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EUROPEAN UNION’S SECURITY POLICY
IN REGARD TO CENTRAL ASIA
WITHIN THE EU STRATEGY FOR CA

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Zhansaule ZHARMAKHANOVA
Ph.D. Student (International Relations), L.N. Gumilev Eurasian National University
(Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan)

Saniya NURDAVLETOVA
Ph.D. (Hist.), Associate Professor, Department of International Relations,
L.N. Gumilev Eurasian National University
(Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan)

Leila AKHMETZHAMANOVA
Ph.D. (Hist.), Associate Professor, Department of International Relations,
L.N. Gumilev Eurasian National University
(Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan)

ABSTRACT
As Central Asia undergoes a rapid transformation process, political, economic and security developments remain uncertain and difficult to predict. External actors will play a key role in defining the contours of transformation in Central Asia.
In recent years, a number of powerful countries—mainly China, the Russian Federation and, to a lesser extent, the United States, Japan and Turkey—have sought to increase their influence in Central Asia. There was a timely initiative proposed by Germany, which presided over the European Union at the time, to launch the process of rethinking EU participation in Central Asia, culminating in the development of a Strategy for Central Asia. Thus, the European Union has reinforced its presence at a strategic moment for Central Asia. The Strategy for a New Partnership, adopted by the European Council on 21-22 June, 2007, became the main document for the significant and decisive strengthening of EU policy in Central Asia. The strategy represents the most ambitious EU project in the region and demonstrates a significant improvement in relations. The EU has the needed resources and, in line with the Strategy, it wants to do its part to transform the region into a secure and well-governed area, which is also in the interests of Central Asians. In 2019, in order to intensify cooperation, the EU updated and launched the new Strategy for Central Asia. It should be noted that security is a particularly important issue. In both the first Strategy 2007 and the updated Strategy 2019, the theme of security is reflected in various EU programs and projects. Thus, the article will provide a general analysis of EU’s security programs in Central Asia.

**KEYWORDS**: EU, Central Asia, Strategy, security.

**Introduction**

Vast reserves of hydrocarbons and minerals have increased the importance of the Central Asian region, while neighboring countries have begun to battle for access and influence in the region. The new Great Game between Russia and China has become strategically important in the region. In addition, Central Asia is home to a trade corridor network that ensures the trade flow between Europe and Asia. Thus, regional stability is imperative in safeguarding the continuity of global trade and international projects. Planned large-scale infrastructure projects linking regional hubs and transport corridors are essential for the sustainability of the global economy and efficient resource allocation.

Moreover, in their analysis of the security situation, the authors examine a variety of issues, i.e., defense institutions, military potential, border security, water and energy security, transport corridors, and other emerging factors.

**EU-CA Cooperation**

Central Asia appeared on the EU’s political radar in 2007, when, realizing the region’s geostrategic importance and its growing proximity, the EU launched the Central Asia Strategy for a New Partnership, accompanied by the Regional Strategic Paper for Assistance to Central Asia for the Period of 2007-2013. It is also important to note that energy was the main driver at the time of the strategy’s launch, yet security gradually became a major concern. Thus, a review document assessing the progress of the implementation of the EU strategy for Central Asia in the summer of 2012 concludes that “security issues have come to the fore in relations with the EU.” In the same year, the Progress Report on the Implementation of the EU Strategy for Central Asia listed specific steps to-
wards improving security, with the establishment of regular high-level dialog between the EU and Central Asia as one of the most important measures.¹

Since Central Asia is a region of strategic importance that faces a number of security challenges, especially due to the growing instability in war-torn Afghanistan, the EU has decided to expand its involvement in the region. On 28 May, 2019, Brussels hosted a high-level political and security dialog between the countries of Central Asia and Afghanistan with EU participation. This dialog led to the discussion of a new EU strategy for Central Asia, as well as to the promotion of the EU-Asia nexus. The EU Strategy for Central Asia was approved by the European Council in June 2019. The scale of EU-Central Asia relations is associated with the readiness of individual CA countries to carry out reforms and strengthen democracy, human rights, the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, as well as to modernize and diversify the economy, including by supporting the private sector and, in particular, SMEs in a free market economy.

The importance of a regional approach and regional cooperation was also highlighted at the meetings of EU and Central Asian foreign ministers, the 16th and most recent of which took place in November 2020 in Bishkek.²

In addition, it should be noted that, despite the increased emphasis on security, the EU has not developed a genuine security strategy or procedures to resolve the security issue in Central Asia. Rather, the EU prefers to support existing multilateral organizations, such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and has participated in NATO’s operation in Afghanistan. Substantial security programs have never been implemented or developed by the EU alone, but always in conjunction with other organizations such as the OSCE or the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). The most revealing programs in this regard are the Central Asia Border Management Program (BOMCA) and the Central Asia Drug Action Program (CADAP), which deal with border and drug trafficking control. Both programs are funded by the EU, with UNDP as the executive body.³

Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that the 2019 EU Strategy for Central Asia is currently the document that forms the basis for cooperation between the EU and Central Asia. An earlier version of the Strategy (2007) has been updated to focus on sustainability (covering spheres of human rights, border security and environment), prosperity, and regional cooperation. The 2019 Strategy has three main objectives:

1. **Partnerships to raise sustainability.** In line with this goal, the EU and Central Asian countries are equal partners with a stake in promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law, enhancing cooperation to meet Paris climate commitments and addressing regional environmental challenges.⁴

2. **Partnership for prosperity.** Both players will strive to unlock “their significant growth potential by stimulating the development of a competitive private sector and creating a healthy and open investment environment.”⁵ This is clearly an economic goal; therefore, Central Asian countries, which strive to develop their land-locked economies, should a priori be the more incentivized side. Accordingly, Central Asian countries have received and will re-

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receive vast amounts of money to invest in projects through programs such as the INOGATE Energy Portal, TRACECA Transport Corridor, Baku Energy and Transport Initiative and BOMCA (EU Border Management Program). In addition to these programs, the region will receive 124 million euros as a solidarity package from the EU. As part of this solidarity package, the EU established a two-year Central Asia Regional COVID-19 Crisis Response (CACCR) Program for Central Asia, launched in July 2020.6

(3) Collaboration. Apparently, the EU does not want to impose its plans or prospects, rather, it seeks to improve the overall situation in this region, as it realizes the many benefits it brings to Europe. Therefore, the EU wants to “strengthen the architecture of the partnership, intensifying political dialog and open up space for civil society participation.”

This leads us to conclude that the problem of security has been relevant since the very beginning of cooperation between the EU and the countries of Central Asia. In addition, it is clear from the above that both the 2007 Strategy and the updated 2019 Strategy were concerned with security. Accordingly, the EU has launched and funded security projects.

### BOMCA and CADAP Programs

Launched in 2003, the BOMCA program focuses on promoting regional cooperation on border management, developing trade corridors and eradicating drug trafficking in the Central Asian region. 2020 was marked by the completion of the ninth phase of the BOMCA program. The ninth phase of the BOMCA Program was active in 2015-2020 with a total budget of 6.6 million euros, and was aimed at empowering border management authorities in Central Asia: border, customs, migration, veterinary and phytosanitary services, as well as relevant higher education institutions and training centers. The program has conducted 223 separate activities involving 3,300 civil servants from the Central Asian beneficiary agencies. The following actions were implemented within the program framework: increasing and improving professional knowledge and skills, updating the regulatory framework, strengthening cooperation and information exchange at different levels. The exchange of know-how and best practices from both EU member states and CA countries was one of the project’s fundamental principles. In addition, the regional countries received assistance in the form of video surveillance and control equipment at border checkpoints and modern technologies for educational institutions, totaling more than 500,000 euros. At the final BOMCA-9 conference, held on 15 September, 2020, Central Asian countries presented the results of the activities implemented under the program and made specific recommendations.8

The sixth phase of the CADAP program (CADAP 6) focuses on further reinforcement of the national drug demand reduction policies of the five beneficiary countries towards a vision that emphasizes an evidence-based and balanced public health approach. CADAP has implemented several regional and national initiatives with the official participation and support of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in the political framework of the EU Action Plan on Drugs in Central Asia 2014-2019 and in accordance with the EU Drugs Strategy for 2015-2020.

Within the framework of the EU-Central Asia Action Plan on Drugs 2014-2020 and with the support of CADAP 6, the Central Asian countries began to adapt the methodologies of the European Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction, such as joint mission assessment, information maps, national action plans on drug information systems, country overviews and preparation of national reports on a common basis.

With the introduction of CADAP 6, a comprehensive set of aspects of health-based drug policy has been used in the region. As a result, regular monitoring of the drug situation is being implemented through the national drug monitoring centers, and evidence-based approaches to prevention are being introduced; therefore, public awareness and prevention of drug abuse have improved through prevention programs and school campaigns. In addition, modern methods of drug addiction treatment and rehabilitation, which are already in use in some countries and are being considered in others, are under examination.9

In addition, the EU expresses its concerns about regional stability through two key initiatives implemented since 2007: The Rule of Law Initiative and The Water Initiative.

**Rule of Law Initiative and EU Water Initiative**

The Rule of Law Initiative is a regional initiative aimed at improving the lives of citizens by supporting human rights, the rule of law and democracy in line with European and other international standards through a demand-driven approach. The main objectives of the program are to promote the creation of a common legal space between Europe and Central Asia, intensify the protection of human rights, encourage transparency and the fight against economic crime, and foster the effective functioning of state institutions and public administration.10 The Rule of Law Initiative is an attempt to advance one of the core norms of the EU, namely the rule of law, which is seen as a guarantee of long-term political, economic and civil stability. Patricia Flor, the then EU Special Representative for Central Asia, reiterates this vision: "...a peaceful, stable, prosperous Central Asia, built on the rule of law and democracy. This is our experience in achieving stability."11 This initiative was chosen by the EU as a replacement for a genuine agenda for promoting democracy, which is difficult to implement in a region where authoritarian rule dominates the political landscape.

To date, completed activities within the framework of this program are as follows: consultations held with the beneficiary institutions and delegations of the European Union to clarify the program’s work plans; a desk review of the anti-corruption system in Kyrgyzstan was completed in accordance with the GRECO approach; provision of recommendations for the Uzbek authorities regarding the improvement of the regulatory framework of the newly created anti-corruption agency; the legal expertise of the draft amendments to the AML/CFT Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan.12

The second key initiative is the EU Water Initiative, which aims to address one of the potentially highest risks to regional stability in Central Asia today, namely the conflict over transboundary

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water resources and their distribution. The program is based on a vision of stability that includes environmental security and promotes regional cooperation as a key goal. The EU is one of the main donors and providers of water-related conflict assistance in Central Asia. Nevertheless, the EU declares itself to be a neutral mediator in tense disputes and does not really take a stance on any issue either for or against any particular state. Likewise, the EU is trying to promote its own regional cooperation model, claiming that it is the only effective way to permanently resolve the deadlock tensions. In addition, due to the presence of many transboundary rivers in its territory, the EU can offer expertise in establishing river commissions and managing transboundary water bodies.

Central Asia Water and Energy Program (CAWEP)

In addition, in order to foster an enabling environment for energy and water security at the regional level, the Central Asia Water and Energy Program (CAWEP) was developed as part of the first EU Strategy for Central Asia. This program aims to support water and energy management processes at the national and regional levels, which can contribute to income growth, poverty reduction and sustainable development, shared prosperity and increased resilience to climate change in the region.

The biggest challenges for Central Asia are the growing demand for water in Central Asian countries, triggered by huge losses of water in irrigation infrastructure, which cause drainage problems and the increasing environmental degradation of aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. Another problem is the weak cooperation between the CA countries in the management of shared water resources, which can have serious economic consequences, especially in the face of the growing climate change challenges.

Yet another issue is the lack of institutional capacity to transform policy into investment in modernization of the existing outdated infrastructure. Lack of maintenance and limited investment in infrastructure, science and technical education have resulted in a loss of technical knowledge. Improving the infrastructure and management of regional water resources to meet the competing needs for human consumption, agriculture, industrial use and electricity production is vital to the economic prosperity and political stability of CA states.

The 2019 work plan included 27 projects: 9 for the Water Security component, 9 for the Energy Security component, 7 for the Water and Energy Links component, along with supporting activities for program management and communications. CAWEP is implemented with regard to the results of the previous program phases and pays special attention to national-level activity as a component of regional security.

In addition, European countries support several multilateral initiatives. One example is the Central Asia Border Security Initiative (CABSI), established by the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior with the support of the European Union, to provide a platform for dialog and discussion. The

EU meets regularly with members of the international community and border security technical assistance agencies such as UNDP, OSCE, UNODC, IOM, Japan, the Russian Federation and the United States. Another initiative is the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center (CARICC) for Combatting Illicit Trafficking of Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Their Precursors. However, it should be noted that due to the lack of independent evaluation, it is unclear whether any of these Western-led programs have had a positive impact or are even sustainable.17

Conclusion

Central Asia is one of the most important regions in the world. Located in the center of the Eurasian continental space, Central Asia is the most important link between the large and dynamically developing countries of the continent, such as China, the EU countries, India, Japan and Russia. Today, Central Asia is in the center of close attention of the international community because of its geopolitical and economic importance, natural and human resources, transit potential for transcontinental trade and transport. The Central Asian states face many challenges, the most pressing of which are ubiquitous corruption, drug trafficking, widespread poverty, unstable and problematic energy distribution, environmental problems and an unstable economy, largely based on the export of natural resources and foreign aid. Moreover, there are certain conflicts between the Central Asian states, in particular, disputes over borders, transboundary rivers and water resources, energy and other issues that seriously affect cooperation between these countries and their development.

Considering the relations between the EU and Central Asia, it should be noted that, unlike many other regions, there was no real history of interaction between the EU and its member states and the CA states. Thus, prior to the adoption of the Strategy in 2007, the EU did not have a unified regional strategy. The new Strategy was presented by the German Presidency of the European Council in June 2007 and subsequently adopted by the Council. The strategy is seen by the German government as one of the “greatest overall successes” of the Council’s presidency.

The following can be considered the main factors that have led the EU to revise its policy towards Central Asia and subsequently adopt a Strategy defining its interests in the region:

1. The EU’s awareness of the need to reinforce cooperation with each of the Central Asian countries in security matters, with regard to their geographic location and direct threats and challenges to the security and stability of the EU;
2. The EU’s awareness of the need to improve its energy security in connection with the serious problems that have arisen in recent years related to gas supplies from Russia to the EU;
3. The EU’s awareness of its increased role and participation in Central Asia against the background of the growing regional activity and influence of the United States, Russia and China.

This document was the first EU strategy developed for Central Asia, it marked a real breakthrough and opened a new stage in relations between European and Central Asian countries.

In July 2017, the Council of the European Union decided to completely revise the Strategy with regard to the new realities, as well as the ambitions and priorities of the regional states in their relations with the EU. In June 2019, a new strategy for relations between the European Union and Central Asia was adopted. The revision of the strategy should allow the EU to strengthen its cooperation with

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the Central Asian countries, highlight the most effective projects and revise those aspects of interaction that did not bring the desired results.

The strategy contains the common interests of both the EU and Central Asia. The former is particularly concerned with regional security and stability, energy security and the promotion of human rights and the rule of law, while the latter strives for sustainable economic development, and ensuring security both inside and outside the region.

Thus, security issues have always been and remain paramount in EU policy for Central Asia. Considering the fact that Central Asia is a vulnerable region, strategically located at the intersection of global drug flows from Afghanistan to Central Asia, and then further to Russia and the EU, a fairly large number of programs and initiatives continue to be implemented with EU support.

EXTERNAL ACTORS IN CENTRAL ASIA: MULTILATERAL COOPERATION MECHANISMS

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Sergey ZHILTSOV

D.Sc. (Political Science), Head, Department of Political Science and Political Philosophy, Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia; Professor, People’s Friendship University of Russia; Research Fellow, S.Yu. Witte Moscow University (Russian Federation)

ABSTRACT

The highly favorable geographic location and rich natural resources are the main attractions of post-Soviet Central Asia. After the disintegration of the U.S.S.R., it became clear that different actors operated differently in this strategically important region. This area occupied different places in their strategies, and their goals were realized using different instruments. Regional disunity (Central Asian states then failed to tune up multilateral cooperation) brought grist to the mill of extra-regional players. Mutual political claims and personal ambitions of the regional leaders made it hard or even impossible to initiate common regional projects. Local contradictions in the water and energy sphere became a serious obstacle on the road towards political interaction when dealing with regional problems, environmental protection being one of them. In short, at that time, Central Asian countries did not yet master the art of pushing aside disagreements and problems for the sake of positive actions. Extra-regional actors capitalized on this fact without reservations. The U.S., the EU, Russia, China, India, Japan, and Turkey proceeded from their long-term interests when they tried to impose their political agenda on the local states and draw them into the sphere of their economic inter-
ests. Apparently, they preferred bilateral agreements with each of the Central Asian states, since their importance for each of the external players depended on their economic development, geopolitical significance and natural resources that they possessed. In recent years, the extra-regional states have revised and readjusted their Central Asian politics. Today, they prefer multilateral relations; in some cases, this format has been used for a long time, while other extra-regional countries have only recently employed the “5 + an extra-regional actor” format. Turkey and Japan are two leaders in this respect: they were the first to suggest this format, and others followed suit. Many countries limit their multilateral formats to the foreign minister level and, therefore, to declarations and joint statements. Regional states prefer this format, which allows them to balance out external players and address their own problems. Predictably, Central Asian countries are ready to be involved in multilateral formats.

KEYWORDS: Central Asia, Russia, United States, EU, China, India, multilateral cooperation.

Introduction

The Central Asian policy pursued by extra-regional actors was shaped by their long-term interests, and by the post-Soviet regional context. Having acquired independence, the new states could not achieve more or less concerted positions on most acute regional issues, i.e., hydraulic energy, borders and border disagreements, which exist in practically all Central Asian countries. As could be expected, territorial issues not only exacerbated political relations, but made wider cooperation practically impossible. Relations between Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan are very complicated. Furthermore, Central Asian countries have failed to formulate common approaches to regional integration.

This explains why the Central Asian countries cannot formulate a common answer to key problems; this added vigor to the regional policies pursued by the external actors, who spotted opportunities in the regional melee of disagreements.

Turkey’s Ambitions

Since the early 1990s, Turkey has been widening its influence and consolidating its positions in Central Asia through economic and cultural projects. In 1992, it set up a Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), which is operating today in all Central Asian countries. The key role, however, belonged to the annual summits of the Turkic speaking countries. At the first of them, which took place in October 1992, Turkey invited all Central Asian countries to set up a Turkic community and a Turkic Common Market with no trade barriers and a common transportation system.

The project failed: Central Asian states were not ready to cooperate in these formats. Turkey, on the other hand, had no money to realize these projects on its own. The huge economic advantages from investing in Central Asian countries, which were in dire need of external assistance, were also not so obvious. However, Ankara was determined to build up a multilateral format of interaction with the Central Asian countries right from the outset.
A total of nine summits of the Turkic-speaking states were organized between 1992 and 2009. In 2009, the Council of Cooperation of the Turkic-Speaking States was established; Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan became its members. No matter how limited, this multilateral cooperation format allowed Turkey to expand the sphere of its influence.

At the March 2021 summit, Turkey paid a lot of attention to the development of transportation routes across the Caspian. It is using all available instruments, including the multilateral cooperation format, to consolidate its positions in the region.

Japan Suggested Regional Cooperation

Despite the vast distance that separates Japan from Central Asia, the former was the second (after Turkey) state that realized the multilateral cooperation format at the foreign minister level. In 2004, Tokyo invited Central Asian states to join the Central Asia plus Japan format\(^1\) in a hope to consolidate its political contacts and broaden trade and economic cooperation.

Against the background of the growing activity of China and the European Union, which had a great interest in the region’s hydrocarbons, Japan needed a firmer position. In August 2004, it organized a meeting of foreign ministers of all Central Asian countries (with the exception of Turkmenistan). This format looked highly attractive at that time. Two years later, in 2006, Tokyo hosted a meeting of foreign ministers in the Central Asia plus Japan format, where the sides adopted an Action Plan of the development of economic cooperation and a wider political dialog. At the same time, Japan elaborated a national energy strategy designed to expand cooperation with the countries rich in energy resources.\(^3\)

In 2010, the foreign ministers of all (including Turkmenistan) Central Asian countries gathered for the next meeting where, despite its active efforts to promote the multilateral cooperation format, Japan failed. At that time, its Central Asian partners were not interested in the 5 + 1 formula. The complicated relationship in the hydraulic energy sphere and orientation towards bilateral relations with extra-regional countries lowered the level of the Japanese format. In 2014, Tokyo conducted the fifth meeting of foreign ministers as part of the Central Asia plus Japan Dialogue, where the sides signed a declaration that specified the regional cooperation goals.\(^4\)

The November 2015 Central Asian visit of the Japanese prime minister produced many agreements; most of them were signed with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Japan was deeply interested in energy projects: in Turkmenistan it signed the projects totaling $18 billion, in Uzbekistan—over $8.5 billion. Since the 1990s, Japan has been greatly attracted by their hydrocarbon resources. As Shinzo Abe, the then prime minister pointed out, in the next five years Japanese companies would earn up to $250 billion on the Central Asian projects.\(^6\)

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In 2017, foreign ministers of Central Asia and Japan met for the next time and signed a Roadmap of wider trade and economic cooperation. In May 2019, at the seventh meeting of the Central Asia plus Japan Dialogue, they confirmed their readiness to deepen cooperation.

For a long time, Japan was working hard to widen its regional presence and establish closer economic ties with the Central Asian countries. This was Tokyo’s response to active policies of other extra-regional states that, likewise, demonstrated an interest in Central Asia.

Tokyo’s achievements were fairly modest, a lesson to be learned by other external players. Central Asian countries did not reject Japan’s attempts to formulate a common regional agenda and did nothing to promote it. They were not ready for deeper interaction with any of the extra-regional actors, let alone for realizing joint projects.

On 11 August, 2020, foreign ministers of the Central Asian countries and Japan discussed regional cooperation and interaction with Japan at the next meeting; a potential Concept of Partnership of the Central Asian States and Japan in security and a platform for further development of economic partnership.

Ultimately, the over 15-year-long history of the relationship between Japan and the Central Asian countries shows that, regardless of its efforts, Japan did not achieve a breakthrough in the political and economic spheres. The Central Asian countries did not reject the suggested format and never moved closer to Tokyo. Japan’s efforts did not consolidate Central Asian regional cooperation, resolve regional conflicts or remove interstate contradictions. Japan remained one of the extra-regional partners with no special preferences.

The European Union and Central Asia

The EU is the most consistent actor among its extra-regional rivals. Early in the 1990s, it formulated several programs; in 1992, the regional countries were included in the TACIS program (Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States), seen in the EU as an important mechanism that increases its influence and promotes its interests in the region. In 1995, the EU proposed the INOGATE program of expanded cooperation with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, two countries rich in hydrocarbon resources.

In view of the great and growing interest in Central Asia all over the world, Brussels increased its attention to the region. In 2002, it elaborated a Strategy Paper for Central Asia, which specified the regional cooperation aims and trends. At the same time, the EU offered the Border Management Program in Central Asia and Afghanistan (BOMCA) to suppress the conflict potential in border regions.

In 2007, the EU elaborated The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership, intended to consolidate EU’s positions in the region, promote its long-term interests, pay more attention to security, regional cooperation and energy.

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The document confirmed the multilateral cooperation format, which presupposed annual meetings between the EU High Representative and the foreign ministers of the Central Asian countries.

The results were fairly modest: the rivalry between the leading countries which, likewise, tried to realize their regional initiatives and projects was rising by the year. Late in 2012, Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs visited all regional states except Turkmenistan, which confirmed the region’s significance in European politics.

In 2015, the EU added bilateral relations with certain states to the multilateral format by signing Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreements, which suggests cooperation on a wide range of issues, including transport, energy, trade and investments. Kazakhstan was the first to sign the agreement. In 2019, a similar agreement was signed with Kyrgyzstan; and negotiations on signing the agreement were initiated with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Simultaneously, the EU formulated The EU’s New Central Asia Strategy: New Possibilities for Strong Partnership, which was presented in mid-2019. It provide for wider cooperation with the Central Asian countries and settlement of regional problems. The European Union is determined to promote its interests in Central Asia on the basis of a multilateral format and on bilateral cooperation agreements. Both formats are expected to consolidate the region’s interaction with the EU through shared initiatives and program documents.

The Flexible Approach of the United States

Since 1992, the United States has maintained an interest in the Central Asian countries; for a long time, it relied on bilateral relations with each of them. In 1999, however, the United States passed the Silk Road Strategy Act, which indicated Washington’s interests in Central Asia, a region of geopolitical importance. Development of democratic Central Asian states and of the relationships with them and support for their economic development were stated as priorities. In 2005, American researcher Frederick Starr formulated a Greater Central Asia concept. If realized, the United States could have consolidated its positions in the region. In the same year, Condoleezza Rice, the then U.S. Secretary of State, visited Central Asia to strengthen the relationship between her country and the regional states.

Under the pressure of exacerbated rivalry between external players, the U.S. attached great importance to each of the countries and the region as a whole. Washington was doing its best to preserve its influence. U.S.’s 2006 National Security Strategy defined Central Asia as a region of strategic importance, however, this fact had no practical implementation.

The U.S. reverted to the idea of multilateral interaction as the most advantageous. In October 2015, Washington offered the C5 + 1 format, which met in November for its first meeting. The signed declaration stipulated wider cooperation in trade, energy, transport and assistance in attracting in-

vestments to the Central Asian countries. The latter positively assessed the American initiative. The multilateral format suggested by Washington paid more attention to anti-terrorist measures, boosted competitiveness in the business sphere, enhanced the development of transport corridors, energy and support of environmental measures at the national and regional levels.

The multilateral format, however, was not subsequently developed. Washington resumed its old practice of bilateral meetings and visits of top officials to the countries of primary importance, i.e. those of geopolitical importance within the region and with rich mineral deposits.

In 2019, the United States created the United States Strategy for Central Asia 2019-2025, Advancing Sovereignty and Economic Prosperity, which registered the basic political approaches to be realized in the region. The document defined Central Asia as “a geostrategic region important to United States national security interests.” Meanwhile, Washington was not interested in the welfare of the local states. According to expert Mars Sariev, “Americans wanted nothing more than to suspend the integration of the Central Asian republics in regional initiatives promoted by Russia and China.”

In February 2020, Mike Pompeo, the then U.S. Secretary of State, visited Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, an obvious sign that they, as the strongest Central Asian countries, were in the focus of the U.S. attention. On 7 January, 2021, the governments of the U.S., Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan issued a joint statement on the Central Asian Investment Partnership initiative. “Through this initiative, the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), Astana International Financial Centre, acting in the interests of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and the Ministry of Investments and Foreign Trade of the Republic of Uzbekistan will make all possible efforts to raise at least $1 billion over five years to support projects that advance private-sector led growth and increase economic connectivity within Central Asia and the broader region.” This meant that Washington preferred bilateral or trilateral formats as more efficient frameworks, within which the sides could arrive at agreements on specific problems.

On the whole, the U.S. is working not only towards keeping the regional countries within its orbit; by promoting various forms of interconnection, including 5 + 1, Washington expected to prevent any strengthening of Russia’s and China’s positions. Very much like other extra-regional countries, the U.S. has not posed itself the task of creating the prerequisites for regional integration. Extra-regional actors promoted their interests through multilateral formats, which were expected to attract all Central Asian countries.

**Russia on the Road Towards a Multilateral Format**

In recent years, Russia has widened its cooperation with the Central Asian countries. Due to the involvement of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in the Eurasian Economic Union, bilateral agreements with Uzbekistan and more active economic contacts with Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, Russia increased its

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17 Ibidem.


influence in the region. It mainly relies on bilateral relations, yet, very much like all other extra-regional states, it initiated regular meetings with the foreign ministers of all Central Asian countries.

