prodazh," 365Info.kz, 15 February, 2019, available at [https://365info.kz/2019/02/v-2018-godu-eksport-nefti-sostavil-2-3-dohodov-ot-zarubezhnyh-prodazh/], 1 August, 2019.

Another factor explaining the Kazakh exception is the less diversified nature of Kazakh gas export. Throughout the decades, the sole consumer of Kazakh gas was Russia. It was only in 2017 when Kazakhstan began to export a low amount of gas (5 bcm) to China. However, the successful implementation of the planned TCG project will enable Kazakhstan to significantly diversify export.

Other factors which could also explain the uniqueness of Kazakhstan are related to demographic and geographic conditions. Kazakhstan hosts the largest number of ethnic Russians representing 20% of the population, while the share of Russians is quite low in other gas-rich Central Asian states (Uzbekistan (8%) and Turkmenistan (4%)). Russians build the majority (more than 50%) of the population in the northern regions of Kazakhstan, which is not the case in any other post-Soviet country. Moreover, Kazakhstan is connected to Russia through the largest 7,000 km border, while other gas-rich states (Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) do not have common borders to Russia. Given these conditions, Kazakhstan has always tried to pursue a careful policy towards Russia. There have already been some precedents when Russian citizens became reasons for Russian aggression (2008 Russia-Georgian war and the 2014 Crimea annexation). Therefore, ethnic Russians could pose similar threats to national security of Kazakhstan too.

Conclusion

The article has studied the relationship between gas and the foreign policies of the Central Asian states. The comparison of five countries—Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan—has shown that rich gas reserves together with profitable export opportunities have enabled Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to pursue "flexible" foreign policy, which in this case means the possibility to stay away from military alliances and economic/political international organizations created by Great Powers—Russia in this case, while the countries with poor gas recourses (Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan) do not have such possibility.

The article has also discussed the case of Kazakhstan, a country with rich gas reserves but less "flexible" foreign policy. This exception was explained by the following factors: Kazakhstan's gas sector is still immature, while the export is not as diversified as in other gas-rich Central Asian states; Kazakhstan shares the largest border with Russia hosting the majority of ethnic Russians, who could create potential threats to national security.