In 2019, Russia organized two such informal meetings. At the second one, which took place on 10 October, Foreign Minister of Russia Sergey Lavrov pointed out when speaking about the Central Asia plus Russia format: “We are not confronting these states with the artificial choice of either you are with us or against us.”

Later, in October 2020, at the third meeting Moscow had somewhat readjusted its approach to the multilateral format. From that time on, such meetings have been interpreted as the foundation of further integration; new strategic integration trends were identified. The document said: “We are confident that these joint activities will contribute to bringing the positions of our states closer on the most significant issues in the modern world and developing consolidated approaches to their resolution.”

This became obvious in Russia’s Central Asian policy. Moscow expected that on par with bilateral relations, the multilateral format of the meetings with the foreign ministers of the Central Asian countries would bring political and economic advantages.

The new format, previously used by other countries, demonstrated that Russia’s interest in the Central Asian countries and the region as a whole has grown significantly. Indeed, Russia was developing cooperation mainly on a bilateral basis or within the Eurasian Economic Union. It is expected that the new format would consolidate bilateral relations and draw all Central Asian countries into the Eurasian Economic Union.

**Chinese Specifics**

In post-Soviet times, China was realizing a trade and economic expansion in Central Asia; its influence was consolidating along with the dramatically growing volumes of China’s trade with the region, which made it one of the main trade partners.

In contrast with other extra-regional states, China did not seek multilateral formats, yet never missed a chance to use them if they suited its interests. This fully applies to the Agreement on Confidence Building in the Military Sphere in the Border Regions signed in 1996 by China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Even if incomplete without Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, it developed, in the course of time, into the key mechanism of China’s Central Asian policy.

Later on, in the first decade of the 21st century, China added energy projects: it bought oil and gas fields, built new pipelines and used them on the basis of bilateral agreements.

Despite its economic activeness and the rising volume of trade, Beijing failed to radically change the countries’ foreign policy priorities. Very much like Russia, China has at its disposal cer-

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23 Ibidem.
tain instruments to promote its influence in the region; it is doing this through the SCO and the Belt and Road Initiative.  

Beijing, however, could not ignore the multilateral cooperation format used by many countries; it followed the same pattern and organized meetings with representatives of all Central Asian countries. The first such meeting at the level of foreign ministers in the 5 + 1 format was organized on 16 July, 2020 on China’s initiative. The participants concentrated on fighting the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and restoration of local economics.

The fact that Beijing is using the multilateral format speaks volumes about its determination to acquire even more mechanisms of influence. More or less recently it paid particular attention to economic cooperation; bilateral relations in trade and economy were expanded through infrastructural projects and crediting, which increased the Central Asian countries’ dependence on China.

Formally, the 5 + 1 format raised China’s policy to a higher level; Beijing moved aside from the old bilateral agreement format. China has proposed multilateral cooperation, not because it was interested in regional integration, rather, because it wanted to preserve its positions. Beijing does not need the U.S. and the EU as two stronger rivals that may challenge China’s influence; nor did it want Russia’s presence either. China expected the 5 + 1 format, which it initiated, to bring about economic advantages, since it wanted as many local countries as possible in its orbit.

Beijing proceeds from its long-term aims when organizing multilateral talks. In mid-2021, another meeting of the foreign ministers took place, at which the sides discussed the problems related to Afghanistan and the pandemic, as well as “consolidation of mutual confidence in politics, promotion of mutually advantageous regional cooperation, realization of joint projects and regional security.”

Clearly, China is sensitive to the current political situation in the world and intends to pay more attention to political issues that were formally outside the scope of interests of Chinese diplomacy in the past.

Central Asia was and remains in the focus of China’s interests for three reasons:

- Central Asia is a buffer zone between Afghanistan and the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, two potentially dangerous neighbors;
- second, it is rich in natural resources and, 
- third, it is located in the center of the Eurasian continent and may become a potential land hub.

The Indian Format

India formulated its main tasks in Central Asia in 2012 in the document named Connect Central Asia. In recent years, India has been stepping up its activity: it attempts to get access to oil and gas fields and uranium and coal deposits. It is very much interested in accessing the gas reserves of Turkmenistan, the uranium deposits of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyz gold mines and uranium and coal deposits.

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26 Ibidem.

In January 2019, India organized the first meeting with the foreign ministers of the Central Asian countries to discuss foreign trade, attraction of investments and technologies to the Central Asian countries and realization of joint projects in science and technology. Kazakhstan, with its $2.4 billion trade turnover with India in 2020 (27.3% higher than in 2019), is the leader of cooperation with India. Uzbekistan is India’s second biggest trade partner with a trade turnover of about $442 million (25% increase against 2019). Trade with other countries occurs on a much smaller scale.

India is mainly interested in energy projects, the CASA-1000 project of electric power export to Pakistan and Afghanistan and, later, to India, where Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are the two key actors; in the TAPI pipeline project (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India), which, if realized, will bring India up to 14 bcm of gas a year. It also holds an interest in Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran and Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran transportation projects and in the Chabahar Port in southeastern Iran, which can be used for freight transportation from Central Asia to India, practically the only route that connects India and Central Asia.

All in all, India’s ties with the Central Asian countries are relatively firm; the former is promoting political, economic and cultural contacts. In the absence of reliable transport communication India cannot realize its ambitions and widen its influence in the region. The conflict between Pakistan and India and Pakistan’s refusal to let its neighbor move its goods across its territory narrow down India’s potential in Central Asia.

The first meeting of the Business Council with the Central Asian Countries, which was set up by India, took place in February 2020. It established an India-Central Asia development group. India does not realize its policy at the state level. As distinct from Chinese and American companies that rely on the state and often promote their countries’ foreign policy, Indian businesses are absolutely independent. India seeks economic cooperation and access to the natural riches of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.

Consultative Meetings:
First Experience

Amid hectic activity of extra-regional states, the Central Asian countries tried to consolidate their positions on the key regional problems at consultative meetings of their representatives. From the outset, they were intended as meetings of state leaders. The first such meeting took place in March 2018 in Astana.

In November 2019, Tashkent hosted the second consultative meeting of the leaders of the Central Asian states, which adopted a Joint Statement that pointed at “the primary and key role of the

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states of Central Asia in tackling urgent problems and acute issues of entire region through negotiations and consultations based on consensus, equality and respect for one another’s interests and that “the tendency formed in Central Asia towards regional rapprochement is a historically conditioned reality. Stirring up regional cooperation in the spheres of politics, security, preserving stability and achieving sustainable development in the region correspond to the core interests of the peoples of Central Asian countries, promote bigger consolidation of brotherly ties among them, serve for full-scale realization of the enormous economic and civilization potential of Central Asia.”

The initiatives of the President of Uzbekistan stirred up a lot of interest: an investment forum of the Central Asian countries, a Council for transport communications and an agreement on joint development of transportation system in Central Asia. President Mirziyoyev also spoke of wider cooperation in the energy sphere and concerted approaches to the problems of water resource usage on the basis of common long-term interests.

So far, consultative meetings have not transformed into a permanent mechanism and have not inspired any decisions. Despite the seemingly changed approaches to regional integration, the regional states pursue their own policies in their own national interests. They have not yet started considering any supranational structures. This fact should not be taken to mean that these consultative meetings were useless. They were a step towards discussions of regional problems in the multilateral format.

The events in Kyrgyzstan in the fall of 2020 and the change of power in this republic made it impossible to carry out the third consultative meeting. After the political turmoil, however, the foreign ministries of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan made a joint statement about the situation in Kyrgyzstan. They confirmed their course at cooperation and “sustainable development of the entire Central Asia.” The joint statement was instigated by the neighboring countries’ concern that the events in Kyrgyzstan would negatively affect economic relations and the political situation in them.

The border conflict that flared up in April-May 2021 at the Golovnoy water distribution point between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan delivered a blow at regional cooperation. The highly promising format of regional consultations was postponed despite the fact that the water and energy cooperation, border and economic collaboration issues have not lost their urgency.

The informal format of consultative meetings is more attractive for the Central Asian countries than any other format. The flexible nature of such relationships allows the states involved to avoid any obligations and integration structures as the result. On the one hand, this does not interfere with wider cooperation with extra-regional countries in the economic and military-political spheres. On the other hand, Central Asian states do not want any of the extra-regional actors to consolidate their positions; they prefer balance and geopolitical rivalry.

32 Ibidem.
36 Ibidem.
ROLE OF CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS
IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF
CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES

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Elena GARBUZAROVA
Ph.D. (Hist.), Associate Professor,
Department of Political Science, Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University (KRSU)
(Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan)

ABSTRACT

Since gaining independence in 1991, the Central Asian countries have embarked on state building with regard for the experience of developed countries. During the political modernization process, the countries of Central Asia heeded great attention to the constitution. The political elites in power have enshrined the separation of powers between the government branches in the basic law. At the same time, the insti-

Conclusion

The proposed multilateral interaction formats are inspired by the desire of all actors involved to expand their influence. The 5 + 1 formula does not necessarily promote regional integration, for which the regional countries are not yet ready and in which they are not interested; it helps extra-regional actors acquire additional mechanisms for promoting their interests.

The new trend of multilateral formats attests to much fiercer rivalry between the extra-regional powers—the U.S., Russia, the EU, China and other countries. They promote their own agenda rooted in their own long-term interests.

Against the background of extra-regional states’ activity, the integration efforts of the Central Asian countries look fairly passive. It is hardly a surprise, since their relationships are complicated, with water and energy being the core problems. The Tajik-Kyrgyz conflict in the spring of 2021 confirmed the vulnerability of multilateral agreements.

At the same time, Central Asian countries may find solutions to their problems in the muddy waters of rivalry between the extra-regional players. They consider investments in their economies, greater attention to environmental problems, wider political contacts as central on their agenda.

In the next decade the region may find itself in the epicenter of geopolitical competition. Meanwhile, extra-regional states assess regional integration by the extent to which it suits their interests. In these countries’ emerging strategies, the Central Asian region is assigned the role of a proxy for their interests in the context of resolving global problems.
tution of the president retained a special status in the state power system. This fact reflected the specifics of the development of new states, where the legislative body was absent or played an insignificant role for a prolonged time period. The president plays a major role in the political systems of the regional states (with the exception of Kyrgyzstan), which was manifested in his special status. As a result, a patron-client model has developed in the regional states, where the president acquires and maintains the loyalty of political elites through material incentives. Meanwhile, the regional countries were undergoing continuous constitutional reforms. The amendments to the fundamental law have been and are being used by the presidents of the Central Asian countries to maintain and reinforce their legitimacy. The need to solve this problem has increased in the context of a decline in economic growth and accumulated internal socio-economic problems. In 2020-2021, the coronavirus pandemic produced a negative impact. These challenges posed the task of implementing a new democratic transformation strategy for the executive authorities of the regional states, in particular, the expansion of powers in the legislative branch of government. At the present stage, a new balance of forces has emerged in Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, which involves a higher responsibility of the parliament and government for the implementation of socio-economic reforms. This afforded greater stability to the political regimes in these countries. In Tajikistan, a power centralization tendency has developed, and the position of the incumbent is being solidified. Hopes for carrying out structural economic reforms are pinned on the president. Kyrgyzstan has demonstrated a desire to develop parliamentarianism in order to prevent the development of authoritarian tendencies. However, the introduction of a parliamentary form of government did not lead to the solution of the country’s internal problems, primarily due to the continued enormous influence of informal institutions on the authorities. Major socio-economic problems faced by the Kyrgyz authorities in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic triggered another round of political tension in the country and ultimately led to a change of power and a transition to a presidential form of government.

The changes introduced to the constitutions of the regional states create the appearance of the implementation of democratic principles and the use of procedures to improve the efficiency of the government. At the same time, institutional changes undermine socio-political stability, creating problems for further national development.

**KEYWORDS:** Central Asia, constitutional reforms, parliament, legitimacy, stability.

**Introduction**

In 1991, the newly independent states were given the opportunity to introduce new liberal democratic practices in the state building sphere. In the process of political formation, an important place was given to the development and adoption of the constitution, which was one of the indicators of democracy and the legislative basis of state building.

In the Central Asian countries, the process of constitutional and legal development took place with regard to national characteristics and historically established political traditions that were preserved in Soviet times. In the countries of Central Asia, “a particular management technique formed,
in which the traditional (regional-clan) principles characteristic of the Central Asian republics existed alongside the generally accepted party-state approaches.” This explains the fact that in the process of forming a new public administration system in all the regional states, preference was afforded to the institution of the president. The president became a key figure in all Central Asian independent states, and hopes for effective democratic reforms and successful economic modernization were pinned on him. The strong presidential power could create the conditions for entering the path of successful socio-economic development and maintaining the levers of control during the transition to a market economy.

In recent years, the institutional design of power in a number of Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan) has been improving through the expansion of the parliament’s authority. One of the factors that has led to these transformation processes in the political life of the regional states was the economic crisis caused by the global plunge in oil prices. It is widely believed that in authoritarian states dependent on the sale of raw materials, democratization processes begin as a result of an economic recession, rather than an upswing. In order to preserve political stability, the autocratic states of Central Asia began to amend their constitutions, which, on the one hand, demonstrated a course towards democratization, but on the other hand, reinforced the presidential powers.

Over the years of independence, the constitution has become the subject of constant manipulation by political leaders in all the regional states. Constitutional reforms were seen as a mechanism to strengthen the power vertical, which allowed to remain in power. The constitutional changes appeared to preserve the legitimacy of the current government either through the extension of the presidential term in office, or through institutional changes designed to ensure the image of political stability.

### Kazakhstan

The main goal of the constitutional changes in Kazakhstan was to create a legal basis for the formation of a strong presidential institution. The economic modernization strategy was successfully implemented simultaneously with the strengthening of the authoritarian power in the country. The first constitution of Kazakhstan was adopted on 28 January, 1993. However, its imperfection was immediately revealed, which led to sharp disagreements between the branches of government. It required a new Constitution, which was adopted at a popular referendum on 30 August, 1995. The Constitution stated that the president determines the main directions of the country’s foreign and domestic policy.

In 1998, 2007, 2011, 2017, 2019, amendments were made to the Constitution of Kazakhstan. Until 2017, the trajectory of the constitutional amendments did not change and Nursultan Nazarbayev was consistently moving towards securing a special Leader of the Nation status. For example, the amendments adopted in 2007 introduced the concept of the First President, who was not subject to the previously established restrictions on being elected for more than two consecutive terms. Thus, the presidential terms of Nazarbayev were reset to zero, which opened up the possibility of his next

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5. I See: bid., p. 47.
nomination in the presidential elections. Simultaneously with the consolidation of the special status of Nursultan Nazarbayev in the Constitution, there was an ongoing solidification of the role of parliament in the political system of Kazakhstan.6

One of the tasks of the ongoing constitutional changes in Kazakhstan was to increase the efficiency of public administration, which could lead to a new breakthrough in the economy. After gaining independence, Kazakhstan strengthened its economy, which was dependent on the fluctuations in global energy prices. Until 2017, when the next changes to the Constitution took place, the economy of Kazakhstan was faced with a serious crisis. This was due, firstly, to the plunge in global hydrocarbon prices, and secondly, to economic problems within the key countries that imported Kazakhstani energy resources (Russia and China).7 Such conditions required a new model of economic growth that would account for the new economic challenges.8

On 25 January, 2017, the President of Kazakhstan announced the next constitutional reforms that aimed to redistribute powers between the three branches of government. After that, on 31 January, 2017, Nazarbayev addressed the people with the message The Third Modernization of Kazakhstan: Global Competitiveness. In his speech, Nazarbayev emphasized the need “to create a new model of economic growth in order to ensure the country’s global competitiveness.”9 This message became a logical continuation of Kazakhstan’s economic development strategy, which began in the 1990s. For a new leap forward in the economy, it was necessary to strengthen the power structure, making it more effective and responsible, particularly given the fact that the third modernization (the first is the transition of Kazakhstan to a market economy as part of the implementation of Strategy 2030, the second is Kazakhstan’s inclusion on the list of the thirty most developed countries of the world within the implementation of Strategy 2050) was considered “one of the most ambitious in the entire history of the existence of modern Kazakhstan and affects all three branches of government.”10

As a result, in accordance with the constitutional amendments of 2017, which were approved on 10 March after a two-month parliamentary discussion, there was a redistribution of powers between the executive and legislative branches of the government. This resulted in the expansion of the parliament’s power and the consolidation of its special role in solving social and economic issues.11 Thus, the parliament, where the majority of seats are held by representatives of the pro-presidential Nur Otan party, received the right to form the government and exercise control over its activities (which was previously the prerogative of the head of state).12

Kyrgyzstan

Unlike other Central Asian states, the parliament’s special role has been established in Kyrgyzstan since the first days of independence. Thus, on 5 May, 1993, the country adopted the Constitution,
which established that the highest authority is the Jogorku Kenesh (parliament). In accordance with the Constitution, the powers of the president were limited, and the functions of parliament were significantly expanded. As a result, the contradictions between the president and parliament led to a political crisis in the country, which resulted in a referendum and the adoption of amendments to the Constitution in December 1994. From that moment on, a course was set to strengthen the position of the president.

The redistribution of powers between the branches of government in Kyrgyzstan led to frequent revisions of the country’s basic law: in 1996, 1998, 2003, 2006, 2007, 2010, 2016, 2021. Two coups d’états in the republic have demonstrated that the shift towards solidifying presidential powers leads to social and political instability and a change in the ruling regime. The third coup d’état, which took place in October 2020, had once again put the issue of transforming the form of government on the agenda, now with an emphasis on strengthening the president’s position.

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The first President of Kyrgyzstan Askar Akaev was the first to attempt to curtail parliamentary authority and expand his personal power. After Akaev, another attempt to strengthen the powers of the president was implemented by Kurmanbek Bakiev, who tried to create a super-presidential form of government, using a new political resource for this purpose—the Central Agency for Development, Investment and Innovation (CADII). This attempt was not a successful one, since the course taken by the president to monopolize power came into conflict with the country’s democratic development principles. In addition, while strengthening the power vertical, Bakiev did not take into account the interests of other political forces seeking to gain or expand levers of influence. Bakiev’s inconsistent foreign and domestic policy made his regime unviable and, ultimately, a change of power took place in the country.

Despite the 2010 coup d’état, the country’s leadership did not manage to solve internal problems and overcome the economic crisis. As practice has shown, after each successive change of government, the economy of Kyrgyzstan has shown a steady decline. For example, at the end of 2010, Kyrgyzstan’s GDP fell by 1.4% compared to 2009, when the growth of this indicator was recorded as 2.9%. In 2011, there was an economic downturn in all the key areas of the country’s economy: agriculture, construction, and the service sector. The decline in economic activity in the republic was the result of a difficult socio-political situation. The negative economic trends, which emerged in the republic in 1991-2010, were highlighted by the country’s leading economists. For instance, according to Academician of the National Academy of Sciences of the Kyrgyz Republic Academician Vladimir Kumskov, the reforms that were carried out in the economic sphere did not correspond to the conditions and needs of national economic development, and “were carried out with a corrupt aim of enriching high-ranking state and economic figures.” As before, the main problems hindering effective economic growth were total corruption, lack of a strong management and control system, underdeveloped transport infrastructure, etc.

The new balance of functions and powers of the president and parliament was confirmed by the Constitution, adopted on 27 June, 2010 at a national referendum. After the next amendments to the principal law of the country, which secured new institutional changes, a temporary ban was introduced in Kyrgyzstan on changing the Constitution until 2020 through a parliamentary procedure.

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Almazbek Atambaev, who was leaving the presidency in 2017, attempted to implement the “strong head of government—weak president” arrangement by amending the Constitution. In the future, he hoped to take the post of prime minister. However, the new president Sooronbay Jeenbekov was not ready to take the back seat in the state and began a political struggle with his competitors. The peaceful transit of power in Kyrgyzstan in 2017 opened up an opportunity for the country to solve socio-economic problems under conditions of political stability. At the same time, traditionalism and informal practices continued to exert a decisive influence on the socio-political development of Kyrgyzstan. Any attempt to monopolize power by one person became the reason for intensifying the inter-clan struggle.

Serious socio-economic problems faced by the Kyrgyz authorities in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic launched another round of political tension in the country and ultimately led to a change of power in October 2020. During the October revolution, Sadyr Japarov, who came to power, initiated a constitutional reform to change the form of government in the republic. As a result of the referendum held on 10 January, 2021, more than 80% of voters approved the transition of Kyrgyzstan from a parliamentary-presidential to a presidential form of government. The new form of government was enshrined in the new version of the Constitution, adopted on 11 April, 2021 following the results of a popular referendum. Over 79% of the citizens of Kyrgyzstan who voted in the referendum approved the adoption of the new Constitution. Thus, under the new Constitution, the powers of the president have significantly expanded, securing the right to form the government alone. Also, in accordance with the new Constitution, the president received the right to be elected for a five-year period and hold the presidency for two consecutive terms. A special place in the new Constitution is given to People’s Kurultai, which received the right to provide recommendations on social development issues. On the one hand, strengthening the institution of the president will help stabilize the socio-political situation in the country and will allow to more effectively cope with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, the monopolization of power by the president creates the preconditions for the next political crisis in the republic. Over the years of independence, a certain tendency has emerged in the political life of Kyrgyzstan: the legislative branch of government was not ready to put up with the modest role that was assigned to it at a certain historical stage. The parliament strove to become a more decisive element in the state power system in the republic. Thus, in the future it is possible that the parliament may want to challenge the secondary role assigned to it and take the initiative into its own hands.

In Kyrgyzstan, unlike other regional states, the democratization processes were especially evident in the political system, with the preference given to the development of parliamentarianism. However, the process of strengthening the parliamentary power in the country was very difficult, which, in turn, negatively impacted the socio-political situation. Fierce competition between the executive and legislative branches made Kyrgyzstan’s political system extremely unstable and prone to political shocks. This prevented the state from overcoming the permanent economic crisis. The transition to a presidential model of state power can be viewed as an attempt to establish more effective governance in the republic and develop a strategy for overcoming economic problems.

In Tajikistan, the first Constitution was adopted on 6 November, 1994. It laid the foundation for the establishment of full-fledged statehood and consolidated the presidential form of government in the country. Subsequently, the principal law was amended in 1999, 2003, and 2016. Since the Constitution amendment process began, a course has been set to strengthen the authoritarian power in the country and increase the level of the president’s legitimacy. At the same time, each new amendment to the Constitution demonstrated “inconsistency, contradictory and incomplete constitutional processes” in Tajikistan.

The challenge for the authoritarian course of Emomali Rakhmon was the opposition Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT). Representatives of this party received positions in the executive branch and occupied a number of key positions at production facilities in accordance with the peace agreement of 27 June, 1997. Considering the IRPT a threat to its absolute political influence, the current authorities banned its activities on 29 September, 2015. The 2016 constitutional reform completed the process of purging the opposition and clearing out the political landscape.

The 2016 reform actually consolidated the situation in the country, in which opposition movements were banned. In accordance with the reform in Tajikistan, a ban was imposed on the creation and operation of public associations and political parties that promote racial, national, social, and religious enmity or call for the violent overthrow of the constitutional order and the organization of armed groups.

Amendments to the Constitution, adopted in 2016, were aimed at strengthening the authority of the current political leader. The new version of the Constitution emphasized that the country has a presidential form of government, with the president being the key political institution in the system of government. The President is seen as a guarantor of stability and a guarantee of movement towards further economic development. For example, when explaining the need for constitutional reform, the Chairman of the National Bank of Tajikistan noted that “the changes are aimed at the stable development of society, further development of the processes of democratization of public life ... as well as the development of socio-economic, cultural and spiritual sectors.”

During the period of constitutional amendments, the economy of Tajikistan experienced significant difficulties, which may have led to social discontent. The economy of Tajikistan is 30% formed by remittances of migrants who mainly work in Russia. The reason for the sharp decline in remittances was the sanctions imposed by Western countries against Russia, as well as the plunge of the ruble exchange rate in 2014-2015. The economic crisis combined with other social problems (high unemployment, worsening living standards of the population) could have undermined the political regime.

Meanwhile, a special attitude has developed in Tajikistan towards the head of state—E. Rakhmon, who, after the civil war, positioned himself as a guarantor of stability and security. For his...
special services to the state, Emomali Rahmon in December 2015 was awarded the title of President, Founder of Peace and National Unity—Leader of the Nation, which was constitutionally enshrined in 2016. The country’s population pinned their hopes for stabilizing the economy and carrying out effective economic transformations on the president. Shortly before the announcement of the constitutional amendments, Rahmon declared his intention to increase wages, pensions and scholarships in order to gain widespread support from the population.

Populist slogans provided Rahmon with the opportunity to successfully hold a referendum on amendments to the Constitution of Tajikistan, which allowed him to run for president an unlimited number of times. As a result, 94.5% approved the amendments and additions to the Constitution of Tajikistan at the referendum on 22 March, 2016. 3.3% of the population voted against the amendments. In addition, the referendum consolidated a new provision in the Constitution, which lowered the age limit for presidential candidates from 35 to 30 years. This allowed to consider Emomali Rahmon’s son Rustam Emomali a possible successor to the head of Tajikistan.

Thus, the constitutional reform of 2016 in Tajikistan set the goal of not only securing the possibility of another nomination at the upcoming elections for the incumbent president, but also to reduce the level of psychological stress in society during the economic crisis. In Tajikistan, the referendum demonstrated the authorities’ commitment to adhering to democratic practices. In fact, the referendum resulted in the reinforcement of the foundations of the authoritarian regime and a confirmation of Rahmon’s legitimacy. Another step was taken towards the conservation of the existing political system in Tajikistan, where the president determines the guidelines for the country’s domestic and foreign policy.

Turkmenistan

Over the years of independence, a strong presidential power has developed in Turkmenistan, which allows to characterize the political regime in the country as totalitarian or sultanistic. During the reign of the first president of Turkmenistan Saparmurat Niyazov, a political and legal basis for the lifetime presidency of the serving head of state was created in the country. Thus, during the 1999 constitutional reforms, Niyazov got the opportunity to govern Turkmenistan for life. At the same time, in 2003, the People’s Council (Khalk Maslakhaty) gained control over the power institutions in the country. This political institution symbolized an element of patriarchal political culture and hindered the “progressive modernization of the political system.” Niyazov hoped to head the People’s Council after his resignation from the presidency.

After the death of Niyazov and the coming to power of the new President Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov, who was elected on 11 February, 2007 through popular elections, the Khalk Maslakhaty lost its broad powers and was abolished. In fact, some of its powers were transferred to parliament. This political reform opened the way for the new president to build his own system of government.

By its nature, the political system of Turkmenistan is distinguished by its traditionalism. Informal practices dominate formal institutions, which play only a decorative role. Turkmenistan’s statehood was based on the 1992 Constitution, which was amended several times: in 1995, 1999, 2003, 2006, 2008, and 2016. The latest amendments, introduced in 2016, were aimed at addressing political challenges. As a result of the constitutional amendments, the President of Turkmenistan was allowed to stay in power for life, since the provision limiting a candidate’s age was excluded from the principal law. Thus, previously a candidate over 70 years old could not become the president of the country, but now the age restrictions were lifted as a result of constitutional changes.

In order to demonstrate the democratic transformations in Turkmenistan to the world, and especially to Western countries, the constitutional law On Khalk Maslakhaty was approved and adopted on 11 October, 2017 at a parliamentary meeting. Thus, a new representative body again officially emerged in the country, which, as indicated in the preamble of the law, allowed the common people to participate in making the most important social and political decisions.

The next constitutional changes were made in 2020. They were associated with problems that escalated in the country. A sharp drop in oil prices, a slowdown in China’s economic development (the main importer of Turkmen gas), and the coronavirus pandemic have caused the food and financial crises and created social tensions and political risks. The population of Turkmenistan does not demonstrate any desire to take part in mass protests. However, according to experts, a protracted socio-economic crisis may have a mobilizing effect on the masses.

In order to strengthen his position, President of Turkmenistan Berdimuhamedov proposed a constitutional reform. As a result, the Constitution of Turkmenistan was once again amended on 25 September, 2020.

The 2020 constitutional reform made the Khalk Maslakhaty the upper house of parliament, which largely surpasses the lower house (the Mejlis) in terms of functions. According to the Constitution, the Khalk Maslakhaty, which forms one of the branches of the supreme legislative body—the National Council, is endowed with the following powers: approves the appointment of the Chairman of the Supreme Court of Turkmenistan, the Prosecutor General of Turkmenistan, the Minister of Internal Affairs of Turkmenistan, and the Minister of Adalat of Turkmenistan. Also, the Khalk Maslakhaty received the right to decide on the conduct of referendums, to approve and reject laws adopted by the Mejlis, to approve the state budget, to make decisions on awarding and conferring titles to the president of the country.

One of the important aspects of the new constitutional reform was the right of every ex-president of Turkmenistan to automatically become a member of the Khalk Maslakhaty. Thus, the parliament of Turkmenistan has turned from a unicameral into a bicameral one, in which the Upper House, that is, the Khalk Maslakhaty, has more prerogatives. The expansion of the functions of the legislative body in Turkmenistan and the consolidation of its privileged position gives reason to believe that the country has set a course towards the gradual development of parliamentarianism. However, these processes are only an imitation of democracy. Many experts rightly
noted that the president plans to implement the “successor” project and has created a place of honor for himself after his possible departure from the post of head of state. This will allow him to retain influence over the political decision-making process. Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov’s son Serdar Berdymukhamedov is seen as his likely successor. 37

The reform was also intended to demonstrate that conditions are being created in the country for the broad representation of the people’s interests. For example, Honored Lawyer of Turkmenistan Murad Khaitov emphasized that Khalk Maslakhaty is “a legal mechanism for expressing the interests of the population to public authorities.” 38 The return of the Khalk Maslakhaty to the governance system as one of the key elements of the legislative branch of power should create the appearance of democratic changes in the country.

The 2020 constitutional reform is also aimed at attracting attention from Western countries, whose investments are important for Turkmenistan. The United States is known to have been continuously criticizing Turkmenistan for its undemocratic political system, violation of human rights and freedom of speech, etc. EU took a similar stance. For example, the 2016 constitutional amendments to extend the presidential term from 5 to 7 years were regarded by OSCE representatives as “serious violations.” 39

The 2020 reform, aimed at restructuring the parliament, seeks to change the image of Turkmenistan in the eyes of the West. Shortly before the constitutional amendments were adopted, Berdimuhamedov ordered the government to intensify its work with international financial institutions.

When deciding to carry out subsequent constitutional reforms, the Turkmen authorities hoped to carry out a demonstrative political modernization. However, the political culture of the country’s elite, is unlikely to allow a change in the unlimited nature of power.

Uzbekistan

The first constitution of independent Uzbekistan was adopted in December 1992. The development of the basic law of the new independent state, such as Uzbekistan, was carried out in difficult socio-economic conditions. Since then, the institutionalization of Islam Karimov’s political leadership, which could save the country “from many mistakes associated with the constitutional process,” began. 40

The political regime in Uzbekistan was characterized as rigidly authoritarian with a strong presidential power. Back in the 1990s, the principle was formed in the country that the state acted as the main reformer and only it was able to ensure sustainable economic growth. Based on this principle, the Uzbek model of economic development was formed.

Gradually, the prerogative in solving economic problems was transferred from the president to the parliament. In accordance with the constitutional changes, which were introduced more than 10 times, at the beginning of the 21st century, the powers of parliament have expanded, albeit maintaining the key role of the president. For example, according to the 2011 constitutional amendments, Uzbekistan was transformed into a semi-presidential republic, where the president was assigned

prerogatives in the field of foreign and defense policy, and the powers of the prime minister included the resolution of socio-economic issues.

In 2016, after the death of Islam Karimov, Shavkat Mirziyoyev became the new president of Uzbekistan. He embarked on a course to carry out large-scale internal reforms, taking new international economic trends into account. On 7 February, 2017, Uzbekistan’s development program Strategy of Actions in Five Priority Areas 2017-2021 was adopted. In accordance with the new reformatory concept of Uzbekistani president Shavkat. Mirziyoyev, the process of political and economic modernization was slated to be launched in stages. The role of the legislative branch, the parliament, was supposed to increase in the course of the political reforms. Expansion of the powers of parliament and increased responsibility of the government was legislatively enshrined in March 2019, when subsequent amendments were made to the Constitution of Uzbekistan. As a result, on 1 April, 2019, the Law on Amendments and Additions to Certain Legislative Acts of the Republic of Uzbekistan in Connection with the Democratization of the Procedure for Forming the Government and Strengthening its Responsibility entered into force in Uzbekistan. In accordance with the new law, the powers of the parliament now include:

1. adoption of resolutions on certain issues in the political and socio-economic spheres, as well as issues of domestic and foreign policy of the state;
2. consideration and approval, upon the nomination by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Uzbekistan, of candidates for members of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan for their subsequent approval by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Thus, in Uzbekistan, all responsibility for the country’s sustainable socio-economic development rests with the parliament and the government. At the same time, the majority of seats in the parliament are filled by the members of the party in power—the Liberal Democratic Party of Uzbekistan, which enables the president to influence the government.

**Conclusion**

Thus, the constitutional changes in the Central Asian states aimed not so much to strengthen the national political system as to increase the legitimacy of the ruling elite. The growing role of the parliament in countries with traditionally authoritarian regimes (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) demonstrated a commitment to the implementation of the basic democratic principles. However, the practical implementation of these changes led to the strengthening of the institution of the president.

In Tajikistan, where power is personified, the stability of the political system largely depends on the popularly elected president, who determines the guidelines for national development. In Kyrgyzstan, there was a demand for a parliamentary form of government, which was viewed as a barrier to the usurpation of power by one clan or the strengthening of authoritarian rule. However, the events of the last decade have called into question the viability of the parliamentary form of government in Kyrgyzstan and the ability of the authorities to solve strategic tasks in the country’s economic sphere. The “October revolution” in the republic in 2020 and the subsequent reformatting of the government laid the foundation for expanding presidential powers, which is largely due to the weakness of democratic institutions.

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The Republic of Turkey has entered what may be the most complicated period in its modern history; its ambitions are on the rise; its final aim to become one of the pillars of the world order is a challenging one. The paper analyzes the present and future of Turkish policy towards the Russian Federation, Central Asia and the People’s Republic of China.

Turkey’s relations with Russia can be described as mutually beneficial cooperation in many spheres. The sides demonstrate their skills when compromises are required in complex situations or even conflicts. They are invariably found despite the sides’ diverging interests in the Middle East, the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia. Special attention is heeded to the mid-term prospects of cooperation between Turkey and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) up to Turkey’s possible membership.

In Central Asia, Turkey’s strategy relies on essential mechanisms of Turkic integration realized by many means, including the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States (the Turkic Council), and on the specifics of Turkey’s relationships with each of the five Central Asian states. It seems that trade, economic and investment cooperation between Turkey and the Central Asian states are treated as priorities along with the expected emergence of the Turkic World in the mid-term. In this context, convergence of interests of the Turkic and Eurasian integration is especially important.

As could be expected, the paper pays a lot of attention to the Chinese policy towards Turkey and connectivity between the
Turkish Middle Corridor and the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. While the contradictions between Turkey and its Western neighbors are growing increasingly vehement, Ankara and Beijing are consolidating their economic, energy, transport and logistic cooperation. At the same time, we should bear in mind that the so-called Uyghur issue is in the way of the otherwise smooth process of rapprochement.

**KEYWORDS:** Republic of Turkey, Russian Federation, EAEU, China, Belt and Road Initiative, Kazakhstan, Middle East, Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States.

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**Introduction**

On 24 March, 2021, on the eve of the 100th anniversary of the Republic of Turkey, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan offered the nation a Manifesto of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party), in which he defined the main political trends until 2023. He pointed out that the forces that have been trying to keep Turkey’s influence within the limits of its domestic affairs in the last two centuries will no longer prevail: “Today, Turkey is very different from what it was in the past. Our development goals specified until 2023 will serve as the starting point for the development of a powerful Turkey of the 21st century and later.”[1] The Turkish President confirmed that his country was ready to join the leading powers in shaping a new world order.

Today, Ankara is realizing several foreign policy projects: the neo-Ottoman projects in the Middle East and Mediterranean are intended to revive Turkey’s positions in the Arab world, specifically, in Syria, Libya and Iraq. As a member of the military and political North Atlantic Alliance, it also wants to join the European Union despite numerous obstacles.

Its exceptionally favorable geographic location between the East and the West and developed transportation and logistical infrastructures allows Turkey to build up mutually advantageous and pragmatic relationships with the Russian Federation, the Central Asian countries and the People’s Republic of China.

Determined to become the center of the Turkic World, Ankara does not hesitate to capitalize on the advantages offered by the EAEU and the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. Turkey spares no effort to establish strategical partnerships with the Central Asian countries despite a certain rivalry with Moscow and Beijing in the region.

In my discussion of Turkey’s foreign policy strategy towards these countries, I relied on analysis, synthesis, comparative and systems analysis, SWOT analysis, etc. In a wider theoretical-methodological context, I prefer the outlook of political neorealism and pay particular attention to the states, their national interests and interstate alliances.

**Turkey-Russia: EAEU**

Active interaction with the Russian Federation is one of Turkey’s foreign policy priorities. The two countries are tied together not only by a complicated past, but also by mutually advantageous

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cooperation in the 21st century. Their strategic partnership is not free from certain elements of rivalry and opposition, yet they invariably arrive at compromises even amid the sharpest of tensions.

The geopolitical and economic interests of Russia and Turkey converged in the Middle East when the conflicts in Syria, Libya and Iraq were rapidly unfolding. Ankara, Moscow and also Tehran, however, arrived at a certain level of mutual understanding in the region through the Astana Process, a unique negotiation mechanism devised by Kazakhstan.

Mohanad Hage Ali, Director of Communications and a fellow at the Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center, has the following to say on this issue: “Turkey, very much like Iran and Russia, tries to extend its power and influence throughout the region’s countries by reviving the ties of the Ottoman epoch. For example, the Turkmen communities of the Arab countries, considerably Arabized today, are trying to revive the relations and cultural ties with Turkey. While the United States is gradually moving away from certain regions, Russia and Turkey are increasing their presence. This duet is playing everywhere, even if their positions are sometimes contradictory. They still manage to improve their relationships and arrive at an understanding of how to cope with these disagreements and, what is even more important, to cope with adversaries and move into the territories abandoned by the United States.”

In the last decades, Turkey and Russia have been competing for domination in the Southern Caucasus, where the Nagorno-Karabakh issue has manifested as the main challenge. The 2020 military conflict and the Azerbaijan’s victory has not resolved the conflict, but altered the region’s geopolitical architecture to a great extent.

The interests of both countries in Ukraine, Crimea and Donbas are very different; this was further confirmed by the talks between the President of Ukraine Vladimir Zelensky and President of Turkey Recep Erdoğan that took place in Ankara on 10 April, 2020 while the situation at the Russian-Ukrainian border worsened.

During the talks, Erdoğan confirmed that he did not recognize “the annexation of Crimea” and supported the “Crimean Platform,” an international platform set up to return Crimea to Ukraine, and that he hoped that the conflict in Donbas would finally be settled based on the Minsk agreements. He wanted to see Ukraine in NATO and promised to help rearm the Ukrainian army with corvette-class ships and armed Bayraktar drones. There are plans to sell 50% of Yuzhmash to Turkey. The Turkish president deemed it necessary to point out that cooperation with Ukraine in the military sphere did not target third countries.

As expected, Russia’s response was fairly harsh. On 12 April, Foreign Minister of Russia Sergey Lavrov said: “We strongly advise all responsible countries with which we are in contact (Turkey is one of them) to analyze the situation and Kiev’s continuing belligerent statements. We warn them against feeding this militaristic sentiment.”

Russia’s discontinued air travel with Turkey between 15 April-1 June due to the pandemic situation in Turkey is fraught with a loss of about $4 billion. Certain experts interpreted this as an attempt to put pressure on Ankara; while Turkish officials, for their part, confirmed that the pandemic situation was worsening.

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Later, Turkey readjusted its stance on Ukraine. On 15 April, Foreign Minister of Turkey Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said that Turkey did not support any side in the crisis between Russia and Ukraine and was ready to assist in crisis settlement by diplomatic means. On 21 April, 2021, after the Annual Address of President of Russia Vladimir Putin to the Federal Assembly, Vice Prime Minister of the RF Yuri Borisov said that if Turkey supplied drones to Ukraine, the Russian Federation would revise the prospects of military and technical cooperation with Ankara.6

The Istanbul channel and Turkey’s possible withdrawal from the Montreux Convention may become another stumbling block in the relationship between Turkey and Russia. The Turkish President assured the world that the channel is unrelated to the convention, yet Russian experts expect a militarization of the Black Sea if and when the convention is revised. In fact, the Montreux Convention that regulates the crossing the Black Sea Straits by civilian ships does not bring a sufficient amount of money to Turkey’s coffers. As soon as an alternative channel is completed, Ankara will set the prices and dictate conditions; it will control practically the entire flow of civilian ships of the Black Sea countries, not only of Russia and Georgia, but also of EU members.7

The relations between Turkey and Russia are fairly complicated, with no aggravation in sight.

- **First**, the countries are connected by fairly active trade. According to the Federal Customs Service of the Russian Federation, in 2020, bilateral trade turnover equaled to $20,8413 billion (export, $15,731 billion; import, $5,1103 billion).8 Turkey and Russia intend to reach the figure of $100 billion a year.9 Cooperation in the energy sphere (including TurkStream and the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant projects) is fairly close in volume.

- **Second**, Turkey and Russia are actively cooperating in anti-pandemic struggle. The Russian Direct Investment Fund and the Turkish Viscoran Ilaç have agreed to produce Sputnik-V vaccine in Turkey. On 28 April, 2021 Health Minister of Turkey Fahrettin Koca informed the country that the contract had been signed; on 30 April President Erdoğan confirmed that his country would get “an impressive number of Sputnik-V within the agreement.”10

- **Third**, the two countries are cooperating in the sphere of military technology. Ankara has already bought a certain number of S-400 Triumf anti-aircraft weapon systems from Moscow; Washington responded with buying the American F-35A fighters previously intended for Turkey; Turkey was evicted from the consortium that worked on F-35 fighters and a second package of measures against the heads of Savunma Sanayii Başkanlığı, Defense Industry Agency was introduced. Turkey, however, intends to continue buying Russian S-400 systems.

On 24 April, President Biden officially recognized the Armenian genocide by Turks during World War I. The response from President Erdoğan, Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu and the Turkish parliament was harsh. Certain Turkish media went even farther: they suggested that either Incirlik (the American air base in Turkey) should be closed or, at least, Turkey should discuss the nuclear weapons stored at the base, boost its activity in Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean and set up a military base in the Turkish Republic of North-

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There is information that Ankara might freeze the key defense deal with the U.S. and an agreement on economic cooperation signed in 1980.

On 28 April, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken deemed it necessary to specify that the president had had no intention to shift the guilt on Turkey when talking about the Armenian genocide in the Ottoman Empire. “U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday [28 April.—Ed.] that Turkey and all U.S. allies should refrain from buying more Russian weapons, at the risk of more sanctions being imposed.”

Fourth, much is being said about Turkey’s potential membership in the EAEU, which may be realized if the relations with the West cool down. In its report Turkey’s Nationalist Course Implications for the U.S.-Turkish Strategic Partnership and the U.S. Army, the RAND Corporation assessed the possibilities of Turkey’s withdrawal from NATO and its rapprochement with Eurasia and the Middle East. There is an opinion in the expert community that EAEU membership would allow Turkey to expand the trade routes in the Black Sea region and eradicate the negative opinions that prevail in the West about the EAEU being a replica of the Soviet Union. It is more or less generally recognized, however, that there are certain serious obstacles on the road towards the EAEU, for instance, the fairly unstable relationship with the RF, Turkey’s NATO membership, close economic ties with the EU, etc.

On the whole, regardless of Turkey’s EAEU membership and many other factors, Russian experts are convinced that the Russian-Turkish relations are and will remain one of the most important aspects of a new political landscape in Eurasia.

Turkey-Central Asia: Turkic Council

Experts have more or less agreed that Turkey seeks the status of the political leader of the Turkic World with the population of 200 million and aggregate GDP of $1.5 trillion. Ankara was one of the first to recognize independence of the Central Asian countries and to extend considerable economic support to them. In 1992, President of Turkey Süleyman Demirel made his first visit to the region where he promised a loan to the total sum of $1 billion. It was at the same time that the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) was set up at the office of the prime minister. By the end of 1993, it had already signed 200 agreements with Central Asian countries.

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Throughout the last three decades, Turkey has been consistently pursuing its strategy in Central Asia as an independent and perspective geopolitical region. Esen Usubaliev, Director of Prudent Solutions analytical center has pointed out that Turkey takes into account the influence of Russia, China and other countries in the region and adjusts its stance and approaches accordingly. Turkey sees Central Asia as a region of its potential influence and part of its interpretation of the “historical depth” term, which defines the geopolitical space of Turkey’s foreign policy activities together with the Middle East, the Balkans and the Southern Caucasus.\(^{18}\)

Russian expert Artem Dankov has pointed at certain factors that make the Turkish Republic attractive for Central Asian countries.

- **First**, it comes second after the RF as a center of attraction of Central Asian guest workers. Ankara has established loyal rules for guest workers, which explains their current number of about 500,000.
- **Second**, Turkey is an important source of investments and qualified specialists involved in realization of large-scale projects in Central Asian states.
- **Third**, it is an attractive market for Central Asian exports.
- **Fourth**, it is developing into a major transportation hub that brings Central Asian products to the world market.
- **Last, but not least**, it is the cultural unity of the Turkic peoples.\(^{19}\)

The Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States (the Turkic Council), set up in 2009, plays an important role in bringing Turkey and Central Asian states closer together. Today, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkey are its members; Hungary is engaged as an observer. There are other important mechanisms of Turkic integration: The Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic-Speaking Countries (The TURKPA), Eurasian Association of Law and Order Structures, the Turkic Academy, the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TURKSOY), the International Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation, etc.

In 2014, the 4th Summit of the Turkic Council signed a Turkic Council-Modern Silk Road declaration based on the Silk Road project launched by Turkey in 2008. It mainly aims to use Turkey as a bridge between the Central Asian countries and Europe to promote economic integration of the Turkic Council’s members. The project, its energy and economic dimensions are intended to put together a Turkic World with a common market and common regional energy and transportation systems.\(^{20}\)

The 2020 events in Nagorno-Karabakh raised another wave of interest in Turkic integration: in the course of the war Turkey extended considerable economic and military-technical assistance to Azerbaijan and thus consolidated its positions in the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia.\(^{21}\)

This revived the Great Turan idea as one of Turkey’s ambitious projects. Russian expert Olga Sukharevskaya has the following to say on this subject: “Turkey has set the tasks that go far beyond cooperation; it wants a quasi-state, which Azerbaijan, all Central Asian countries and certain regions of Russia are expected to join in some paradoxical way, while the Turks of Afghanistan, Uyghurs,

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\(^{20}\) See: Y. Jaimaz, op. cit.

Karaims, etc. are left out. It seems like a large-scale geopolitical project of revising the map of the world, which will cost the Central Asian countries their independence and plunge them into wars and conflicts.”

On 19 February, 2021, Foreign Minister of Russia Lavrov said: “Speaking about the Great Turan as a supranational entity in a historical sense, I don’t think that this is what Turkey is after. I don’t see how former Soviet and now independent countries can be supportive of this idea in any form. On the contrary, their foreign policies and practices focus on strengthening their national states.” At the same time he has admitted: “The relations between Turkic-speaking peoples have become an integral part of cooperation between Turkey and the corresponding countries, including Azerbaijan and a number of Central Asian states.”

It is obvious, however, that the independent Central Asian states will hardly agree on being objects rather than subjects of Turkic integration, which should proceed from both sides.

This tectonic shift was registered at the informal Turkic Council summit convened on 31 March, 2021 on Kazakhstan’s initiative. Modernization of Turkic civilization was the leitmotif of the summit, at which Kazakhstan suggested declaring the city of Turkestan the spiritual capital of the Turkic World, creating a special economic zone in the Turkestan region, uniting the Turkic countries, developing joint digitalization projects, accelerating the development of the Turkic Investment and Integration Foundation, supporting the International Biosafety Agency suggested by Kazakhstan and establishing the Great Turkic People Education Foundation.

As Honorable Chairman of the Turkic Council, Nursultan Nazarbayev pointed to a huge potential in mutual trade and investments: “The peace agreement signed between Baku and Erivan with the support of Russia had ushered new opportunities for the prosperity of the Great Silk Road and increased the role of the Caspian Sea in China’s One Belt One Road Initiative.” The Trans-Caspian International Transport Corridor (the Turan Corridor) is developing into the most secure and shortest route between Europe and Asia.

President Erdoğan, who also spoke at the summit, said that he treated the Turkic peoples as one nation with several states. He deemed it necessary to point out: “The Turkic Council, which has completed its institutionalization in 12 years, has a high international reputation. I believe that it is time to recognize it as an international organization.”

The summit adopted a Turkestan Declaration, in which the participants expressed their gratitude to Turkey for its prompt recognition of their independence in 1991 and pointed to a great political, social and economic progress of recent years.

They expressed their satisfaction with the end of the Armenian-Azeri conflict, supported the normalization of the relationship between the two countries on the basis of mutual recognition and


respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity and the principle of inviolability of internationally recognized borders.

The sides spoke highly of the activities of the Turkic Council’s Secretariat related to the first documents of the Turkic World Vision 2040 and Five-Year Strategic Plan (Vision 2025) projects.

The summit also appreciated the great value of the heritage of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi and established the International Prize of the Turkic Council named after Alisher Navoi. The participants instructed the corresponding member states’ organizations to coordinate with Turkic cooperation organizations and set up events in commemoration of outstanding poets, philosophers and state figures tied to the 1005th anniversary of Yūsuf Balasaguni, 880th anniversary of Nizami Ganjavi, the year of Yunus Emre and the Turkish language, 580th anniversary of Alisher Navoi, 155th anniversary of Djambul Djabaev, 155th anniversary of Alikhan Bukeikhanov and 120th anniversary of Kusein Karaseev.

At the same time, Turkey is realizing its Central Asian strategy in its regional and bilateral formats, with the scopes of trade, economic and investment cooperation differing by country. Kazakhstan is at the center of Turkey’s Central Asian strategy. The High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council has been functioning since 2012; the two countries are realizing a new joint New Synergy program. On 10 November, 2019, they approved the Road Map of bilateral trade and economic relations.

Their trade is highly dynamic: in 1992, bilateral trade turnover was merely $30 million, yet by 2020 it topped $3 billion, with their common goal being $10 billion.

In the last 30 years, Turkey invested over $4.2 billion into Kazakhstan’s economy; according to its foreign ministry, in 2020 the volume of investments increased by 1.3% against 2019 to reach $362.4 million. This is the highest annual amount of investments from Turkey during the years of independence.\(^{29}\) In the next 3 to 5 years Turkey may invest approximately $1 billion; today there are over 2700 enterprises in Kazakhstan with Turkish capital. In 2021, Turkish businessmen will open 10 new machine-building and food industry enterprises, production of medicines and medical supplies as well as infrastructure, mining and communal services in Kazakhstan.\(^{30}\)

Turkey and Uzbekistan survived a period of complicated relations. The U-turn occurred when Shavkat Mirziyoev came to power in the Republic of Uzbekistan. In 2017, he paid an official visit to Ankara, the first in the last two decades, during which the sides signed over 26 agreements.

According to Serdar Keskin, head of the Uzbekistan-Turkey Export Promotion Center, in 2020 trade turnover between the two countries was $2,101 billion, the ambitious goal being $10 billion. Today Turkey is the 5th biggest trade partner of Uzbekistan with a share of 5.5%. It is the third biggest exporting and the fifth biggest importing partner.\(^{31}\)

Cooperation between Turkey and Turkmenistan is rapidly consolidating due to the unfolding trade turnover. In 2019, it reached $944,477 million; in 2020, despite the pandemic, $2 billion. Ashgabat invites Turkey to take part in joint energy, transportation and high-tech projects, while Turkey is making efforts to start delivering Turkmen gas to Europe.\(^{32}\) On 31 March, 2021, Erdoğan repeated its invitation for Turkmenistan to join the Turkic Council.

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Turkey’s attention to Kyrgyzstan is traditional; the figures of trade turnover are not impressive, but stable. According to the Embassy of Kyrgyzstan to Turkey, in 2016 their bilateral trade turnover was $459.4 million; in 2017, $534.1 million; in 2018, $455.9 million; in 2019, $519.2 million; in 2020, $507.5 million. Both presidents agreed to strive for the figure of $1 billion. Ankara extends considerable aid to Kyrgyzstan within the TİKA.

Turkey pays particular attention to Tajikistan, which does not belong to the Turkic Council yet their bilateral trade volume is not impressive. In 2020, its volume reached $323 million (a drop by 15% against the previous year), of which $203 million were related to export from and $120 million to import from Tajikistan from Turkey. In 2020, Turkey was 5th in Tajikistan’s foreign trade turnover after the RF, Kazakhstan, China and Uzbekistan. It has already invested $200 million in the Tajik economy; Turkish companies realized 52 projects totaling $660 million as contractors. Ankara supported Dushanbe with $90 million.

According to Russian expert Dmitry Borisov, in 2015-2019 Turkey was the 4th with the total sum of $29.929 billion among Central Asia biggest trade partners after the EU ($181.888 billion); China ($133.547 billion), and Russia ($118.786 billion). It left behind the Republic of Korea ($22.758 billion), the U.S. ($12.324 billion), Japan ($9.250 billion), India ($7.008 billion), Iran ($5.373 billion), and Saudi Arabia ($240 million) and can considerably improve its trade indices in Central Asia.

Turkey-China: Belt and Road Initiative

China is one of Turkey’s foreign policy priorities: the national interests of these countries are close in many respects, which should not be taken to mean that there are no problems in their bilateral relations.

They marked the 50th anniversary of their diplomatic relations and are engaged in an equal dialog; they recognize each other’s rights to pursue sovereign internal and external policy. On 26 March, 2021, at the negotiation table with Foreign Minister of Turkey Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu his Chinese colleague Wang Yi said: “China supports the independence and sovereignty of Turkey, and respects the social system, economic model, and path of development chosen by the Turkish side that fit its national conditions” and continued: “China is willing to work with Turkey to enhance mutual trust, deepen mutually beneficial cooperation, and elevate the strategic cooperative relations to a new level.”

Ankara and Beijing spare no effort to achieve connectivity of Turkey’s Middle Corridor and the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. Trade turnover between the two countries is on the rise. In the 2000s, the volume of trade between China and Turkey was $1.1 billion, in 2018, it reached $23.6 billion making China Turkey’s third (after Russia and Germany) biggest trade partner. At the same time, China

37 Ibidem.
accounts for one-third of Turkey’s foreign trade deficit ($55 billion).  


42 “Ankara stanovitsia oknom Pekina...”

43 See: K. Loginova, op. cit.


46 See: “Ankara stanovitsia oknom Pekina...”

Turkey, however, should take the U.S. into account when it comes to the high-tech sphere. On 24 September, 2020, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that Turkey’s growing reliance on Huawei and other Chinese companies could complicate Washington’s military cooperation with Ankara. “It’s not only military and security networks that will be impacted by increasing activity inside of Turkey or any other country from Chinese networks. We’re gonna make sure and protect American data.”

Turkey and China coordinate their efforts in the struggle against the pandemic. In April 2020, Chairman Xi Jinping said that China would facilitate Turkey’s procurement of medical supplies. On 26 March, 2021, at the talks in Ankara foreign ministers of both countries objected to politicization and stigmatizing of vaccines. Turkey mainly uses the Chinese vaccine CoronaVac. In December 2020, it bought 50 million doses from the Chinese Sinovac company; in March 2021, 50 million more.

Turkey and China are closely cooperating in the security sphere. According to Head of the Center for Turkish Studies at the Middle East Institute (Washington, the U.S.) Gönül Tol, back in 2013 Turkey concluded a contract with a Chinese defense company totaling $4 billion. Later, under the pressure of NATO allies the contract was canceled.

Back in the 1990s, in cooperation with China and on the basis of the Chinese B-611 complex, Turkey created a conventional battlefield ballistic missile system J-600T Yıldırım with a 600-mm 150-km range missile. In 2017, Turkish ballistic missile Bora was designed after the Chinese missile B-116.

The so-called Uyghur issue figures prominently on the two countries’ agenda.

Turkey poses as a protector of the Uyghurs of Xinjiang and is fully aware of its own nearly 50,000-strong Uyghur population. On 26 March, 2021, at a meeting in Ankara with Foreign Minister of Turkey Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Foreign Minister of China Wang Yi pointed out: “The essence of Xinjiang-related issues is fighting against violence, terrorism and separatism,” to which his Turkish colleague responded: “Turkey will never get involved in any actions that are hostile to China, while prohibiting any violent terrorist acts against China on its territory.”

Turkey and China are tightening their cooperation in the Middle East; Turkey highly appreciated China’s “five-point” initiative for achieving the security and stability in the Middle East and was ready to consolidate interaction and coordination with China in this respect. By way of comment, Renmin Ribao wrote that support of the “five points” by Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran and the UAE mean that “China is popular in the Middle East because, as distinct from the West, it has no intentions to dominate in the region. Beijing encourages and supports the Mid-Eastern states regardless of their searches for development paths, which correspond to the local conditions.”

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51 See: K. Loginova, op. cit.
53 See: “Ankara stanovitsia oknom Pekina...”
54 “Wang Yi Holds Talks with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu.”
In Russia, however, the “five points” stirred up concerns. Igor Yanvarev, a Russian expert, wrote: “Even if Beijing’s diplomatic activity was inspired by the lower priority of the Middle Eastern issues in the U.S. foreign policy agenda, it cannot but stir up a premonition that the Russian influence of the region is being challenged.” In all likelihood, such concerns are not well founded.

**Turkey-Afghanistan**

Turkey consistently and purposefully pursues a course to strengthen its positions in the Islamic world, seeing it as its long-term historical mission. In particular, over the years, Turkey has played an important role in solving the Afghan problem by overseeing the Istanbul Process, which was launched in 2011. However, today Turkey is in a unique position as the situation around Afghanistan is changing rapidly.

When it became clear that the U.S. and NATO intend to withdraw their military contingents from Afghanistan, President Erdoğan announced his readiness to maintain the Turkish military presence in Afghanistan and take control of the international airport in Kabul. However, on 15 August, the Taliban entered Kabul. The new authorities demanded that U.S. and NATO troops leave Afghanistan by 31 August.

In the new geopolitical conditions, Turkey is forced to adjust its stance in regard to Afghanistan and its new leadership. On 18 August, Erdoğan stated that Turkey is ready for all types of cooperation in order to preserve peace for the Afghan people, to ensure the well-being of Turkish citizens living in Afghanistan, and to protect the interests of Turkey. Erdoğan also noted that he welcomes the “moderate and balanced” statements of the Taliban leaders made after their ascent to power, and reaffirmed his readiness to meet with the Taliban leaders. According to him, Turkey will support Afghanistan through good times and in bad times under any leadership.

On 20 August, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid emphasized: “We wish for good relations with Turkey, but we do not want its soldiers to be present in Afghanistan.”

Thus, Turkey’s geopolitical, military and economic interests in Afghanistan are currently questionable, but there is a chance that the two states will find a common ground, establish dialog and

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resume cooperation. In any case, Turkey will remain an important international player and will try to get the most out of the Afghan direction.

**Conclusion**

An analysis of the current situation convincingly demonstrates that Turkey’s foreign policy strategy in relation to Russia, Central Asia and China is growing more comprehensive, rational and pragmatic. Ideology is still important, yet mutual advantages and mutual support against the background of the steadily complicating international situation are moving to the fore.

The fact that Turkey as a NATO member with aspirations of EU membership is an inalienable part of the Western world cannot be pushed aside. Its close ties with the East, including Russia, Central Asia and China, are equally important.

These ties are confirmed by the history, economy, geography, culture and trade routes inherited from distant past. This explains why in the mid- and long-term perspective Turkey will continue balancing between the West and the East and profiting from its unique location at the crossroads of the two worlds.

The cooling relationship between Ankara and Washington played its role in Turkey’s current rapprochement with Russia, Central Asia and China. This factor is not the main one: each crisis in bilateral relations between Turkey and the U.S. ends with return of normalcy. This means that the current Turkish strategy in relation to Russia, Central Asia and the People’s Republic of China is especially valuable for researchers who should analyze in detail the civilizational, cultural, geo-economic, geopolitical and military strategic factors.

Today, we can say that in the near future Turkey will be moving closer to Central Asia within the Turkic World, will actively cooperate with Europe and the EAEU as its integration project, as well as with China and its One Belt One Road Initiative.

On the whole, the long-term interests of Turkey, Central Asia and China are largely identical. They serve as a firm basis of their mutually advantageous cooperation. At the same time, Turkey will continue its course at becoming one of the important pillars of the developing world order of the 21st century.
MILITARY POWER OF THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY IN REGIONAL PROJECTIONS OF TRANSBORDER MILITARY OPERATIONS

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Tahir GANIEV
Ph.D. (Political Science), Assistant Professor, Professor at the Department of Military Regional Studies, Military University, Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation (Moscow, Russian Federation)

Vladimir KARYAKIN
Ph.D. (Military Science), Lecturer, Department of Military Regional Studies, Military University, Defense Ministry of the Russian Federation (Moscow, Russian Federation)

ABSTRACT

The article examines the modern military power of the Turkish Republic and its role in ensuring national security and advancing Turkey on the path of regional leadership. An analysis of Turkey’s geopolitical and strategic military position in the Middle East, as well as the geopolitical and strategic military views of the Turkish leadership, is presented. The article examines the potential of the sides and possible scenarios in the event of a hypothetical military conflict between Turkey and Iran, Egypt, and Israel. The goals and methods of military operations conducted by the Turkish armed forces in Syria and Northern Iraq, Turkey’s participation in the civil war in Libya and its assistance to Azerbaijan in the war to liberate Nagorno-Karabakh are analyzed. The article concludes that Turkey’s modern armed forces, despite certain difficulties in development, are the most combat-ready in the NATO bloc and in the Middle East region and provide the Turkish leadership with a solution to all military and political problems.

KEYWORDS: Turkey Republic, Turkish Armed Forces, Turkish military operations: Euphrates Shield, Olive Branch, Peace Spring, Sun, Claw-Eagle, Turkish military assistance to Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh, participation of Ankara in Libyan civil war.
Introduction

Today, Turkey, as a state that is politically, economically and militarily dependent on Western countries, is gradually transforming into a state that implements foreign and domestic policy independently of its Western partners.

The main goal of Turkey’s military/political course is to build up the country’s military potential to a level that ensures its security and the realization of strategic national interests, the key interest being the country’s transformation into a regional leader in the Middle East and Southern Europe.

The Turkish Armed Forces are one of the largest in the Middle East and NATO as a whole. They have combat experience gained during the military operations to capture Northern Cyprus, as well as operations in the Syrian Arab Republic, Northern Iraq and Libya. The military policy and the formation of the country’s armed forces are based on the military, political and strategic goals of Turkey’s top leadership at the present stage, as well as on the historical characteristics and economic capabilities of the state.

Geopolitical and Military Strategic Views of the Leaders of Republic of Turkey

Recently, Turkey has become one of the main focal points of the global media thanks to its military operations in Libya, Syria and Northern Iraq. In the Eastern Mediterranean, its interests clash with NATO allies—Greece and France.

In Libya, Turkey is supporting the U.N.-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli, by deploying its troops and thousands of mercenaries there. Thanks to the agreement between Turkey and GNA, important regions of the country with gas and oil fields were brought under control.

Turkey lays claim to gas fields in the Eastern Mediterranean, clashing with the interests of Greece and Egypt. Turkish influence is also growing in Azerbaijan. After a military conflict broke out between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh in the fall of 2020, Turkey supported Azerbaijan by providing advisers and supplying arms.

Thus, Turkey extends its influence over a vast area from Libya to Kashmir. The head of Mossad (Israeli intelligence service) Yossi Cohen has stated that the regime of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is becoming a threat to the region. The reaction resulted in the formation of a bloc of Turkey’s opponents, which includes Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Greece, France, Israel and India. At the same time, countries such as Qatar, Pakistan, Malaysia are building up their cooperation with Turkey. This suggests that a new system of opposing military blocs is being formed in the Middle East.

Turkey-NATO relations are currently experiencing a cooldown for the following reasons:

- First, the Turkish authorities were disappointed that the NATO leadership did not act immediately after the 2016 coup to condemn it. A version that is very popular in Turkey claims that NATO structures knew about, or at least suspected of, the impending coup.
- Secondly, NATO membership does not allow the Turkish leadership to strengthen national security and realize the country’s vital strategic interests in the Middle East independently of the leaders of the Alliance and the United States.

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Projecting Turkey’s Military Power on Neighboring Regional States

As noted earlier, all the problematic issues in the Middle East are directly linked to Turkey, which is at the epicenter of regional contradictions. Another important factor is the presence of militarily strong states in the region, such as Iran, Israel and Egypt.

When estimating the outcome of a hypothetical interstate military conflict, their military and military-industrial potentials are traditionally compared to assess the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of the armed forces, and the capabilities of the allied forces that may participate in the confrontation.

Even a superficial analysis and forecast of the development of these hypothetical conflicts, i.e., Turkey vs. Iran, Turkey vs. Egypt, Turkey vs. Israel, demonstrate that the confrontation build-up scenarios may end up in a stalemate.

Nevertheless, we will attempt to assess the possible benefits and the associated risks for the warring parties.

**Turkish-Iranian confrontation.** The sides’ military potentials are equal, but Turkey possesses an advantage in the quality of weapons and military equipment and in military technological development.

Both countries have their own military-industrial complex, which is relatively strong by Middle Eastern standards, but Turkey has far better prospects in this sphere. It buys and also manufactures a lot of equipment of its own design, while Iran copies foreign models (American, British, Russian and Chinese). Moreover, Turkey has never been under sanctions. Therefore, in almost all respects, the Turkish Armed Forces are superior to the Iranian quality-wise.

If a potential war between Turkey and Iran occurred without the allies’ participation, a victory in this military conflict would not bring laurels to either Ankara or Tehran. The military conflict would extend into the long term, the confrontation will become futile, incur major losses on both sides and lead to an exchange of air and missile strikes on strategically important targets. For Iran it would be a repetition of the war with Iraq, which essentially ended in a hopeless dead-end for both. Ankara and Tehran are well aware of this prospect. Therefore, this conflict is undesirable for both sides, which implies a low probability of an armed clash.¹

Meanwhile, the Iranian-Turkish conflict may become part of the regional Sunni-Shi’ite confrontation, which is present in either latent or explicit form in the Middle East.

The confrontation between these countries will probably take place indirectly within other regional countries, where Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan will fight for their interests.

**Turkish-Egyptian confrontation.** The military potentials of these two countries are also almost identical, but Turkey has an advantage both in terms of military technology and in the equipment and combat experience of its armed forces.

However, neither side has the critical superiority for a decisive and confident victory. Both countries spend significant financial resources on purchasing weapons. Turkey also has a military-industrial complex that is powerful by regional standards. Turkey and Egypt have no direct access to each other for a full-scale deployment of ground and air forces in a theater of operations, like Turkey and Iran do. The conflict may be indirect and occur in other regional countries, i.e., Libya, Sudan, Ethiopia, Syria, etc.

Egypt has significantly more allies in the region. For example, in the confrontation in Libya, the operational lines of the Egyptian Armed Forces approach the Libyan military theater, and extending

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them to the Libyan capital Tripoli is a technicality, while Turkey needs to go across the Mediterranean Sea. In this case, Turkey does not have a decisive advantage. In addition, for the sake of destabilization Turkey may support the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, which still has powerful support in this country, although it has gone underground.

**Turkish-Israeli confrontation.** The Turkish armed forces outnumber the Israeli armed forces almost two-fold. Officially, based on Global Firepower data for 2020, the Turkish Armed Forces are in 11th place, and Israel is only 20th, with the Israeli Armed Forces approximately two times inferior to the Turkish in almost all weapon types.

For example, at the beginning of 2021, Turkish military personnel numbered 300,350 people, while in Israel there were almost two times fewer soldiers, or 170,000 people. However, Israel has more reservists, namely, 465,000 people ready to reinforce the IDF at any time.

In Turkey, the number of reservists does not exceed 380,000 people; however, Turkey’s total mobilization resource is much higher than that of Israel due to its large population. In the event of a full-scale war, about 1,400,000 people will be called up in the Turkish Armed Forces, versus only 120,000 in Israel; thus, with the maximum mobilization efforts, the number of Turkish army personnel will exceed 2 million people, while only 700,800 soldiers can be drafted into the Israeli Armed Forces.

However, the outcome of modern wars is decided not so much by the size of an army as by its equipment and technological sophistication, and Turkey’s advantage is not unconditional in this sphere.

Israel manufactures its own tanks—the Merkava family, while Turkey’s own Altai tank is only now getting ready for release. The country’s arsenal also includes Jericho ballistic missiles and the Iron Dome anti-missile defense system. Unlike Turkey, Israel produces a number of modern weapons, although it also depends on foreign supplies.

Israel’s military budget is several billion dollars larger than that of Turkey. According to the SIPRI Fact Sheet, these countries’ military spending in 2020 equaled $21.7 and $17.7 billion for Israel and Turkey, respectively. In addition, the Israeli armed forces always keep up with the times in armament and equipment, and are sometimes even ahead of the times. Today, the Israeli Armed Forces are capable of waging a high-tech war using various types of weapons. Israel relies primarily on its air defense, air force, MLRS and self-propelled guns.

The Turkish Air Force is almost twice as large as Israel’s. Turkey possesses over 1,000 military aircraft of various types, while Israel has about 600; however, Israel has more purely combat aircraft, with over 240 ready-to-strike fighters and attack aircraft, while Turkey has only 205 such planes. Moreover, after the last failed military coup, numerous pilots from the Turkish Air Force were dismissed and/or purged. In Israel, pilots are the golden pool of the armed forces, and are capable of performing the most difficult combat missions under any circumstances.

Israeli aviation is superior to Turkish quality-wise: it is based on 20 F-35 combat aircraft, while the Turkish Air Force is still flying obsolete, although modernized, F-16s, since the United States refused to supply them with fifth-generation fighters due to Turkey’s purchase of Russian S-400 air defense systems.

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4 Global Firepower (GFP) is undoubtedly an authoritative resource. There are certain conventions and assumptions, but the evaluation criteria take into account several dozen defining statistical parameters, as a result of which the rating itself looks quite objective and noteworthy. However, the author of this article believes there are certain shortcomings and defects in this assessment system. The rating data is most accurate in the top three countries, further on in the list the number of factors affecting each country’s state of military power begins to increase, which gradually begins to affect the final rating indicators. The further from the top three, the more errors and inaccuracies are present. Among the top 10 or 15 countries, the gradation may be presumed reasonable, but even here, questions already begin to arise. Further on, within the first hundred countries, there are numerous factors of influence and errors, which increases the controversy and decreases the accuracy of the rating. Still further on, these factors and errors are reduced, and the rating gradually becomes the most accurate.
As the Syrian campaign demonstrated, the S-400 air defense system is quite effective against the F-35, therefore, the Turkish air defense system, formed with this air defense system at its core, is most likely capable of repelling an Israeli air attack and inflicting damage on its air force, however, one division is not sufficient to effectively repel an attack and cover the country’s critical facilities.

Israel’s Iron Dome air defense system is also very effective. Over a decade of its existence, it destroyed a fairly large number of missiles that arrived regularly from the Arab territories, thus, in an air clash between Turkey and Israel, air force parity will be disrupted by the air defense factor of the defending state.

If it comes to a direct ground conflict, the Turkish Armed Forces will rely on the massive use of tanks. The Turkish Armed Forces have a two-fold advantage over Israel in the number of tanks and armored vehicles. The Turkish troops possess approximately 4,000 tanks, while Israel has over 2,000 tanks of various modifications (including the outdated M60A1/AZ, Patton, Merkava Mk1 and Merkava Mk2). The basis of the modern tank fleet in Turkey is made up of German Leopard 2 and M60A1, and Israel is armed with modern tanks of the Merkava Mk.3 and Merkava Mk.4 series.

However, it is worth noting that in order for a tank battle to be similar in scale to the Battle of Kursk or the tank battles of the Arab-Israeli wars, Turkish tank forces would have to pass through the Syrian territory and concentrate on the Israeli borders, while remaining under tactical, operational, and strategic disguise, which is practically impossible.

It is at this stage that the IDF may try to apply its weighty counterargument, namely, precision weapons (Air Force, missile and self-propelled guns). In addition, there are at least 650 self-propelled guns in Israel. Israeli long-range artillery is based on the American M107 and M109 self-propelled guns, proprietary ATMOS 2000 self-propelled guns, which cover a distance of up to 40 km, as well as up to 2,500 anti-tank weapon units. The outcome of a ground military conflict will be decided by the success of the use of these types of weapons; and if the Israelis manage to use them effectively with the support from their air force and combat helicopters, then even the overwhelming advantage of armored vehicles won’t help the Turkish armed forces. Nevertheless, in the event of a breakthrough of Turkish tank strike wedges with massive infantry support into Israel, which is rather small in scale, Turkey would be more likely to win.

As for the maritime component of the hypothetical conflict, Turkey has an advantage in this sphere. Israel has only three large ships—Saar-5 corvettes armed with obsolete American harpoon missiles and torpedoes. Israeli Navy also has 5 Dolphin-class submarines, and the rest of the Israeli fleet comprises missile and coast guard patrol boats, which is hardly surprising, since Israel relies on the US Sixth Fleet for protection at sea.

At the same time, Turkey has the most powerful warship group in the Black and Mediterranean Seas, which is comparable to the Russian Black Sea Fleet in terms of striking power and surpasses it in total deadweight.

The Turkish Navy includes 16 frigates equipped with long-range missiles, 10 corvettes and 13 submarines. If Israel loses American support, a Turkish naval strike from the sea could be decisive in Turkey’s military victory in a hypothetical Turkish-Israeli confrontation.

To intensify its naval strike potential, Turkey is actively developing the latest sea-based Atmaka anti-ship missiles designed to destroy both sea and coastal targets. Their testing cycle was completed in the summer of 2020, and Turkey is currently actively equipping its frigates and corvettes with these missiles. It is a smaller copy of the Tomahawk missile and is capable of carrying a 250-kg warhead over a distance of up to 360 kilometers.

Notably, the missile is highly resistant to electronic countermeasures. Atmaka anti-ship missiles are slated to be installed on the Ada-class corvettes, G-class and Istanbul-class frigates, the first of

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which went into production in 2017. If a dozen large Turkish warships fire a simultaneous salvo at Israeli targets, Israel may completely lose its coastal military infrastructure. It is important to note that the Atmaka missile carrier is not only a long-range high-precision weapon, but it is also capable of adjusting its flight. In this case, Israel’s Iron Dome air defense system may not be able to cope with so many missiles simultaneously, and if a missile strike from the sea is successful, the outcome of the conflict will be a foregone conclusion in Turkey’s favor.

However, Israel has a powerful trump card for a critical situation, namely, nuclear weapons, the possession of which Tel Aviv neither confirms, nor denies. Moreover, fragmentary data suggests that Israel has low-range missiles with nuclear warheads, some of which are allegedly based on five submarines as a doomsday weapon. If Israel is threatened with a complete defeat in a military confrontation, it will undoubtedly use it. However, all we can do is hope that this does not happen, since there are too many factors that will prevent an actual military conflict between the two countries.

However, despite all disagreements, Turkey is still not powerful enough for a military confrontation with Israel. In addition, being a NATO member, Turkey adheres to the Alliance rules and seeks to be the regional guarantor of security. Thus, it will not succumb to serious provocations or add pressure to a situation which may lead it to an unpredictable outcome.

Military Operations of the Turkish Armed Forces in the Middle East

Turkey’s Military Operations in the Syrian Arab Republic. Starting in the second half of 2011, when the Syrian conflict began to grow into a full-scale civil war, Turkey assumed an extremely rigid position against the Syrian authorities, specifically Syrian President Bashar Assad, demanding change in the country. Political and military leadership structures of the opposition’s Free Syrian Army (FSA) were formed and its rear formations were deployed in Turkey.6 Turkey, which was flooded by Syrian refugees, began to insist on creating a “security zones” for them in the border areas and no-fly zones for government aviation in the north of the country, which, in fact, meant establishing a military protectorate there.

Operation Euphrates Shield. Without the support of NATO allies and the international community for the creation of security zones, in 2014 Turkey’s leadership began to prepare a unilateral military operation in Syria under the pretext of fighting Kurdish terrorism, and increased its support of the FSA and other Islamists fighting against the Syrian government.

Turkish leadership decided to carry out the operation on the basis of Art. 51 of the U.N. Charter, which recognizes the states’ right to self-defense. The direct threat to Turkey’s security at that time was posed by ISIL terrorists who were acting in the Syrian border areas adjacent to Turkey.

Ankara had its own goals in the Syrian conflict: to strengthen its influence in areas with predominantly Turkic population (the northern part of Latakia province, Aleppo and certain other areas), weaken Damascus, and, most importantly, prevent the creation of a Kurdish enclave in Syria and Iraq, which could serve as a base for the establishment of Turkish Kurdistan. Turkey considers the north of Syria its forward defense area, and, if it is unable to establish itself there, it aims to at least prevent others from doing that. That was the aim of Ankara’s Euphrates Shield military operation.

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6 The Free Syrian Army (FSA) is one of the largest militant groups in Syria, leading an armed struggle against the Syrian government, led by President Bashar Assad. The FSA is made up of small local organizations operating throughout Syria. Most FSA members are Sunni Arabs, but include organizations that comprise Kurds, Syrian Turkmen, Palestinians, Libyans and Druze. The FSA also includes militants from Lebanon, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia and other countries.
Figure 1

Operation Euphrates Shield. Directions of the Turkish Armed Forces Offensive in Syria
The operation officially targets ISIL positions; however, its immediate purpose is to prevent the attack of the Kurds on the city of Manbij and the displacement of the ISIL divisions from this strategically important city on the western bank of the Euphrates.

The purpose of the Turkish operation was to advance 30 km into Syria with a 100-kilometer front, and occupy the cities of Al-Bab and Manbij and 150 small towns.

It was supposed to have created a “security zone” in the north of Syria, which Turkey has been advocating for several years. The core of the invasion forces was made up of various pro-Turkish Syrian opposition forces, trained and additionally armed by Turkey, including FSA and Turkomans, whose total number was estimated at 3-5 thousand people. They became the Turkish proxy army, which should have endured the greatest severity of fighting and taken the area under control.

Turkish forces were only supposed to provide fire support, and were represented by the M60A3 tank battalion of the 2nd Field Army, convoyed by the fighters from the Turkish Special Operations Command and the Army Special Forces. The Turkish contingent at the first stage numbered approximately 350 people.

Over 217 days of the military operation, 2,055 sq. km. of Syrian territory was liberated from Kurdish forces. Over the following months, FSA fighters and Turkish servicemen ensured the safety of secured Syrian areas. With Turkish support, the local police structures were formed and the work of medical, educational institutions was restored. Conditions have been established to safely return refugees to their homeland.

This military operation gave the Turkish army the experience in land combat operations, and its headquarters—the experience in planning and operations. It also allowed to test various techniques in battle, including attack drones and proprietary high-precision weapons. At the same time, the losses among Turkish soldiers were moderate. By mid-February 2017, there were 68 dead and 386 wounded among Turkish soldiers. The losses among various pro-Turkish opposition forces were greater—470 dead and 1,712 wounded. Turkey lost about 30 units of armored vehicles, half of which were tanks. Manned aircraft of the Turkish Air Force did not suffer.

In general, despite a number of errors, shortcomings, unnecessary losses of equipment, the Operation Euphrates Shield was rather successful for Turkey. Turkey had achieved the initial goals of this military operation.

Operation Olive Branch. Olive Branch was an operation of the Turkish Armed Forces and pro-Turkish militant groups in the north of Syria. The launch of the operation was officially announced by the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces on 20 January, 2018.

According to Turkey, the YPG terrorist organization has controlled the Afrin area for years, posing a threat to Turkey’s national security. YPG transported weapons and carried out illegal border crossings over the Nur mountains. Turkish security forces have repeatedly intercepted a large number of weapons belonging to the YPG as part of the fight against terrorism. YPG presence in Afrin also contributed to the enlistment of militants. Turkish officials began to discuss the possibility of conducting a new operation in Syria to counter “terrorist groups” from the Syrian Kurdistan almost immediately after the end of the Operation Euphrates Shield (August 2016-March 2017).

The purpose of the operation is the dislodgment of Kurdish armed groups (YPG, YPJ) from the Afrin area (Western part of Syrian Kurdistan) and the creation of a buffer area on the border between Turkey and Syria.

Military situation and objectives of Operation Olive Branch:

- depth of operation: 20-25 km;
- target: the city of Afrin; presents no special difficulties for an assault (50,000 inhabitants, mainly low-rise buildings);
- the operational theater is geographically similar to Yemen. Three zigzagging mountain roads that cross each other on the way to the city of Afrin, which may lead to Turkish de-
Figure 2

Turkey’s Military Operation Olive Branch in Syria

Areas controlled by:
- Syrian armed forces
- Kurds
- Turkish Armed Forces and Syrian opposition

Directions of offensive by Turkish Armed Forces

Dislocations of “security forces” of the U.S.-led coalition

Repositioning of the Russian military

Airfields

Areas under artillery attacks by Turkish Armed Forces

50 km

Kobani
Al-Bab
Aleppo
Kobani
Al-Bab
Aleppo

Figure 2
Turkey’s Military Operation Olive Branch in Syria
tachments stretching out over fairly long distances. At the same time, the roads themselves and each of their turns offers Kurdish detachments a place to conduct an ambush.

Equipment and personnel on both sides:

- Kurds: 8,000 to 10,000 people (Turkish estimate);
- Turks:
  - FSA (Free Syrian Army) - up to 5,000 fighters;
  - units of the 52nd Turkish Tank Division, previously transferred from the Istanbul area (a tank brigade comprises about 5 thousand people);
  - 1st Commando Brigade of the 2nd Army;
  - possibly units of the 6th Corps: 5th Tank Brigade (from Gaziantep), 39th Mechanized Brigade and 106th Independent Artillery Regiment;
  - engineering, sappers, border guards, possibly military police (gendarmerie) units;
  - Air Force (2 aircraft), air defense.

In total, the Turkish military group numbered up to about 30-40 thousand people, over 280 tanks (7 tank battalions, of which are at least 3 used Leopard-2 tanks), 72 aircraft.

As a result of Operation Olive Branch, which began on 20 January, 2018, members of PKK/YPG were unable to repel the Armed Forces of Turkey and the Free Syrian Army (FSA).

In the second month of military operation, Turkish troops and FSA were occupying ten new villages daily. Control over the center of Afrin was established following several hours of collisions as early as by 18 March. There were many reasons for the acceleration of the operation in the second month and the inability of PKK/YPG to offer due resistance:

- First, the local population did not support the YPG, and their military training was inadequate, contrary to media propaganda.
- Secondly, the Turkish military command has taken into account the experience of the preceding military Operation Euphrates Shield and developed the required tactics and strategy that Turkish Armed Forces used in the first month of operation.

Results of Operation Olive Branch. The main result of this operation was the military deterrence effect achieved by Turkey. Turkish Armed Forces had to face a situation in Afrin that was more complex in comparison with the Operation Euphrates Shield and had to face a far greater number of militants. Nevertheless, they managed to complete this military operation in a very short time and with significantly smaller losses. Thus, despite certain losses and demonstrating their growing combat experience, Turkey began to confidently fight the YPG in the Manbij and on the east coast of the Euphrates River, that is, throughout the entire northern strip of the Syrian-Turkish border.

Operation Peace Spring is a military operation conducted by Turkey and the pro-Turkish militant formations of the Syrian opposition in the north of the Syrian Arab Republic.

On 9 October, 2019, President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced the beginning of Peace Spring, another military operation in Syria. He stated that the purpose of this operation is “the destruction of a terrorist corridor, which they attempted to create along the republic’s border, as well as the achievement of regional peace and stability.”

One of the main reasons for the Turkish military operations in Syria was Ankara’s concern that the Kurds may create an independent territorial entity in the north of the country.

In order to hold the Idlib zone in Syria under its control, Turkey sent its troops numbering one mechanized division (presumably up to 14,000 soldiers, up to 250 tanks and 300 other armored vehicles), reinforced with special forces.
The purpose of this operation is to use the most severe methods and clear the Syrian border areas of representatives of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and the Syrian Democratic Union (PYD), which are considered terrorist organizations in Turkey.

The next goal was to create a security zone of up to 30 km along the entire span of the Syrian-Turkish border (about 480 km) in the SAR.

According to Turkey’s plan, Turkish troops were supposed to push Kurd formations 30 km away from the border. At the same time, it was necessary to destroy the enemy or inflict maximal losses further into the Syrian territory (special forces raids, artillery fire and aviation strikes). The questions that remained were how and for how long does the Turkish army need to guard the 480-km security perimeter in the SAR.

Meanwhile, Kurdish formations were supposed to return to the border areas over time, as they retreated from the Turkish attacks, and begin to shoot at the Turkish troops along the entire 480 km border strip.

*Figure 3*
As a result of the operation, a corridor up to 30 km deep and 120 km wide was created between the cities of Tell Abyad and Ras al-Ayn, where up to 2 million refugees will be resettled.

In the course of the operation, Kurdish groups were displaced from this area. They left the Syrian cities of Tell Rifaat and Manbij and withdrew 30 km south of the Syrian-Turkish border, losing the opportunity to attack Turkish troops in the southeast of the country.

An important consequence of Operation Peace Spring was the withdrawal of the American armed forces from Syria. The United States decided not to interfere with Turkey’s operations that aimed to destroy the radicals.

In addition, the United States refused to provide any military and technical assistance to Kurdish military formations. Britain and France also followed in the U.S. footsteps.

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**Turkey’s Participation in the Military Conflict in Libya**

After the offensive was launched on Tripoli by Khalifa Haftar’s Libyan National Army (LNA) in April 2019, Turkey expressed deep concern and condemned his actions for destabilizing the situation in the country. In November 2019, Ankara announced that it had signed an agreement with the internationally recognized government of Libya on Mediterranean maritime borders, in addition to an agreement on security and military cooperation. This agreement was protested as illegitimate by the governments of Egypt and Greece and was called a geographical absurdity, since Turkey deliberately ignored the Greek islands, particularly the island of Crete, located between Turkey and Libya.

The allies of each of the warring parties began to supply arms to Libya in the winter and spring. In 2019, the U.N. reported regular and systemic violations of the arms embargo against Libya by Jordan, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), noting that these countries were making little effort to hide the origins of the ammunition. Turkey’s interests also began to threaten France in North Africa, as France began to realize that the Turks were more active and that former French colonies could eventually become truly former in the near future.

Thus, an indirect military confrontation unfolded between Turkey, which began to support the Government of National Accord (GNA) formations (official Tripoli) and sent thousands of Syrian militants, military advisers, military equipment and unmanned drone systems to the Libyan front, and the Arab monarchies of the Persian Gulf, among which the United Arab Emirates stands out.

In January 2020, the Turkish Grand National Assembly approved a bill on the deployment of troops in Libya to support the U.N.-recognized government after forces loyal to Haftar launched an offensive along the entire front line. The bill was passed by a majority of votes, but the exact details of the military campaign were not disclosed.

Already during the defense of the Libyan capital in January 2020, Ankara began a military campaign in support of Fayez al-Sarraj’s GNA, sending about 100 officers and about 2,000 Syrian mercenaries to reinforce the defense of the Libyan capital, Tripoli. This was reported on 15 January online by the British newspaper *The Guardian*. It stated that approximately 650 fighters left Syria at the end of 2019 and have already arrived in Tripoli. Another 1,350 fighters arrived in Turkey on 5 January, where some of them started training at training camps in the south of the country.

Later on, Turkey transferred fighters from the Al-Mu’tasim Division, the Sultan Murad Brigade, Suqour al-Sham and other groups operating in northwestern Syria to Libya as part of building up military assistance.
Khalifa Haftar declares LNA’s offensive on Tripoli

Libyan National Army captures the town of Gharyan

Direction of the offensive launched by the LNA led by Khalifa Haftar

Areas and towns controlled by
- Libyan National Army (LNA) and government in Tobruk
- Government of National Accord and its allies
- Local tribes
- Oil and gas fields
- Oil refineries
- Oil pipelines
- Gas pipelines
- Oil loading terminals
In addition to mercenaries from among the Syrian armed opposition and large consignments of weapons (ACV-15 infantry fighting vehicles, 35-mm Korkut anti-aircraft guns, T-155 Firtina howitzers, etc.), Bayraktar TB2 tactical and strike UAVs, Turkey transferred its military advisers, special army forces, and a group of the Turkish National Intelligence Organization (MIT) operatives.

In March 2020, Turkey significantly expanded its military involvement in supporting the Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli. Turkish air force and drones have flown dozens of combat missions against LNA supply lines that extended over 1,000 kilometers from eastern Libya to positions in the west of the country.

Thanks to Turkey’s support of the GNA, Haftar’s troops lost control of all major cities west of Tripoli by 13 April, 2020. Turkey achieved strategic success by breaking through the year-long siege of the Libyan capital Tripoli and pushing the LNA forces back to their original positions.

At the same time, GNA’s powerful offensive with Turkey’s military support demonstrated that a clear signal has been sent to Haftar’s LNA and his sponsors, i.e., the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, that it is impossible to overthrow the GNA in Tripoli by military means.7

In early July of the same year, an agreement on military cooperation between Turkey and Libya (GNA) was signed, which gave Turks a mandate to directly intervene and protect the official leadership of Libya.

The agreements were signed during the visit of the Minister of Defense Hulusi Akar and the Chief of the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces Yaşar Güler to the Libyan capital.

Official missions of Turkish ground forces, air defense, air force and UAV command began deployment in Libya. The agreement also provided for the creation of a Turkish military base in the country and the provision of diplomatic status to Turkish personnel.

The turning point in the military situation in Libya undoubtedly resulted from Turkey sending its military to support the GNA. The vital instrument of influence created by Ankara comprised two elements: air superiority and 10,000 Syrian mercenaries brought in from Syria.

Haftar’s disastrous failure to take Tripoli after Turkey’s intervention was a severe blow to his allies, especially the UAE and Egypt. Subsequently, the question of capturing the Libyan capital Tripoli had to be postponed.

In this context, Egypt has threatened to intervene if the GNA took over the Jufra oil-bearing region and entered Sirte, which is located 900 km from the Egyptian border.

To demonstrate the seriousness of its intentions, Egypt conducted military exercises codenamed Decisive 2020 on its side of the border, aimed at “eliminating mercenary elements from irregular armies.”

However, these Egyptian threats and maneuvers did not change the prevailing reality, so Cairo’s plans for military intervention in Libya turned out to be unrealistic.

In addition, the likelihood of a full-scale war between Egypt and Turkey in Libya was unlikely, but Turkey proved to be more experienced in planning and conducting hostilities even in a remote theater of operations and in the ability to wage high-tech warfare. It was with Turkey’s military assistance that the official leadership of Libya managed to push back Haftar’s forces hundreds of kilometers away from Tripoli.

Thus, the Libyan direction is of vital importance in Turkish foreign policy. This is confirmed by the significant amount of resources spent by Ankara on the military campaign in this North African country.

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Turkey’s Military Operations in Northern Iraq

Turkey’s military operations in northern Iraq were necessitated by the struggle with the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), which has lasted for over a decade.

The PKK established a network of cells in the regional countries, and has been receiving stable funding for its activities through donations from Kurdish businessmen from different parts of the world.

The PKK also has subdivisions in Iraqi Kurdistan, although it is not part of the autonomy’s parliament or government. According to researchers, Iraqi Kurdistan has become the main springboard for the PKK since its establishment in the early 1990s, allowing the organization to increase its activity along the Turkish border.

Turkey could not but respond to these actions, and in 2007 the Turkish parliament sanctioned the first major anti-terrorist operation in northern Iraq.

*Turkey’s Operation Sun (16 December, 2007-29 February, 2008).* This operation targeted PKK units. In October 2007, Kurdistan Workers’ Party militants carried out attacks on the Turkish military from the Iraqi border regions. In response, Turkey pulled 50,000 to 60,000, or, according to other sources—about 100,000 military personnel to the Turkish-Iraqi border. Turkish Air Force launched several airstrikes on PKK bases located near the Iraqi border, and Turkish special forces crossed the border several times to conduct operations, however, the Turkish authorities did not carry out a large-scale invasion of Iraqi territory.

According to the Turkish military, there were approximately 3,500 PKK militants in northern Iraq at that time. Almost 10,000 people were involved in Turkey’s invasion of Iraq.

*Military Operation of the Turkish Armed Forces in Iraq (2015-2016).* According to Turkey, the objective of the military operation was to fight against ISIS. The forces engaged in this operation comprised a battalion-tactical group (tank battalion and infantry) with aviation support.

On 4 December, 2015, a Turkish tank battalion entered the Iraqi province of Nineveh. The stated purpose was to train militiamen involved in fighting terrorists. The Iraqi Foreign Ministry and Defense Ministry called the presence of the Turkish military a “hostile action,” which was not sanctioned by the authorities.

On 16 July, 2016, after an attempted military coup in Turkey, the Turkish army withdrew some of its forces from Iraq. However, already on 20 July, the Turkish Air Force aviation began bombing the positions of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party in northern Iraq once again. On 24 August, Turkey launched the military Operation Euphrates Shield in Syria, which neighbors Iraq.

On October 1, 2016, the Turkish parliament approved the government’s request to extend the powers of the Turkish Armed Forces to conduct operations in Syria and Iraq for a year.

Turkey and the Military Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh

At the end of September 2020, the war between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh resumed. Armenia claimed that Turkey, Baku’s strategic ally, played the main role in Azerbaijan’s military operations; however, Ankara did not officially acknowledge the participation of the Turkish Armed Forces on Azerbaijan’s side in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. At the same time, both
Turkey and Azerbaijan have officially denied this fact. If we were to reconstruct the situation according to the information in the media, it would result in the following.

Information about the participation of the Turkish army in the war for Karabakh was provided by the Kommersant online media resource. As expected, some of the Turkish servicemen who participated in joint exercises with Azerbaijan were not withdrawn. About 600 Turkish servicemen remained in Azerbaijan.8

In addition, Kommersant stated that the current major aggravation of the conflict around Nagorno-Karabakh was deliberately planned and provoked by Turkey. According to the newspaper, over the preceding months, Ankara has been actively pushing Baku to start hostilities under the promise of comprehensive political, diplomatic, intelligence and military-technical support. The U.S. and French authorities also noted Turkey’s direct intervention in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.9

According to Kommersant, after the completion of the Turkish-Azerbaijani maneuvers in July-August 2020, a significant group of the Turkish Armed Forces allegedly remained in Azerbaijan. The group was subsequently called upon to play a coordinating and directing role in planning and conducting an offensive operation in Nagorno-Karabakh.9

It comprised 600 military personnel, including a battalion tactical group of 200 people, 50 instructors in Nakhchivan, 90 military advisers in Baku (who acted as a liaison during the hostilities in the brigade-corps-general headquarters chain), 120 flight technical personnel at the Gabala airbase, 20 drone operators at the Dallar airfield, 50 instructors at the Yevlakh airfield, 50 instructors in the 4th Army Corps (Pirekeshkul) and 20 people at the Heydar Aliyev Naval Base and Military Academy in Baku.10

It may seem that these numbers are not significant during a war. However, Turkey has been fighting in the Middle East for several years and has gained significant experience in conducting local operations. For example, coordinated army actions are impossible without high-quality communication, and 90 advisers from Turkey were employed to manage this issue.

In addition, about 50 Turkish instructors trained Azerbaijani units in the Nakhchivan region, which borders Armenia. Another 50 Turkish servicemen were engaged in training personnel reinforcements called up from the reserve. 20 Turkish specialists were involved in training commanders at the Heydar Aliyev Military Academy.

Turkish military specialists were also present at the Gabala airbase and other military airfields. There are 120 technicians and pilots at the Gabala airbase. A UAV control base was created at the Dallar airfield, to which 20 operators from Turkey were assigned. Thus, precise drone strikes were probably carried out by the more experienced Turkish military personnel. This is confirmed by a statement made by the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, who emphasized the vital role of Turkish drones in Nagorno-Karabakh.

In addition to numerous advisers, Turkey has dispatched 200 military personnel to Azerbaijan as part of a tactical group. Presumably, these were members of the Turkish special forces that were entrusted with solving particularly important tasks, which require top-notch training and experience. It is possible that they were not actually engaged, but they could have been used as a decisive factor at any point when the success of the battle depended on the availability of reserves, and special forces were an added benefit.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian also noted Turkey’s participation. “Foreign intervention, in particular Turkey’s intervention, is fueling this escalation and is unacceptable,” he said.

Ankara’s influence on the conflict in Karabakh was also mentioned by French President Emmanuel Macron. He stated that the Turkish authorities were transferring militants from Syria to Azerbaijan.11

U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo emphasized Turkey’s active role in the conflict. “Now the Turks have intervened and provided resources to Azerbaijan, thereby increasing the risk, adding fuel to the fire of what is happening in the historic battle for Nagorno-Karabakh—a small territory with a population of about 150,000 people,” he said in an interview to WSB radio station.12

It is worth noting that the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev categorically denied the fact that foreign mercenaries were fighting on the Azerbaijani side. “No one has provided us with any evidence of the presence of foreign armed formations in the Azerbaijani territory that are taking part in the current clashes. Our official position is that there are no foreign mercenaries here,” Ilham Aliyev said during a parallel interview with the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia to RIA Novosti.13

Combat potential of mercenaries compared to that of the Azerbaijani forces is low and their participation in hostilities is unlikely to have been initially planned, since it is difficult on many levels. One of the main issues is the language barrier and the required remote communications, which could have been intercepted by Iranian, Armenian or Russian radio-technical intelligence, confirming the presence of mercenaries, which would be highly disadvantageous for the official Baku.

In addition, Azerbaijan needed to test the strength of its armed forces, in which large funds had been invested over the past decades. If there was a military projection of Turkey there, it was the assistance provided by Turkish technical personnel, instructors and military advisers to the Azerbaijani Armed Forces within the framework of allied relations with Turkey. In addition, Istanbul provided Baku with the very military-political umbrella that Azerbaijan lacked to start this military operation.

**Conclusion**

The geopolitical position of the Republic of Turkey is of great military and strategic importance. Turkey is located at the crossroads of the key international sea, air and land routes between Europe and the Middle East, has access to vital global communications to the Mediterranean Sea, to the Indian Ocean through the Suez Canal, and to the Black Sea.

The Republic of Turkey is located near the largest agglomeration of hydrocarbon reserves, which makes it the most important transport and communication hub between Europe, the Middle East and the Mediterranean countries. Meanwhile, Turkey has militarily strong neighbors in the Middle East: Iran, Israel and Egypt, and the potential for conflict remains due to the contradictions with Greece associated with the Aegean Sea islands and the Turkish part of Cyprus, as well as with the presence of the Turkish Armed Forces in Syria.

The growth of Turkey’s military activity in the region is definitely rooted in the historical features of the country’s development, since the objective nature of the country’s historical past did not disappear without a trace. Historical memory actively influences modern Turkish society and decision-making by the state leadership. In the past, Seljuk and Ottoman leaders have always sought to play a leading role in regional processes, aiming to accumulate various resources for their country, chiefly a powerful army, a stake on victory and expansion of territorial space.

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12 See: “Prinuzhdenie k konfliktu.”
The Turkish government consistently initiates programs aimed at modernizing the national military-industrial complex, and reducing the share of imported weapons and military equipment in the country’s armed forces. The country is already capable of creating a wide range of weapons of its own design.

Over the past ten years, Turkish specialists have made a significant breakthrough in a number of branches of the military-industrial complex, including the air defense, radio-electronic, shipbuilding and armored vehicle industries. However, it seems that complete outfitting of Turkey with domestic technologies is a long-term prospect due to financial and scientific-technological constraints. So far, in most cases, we are talking about the successful adaptation of foreign developments to Turkey’s own needs. However, the Turkish military-industrial complex has already reached the required level in a number of spheres, and the Turks are close to establishing their own technological platforms in certain areas.

In general, it should be noted that the Republic of Turkey is one of the foremost military powers in the Middle East. The Turkish Armed Forces have high combat capability, are numerous and possess sufficient technical equipment. At the same time, against the background of other regional armies (with the exception of Israel’s Armed Forces), the Turkish army is well equipped, has an optimal organizational structure, which effectively ensures the defense of the state and allows it to conduct local military operations both inside the country and abroad.

The conduct of independent military operations by the Turkish armed forces, the use of large proxy formations, effective logistics and combat support demonstrate the increasing combat experience in the use of troops in this context. This testifies to the increased preparedness of the Turkish Armed Forces to conduct military operations of low and medium intensity without relying on the assistance of NATO allies.
EXPECTATIONS AND PREDICTABILITY OF THE ACCUMULATED COOPERATION EXPERIENCE: KAZAKHSTAN AND UZBEKISTAN

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Zhansaya SEMBAYEVA
Doctoral Student, Ablai Khan Kazakh University of International Relations and World Languages (Almaty, Kazakhstan)

Zarema SHAYMORDANOVA
D.Sc. (Hist.), Professor, Ablai Khan Kazakh University of International Relations and World Languages (Almaty, Kazakhstan)

ABSTRACT

The authors present their attempt at rethinking the development of interaction between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan against the background of a change in political elites in both countries.

The interaction of the two countries, which received a new impetus after several years of stagnation, is viewed as a factor of partnership, which, in turn, can be considered the first step towards full-fledged integration.

The accumulated experience demonstrates that the intensification of international cooperation between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan is an objective process with its own logic. This process, analyzed on the basis of empirical, general scientific and general logical research methods, has both positive and negative aspects.

The data obtained in the course of in-person and correspondence questionnaires (100 respondents from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan each) allowed to formulate the expectations of both the expert community and the wider circles for subsequent manifestations of the accumulated cooperation experience in the process of changing political elites and generations, and the subsequent transformation of public consciousness. The authors believe that the historical moment will come in the course of the generational change when the process of consolidation of the Central Asian countries will become natural, practically spontaneous and recognized.

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Central Asia has attracted and is still attracting close attention of political scientists, international analysts and other researchers from various countries. The formation of new independent states after the collapse of the U.S.S.R. led to the severing of ties between the republics that shared a common past, but faced an unclear, albeit largely unified, future. This future is filled with challenges, risks and threats: security problems, the impact of Islam, political, economic, social, environmental and cultural difficulties, etc. However, there are also significant achievements.

Today Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are the most powerful and developed states in Central Asia. The first leaders were replaced in both, and the process of rejuvenation of the executive branch is underway. The natural change of generations will presumably clear the way for new innovative approaches both to the internal development of the two states and to their cooperation.

The problem of integration of the Central Asian states was acknowledged a long time ago. In 2009, Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) organization was created. However, it did not live up to the hopes pinned on it and ceased to exist.

We are not referring to integration, rather, to the consolidation of Central Asian countries, and we are examining this process using the example of cooperation between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. We understand consolidation as strengthening cooperation, uniting individuals, groups, organizations and states to achieve a common goal or fight for common aims. Recently, the concept of consolidation has often appeared in political science texts, in particular, in the works of Sergey Karaganov, Andrei Kortunov and other authors. We see consolidation as the first step towards regionalization—a genuine, effective, mutually beneficial, institutionalized unification of the Central Asian states. The consolidation of the interstate strategies of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, which deepens their systemic complementarity and increases the competitiveness of both states and their strategies, is becoming an example for other regional countries and is called upon to play a key role in the dynamic development processes in the states of Central Asia.

Methodology

The main method was a questionnaire survey (100 questionnaires from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan each). General scientific methods were used as a methodological basis for the study: systemic—as a set of general scientific methodological principles, structural—as a consideration of a set of stable relations; analysis—as one of the general logic methods used to identify the forms of interaction of the countries under examination, to identify the interaction factors and the interfering causes. The synthesis method allowed to unify various aspects of the issue, and the comparative method was used when comparing various aspects to obtain research results and formulate conclusions.

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Geopolitical Features and Challenges of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan

The spatial and geographical factor has had and continues to have an impact on modern geopolitical processes. The geographical factor helps not only to explain historical events, but also to predict the development of international relations and the future of the political map of the world. Political and socio-economic processes in the Central Asian states, including those that are a part of the New Great Game, determine the geopolitical characteristics of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

The population of Uzbekistan is 1.8 times larger than that of Kazakhstan (32.96 million and 18.28 million, respectively, in 2018). At the same time, the area of Kazakhstan is 6 times larger than that of Uzbekistan (2.725 million sq. km and 448,978 sq. km, respectively).²

Kazakhstan has the longest borders with Russia and China, and borders Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in the south. Its border with Turkmenistan is 5 times shorter than with Uzbekistan. In addition to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan are adjacent to Uzbekistan. Proximity to the latter two countries brings the issue of security to the agenda.

Geography gives rise to such problems shared by the two countries as the need to improve water resource management of the Syr Darya, which is a transboundary river, and to deal with the environmental consequences of the drying up of the Aral Sea. Another common problem is lack of access to sea. Shared problems have become a significant motive for the consolidation and expansion of cooperation between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

Islamic radicalism, especially among young people, is a serious problem for both states. Turkey and Saudi Arabia influence the value system of the younger generation through Islam, which is partly manifested in the struggle between radical and moderate Islam. On the other hand, the influence of Western culture and Western values is strong among young people, especially in Kazakhstan.

Another challenge is the problem of migration, especially among young people, and the need to increase incoming cash flows, which have significantly decreased due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The migration problem manifests in different ways in the two countries. If we use migration to Russia as an example, it is apparent that temporary labor migration is characteristic of Uzbekistan, while an outflow of educated youth is more typical of Kazakhstan: 25% of emigrants are young people under the age of 29.

Other challenges common to both countries include general security issues, surging nationalism, which, however, does not develop into prolonged large-scale conflicts, environmental pollution, especially in large cities, arms and drug trafficking, etc.

Geo-Economic Challenges and the Search for Effective Mechanisms for the Consolidation of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an economic downturn in practically the entire world. In the countries under investigation, the situation is uncritical, but alarming. Problems are linked to the

² See: M.T. Laumulin, “Tsentralnaia Azia v epokhu transformatsii,” KISI under the President of RK, Nur-Sultan, 2020, p. 269.
³ See: Ibid., p. 361.
shutdown of certain types of production, reduced exports, dropping oil prices, job cuts, rising unemployment, budget deficits, the threat of Islamic radicalism, etc. By the end of 2020, Kazakhstan’s GDP decreased by 2.7%. However, in Uzbekistan, according to data from the State Statistics Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan, economic growth continued in the first nine months of 2020: GDP grew by 0.4%. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have an internal and interstate transport network: they are connected by railways and highways, as well as air traffic, regulated by intergovernmental treaties and agreements.

In 2015, the Khorgos container terminal was commissioned. It is located on the border of Kazakhstan and China and was named the Khorgos Dry Port. It functions simultaneously as a Khorgos—Eastern Gate special economic zone and as a transport and trade hub for business development and tourism. The construction of the “Central Asia” International Center for Trade and Economic Cooperation (ICTEC) is planned on the border of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Its opening will provide an additional impetus to the interaction of the two countries.

The efforts to deepen cooperation intensified after the change of government in Uzbekistan in connection with the coming to power of Shavkat Mirziyoyev in 2016, as well as in Kazakhstan with Kassym-Jomart Tokayev’s inauguration as President in 2019. At a November 2020 meeting in Kazakhstan city of Turkistan, the prime ministers of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan confirmed their intention to fully implement the Plan for the Development of Cooperation for 2020-2022, increasing trade turnover by 21% and bringing it to $4.5 billion. In the future, the countries plan to reach the amount of $10 billion. However, as noted by regional experts, the economies of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are not complimentary to a significant extent, and there are noticeable differences in the internal development and foreign policy strategies and the interest of both countries in external partners and investors significantly exceeds their mutual interest in each other. It is important to note that Kazakhstan is a member of the EAEU, and Uzbekistan is only an observer.

Economic models based on the export of raw materials and labor are outdated. It is necessary to develop technologies and increase production in the agricultural sector. In Uzbekistan, GDP grew by 0.4% in the first three quarters of the pandemic, thanks to the development of the agricultural sector. The peculiarity of agricultural production in Uzbekistan is that it is carried out by small farms with 18 workers on average.

The negative experience of CAREC has demonstrated, in particular, that the potential of bilateral cooperation between the regional countries is significantly higher than that of multilateral cooperation. This fully applies to the countries in question. The need to address common problems, such as ensuring water and environmental security, can significantly stimulate interaction. The issue of cooperation in the sphere of water resources can be solved by improving the administration system, but the mechanisms for implementing the relevant decisions have not yet been developed. The geographical, historical and cultural proximity of the Central Asian states and the Central Asian peoples, a common natural environment, complementary economic sectors—all of the above allows to improve the regional emergency preparation and response system and cut the associated costs.

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The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the logic of the current situation and the crisis: it requires cooperation, rather than competition, as well as drivers of this cooperation.

Reasonable reindustrialization and re-creation of stable self-contained technological chains within the region seems to be the optimal development scenario. The crisis highlights the promising areas of reindustrialization. Each of the regional countries needs to determine new priority industries for themselves, since the old ones have physically disappeared, with the exception of individual enterprises that have undergone a technological refitting. New industrial directions in an integrated regional market will require significant investments and coordination of participants’ actions. Alternative options for the development of global politics and economy are presented in the analytical report provided by the North-South political science center and the Greater Eurasia expert platform: the collapse of the integrated globalized system will lead to global macro-regionalization. In this sense, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan will have to involve other Central Asian countries in interaction, making decisions independently and in a consolidated manner and observing the balance of cooperation with such large countries as Russia and China.8

In her article “Relations with Other Central Asian Countries,” British researcher Annette Bohr argues that as the need to improve intraregional trade becomes more evident, “the Central Asian leaderships would benefit from adopting measures to boost border efficiency, in particular by tackling informal payments and other non-tariff barriers.”9 A policy of this sort would increase the potential benefits of joint projects, such as the International Center for Trade and Economic Cooperation. Annette Bohr sees a unique Eurasian state in Kazakhstan, a state that strives to move towards a new economic model, an ideal place for the development and implementation of new ideas. Meanwhile, she characterizes Uzbekistan as a country that is undergoing reforms, and whose economy is experiencing serious problems, including pandemic-related challenges in the health sector.10 President of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev spoke about mutual support in the context of a pandemic in his speech at the 75th anniversary session of the U.N. General Assembly. He discussed this subject in the midst of the transformation of relations between the Central Asian countries and expressed hope for profound long-term interaction with neighboring countries.11 The President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev also expressed confidence in the future of a prosperous and strong Central Asia that meets local and global interests in a speech at the same U.N. anniversary session.12

Another important component of the development of successful cooperation between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan is a departure from the resource-based economy model as part of a reasonable reindustrialization, which we discussed earlier. Kazakhstan, Russian and Western researchers, in particular U.S. experts Ariel Cohen and James Grant, have emphasized the need for a transition to knowledge based industries, analyzing the problems and barriers to the economic development of Central Asian states and the path of transition to knowledge based industries. They have said: “It is the clarity in barriers to economic development and the reinvigorated interest in accelerating Central Asia’s economic transition away from fossil fuels, raw materials, and remittances towards knowledge based industries.”13

Another factor and vector of interaction is ensuring political stability and coordinating security policy in the context of the SCO and the CSTO.

As for the most feasible conditions for the integration of the post-Soviet Central Asian states, a change in the political elite seems to be the most reasonable.

Change of the Political Elite

Up until now, all meetings of the heads of state as the highest level of the political elite have not gone beyond consultations. The first Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of Central Asia in a new composition was held on 15 March, 2018 in Astana (now Nur-Sultan). It concerned the security issues related to the immediate proximity of Afghanistan, problems of transboundary rivers, trade and economic cooperation and other topics. At the end of the summit, the next such meeting was scheduled for next March in Tashkent. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting did not take place as planned, and was moved to 28 November, 2019. Institution-level proposals were made at the summit, i.e., the establishment of the Investment Forum of the Central Asian countries, the Regional Council for Transport Communications, the development of tourism and conducting an international tourism conference “Traveling in Central Asia.”

Hopefully, the consultative meetings of the Central Asian elite will fulfill their political functions. However, the head of the Program for the Study of Central Asia, Harvard University Professor Nargiz Kasenova believes that the Central Asian elites did not fulfill their duty and missed the moment when infrastructural institutions could have been created with far fewer efforts: “Our state machine was built according to others’ random drafts, very approximately and painted on one side. As a result, we got a poor excuse for a structure, which seems to be somewhat similar to the original and looks decent, but moves badly. There was, however, a wonderful moment—when everything is broken down, it is easier to build something new. Where the foundation was initially laid down properly, everything remains relatively normal in our country, i.e., the country’s openness, its transfer to a market track. There were literally several people doing this in the 1990s, and resources were very limited. But there was a team and some kind of vision at that point.”

The Italian political scientist and sociologist Gaetano Mosca in this monograph The Ruling Class has written: “In all societies—from societies that are very meagerly developed and have barely attained the dawnings of civilization, down to the most advanced and powerful societies—two classes of people appear—a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The first class, always the less numerous, performs all political functions, monopolizes power and enjoys the advantages that power brings, whereas the second, the more numerous class, is directed and controlled by the first.”

One of the founders of the theory of elites, Vilfredo Pareto, wrote about the importance of changing elites as an element required for development: “In virtue of class-circulation, the governing elite is always in a state of slow and continuous transformation. It flows on like a river, never being today what it was yesterday. From time to time sudden and violent disturbances occur. There is a flood—the river overflows its banks. Afterwards, the new governing elite resumes its slow transformation.”

In mid-December 2016, a new president, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, was elected in Uzbekistan; in March 2019, presidential power was transferred to Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. Accordingly, the com-

position of the cabinet of ministers in both countries has also changed. There are 18 ministries functioning in Kazakhstan today. According to ranking.kz, the average age of Kazakhstani ministers is 48. The youngest heads of ministries are: Minister of National Economy Asset Irgaliyev (33), Minister of Digital Development, Innovation and Aerospace Industry Bagdat Musin (37) and Minister of Education and Science Askhat Aimagambetov (38).17

In Uzbekistan, the average age of ministers is 51.3 years. The youngest minister is the Minister of Communications, Investments and Trade Sardar Umurzakov (40), followed by the Minister of Justice Ruslanbek Davletov (41) and Minister of Finance Timur Ishmetov (42).18

The studies of numerous analysts and experts concerned with Central Asian problems are devoted specifically to the subject of the political elite. According to the director of the French Institute for Central Asian Studies Catherine Pujol, these countries, including those examined in this article, need to modernize their political elites. Moreover, she notes that there are fewer people in Kazakhstan born shortly before or shortly after the collapse of the U.S.S.R. than in other post-Soviet Central Asian countries.19

Despite the issues with the political elite, in 2019 Kazakhstan ranked 89th among 209 countries in terms of government performance, that is, it was in the top half. The rating indicators included quality of public services, quality of the development and implementation of domestic public policy, the level of public confidence in domestic policies, the quality of the functioning of the state apparatus and the work of civil servants, etc.

Note that the problem of the political elite today is not only relevant for the Central Asian states. There is a weakening of the European elite and the elite of certain Asian states, exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. The emerging signs of the consolidation of the Western elites have little impact on this process: “There is a new period of the West’s short-lived consolidation which coincides with its current decline and therefore is its integral part. So far, consolidation is taking place, among other things, through confrontation with Russia.”20

Any event or phenomenon goes through several stages: the event itself, its comprehension and reflection. The Central Asian states gained independence 30 years ago. Conceptualization has taken place. Now is the time for reflection. The first visit of the new President of Uzbekistan Mirziyoyev to Turkmenistan on 6 March, 2017 can be considered a landmark in the context of the Uzbek consolidating reflection.

The change and transformation of the political elite goes hand in hand with the natural change of generations, followed by the process of renewal and modernization of consciousness. This process in the Central Asian countries should be examined with regard to economic and sociocultural factors, as well as social stratification.

### Questionnaire Predictability

Despite the renewal of the political elite and the change of generations, a significant part of the population is still experiencing nostalgia for the past, which can be regarded as an attempt to comprehend the present through the prism of the past and preserve the old values. According to Timur

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18 The authors’ analysis.
20 S. Karaganov, op. cit.
Dadabaev, “a considerable number of senior citizens recall Soviet times with a sense of longing and nostalgia.” In parallel, the transformation of the consciousness of a significant part of Western and non-Western elites and societies is underway. Pseudo-ideologies began to gain strength: democratism; climatism, which is not associated with any real actions to protect the environment; minority rights; feminism (not to be confused with women’s rights); Black Lives Matter, Me Too, etc.

All this cannot but affect the population and elite of the Central Asian states and the consolidation processes in these countries. A 100-respondent questionnaire survey aimed to analyze the society’s comprehension of the current problems in consolidation and expanding cooperation between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The questionnaire included 20 questions about how interesting the respondents found political, economic and socio-cultural events in the Central Asian region, their assessment of integration prospects, whether they consider it correct to create a single union or an organization dealing with Central Asian integration, and which regional country is considered a driver of such integration. Also, the questionnaire contained questions about the assessment of recent events in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (using the Sardoba reservoir and the creation of an analogue of the Schengen visa as examples); about the actions which, in the respondent’s opinion, would contribute to improving regional interaction and cooperation, priority areas in cooperation between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, and whether the common Soviet past affects the regional integration processes.

Further on, the questions were elaborated. For instance, whether it is necessary to create favorable conditions for integration and what they should be: a visa-free regime, a free labor migration regime, educational and cultural tourism, formation of free economic zones or free trade areas, the development of uniform social standards; Does CA’s geographic position as a landlocked region play a role in the integration processes, what is the role of the natural and intellectual resources of CA countries in regional integration, and whether the current COVID-19 pandemic contributes to integration? The final part of the questionnaire contained questions on the presence of opportunities and prospects for the consolidation of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the expected contours of such integration and the possibility of creating a unique integration model for the Central Asian countries.

The purpose of the survey is to reveal the opinion of the Kazakh and Uzbek societies about the future of Central Asia and their readiness for consolidation. As we noted earlier, one of the main influencing factors in the consolidation of Central Asia is the understanding and adoption of appropriate actions by societies.

The survey was carried out anonymously through distribution of questionnaires among the population of the two countries. We also used Google Forms, social media (i.e., Facebook), instant messengers (WhatsApp), e-mail (mail.ru), etc.

The obtained questionnaires were systematized by social and age groups: group 1—specialists in the field of international relations and political science, group 2—specialists with higher non-core education, group 3—undergraduate students majoring in international relations, and group 4—other persons (with secondary and incomplete higher education) (see Table 1).

The number of responses obtained varies by country, age and social group. For instance, in group 1, the largest number of responses (33%) was received from Kazakhstan, of which the most (19%) came from respondents 45-65 years of age. In Uzbekistan, responses from the representatives of group 1 accounted for 28% of all responses received, however, the most out of the total (17%) came from the 35-45 age group. In group 2, on the contrary, more answers (35%) came from Uzbekistan, and a significant part of them came from the 35-45 age group. In Kazakhstan, this group produced 28% of responses, most of them (9%) from respondents in the 25-35 age group.

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Number of Respondents (100 People from Each Country), %</th>
<th>Social Groups, % (18-65 years) Age Groups, %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21% of responses from Kazakhstan and 7% of responses from Uzbekistan were obtained from respondents 18-25 years of age from group 3 (the entire group comprises students).

Group 4, which includes respondents from other spheres, the largest number of responses (30%) came from Uzbekistan, with the 25-35 age group prevailing. Kazakhstan was represented by 18%, including 6% of respondents in the 45-65 age category.

When asked whether the respondents are interested in political, economic and socio-cultural events in Central Asia, 69% of respondents from both countries answered affirmatively, 19%—negatively, and 12% found it difficult to answer. Moreover, there were 7% more interested respondents in Uzbekistan.

Fig. 1 shows the distribution of answers to the question “How do you assess the integration prospects in the Central Asian region?” Here we are primarily interested in the assessment of the time horizon of the expected integration and the similarity/difference of this assessment among the representatives of the two countries. In Kazakhstan, 38% of respondents expect such integration within the next 5 years. At the same time, 7% (slightly over 20% of all Kazakhstani respondents holding this opinion) belong to group 1 and are aged 35-45 and 45-65 (5% and 2% of the total number of Kazakhstani respondents, respectively); another 6%—to group 2, 21%—to group 3, and 4%—to group 4. 7% gave a negative answer: “Never”.

In Uzbekistan, 34% of respondents assumed that integration will take place within 10 years. The distribution of answers by age seems interesting: 17%, or half of all Uzbek respondents who provided such a response, belong to group 1 and age categories 35-45 and 45-65 years (11% and 6% of Uzbek respondents, respectively); another 6% belong to group 2; 7% belong to group 3 and 4%—to group 4. 16% of respondents expect integration in 15 years.
Fig. 2 reveals the distribution of respondents’ answers in relation to factors that could contribute to the interaction and cooperation processes: regional economic development (RED), change of generations, and change of political elites. In Kazakhstan, 59% of the respondents indicated the leveling of economic development among the regional states, 18%—the change of generations and 23%—the change of political elites. In other words, public opinion is pinning its main hopes on the economic upgrade of the region. The age analysis is also of note here (see Table 2).

**Table 2**  
**Distribution of Opinions on Factors that Can Accelerate Integration by Social and Age Groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Number of Respondents (100 People from Each Country), %</th>
<th>Social Groups, % (18-65) Age Groups, %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kazakhstan: Regional Economic Development</td>
<td>Uzbekistan: Regional Economic Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following responses were received in Uzbekistan: 48%—regional economic development, 25%—change of generations, 27%—change of political elite.

It is apparent that the citizens of the two countries consider the leveling of economic development an essential factor of integration. In the second place is the change of political elites with 23-27%. Respondents from both countries believe that the change of generations is almost as important as the change of elites.

Which areas of cooperation do the citizens of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan consider the most important for the consolidation of the two states? Fig. 3 reveals the distribution of answers to the corresponding question.

Thus, the majority (the overwhelming majority in the case of Kazakhstani respondents) considers the economy a priority. Note that Kazakhstani respondents assigned the economic factor a significantly more prominent role than their Uzbek counterparts in responding to the previous question.

The questionnaire also included a question on the states that are drivers of consolidation and integration in Central Asia. The answer was predictable: 80% of the respondents singled out Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

The question of whether the common Soviet past influences the regional integration processes was answered in the affirmative by almost 74% of respondents in each of the two states.

Analysis of the responses to questions about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the integration processes in Central Asian countries, on the projected characteristics of consolidation of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and on the need to develop a special model of Central Asian integration demonstrated that the population of the two countries is not yet ready to perceive Central Asia as a unified region and welcome close cooperation in relevant areas. It is apparent that interaction should begin with the economy.
Regardless of how important the country’s foreign policy, shaped by its political elite, is, the choice made by the society itself and its awareness of the need for close interaction play a very important role.
Fig. 4 shows the distribution of responses to the question of the necessity to create special conditions for the subsequent development of cooperation among Central Asian states. 45% of Uzbek respondents prioritized the formation of free economic zones and free trade areas. In Kazakhstan, the responses were split almost equally between supporters of free trade areas and the development of educational and cultural tourism. The distribution of answers on the introduction of a visa-free and a free labor migration regime turned out to be close (8-12%). The development of uniform social standards received the lowest percentage of all votes (4%—Uzbekistan). These data also fit well into the general trend of preferential interest in the development and support of the economy.

The conducted analysis and questionnaire survey data allow to conclude that the competition between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan for leadership in Central Asia is not merely a fact of consciousness of the ruling elites, but of the society as a whole. Each country considers itself a driver of development and claims to be the regional leader. This is, in fact, one of the problems, since the only type of acceptable competition should be healthy and balanced. However, as we have already noted, it is better not to compete, but to take confident steps towards long-term integration, creating a favorable climate in relations with other Central Asian countries.

**Conclusion**

Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan cooperation is associated with a convoluted complex of heterogeneous issues: political, economic, socio-cultural, etc., which cannot be ignored and which manifest themselves, exerting both favorable and unfavorable effects on the course of events. An analysis of these issues opens up opportunities and prospects for rethinking cooperation between the two countries through contextual integration.

As noted earlier, the response to the main survey question ("How do you assess the prospects of Central Asian regional integration?") revealed that people consider the leveling of countries’ economic development the main condition for integration. As for the timeframe of consolidation, 38% of Kazakhstani respondents estimated it at 5 years, and 34% of Uzbek respondents—at 10 years.

On the one hand, the respondents’ answers demonstrated that neither Kazakh nor Uzbek society is quite ready to see and build Central Asia as a single integral region. On the other hand, the time that the respondents allot for consolidation (5–10 years) presupposes the completion of the generation change: by this time, decision-making will finally pass to the generation born and brought up under the conditions of independence. At this time, however, the perception of the region as a unified whole by political elites and the society is encountering various obstacles.

Consolidation of Central Asia using the example of cooperation between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan allows to examine the problems of regional unification from a new point of view and answer two key questions: “What kind of Central Asia are we looking for?” and “What kind of Central Asia do we need and is its integration necessary?”
EURASIAN ECONOMIC UNION
DURING THE PANDEMIC:
INTEGRATION PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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Dolores TYULEBEKOVA
D.Sc., Director, Center for World Economy Studies, Economic Research Institute
(Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan)

Sayat ABILDIN
Doctoral Student (8D03106—Political Science and Conflictology),
L.N. Gumilev Eurasian National University
(Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan)

Yelena NECHAYEVA
Ph.D. (Political Science), Professor, Department of Political Science,
L.N. Gumilev Eurasian National University
(Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan)

Maira DYUSSEMBEKOVA
Ph.D. (Political Science), Associate Professor, Department of Political Science,
L.N. Gumilev Eurasian National University
(Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan)
ABSTRACT

The article aims to assess the results of the development of the Eurasian Economic Union, including in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. The theoretical and methodological foundation of the study of integration is based on studying the activity of various regional associations from the viewpoint of the integration levels and ultimate goals. Depending on the set goals, it is possible to predict and strategically calculate the consequences and possible benefits of economic integration.

Using statistical analysis tools, the authors analyzed the key economic indicators affecting the development of the EAEU. Official data of international structures (World Bank, U.N., EAEU), government agencies, various reports and reviews were also used in the work. The studied indicators are presented in the article in tables and graphs, created by the authors for the purpose of visualizing the relevant processes. Logical reasoning is used to describe the results obtained.

The article assesses the consequences of the pandemic for global trade and analyzes further ways of developing the world political process. Today, many countries face similar problems due to the pandemic, and take unprecedented measures in order to address them. Most countries have restricted the export of essential goods, such as medical supplies and food. Global economic ties aimed at liberalizing trade have been called into question, since each state is forced to ensure its own national security in the face of the pandemic.

In this respect, the question of strength and stability of the globalization processes are in a changing world? Certain event scenarios are considered in the conclusion of the article, one of which is a transition to a policy of protectionism and import substitution.

KEYWORDS: Eurasian Economic Union, integration, trade, investments, globalization, Republic of Kazakhstan.

Introduction

The Eurasian Economic Union (further on—the EAEU or the Union) is a fledgling integration project, whose potential and viability has yet to be fully assessed. It can be poetically compared with a new experimental model of a seafaring vessel, whose power and technical parameters can only be estimated theoretically, and its real capabilities will be demonstrated when it is launched on the open water, in other words, the international market, regional, and subsequently the global geopolitical space. In turn, the real capacity of this frigate is only revealed during storms, both anticipated, such as various economic and political crises and conflicts of interest in international markets, and unexpected, such as a pandemic of a new strain of coronavirus.

In order to objectively analyze this integrative institution and forecast its subsequent development, it is necessary to determine what it is, its inherent goals, and assess how effectively these goals are being implemented. At the same time, when conducting this assessment, one should be guided not only by its mission declared by officials and in official documents, but also by the statistical parameters of his activity.
Concepts of Integration and Economic Integration; Types of Economic Integration

In accordance with the second paragraph of Art 1 of the Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union, signed in Astana in 2012, the Eurasian Economic Union is an international organization for regional economic integration with international legal standing.¹

To understand the integration processes that have already been realized, as well as those that have yet to be implemented within the EAEU framework, one should clearly understand both the concept of international integration and the classification of integration types. The concept of integration comes from the Latin *integratio*—restoration, renewal.²

In modern use, this concept has taken on a slightly different meaning. Its usage depends on the sphere in which it is used. At the same time, integration is generally understood as the combination of any elements into something larger, a whole.

In the textbook *Integratsionnoe pravo* (*Integration Law*) edited by Doctor of Law, Professor Sergey Kashkin, integration is defined as a social phenomenon, one of the factors in the development of human civilization. It is emphasized that integration and society manifest themselves in the formation of permanent, stable relationships between people and social groups, involvement in which becomes a required condition for their life. The broader and more diverse such interrelationships are, the more integrated society is.³

As for the concept of international economic integration in the scientific literature, there are also different approaches to its definition.

Thus, Fukuoka University professor Ali M. El-Agraa points out that “international economic integration” is one of the aspects of “international economy.” He also notes that the term itself has a rather short history, in particular the Austrian and American economist Fritz Machlup (1977) could not find a single case of its use until 1942. Since then, the term has been used at various times to refer to virtually every area of international economic relations. However, by 1950, international trade economists had a specific definition of the term to refer to a state of affairs or a process involving the amalgamation of individual economies into larger regions, and the term is used today in this more limited sense.

More specifically, international economic integration is associated with the elimination of all trade barriers between the participating countries and the establishment of certain elements of cooperation and coordination between them. The latter depends entirely on the specific form of integration. Various forms of international integration can be envisaged, and some of them are de facto implemented through free trade areas, where member states remove all trade obstacles between themselves, but retain their freedom to determine the policies towards the outside world (but not the other member states), i.e., the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and the disbanded Latin American Free Trade Area (LAFTA).

Representatives of the scientific schools in the post-Soviet space—areas where integration processes are actively proceeding—are also actively studying this process. In particular, Russian professor Sergey Sutyrin considers international economic integration to be a process of gradual merging

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and mutual adaptation of national economies of two or more states, optimization of their economic structures, which leads to the formation of a single economic complex.4

Russian scientist Nikolay Liventsev, in turn, defines the concept under consideration as a high degree of production internationalization based on the development of deep stable relationships and division of labor between national economies, leading to a gradual merging of the reproduction structures of a number of countries.5

Béla Balassa, a Hungarian-American economist, identified several forms of economic integration, viewing them as stages of the evolutionary intensification of this process. In particular, he points out that economic integration may take several forms, which represent different degrees of integration. They are: a free trade area, a customs union, a common market, an economic union and full economic integration. In a free trade area, tariffs (and quantitative restrictions) between participating countries are abolished, but each country retains its own tariffs in regard to non-member states.

In addition to suppressing discrimination in the movement of goods within a customs union, the creation of such a union implies equalization of tariffs for trade with non-member countries. A higher form of economic integration is achieved in the common market, where both trade restrictions and restrictions on the movement of the factors of production are removed.

An economic union, in contrast to a common market, combines the suppression of restrictions on commodity and factor policies in order to eliminate differences in these policies. Finally, full economic integration presupposes the unification of monetary, fiscal, social and countercyclical (stabilization) policies and requires the creation of a supranational authority, whose decisions are binding for the member states.6

Depending on the content of the integration measures carried out by the participating countries, the following types of integration are typically distinguished:

- negative integration—presupposes the mutual elimination of obstacles to the development of cross-border relations between their peoples by the integrating states;
- positive integration—presupposes the development and implementation of a common policy for social life administration in their combined territory by the integrating states.7

In addition, depending on the level of coverage of the spheres of economic and political cooperation, integration can be classified as full or partial. In terms of geographic participation, the types of integration are presented as global, regional or interregional.

The World Trade Organization, with its 164 member states, constitutes an example of deep economic integration at the global level.8

Integration in the Post-Soviet Space:
Political, Historical, and Economic Premises

As a result of the collapse of the U.S.S.R. in 1991, a heterogeneous geopolitical formation comprising 15 sovereign states was formed, which is usually referred to as the post-Soviet space in scientific literature, or the countries of the CIS and the Baltic states. The fact that these states were

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4 See: S.F. Sutyrin, Mezhdunarodnye ekonomicheskie otnoshenia, St. Petersburg, 2002, p. 120.
5 See: N.N. Liventsev, Mezhdunarodnaiia ekonomicheskii integraatsiiia, Moscow, 2006, p. 10.
8 Information as of 2020.
previously integrated in the political, social, cultural and, above all, economic terms, was already a prerequisite for both integration and disintegration processes.

In economic terms, the Soviet Union was a centralized macroeconomic structure and functioned as a single national economic complex for a relatively long period. At the same time, the interests of the union prevailed over the interests of specific republics, which, in turn, could not but affect the form of economic ties. The economic and geographical division of labor in the U.S.S.R. left its mark on commodity flows, transport infrastructure, migration of human resources, etc.

Since 1928, the practice of adopting five-year plans for economic development was introduced in the U.S.S.R. One of the aspects that were always taken into account when developing and discussing these plans was the territorial division of labor. During the period of overall industrialization of the Soviet economy, industry was particularly actively developed in the national republics. A typical mechanism for creating new enterprises involved qualified personnel, chiefly from the European parts of the country—Russia, Belarus, Ukraine.

The role of the eastern regions increased significantly during the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945. Division into 13 economic regions was introduced at that time and remained in place until 1960. The national republics developed in a direction determined by the general vector of economic processes and policies of the U.S.S.R., which is still reflected in the existing interdependence of the post-Soviet countries’ economies.

The emergence of new states after the collapse of the Soviet Union gave a powerful impetus to the reformatting of economic relations and socio-economic ties in this geopolitical field. The creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States was used as a transitional mechanism, and the corresponding agreement provided for the preservation of a unified economic space between the twelve member republics. However, due to various objective and subjective processes, this intention was only partially realized.

As a rule, the prerequisites for regional integration are the coinciding levels of states’ socio-economic development, the corresponding level of development of the market economy, the need and desire to impose contacts with other integration process participants. Common borders and a history of economic and political relations are important aspects of regional integration. This is due to the fact that the integrating states are usually located in the same geographic space and have the potential to develop and link their transportation networks.

As for the disintegration element, it is particularly necessary to note the significant difference in the political and economic situation in these states. In particular, separatist conflicts, coups d’etats, civil wars, and political crises have occurred in the majority of the republics.

In addition, the single currency space was destroyed by the introduction of national currencies by each of the republics. Accompanied by hyperinflation, economic reforms proceeded unevenly and erratically. All of the above led to economic instability and hindered the implementation of regular and stable economic relations between the new post-Soviet states.

This is confirmed by statistical data on the volume of imports of some former Soviet Union republics, which are currently EAEU member states. It is worth noting that the modern databases of the Statistics Committee of the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the State Revenue Committee of the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Kazakhstan do not include pre-2005 data. In the article, the authors use their own calculations of goods turnover for 1995-2007. Statistical analysis includes the designated period, since the countries were establishing bilateral economic ties, introducing national currencies, and carrying out domestic reforms prior to 1995. In this light, 1995 is defined by the authors as the starting year for the development of trade relations.

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Currently, the Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated 5 October, 2020 No. 427.
in the new reality and within the newly adopted legal and regulatory framework for the functioning of independent states. The research period ends in 2007, since the next stage entails interaction within the framework of an integration project.

As demonstrated by the analysis, the smallest share of Kazakhstan’s imports from the member states of the Eurasian Union during this period falls on Armenia. Thus, between 1995 and 2007, the volume of Kazakhstan’s imports from Armenia varied from $2.5 million in the beginning to $5.9 million in 2007. This trend continues to this day, now within the framework of the Eurasian Union. A similar situation is also observed in relation to other EAEU member countries (see Fig. 1).

In turn, the dynamics of imports of goods from Russia, Kazakhstan’s main economic partner, exceeded the total volume of imports from all other countries of the future Eurasian Union. Thus, as shown in Fig. 2, in 2007, imports from the Russian Federation amounted to $11.6 billion, which is almost 4 times more than imports from China in the same year (see Fig. 2).

At the same time, within the framework of the new global economic relations, local goods were rapidly pushed out by goods from third countries, such as China, the U.S., and the EU countries, which also led to a certain decrease in mutual trade (see Fig. 3).

With regard to the above-described integration and disintegration processes, we can conditionally designate two alternative strategies for the subsequent development of this geopolitical region.

First, there is a “disintegration option,” which presupposes the republics’ independent entry into the regional and global political and economic space. A sub-variant of this development vector may include the entry of the regional countries into various non-overlapping international alliances and unions. This scenario, due to the formation of new international obligations that are not approved by or coordinated with the rest of the region, leads to a weakening of the previously formed interstate relations. This process leads to growing differences, primarily of an economic nature, and to the destabilization of the region as a whole, due to increased internal tension, entry of various external

![Figure 1](image-url)

**Figure 1**

**Dynamics of RK’s import from EAEU countries, besides Russia, $m**

*Source: Authors’ calculations.*

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political forces and major international players into the struggle for profits, i.e., rich natural resources, regional sales markets, and increasing geopolitical influence.

**Figure 2**

**Dynamics of Imports to RK from Russia, $m**

![Graph showing the dynamics of imports to RK from Russia from 1995 to 2007.](image)

*Source: Authors’ calculations.*

**Figure 3**

**Dynamics of Imports to RK from non-CIS Countries, $m**

![Graph showing the dynamics of imports to RK from non-CIS countries from 1995 to 2007.](image)

*Source: Authors’ calculations.*
Examples of the above in the post-Soviet space are the independent accession of the republics to the World Trade Organization on different terms with significantly diverging obligations, the accession of the Baltic countries to the European Union and NATO, the conclusion of association agreements with the European Union by Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine.

The opposite of this strategy can be the “integration option,” which puts coordinated economic and political modernization at the forefront. This process should be based on the unification and synergy of the regional countries’ economic potentials, both in the domestic market and upon entrance to the international market. This approach is focused on reducing political and economic risks for the entire region as a whole and each republic in particular. In addition, it allows to effectively use the infrastructural potential established in the Soviet past, although due to various objective factors, only its geographical aspect remains unchanged. As in any integration scenario, this model’s high stabilization potential is offset by the formation of the parties’ mutual dependence on the other’s political and socio-economic processes.

In general, the following may be considered the main generators of integration trends in the post-Soviet space:

— division of labor, which requires considerable time to change fundamentally;

— the presence of different levels of connections, from interpersonal and intrafamilial to cultural, economic and infrastructural, which have arisen during the long existence of the republics within the framework of a single state;

— technological interdependence, the presence of uniform technical standards and approaches in almost all sectors of the economy.

However, these factors run into opposing tendencies, i.e., the desire of national elites to reinforce their sovereignty and statehood, the consequences of various ethnic conflicts (a number of tinderboxes have yet to be extinguished: Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, etc.), different social attitudes to integration processes (fear of the return of the Soviet Union), etc.

Analysis of the Evolution and Development Dynamics of the EAEU

These multi-vector processes in the post-Soviet space have been going on practically since the collapse of the U.S.S.R. This has led to the formation of interstate associations differing in composition, political and economic weight, orientation, and integration potential. First and foremost, these are the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Union State of Russia and Belarus, the Customs Union, the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

In comparison with other integrative unions in the post-Soviet space, the Eurasian Economic Union is currently a more viable association, since the greatest economic and political efforts of the member states are directed at its development. Experts believe that, despite a number of difficulties, the EAEU has the potential to expand its influence on the continent and acquire the powers of a political organization.\(^\text{10}\)

The EAEU Treaty provides for the harmonization of macroeconomic policies in three main areas: strict budget deficit commitments with a threshold of 3% of GDP, a public debt limit of 50% of

GDP, and maximum inflation of 5%. At the same time, the analysis of key macroeconomic indicators demonstrates that the gross domestic product of the EAEU member states is unstable (see Table 1).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2021</th>
<th>2022</th>
<th>2023</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Armenia</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>-7.4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belarus</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>-0.9</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>-2.6</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>-8.6</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>-3.0</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: EDB.

It is important to note the presence of other significant differences in the main macroeconomic indicators. Most of the EAEU member states’ economies showed moderate growth in 2019, however, the differences in growth rates between the Union countries remain significant. According to 2019 data, the Union’s GDP (in constant prices) against the background of sustainable growth in the service sector and industrial production increased by 1.7% (a year earlier it increased by 2.7%) compared to 2018. All states exhibited positive dynamics of the key four macroeconomic indicators: industrial production, construction, passenger traffic, services and retail trade, nominal and real wages.11 The difference in the main macroeconomic indicators is considered a deterrent to successful integration.12

The growth rates of foreign trade at the end of 2019 turned out to be lower than in 2018 for all member states except Armenia, where trade with the EAEU countries has accelerated. In general, EAEU’s growth rate remains lower than that of the global economy. This is due to a growth slowdown in one of the key economies—the Russian Federation, which negatively affects bilateral trade flows13.

At the same time, as shown in Fig. 4, the main share of Kazakhstan’s trade falls on Russia. Since 2016, mutual trade between these two countries has exhibited stable growth, with the exception of 2020, which is an outlier due to the COVID-19 pandemic and cannot be considered indicative for economic calculations.

The slowdown in the global economy and trade growth rates, as well as in the economic activity in some member states, had a negative impact on the state of the EAEU’s foreign trade. Both non-recurring factors and macroeconomic conditions have contributed to this. As trade disputes escalate and global economy slowed down, global trade growth decelerated.

2019 brought a decrease in the volume of the Union’s foreign trade, as well as a slowdown in the economic growth in most member states. The increase in production growth rates in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan had a supportive effect on the foreign trade export activities of these countries. The slow-

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13 See: Analytical Report...
Mutual Trade of the RK with EAEU Countries, $m

Source: Authors’ calculations based on data of the RK BNS.
Figure 5
Mutual Trade of
the RK with Other Countries, $m

Source: Authors’ calculations based on data of the RK BNS.

Figure 6
Kazakhstan’s Trade with EAEU Countries

Source: JS Institute of Economic Research based on RK BNS.
down in industrial production and agriculture observed in other member states, along with unfavorable external economic conditions, led to negative export dynamics14 (see Fig. 5).

The trade between Kazakhstan and the EAEU in 2019 decreased by 2% compared to 2014, including a 10% drop in exports and a 2% increase in imports. At the same time, trade turnover increased by $2.8 and 1.2 billion in comparison with 2017 and 2018, respectively. This difference in indicators is due to a decrease in world prices for raw materials and mineral resources, which is directly reflected in trade indicators and within the EAEU (see Fig. 6).

Among the reasons for the lack of success of economic integration efforts within the CU, CES and EAEU, the main factor is the presence of differences in the stated goals of the organization, and interests and tasks of the member states. According to foreign experts, Russia seeks to use the EAEU to promote its political, security and strategic interests, as well as to demonstrate Russia’s global prestige and leadership. Armenia, Belarus, and Kyrgyzstan expect to get the maximum benefits from Russia. Kazakhstan, the most active post-Soviet state and a strong supporter of economic integration, wants to focus more on economic, trade, and investment issues without political, ideological or other pressures. The main goal of Kazakhstan’s accession to the EAEU is to promote free trade and free movement of capital, human skills and investment.15

### Pandemic and New Integration Challenges

The globalization processes, which have been gaining momentum over the past 30 years, reinforce stable global economic ties. In order to join the current global processes, regional countries formed integration structures with various levels of trade liberalization.

As practice shows, most integration associations adhere to an open regionalist policy. However, this trend may change under certain conditions, i.e., as shown in Fig. 7 (the economic crisis of 1974-1975, the energy crisis of the 1980s, the world economic crisis of 2008 and the 2020 pandemic).

However, the experience of the 2020 pandemic demonstrated that neither the regionalization, nor the globalization could provide adequate support to global development during a global crisis. At the peak of the pandemic’s negative effects, many countries have restricted the export of goods essential for combatting Covid-19. Meanwhile, these same countries began to import medicines, medical products, alcoholic beverages, and food products. The European Union, for example, introduced an approval procedure for the export of personal protective equipment and exempted the goods required to combat the consequences of the Covid-19 outbreak from import duties and VAT (until 31 October, 2020). The import duties on medical devices and medicines were temporarily canceled (exemptions are still valid); this also applied to a number of food products (exemptions were in effect to 30 June, 2020). The EAEU introduced bans on the export of masks and a number of food products, which were lifted on 30 September and 30 June of the last year, respectively.

At the same time, we can say that all the measures taken against the COVID-19 pandemic had similar consequences for most countries of the world, including the EAEU member states:

- a 4.7% decline in economic growth in 2020, after which the region’s economy will start to grow again in 2021, thanks to policy measures, a rebound in global commodity prices and in trade; thus, by the end of 2021, the EEC expects the total GDP of the EAEU countries to grow by 3.8%.
- decline in social and economic activity;

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large-scale disruptions in global and regional value chains;
- reduction in the number of trips and the scale of tourism;
- decrease in demand for export products.

According to the UNCTAD UN World Investment Report,16 “the COVID-19 crisis will cause a dramatic fall in FDI. Global FDI flows are forecast to decrease by up to 40 per cent in 2020, from their 2019 value of $1.54 trillion. This would bring FDI below $1 trillion for the first time since 2005. FDI is projected to decrease by a further 5 to 10 per cent in 2021 and to initiate a recovery in 2022. A rebound in 2022, with FDI reverting to the pre-pandemic underlying trend, is possible, but only at the upper bound of expectations.”

In particular, in Kazakhstan, FDI fell by 35% in the first half of 2020 (see Fig. 8).

The future prospects for international trade also remain unpredictable due to the possible increase in the incidence of coronavirus around the world. The rebound of economic growth will largely depend on the effectiveness of the countries’ specific economic policies. However, in the event of a protracted recession, investment activity will continue to decrease, which, among other things, will indicate the continued weakness of external demand.

Within the framework of Eurasian integration trends, the “coronacrisis” also demonstrated the instability of economic ties and led to the closure of borders even within a unified customs zone.

At the same time, it should be noted that countries, including the EAEU member states, are returning to the existing interactions at the first opportunity. Moreover, a potential transition of the Union countries to self-sufficiency and import substitution may entail negative consequences, as was

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the case with Latin American countries, whose economies are raw material-based, like that of Kazakhstan. Experts note that import substitution initially produces a positive effect, but subsequently leads to negative effects. In most countries, import substitution occurred on the largest scale in the consumer goods and food industries. Import phaseout of consumer goods is generally relatively easy. However, in the future, the import of means of production, i.e. machinery and equipment, will also need to be phased out. This substitution requires serious investments and corresponding sales markets, as well as modern technologies.  

Thus, the second scenario is likely to be realized: a revision of the mechanisms of existing integration platforms.

In the post-coronavirus period, countries are already beginning to gradually rebuild their economies through the resumption of trade ties, among other things. Integration associations are also reverting to the established forms of cooperation and already implementing joint measures.

At the same time, there is still a sense that in case of a “black swan”, states are doomed to independently cope with the economic crisis. That is, integration processes will continue, since global economic ties have existed from time immemorial and are so strong that their breakdown would doom countries to economic isolation. At the same time, these processes will presumably proceed at a slower pace and with greater caution.

Conclusion

The economic indicators among the EAEU countries are relatively negative, however, we need to note that integration is a long-term project, sometimes with delayed positive results, one that requires adjustment for global economic shocks, internal problems, etc.

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Integration in the post-Soviet space is determined by many factors. One of them is the relatively low competitiveness of goods produced in the countries of the former Soviet Union in comparison with foreign goods. Integration is based on building and maintaining the ties that developed during the Soviet era. Relative economic equality of partners is required for effective integration to ensure mutual economic benefits, exclude the possibility of influence and dominance among the association members. In case of the EAEU, even trade turnover indicators serve to clearly demonstrate that the Russian Federation is the key partner for all other EAEU members: all countries trade mainly with Russia, rather than with each other. On the other hand, lack of access to the open sea and the need to maintain regional security and stability in the context of globalization require Kazakhstan, much like other Central Asian countries, to maintain strategic and long-term contacts with its closest neighbors.¹⁸

The Eurasian Economic Union has made significant progress in achieving its initial goals in a relatively short period of time:

— creating conditions for the stable development of the member states’ economies in the interests of improving the standard of living of their population;
— formation of a single market for goods, services, capital and labor resources within the EAEU;
— comprehensive modernization, cooperation and increased competitiveness of national economies in the global economy.

However, the instability of the world economy and the raw material orientation of the EAEU member states negatively affect Kazakhstan’s macroeconomic indicators within the framework of four freedoms—freedom of movement of goods, capital, services and labor.

The Eurasian Union was created due to a number of objective geo-economic aspects; the prospects and trade advantages of integration are difficult to ignore. At the same time, its member states, including Kazakhstan, are facing certain factors that negatively affect mutual trade indicators. Therefore, the subsequent development of this integration association will depend on how dynamically the strategy of EAEU member states’ interaction is reformatted under new conditions. The key areas of this long-term strategy should be high-tech development, rapid (outpacing) digitalization, maintaining socio-economic stability and effective employment.

PROSPECTS FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION IN CENTRAL ASIA

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Karlygash MUKHTAROVA
D.Sc. (Econ.), Professor,
Department of International Relations and World Economy,
al-Farabi Kazakh National University
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)

Klara MAKASHEVA
D.Sc. (Hist.), Professor,
Department of International Relations and World Economy,
al-Farabi Kazakh National University
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)

Zere KENZHEBAEVA
D.Sc. (Econ.), Professor,
Department of Economics, NARXOZ University
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)

Mansiya SADYROVA
D.Sc. (Sociol.), Professor,
Department of Sociology and Social Work,
al-Farabi Kazakh National University
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)

ABSTRACT

This research article examines the state and prospects of economic cooperation among the countries of Central Asia (CA).

As history would have it, economic cooperation within the CA region was previously limited, and investments in Central Asia were mainly concentrated in the mining sector of the economy. Demographic and economic trends in the region have led to an expansion of the internal market; most Central Asian states have implemented wide-ranging reforms, which have improved the overall investment climate; and the CA states have stepped up the development of multilateral trade and economic relations, laying the groundwork for broader cooperation. The article also covers recent problems related to the economic situation in the region.
For example, the current situation associated with COVID-19 has had an impact on economic relations between the CA countries. In the view of international experts, this crisis has not provided any new reasons for integration in the region. The quarantine measures taken in various Central Asian countries have had a negative effect on their foreign trade and thus on intra-regional trade and economic cooperation in general.

The authors also examine other problems, such as those caused by the CA countries’ economic dependence on other countries, namely their dependence on imports from outside the region. These problems also affect the prospects of economic cooperation in Central Asia.

All countries, including those rich in natural resources, want to produce and export finished goods with high value added. The production of high value added products and services enables a country to earn more revenue and reduce its dependence on primary commodity exports. The Central Asian countries are no exception. But for many reasons their finished products are often insufficiently competitive in countries outside the region.

Despite the existence of economic problems connected with the need to improve the economic aspects of cooperation, there is a clear trend towards diversification of the economy of the CA countries caused by a desire to develop various specializations. These include agricultural processing, production of consumer goods for the population, development of the service sector, and other areas.

Thus, the choice of a new model for the development of multilateral relations and the emerging trend towards economic growth in the region have made it possible to lay the foundation for long-term cooperation among the Central Asian states.

**KEYWORDS:** regional cooperation, Central Asia region, diversification of the economy, trade regimes, Central Asian countries, external economic policy, region, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan.

**Introduction**

The history of the creation of the Central Asian Union includes the establishment of international structures such as the interstate council with an executive committee, the council of foreign and defense ministers, and the prime ministers’ council, as well as financial institutions such as the Central Asian Bank for Cooperation and Development (with an authorized capital of $6m). In addition, this integration union had a solid legal and regulatory framework (more than 250 treaties and agreements). At the initial stage of cooperation, according to a national expert, the Central Asia region intensified integration into the global economy, maintaining trade and economic ties with 192 countries in the world. The highest demand was for mineral resources exported from the region (oil, gas, metals, and coal), as well as for agro-industrial products (cotton, wheat, vegetables, leather, etc.).

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But, as subsequent events have shown, the hopes for effective development of these structures have not been fully realized.

International experts believe\(^3\) that if the economic barriers between the Central Asian countries are removed, market competition will help each country to identify the most competitive sectors and industries in which it could first specialize within the regional division of labor and then enter larger international markets.

The creation of an international integration union of the Central Asian countries was seen as a most ambitious project with good development prospects that provided for comprehensive win-win cooperation between these countries in both the socio-economic and the political spheres.

Today, as in the past, the countries of Central Asia have all the necessary prerequisites for effective regional integration, which provides ample opportunities for addressing a whole range of regional problems in different areas: the economy, the social sphere, the transport sector, the environment, etc.

According to an expert,\(^4\) the Central Asian countries apply different foreign trade regimes in trade with each other and differ in the degree of openness to international and intra-regional trade and to the movement of labor and capital, which has a corresponding effect on the development of closer cooperation ties and integration between them.

At present, all five states of Central Asia are ready to expand mutually beneficial multilateral cooperation in general and to deepen regional industrial cooperation in particular, so that the need for trustful dialog, political consultation, and practical collaboration between them has increased manifold.

Overall, the following key mechanisms can be used to unlock the region’s full potential:

- Building regional infrastructure: region-wide infrastructural improvements will help create a more unified market in Central Asia;
- Facilitating cross-border movement of goods, services, people, and capital: trade facilitation measures are being implemented in both regional and international trade;
- Harmonizing regulations and investment climate: a harmonized investment climate allows the region to increase the inflow of foreign direct investment (FDI).\(^5\)

### Methods and Materials

There are numerous studies on issues of regional cooperation.

Of special interest are expert assessments published by the Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting (CABAR), a well-known specialized international platform. It has published an analytical

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Among the consultants who provided professional advice on matters of research were international experts from different regions of the world: Igor Alekseev, Milana Bubyakina, Nikita Gorbun, Evgenia Zanina, Evgeny Mlodik, Konstantin Polunin, Julia Nikolaeva, Anton Stepanenko, Anna Chojnowska, and others.9

Other researchers, including Aigul Ibrayeva (Uzbekistan), Zulfiya Raisova (Kyrgyzstan), and Alibi Saruar (Tajikistan),7 specialize in matters of economic cooperation between particular Central Asian countries.

Analytical studies addressing the current situation, which has had an adverse effect on trade and economic cooperation, particularly during the pandemic, include works by Yuri Kutbitdinov, Nargiza Murataliyeva, Nikolay Kuzmin, and others.8

An analytical review and comprehensive studies by Annette Bohr, Tatiana Panchenko, Yuri Yusupov, and other experts in Central Asia9 deal with the current status and prospects of regional economic cooperation.

In this research article, use was also made of a document of national importance, as well as official statistics.10

The general research methods used in this article include comparative analysis, analytical review, market research in Central Asia, and structural analysis of trade and the CA countries’ export and import policies. Throughout the article, use was also made of special research methods: economic-statistical analysis and forecasting. The results of statistical and economic analysis and calculations are presented in the form of tables and charts.

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Discussion and Results

There is an objective basis that calls for economic integration between the Central Asian countries. Moreover, this economic integration is extremely beneficial for these countries. According to the theory of competitive advantage, every country benefits from specializing in the production of goods and services that it can produce at relatively lower costs. While exporting these goods and services, the country imports the goods and services it needs, but whose production costs in the region are higher.\footnote{See: Yu. Yusupov, op. cit.}

Below, we illustrate the state of trade and economic relations in each region of Central Asia.

First, let us consider the commodity structure of exports and imports between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (see Table 1).

\textit{Table 1}

\textbf{Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan: Major Exports and Imports by Product (January-December 2019)}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goods Exported from Kazakhstan</th>
<th>Exports ($m)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wheat</td>
<td>372.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-finished products of iron or steel</td>
<td>158.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil and oil products</td>
<td>113.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copper ores</td>
<td>87.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aluminium</td>
<td>86.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheat flour</td>
<td>77.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunflower seeds</td>
<td>75.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattle</td>
<td>70.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zinc water</td>
<td>60.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cement</td>
<td>53.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>\textit{Exports from Kazakhstan to Uzbekistan}</td>
<td>1,982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>\textit{Total trade between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan}</td>
<td>2,753</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goods Imported into Kazakhstan</th>
<th>Imports ($m)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fruits</td>
<td>164.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural gas</td>
<td>113.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polyethylene</td>
<td>79.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>78.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rolled metal</td>
<td>36.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crude zinc</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor cars</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kazakhstan’s exports to Uzbekistan for January-December 2019 reached $1.98bn, an increase of 10.8% from the previous year. In 2019, wheat constituted 13.5% of the country’s total exports, amounting to 2.19m tons with a total value of $372.7m.

Semi-finished products of iron or steel are the second-largest category of goods among Kazakhstan’s exports to Uzbekistan, which is the main buyer of such products. In 2019, the value of semi-finished products of iron or steel imported from Kazakhstan was $158.1m, which amounts to 65% of Kazakhstan’s total exports of such products. Today, Kazakhstan’s biggest integrated steel mill is ArcelorMittal Temirtau.

That year, Uzbek imports of oil and oil products from Kazakhstan totaled $113.2m, including 120.6 thousand tons of crude oil worth $52.6m. In 2018, the government of Kazakhstan ratified a Framework Agreement Between the Governments of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan on Some Issues of Cooperation in the Field of Energy, under which Kazakhstan is to supply crude oil for Uzbek refineries.

Exports to Uzbekistan also include aluminium ($86.1m), wheat flour ($77.0m), sunflower seeds ($75.9m), cattle ($70.1m), crude zinc ($60.8m), and cement ($53.7m).

Total trade between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in 2019 was $2.753bn; of this, Kazakh exports to Uzbekistan amounted to $1.982bn.

As for Kazakhstan’s imports from Uzbekistan in 2019, fruits were the largest import item, worth $164.2m, followed by natural gas valued at $113.9m.

The third largest item of Uzbek goods imported by Kazakhstan is a plastic polymer (polyethylene), for which Kazakhstan paid $79.3m. The major producer of polyethylene in Uzbekistan is Uz-Kor Gas Chemical LLC, a joint venture with South Korea that specializes in processing natural gas from the Ustyurt region.

The main products imported into Kazakhstan also include vegetables ($78.1m), rolled metal ($36.2m), crude zinc ($24.8m), motor cars ($22.7m), lead ($22.4m), fertilizers ($15.3m), as well as dried fruits and nuts ($12.2m).

Out of the total trade between the two countries in 2019 ($2.753bn), exports from Uzbekistan to Kazakhstan amounted to $771m. Thus, Kazakhstan had a trade surplus with Uzbekistan: its exports exceeded its imports by $1.211bn.\(^{12}\)

Let us now look at the commodity structure of exports and imports between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (see Table 2).

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\(^{12}\) See: A. Ibrayeva, op. cit.
Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan:
Major Exports and Imports by Product (January-December 2019)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goods Exported from Kazakhstan</th>
<th>Exports ($m)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco products</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil products</td>
<td>41.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural and liquefied gases</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheat</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waters, including mineral and aerated waters, containing added sugar</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cement</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hygiene products for women and children</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor cars</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coal</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flat-rolled products of non-alloy steel, plated</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goods Imported into Kazakhstan</th>
<th>Imports ($m)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Precious-metal ores and concentrates</td>
<td>90.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastic containers</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Footwear with uppers of leather</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polished glass</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skin care cosmetics and make-up</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bread and bakery products</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceramic facing tiles</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh apples, pears, and quince</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tractors and truck tractors</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fabrics of synthetic filament yarn</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled by the authors based on data from the following article: Z. Raisova, “Chem torguyut drug s drugom Kyrgyzstan i Kazakhstan,” Mir finansov, 2 March, 2020, 10 pp., available at [https://wfin.kz/publikatsii/linchyj-kapital/35033-chem-torguyut-drug-s-drugom-kyrgyzstan-i-kazakhstan.html], 10 October, 2020.

In January-September 2019, Kazakhstan’s exports to Kyrgyzstan mainly consisted of tobacco products, oil products, and natural and liquefied gases. Overall, exports included 787 product categories. Compared to the previous year, the export of oil products was down by about two-thirds, losing first place to tobacco products.

Exports from Kyrgyzstan to Kazakhstan in January-September 2019 consisted of 323 product categories, including 36 major categories. Precious-metal ores and concentrates made up the largest share of the total, while the supply of plastic containers had almost quadrupled in the previous two years.
Other major imports into Kazakhstan included goods such as leather footwear ($11.9m), polished glass ($10.5m), skin care cosmetics and make-up ($8m), bread and bakery products ($7.6m), ceramic tiles ($6.6m), fresh fruits ($4.6m), tractors and truck tractors ($3.7m), and fabrics of synthetic filament yarn ($3.5m).

It should be noted that in 2015, after Kyrgyzstan’s accession to the EAEU, the country’s total exports fell by a third, and its exports to Kazakhstan by 53%. In subsequent years, its total exports not only recovered, but also exceeded the previous level, but this was due to increased trade with Russia. As for exports to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan has not yet reached the level of 2014.\textsuperscript{13}

Let us turn to the commodity structure of exports and imports between Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan (see Table 3).

\textit{T able 3}

\textbf{Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan: Major Exports and Imports by Product (2018)}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goods Exported from Kazakhstan</th>
<th>Exports ($m)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wheat</td>
<td>41.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheat or wheat-rye flour</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural barium sulphate and carbonate</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asbestos</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malt extract, food preparations of flour, cereals or starch</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extracts, essences or concentrates of coffee, tea or maté, coffee substitutes</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rails</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other ferrous metal products</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastas</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processed cereal grains</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other goods</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total exports from Kazakhstan to Turkmenistan</strong></td>
<td>86.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goods Imported into Kazakhstan</th>
<th>Imports ($m)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oil products</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomatoes</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bed, table, toilet or kitchen linen</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cruise excursion boats, ferries, and other passenger vessels</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotton fabrics</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpets and floor coverings</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Railway or tramway wagons</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{13} See: Z. Raisova, op. cit.
According to Table 3, the main products exported from Kazakhstan to Turkmenistan in 2018 were wheat (with a share of 48.3%), wheat or wheat-rye flour (19.5%), natural barium sulphate and carbonate (7.7%), asbestos (2.4%), and malt extract, food preparations of flour, cereals or starch (2.1%). These goods constitute 80% of Kazakhstan’s exports to Turkmenistan. Thus, its exports to that country totaled $86.6m.

That year, Kazakhstan’s major imports from Turkmenistan were oil products worth $3m (with a share of 23.6%), tomatoes worth $1.9m (15%), bed, table, toilet or kitchen linen worth $1.8m (14.2%), cruise excursion boats, ferries, and other passenger vessels worth $0.932m (7.2%), cotton fabrics worth $0.505m (3.9%), carpets and floor coverings worth $0.502m (3.9%), railway or tramway wagons worth $0.476m (3.7%), and fresh or dried grapes worth $0.403m (3.1%). Thus, imports into Kazakhstan from Turkmenistan amounted to a total of $12.9m.

Finally, let us analyze the commodity structure of exports and imports between Kazakhstan and Tajikistan (see Table 4).

Table 4
Kazakhstan and Tajikistan: Major Exports and Imports by Product (January-October 2019)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goods Exported from Kazakhstan</th>
<th>Exports ($m)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wheat</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propane and butane</td>
<td>110.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron or steel products</td>
<td>86.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aluminium oxide</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil products</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheat flour</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood products</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunflower oil</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food industry waste</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other products</td>
<td>83.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In 2019, exports from Kazakhstan to Tajikistan included wheat ($158m), propane and butane ($110.1), iron or steel products ($86.8m), aluminium oxide ($35.7m), oil products ($13.2m), wheat flour ($12.5m), and other goods, with total exports amounting to $534.2m.

Kazakhstan traditionally imports lead ores ($45.5m), zinc ores ($38.8m), onions ($6.4m), fruits ($4.3m), copper ores ($3.2m), and other goods with small import shares.

In the first ten months of 2019, imports from Tajikistan totaled $101.9m, while bilateral trade reached $636.1m.

An international expert believes that Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan are oriented towards regional markets to a much lesser extent than Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, while Uzbekistan occupies an intermediate position. He also notes that the exports of the former two countries—Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan—mainly consist of hydrocarbons, which are exported for the most part to countries outside the region.14

Along with the above, one should take into account the well-known fact that heavy dependence on primary commodity exports carries significant risks and problems. The risks are associated with the volatility in global commodity prices. Their decline can have a very negative effect on the economies of exporting countries, which makes them extremely dependent on external factors. A well-known key problem here is the so-called Dutch disease, when the export of significant amounts of natural resources freezes the development of other sectors of the economy, primarily the manufacturing sector. Other common consequences of a country’s heavy dependence on commodity exports, in the view of an international expert, include household income inequality and widespread bureaucracy and corruption.15

15 Ibidem.
For much of the post-independence period, relations between the Central Asian states—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—have been characterized by low levels of cooperation and regular disputes, including trade wars, border feuds, and disagreements over the management and use of water and energy. In 2015, for example, Kazakhstan’s combined trade with Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan accounted for a mere 3.7% of its total foreign trade, this share having increased by less than 1 percentage point in the previous 14 years. Non-tariff trade barriers among the CA countries remain notoriously high.\textsuperscript{16}

Economic relations between the CA countries have also been affected by the current pandemic. In the opinion of another analyst,\textsuperscript{17} the crisis caused by the pandemic has not provided any new reasons for integration in the region. In Kazakhstan, for example, the coronacrisis has led to a budget sequester and has thus jeopardized the country’s sufficiently friendly tax regime, depreciated the tenge, and reduced the inflow of foreign direct investment, especially in the oil and gas sector.

In the first five months of 2020, Kazakhstan’s trade with the other CA countries totaled $1.5bn, down 16.9% from the same period of 2019.

According to the Ministry of Trade and Integration (MTI) of the Republic of Kazakhstan, exports fell by 5.5% (from $1.4bn to $1.2bn), and imports by 9.3% (from $475.4 to $336.0) (see Figs 1 and 2).

In January-May 2020, there was a significant decline in Kazakhstan’s trade with Uzbekistan: total trade fell by 19.6%, exports by 20%, and imports by 18.6%. In that period, Uzbekistan accounted for 59% of Kazakhstan’s trade with the CA countries, compared to 61% in January-May 2019. Its trade with Kyrgyzstan also fell by 15.7%, including exports by 15.7% and imports by 15.9%.

Compared to trade with the other CA countries, Kazakhstan’s trade with Tajikistan declined insignificantly, by 9.5%, with an increase of 18.5% in exports and a drop of 90.3% in imports.

The republic’s trade with Turkmenistan fell by 13.8% as exports shrank by 27.5% and imports rose by 66%.

The overall picture in the CA countries during the COVID-19 crisis is as follows. For example, Uzbekistan’s total trade with the other CA countries in January-May 2020 fell by 13.9% year-on-year to $1.78bn (from $2.06bn in 2019). The share of the other CA countries in its total foreign trade increased insignificantly to 13.7% (from 13.4% in 2019).

In January-May 2020, Kazakhstan accounted for 61.4% of Uzbekistan’s total trade with the other CA countries (compared to 65.9% in 2019), Kyrgyzstan for 17.1%, Turkmenistan for 11.0%, and Tajikistan for 10.6%. In that period, a significant decline was recorded in Uzbekistan’s trade with Kazakhstan: its total value fell by 19.8%, exports by 38.8%, and imports by 8.1%.\textsuperscript{18}

These figures reflect the impact of the quarantine measures adopted in various Central Asian countries.

There is yet another problem in cooperation between the CA countries, as we have already mentioned above: it is their economic dependence on non-regional countries. That is, the prospects of economic cooperation in Central Asia also hinge on an issue that is crucial to the future of this cooperation and whose analysis is incomplete without considering the extent of the CA countries’ dependence on external imports.

All countries, including those rich in natural resources, want to produce and export finished goods with high value added. The production of high value added products and services enables a country to earn more revenue and reduce its dependence on primary commodity exports. The Central

\textsuperscript{16} See: A. Bohr, op cit.
\textsuperscript{17} See: T. Panchenko, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{18} Yu. Kutridinov, op. cit.
Asian countries are no exception. But for many reasons their finished products are often insufficiently competitive in countries outside the region.

At the same time, for the Central Asian countries their neighbors in the region (as well as Russia) are ideal markets for non-primary products (food, clothes, footwear, home appliances, chemicals, building materials, medical supplies, etc.).

Moreover, if mineral resources are excluded from total merchandise exports, the share of intra-regional exports in the CA countries’ total exports will be much higher, and this means that for other consumer goods and services there is potential for the development of trade between the Central Asian countries (see Table 5).

It should be noted that since the exports of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan mainly consist of hydrocarbons, which for the most part go to extra-regional partners, these two countries are less oriented to the regional market (4.8% and 4.1%, respectively) than Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (30.6% and 19.8%, respectively), with Uzbekistan occupying an intermediate position (12.4%).

In view of this, an expansion by the CA countries of mutual access to their domestic markets will do a great deal to help them achieve the objective of increasing the export of finished products, because in intra-regional trade in many non-primary goods they can be partners rather than competitors.

Table 5

Shares of Trading Partners in the CA Countries’ Total Foreign Trade in 2019, %

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CA countries</th>
<th>Trading Partners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CA Countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td>30.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkmenistan</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In this case, the CA countries’ proximity to each other gives them an advantage in terms of transportation costs. Moreover, joint efforts to create international transport corridors and international transport infrastructure in the region will also serve to reduce transportation costs in exports to external markets.

The prospects for economic and industrial cooperation between the countries of the Central Asia region depend on the effective development of inter-regional and cross-border ties, improvement of
conditions for investment cooperation, optimization of transit traffic and tariff policy, and simplification of administrative procedures in general.

The Central Asian countries have adopted long-term plans and various strategies for developing international cooperation. At the same time, the tasks associated with the expansion of intra-regional trade and economic ties are a priority from the perspective of integration cooperation in Central Asia.

**Conclusion**

1. Despite a serious decline in trade between the Central Asian countries since 1991, economic relations between them began to recover in recent years. Practically all experts see a trend towards the intensification of intra-regional ties. In 2019, for example, statistics for all CA countries recorded a sufficiently sharp increase in mutual trade. One should not forget that regional integration needs a solid economic base, including efficient transport and logistics systems that would facilitate interstate cooperation.19

2. Merchandise exports from the countries of Central Asia mainly consist of natural minerals and primary mineral products (87.6% of total merchandise exports in 2017), but it is precisely these products and raw materials that are traded between the CA countries to a much lesser extent than are exported to countries outside the region.

   Nevertheless, the current situation with the trade structure is changing: if we analyze the value of merchandise exports excluding mineral products and metals, we will find that the share of intra-regional exports will increase to 28.2%. This means that there is active intra-regional trade in goods other than minerals.

3. Today, enterprises in Central Asia that produce non-primary products are mainly oriented towards limited domestic markets, which does not allow them to adopt modern high-performance technologies, to expand production capacity or increase capacity utilization, and thus to benefit from narrow specialization and economies of scale. These advantages and specific features of specialization are the main tools for increasing competitiveness in the modern economy.20

   The Central Asian countries are already actively trading among themselves, and precisely in goods other than raw materials. There are numerous forms of mutually beneficial cooperation at the level of businesses. According to research findings, there is significant untapped potential in this area, ranging from franchise to the creation of regional clusters.21

4. The countries of the region have similar problems (political, economic, and administrative) with similar origins and causes. From year to year, however, there is more dissimilarity in the nature of their development. The situation in the region’s social, religious, energy, banking, and monetary-financial spheres is traditionally complicated.22

   The situation with commodity-money relations has changed under the impact of the economic crisis associated with the pandemic. In the view of an expert, the current coronavirus pandemic shows that the Central Asian states still lack a common economic agenda,

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20 Yu. Yusupov, op. cit.
21 See: Eksperty obsudili voprosy razvitiia torgovo-ekonomicheskikh otnoshenii v stranakh Tsentralnoi Azii.
22 See: N. Murataliyeva, op. cit.
as well as mechanisms for reconciling their interests. The anti-crisis plans adopted in each of these countries do not provide for any joint action.\textsuperscript{23}

5. Overall, there is a growing awareness in the region that cooperation will help to build an internal market for about 70 million people, that the removal of internal barriers will help to develop private business in all countries, and that the establishment of common quality and safety standards for agricultural products will create conditions for increasing exports to external markets.\textsuperscript{24}

6. The regional integration process may be seen as irreversible, since the benefits of regional economic cooperation are obvious. And the faster the integration process, the more benefits will be gained by the countries of the Central Asia region.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{23} See: N. Kuzmin, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{24} See: Ibidem.
\textsuperscript{25} See: Yu. Yusupov, op. cit.
SOCIO-ECONOMIC POTENTIAL OF THE ARMENIAN DIASPORA IN THE CONTEXT OF EAEU INTEGRATION

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Anatoly TOPILIN

D.Sc. (Econ.), Professor, Chief Researcher, Institute of Demographic Research of the Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology, Russian Academy of Sciences (Moscow, Russian Federation)

Gevork POGOSYAN

D.Sc. (Sociol.), Professor, Academician, National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia; Scientific Director, Institute of Philosophy, Sociology and Law, National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia (Erevan, Republic of Armenia)

Galina OSADCHAYA

D.Sc. (Sociol.), Professor, Chief Researcher, Institute of Demographic Research, Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology, Russian Academy of Sciences (Moscow, Russian Federation)

Nikita RYAZANTSEV

Junior Researcher, Institute of Demographic Research, Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology, Russian Academy of Sciences (Moscow, Russian Federation)

ABSTRACT

The problems in the formation of the diaspora’s socio-economic potential are poorly studied by modern science. The article defines the notion of the diaspora’s socio-economic potential. The factors that determine the uniqueness of the Armenian diaspora phenomenon are identified, including professional specialization specifics, labor skills, ethnic entrepreneurship, aggregation of property and capital, socio-de-

The reported study was funded by RFBR and SC RA, project number 20-511-05007.
mographic structure, corporatism, social solidarity and cohesion and social capital. The Armenian diaspora, which formed in Russia in the 17th century, is a conventional diaspora with deep historical roots. Its influence on the economy, social policy, culture, interethnic relations and other spheres of life of the population in the host country and country of origin is steadily increasing. New opportunities for continued development of the Armenian diaspora opened up along with the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union in the post-Soviet space and Armenia’s accession to the EAEU. The secret of the advancement of the Armenian diaspora as an ethnocultural and ethnopolitical phenomenon is rooted in the peculiarities of formation of its socio-economic potential throughout the entire history of good-neighborly relations between Russia and Armenia.

A methodological strategy and an applied sociological research model, as well as tools for studying the Armenian diaspora’s socio-economic potential in the context of EAEU integration processes have been created. In order to study the problem further, authors intend to conduct a questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews in the Moscow agglomeration, Krasnoyarsk and Stavropol regions, which will allow to reveal the attitude of members of the Armenian diaspora to various aspects of life: migration and repatriation intentions, the degree of cohesion and corporatism, subjective assessments of the contribution of the Armenian diaspora to Russia’s and Armenia’s socio-economic development, as well as to assess the EAEU integration trends. Based on the results of the sociological study, scientific recommendations will be developed to improve the efficiency of using the Armenian diaspora’s socio-economic potential for the sake of improving the quality of life and social well-being of citizens of Russia and Armenia, and the advancement of EAEU integration processes.

KEYWORDS: Armenian diaspora, socio-economic potential, migration, repatriation, integration, sociological research, Russia, Armenia, EAEU.

Introduction

Diasporas, as a distinct form of expansion and self-preservation of an ethnic group, have an ever-increasing influence on the socio-economic development of any state in the context of global migration. Diaspora formation processes go back centuries and acquire new scales and forms in the modern world. Thus, as a result of migration, which took on a massive and involuntary character following the collapse of the U.S.S.R., settlement enclaves of the peoples of the former Soviet republics significantly expanded throughout Russia. According to the latest U.N. estimates, the largest ethnic diaspora comprises migrants from Uzbekistan (5.5 to 5.7 million people), the second largest is the Tajik diaspora (up to 3.6 million people). The Ukrainian diaspora is estimated at 3.5 million people. The Armenian diaspora, along with Azerbaijani and Georgian communities, are considered large diasporas. According to available estimates, 2.2 million people constitute the Armenian diaspora in Russia, which is almost twice as large as reported in the 2010 All-Russia Population Census.

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Over the past decade, numerous international events have influenced the intensity and direction of migration flows. However, the significant growth of diasporas and their influence on the socio-economic development of many countries is an ostensible fact.

The new social reality rooted in the creation of a regional integration association—the Eurasian Economic Union—in the post-Soviet space and Armenia’s accession to this union transformed the role and place of the Armenian diaspora in Russia as an ethnocultural and ethnopolitical phenomenon and revised the analysis of its contribution to socio-economic processes in Russia and Armenia. However, there are no theoretical concepts or empirical models in Russian science today that allow to study it under new conditions and provide answers to essential questions, such as the criteria for diaspora structuring; changes in the migration motives, socio-economic roles, collective and individual adaptive scenarios; social boundaries of the Armenian diaspora, opportunities for widespread repatriation of Armenians from the EAEU countries.

The Concept of a Diaspora’s Socio-Economic Potential:
Theoretical Approaches

The term “diaspora” is examined from different positions in scientific literature. A broad interpretation of this term is reduced to viewing it as an ethnic group that lives outside its historical homeland or its main settlement range. In this article, a diaspora is understood as any ethnic or confessional minority living in a foreign environment, united by a common self-awareness expressed through a sense of group solidarity. The mere presence of a minority does not imply the existence of a diaspora, since its representatives may choose the path of individual adaptation through assimilation. Diaspora is only that minority that has internal consolidation institutions. It is a long-standing group, although in the future it may disappear or transform into a community of a different type—sub-ethnos, castes, etc.

A diaspora is usually examined in connection with the country of origin and the receiving country. At the same time, in different sources “country” may mean either a state or a cultural and historical region. In this article, it refers to a cultural and historical region, which is not identical with the term “state.”

The term a “diaspora’s socio-economic potential” has been insufficiently studied by modern science. The problems of assessing a diaspora’s potential in the context of globalization, expansion and deepening of a diaspora’s internal and external ties with their historical homeland and with other communities and countries have become especially relevant. The role of the diaspora and its socio-economic potential can manifest itself in a new way within a new paradigm, i.e., the need to concentrate all resources to counter existing challenges and threats, such as epidemics and pandemics.

A diaspora’s socio-economic potential is characterized by several aspects, enumerated below.

1. **Specific labor and professional skills, status in the labor market** (manager, qualified employee, owner, entrepreneur). Diaspora representatives, labor migrants are stronger than the local population, have a more developed sense of self-affirmation, the desire to climb the social ladder quickly, open their own business, get a higher education and achieve success.

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The combination of these qualities provides a synergistic effect, expressed in the increase of the diaspora’s socio-economic potential through an increase in the contribution of each of its members.

2. *Earnings and property status.* The diaspora’s accumulation of its own capital, real estate and other resources allow not only to assist ethnic community members, but also to invest in the development of both its own and Russian businesses, increasing its influence on local authorities.

3. *A diaspora’s socio-demographic structure* (gender and age composition, education level, family and marriage relations). The contribution of the demographic factor to a diaspora’s socio-economic potential is increasing due to the rise in the number of labor migrants of young reproductive age with an education and professional skills, as well as due to the growth in the number of educational migrants.

4. *Attitude towards success; activity and cohesion of the diaspora* (mutual assistance, communication and interaction with other communities, etc.). Corporate nature is a powerful factor that contributes to the formation and development of the diaspora and helps to solve internal problems (assisting diaspora members), and to develop and strengthen international relations with other diasporas and states, to integrate into the world community and the EAEU.

5. *Social capital indicators* (primarily connections). Social capital allows to successfully integrate members of the ethnic community, labor migrants into the diaspora’s socio-cultural space. Ethnic capital, as the preservation of a community’s identity, can either increase or undermine social capital in unfavorable conditions of the host environment.

6. *Social well-being, satisfaction with various aspects of life.* The socio-economic potential of the diaspora increases with the successful integration of migrants into a foreign ethnic environment, creating additional incentives for the influx of compatriots. When diaspora members are dissatisfied with the living conditions, its potential does not grow, moreover, it may decline due to return migration.

7. *Migration attitudes, including return migration.* As a rule, a migrant decides to return to the home country based on an assessment of benefits and losses. According to a study conducted in February-March 2017 by the Center for Ethnopolitical and Regional Studies, a quarter of the respondents would like to remain in Russia. At the same time, estimates for the EAEU countries differ significantly: among the surveyed labor migrants who spoke out in favor of staying in the Russian Federation permanently, 72.1% were from Armenia, 65.5%—from Kazakhstan, 34.2%—from the Republic Belarus, and 24.8%—from Kyrgyzstan.\(^3\)

8. *Subjective assessments of the diaspora’s contribution to the socio-economic development of Russia and the country of origin.* In our case, the assessments provided by respondents in the course of the sociological survey or experts based on in-depth interviews create a positive image of both Russia, the host country and Armenia, the country of origin. This reveals a tendency towards the development of the socio-economic potential of the Armenian diaspora and the deepening of integration of Russia and Armenia.

9. *Assessment of integration processes, their success and focus, integration problems and measures to strengthen the EAEU.* The level of development and the nature of use of the

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diaspora’s socio-economic potential is reflected in the respondents’ assessment of positive population well-being dynamics in each of the EAEU countries, the functioning of the common labor market, formation of a common EAEU educational and cultural space and other integration indicators.¹

Various methods are used in the analysis, including comparative, sociological (personal formalized interview, questionnaire survey, snowball method), indicative method—determination of target values of various integration indicators, i.e., levels of employment and unemployment, population poverty in the EAEU countries, the share of people aged 18-24 who did not graduate from secondary school, the share of the population with higher education, etc.

Features of the Formation of the Armenian Diaspora in the EAEU Countries

The geography of the Armenian diaspora is vast, with communities in over 100 countries. Based on the results of a large-scale study of the Armenian diaspora carried out by Armenian scientists in 2016, it was established that 4,978,000 Armenians officially live abroad, that is, they are citizens of other countries, or have the right to permanent residence or residence. 1,373,000 Armenians are labor migrants, while another 616,000 Armenians have no special status, i.e., they are illegal migrants.

The largest Armenian community, comprising 2.9 million people, lives in the CIS countries. According to unofficial data, 2.5 million Armenians live in Russia, 450,000-500,000 live in Ukraine, and 80,000—in Kazakhstan, thus, we can estimate the total number of Armenians at approximately 3.5 million.² One should also account for the smaller Armenian diasporas in the Belarus and Kyrgyzstan. According to the 2009 Belarusian census, 8,512 Armenians lived in the republic. In addition, there is a large number of Armenian labor migrants in the CIS countries. For instance, in Russia there are about 800,000-1,000,000, in Ukraine—about 300,000-350,000, and in Kazakhstan, according to some data, their number exceeds 50,000.

The historical Armenian diaspora in Russia is an important actor in socio-economic processes, and is involved in all spheres of life in Russia as the host state and Armenia as its historical homeland. According to the 2010 All-Russia Population Census, the Armenian diaspora numbered 1,182,400 people, or 0.86% of Russia’s population. The bulk of the Armenian diaspora is concentrated in the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts: Krasnodar Territory—281,700 people, or 23.8%, Stavropol Territory—161,300, or 13.6%, Rostov Region—110,700, or 9.4%. Significant Armenian enclaves exist in the Volgograd and Astrakhan regions, the republics of Adygea and North Ossetia-Alania. In total, according to the latest census, 633,300 Armenians, or 53.6% of the Armenian diaspora, lived in the Southern Federal District. As far as the other regions are concerned, the Armenian diaspora is most numerous in Moscow, with 106,500 people, or 9% of their total number, the Moscow region—63,300, or 5.4%, St. Petersburg—20,000, or 1.7%, and in the Saratov and

² See: G.A. Pogosyan, “Armianskaia diaspora: kontury migratsii i repatriatsii,” Materials of the International Methodological Seminar “Theoretical, Methodological and Methodological Strategies for Researching the Socio-Economic Potential of the Armenian Diaspora in the Context of Integration Processes in the EAEU”, IDI FNISTS RAS, 2 March, 2021, available in Russian at [https://xn--h1aahu.xn--p1ai/%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BB-%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%BC%D1%8F%D0%BD%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B9-%D0%B4%D0%B8-%D0%BD%D1%81%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%80%D1%8B/].
Samara regions—23,800, or 2% and 23,000, or 1.9%, respectively. In the Ural Federal District, Armenian communities are present in the Tyumen and Sverdlovsk regions (15,500 and 11,500, respectively). There is a shift in the settlement of Armenians towards the southwest—the Armenian diaspora in the Southern macro-region is growing, while in the Siberian and Far Eastern federal districts it is decreasing.

Thus, historically, Armenians have always gravitated towards settling in the south of Russia, in similar natural and climatic conditions and in areas populated predominantly by Russians and other Orthodox peoples. At the same time, Armenians also live in the national republics of the Northern Caucasus, albeit in smaller numbers.

Migration processes play an important role in the formation of the Armenian diaspora. In recent years, there has been a stable migration-related growth of the Armenian diaspora in the exchange of population with the CIS countries, Russia among them (2016—11,993; 2017—13,999; 2018—14,358 people). The dynamics of the inflow to the Russian Federation from Armenia is stable (2016—43,929; 2017—46,898; 2018—46,442 people). In 2019, there was an increase in migration: 71,984 people arrived in Russia from Armenia, which is 25,542 people, or 55% more than in 2018. The number of those who left for Armenia changed insignificantly, as a result, the migration growth of the Armenian diaspora increased to 35,109 people, or almost by 2.5 times compared to 2018.

In 2020, migration flows in exchange with Russia fell sharply due to the global coronavirus pandemic. However, following the defeat in the Karabakh war in November 2020, migration tendencies in the Armenian society grew significantly again, and, according to our forecasts, a large-scale outflow of the population (150,000-200,000) people was to be expected in the spring and summer of 2021. This will also be facilitated by the easing of the quarantine regime in Russia and in other countries of the CIS and Europe.6

Thus, the data on the recent dynamics of migration processes indirectly testify to constant size of the Armenian diaspora. Accurate data on the ethnic composition of the population of Russia and the Armenian diaspora will be obtained after the next census in the fall of 2021.

The creation of the Eurasian Economic Union in the post-Soviet space and Armenia’s accession to it opened up new opportunities in Russia and Armenia for the Armenian diaspora to realize its socio-economic potential, which has not yet been measured, understood, or evaluated. The phenomenon of the Armenian diaspora in the context of Eurasian integration, its impact on socio-economic processes in the host country and the country of origin are yet to be examined: migration processes as the reason of its growth or contraction; the socio-demographic structure of the Armenian diaspora as a prerequisite for economic leadership; cohesion and corporatism as advantages in economic activity; changes in civic and ethnic identity; adaptation and integration features; self-organization of migrants.

The growing interest of members of the Armenian diasporas from the near abroad in Armenia, which has emerged in the last two years, also requires attention. This is evidenced by the increased flow of Armenian tourists from Russia and other EAEU countries. It is therefore extremely important to study the “repatriation resource” of the Armenian diaspora in the countries of the Eurasian Union, the Russian Federation in particular, where most of its members live.

Despite the scientific interest in various aspects of the formation and functioning of diasporas in Russia, the problem of the socio-economic potential of the Armenian diaspora in the context of the integration processes in the EAEU remains unexplored. Currently, there is no methodology or empirical study model for the study of this issue, and the phenomenon of the Armenian diaspora in Russia under the new conditions has yet to be researched.

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Socio-Economic Potential of the Armenian Diaspora in the EAEU Countries

The following factors determine the formation and functioning of the diaspora’s socio-economic potential and the enhancement of its role as a subject of economic processes:

1. Professional specialization, work skills and work sphere preferences of the diaspora members. Representatives of a diaspora minority may have specific work skills that are uncommon in the host environment. For instance, between the late 18th century and 1917, the Armenian diasporas in the Volga region confirmed the rule regarding the disproportionately large contribution of the diaspora to the economy in the trade and industrial sphere, while the Ukrainian minority in the region practically monopolized the salt industry.7

In modern conditions, the preferences of ethnic groups for various types of economic activity are retained. For example, according to the all-Russia survey of labor migrants, conducted in 2017 in 19 regions of Russia among migrants from Armenia, every third migrant (35%) was engaged in trade and repair of vehicles and household goods, while there were twice as many (72.2%) among those from Azerbaijan. Almost every third labor migrant from the Republic of Belarus (31.3%) prefers to work in construction.8 Specific labor skills and type of economic activity can be associated with specific ethnocultural characteristics of diaspora members.

Economic activity has a clear ethnic, hence an ethnodiasporal, marking. There is a huge number of examples of this fact. The reason is that ethnic groups are associated with their distinctive economic and cultural types. The latter are formed under the influence of geographic, climatic and social conditions, are reflected in labor skills and, accordingly, affect the diaspora’s socio-economic role. As interethnic integration develops in connection and in parallel with economic integration, traditional skills and manufactured products are much less often perceived as having ethnic markings.

Ethnic entrepreneurship is an important factor in the formation and development of the socio-economic potential of the Armenian diaspora. A sharp leap in its development occurred in the mid-1990s after the first refugees from Armenia and Azerbaijan arrived in the southern regions of Russia.9 The presence and implementation of an entrepreneurial initiative has an ethnically distinctive adaptation criterion. The data of a sociological survey conducted in the Stavropol Territory at the turn of the 21st century showed an increase in entrepreneurial activity among all migrants. However, while the share of all migrants who own a business equals 11-13% of the respondents, Armenian migrants have a business potential that is about 2-3 times higher than the Russians, and are 1.5-2 times more effective in applying it.10

Armenian entrepreneurship is diverse in form, and includes a network of small shops, cafes, restaurants, shoe repair shops, and the provision of other consumer services. The diaspora controls many large stores and markets in the cities of the Southern macroregion, the funeral services industry and a number of large manufacturing firms. The economic role of the Armenian diaspora in the region has always been significant and tends to establish

10 See: Ibid., p. 82.
control over local government and penetrate the regional power structures. Thus, ethnic entrepreneurship should be considered a result of combined predisposition of individual ethnic minorities to various types of activities and the successful adaptation of migrants to living conditions in a different socio-cultural environment.\footnote{See: Ibidem.}

Noting the rather clearly expressed ethnic tendencies in employment, we need to emphasize the general underutilization of labor migrants’ potential, especially initially after the move. According to a sociological survey of labor migrants in Moscow, conducted in June 2016, 39% of migrants from Armenia were employed in trade against 21.3% involved in this sphere prior to moving, from Belarus—32.9% and 18.1%, from Kazakhstan—37.5% and 23.1%, from Kyrgyzstan—33.3% and 15.7%, respectively, that is, a significant share of labor migrants work in the Russian capital as sellers, loaders, laborers, etc., rather than in their professional sphere. The same situation is true in construction, where the share of employed labor migrants in Moscow ranged from 11% to 21.3% among those who arrived from Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, against 9.3% and 13.9% who were construction workers in the home country. The survey also revealed that every third or fifth migrant had no professional experience prior to moving.\footnote{See: G.I. Osadchaya, op. cit., p. 145.}

EAEU integration processes will contribute to the creation of favorable conditions for ethnic minority entrepreneurship as a catalyst for the advancement of socio-economic processes.

2. **Aggregation of capital and property.** Diasporas may own a disproportionate share of property compared to the population of the host environment. The rapid development of ethnic entrepreneurship among diaspora members also contributes to increased differentiation in income levels along ethnic lines. Labor migrants also contribute to this process. Not only do they regularly send home significant funds to support families and start their own businesses, they also channel some of the funds through the diaspora structures to the development of the Russian economy. In 2019, Armenia received $1.49 billion in remittances, which amounted to 10.9% of its GDP. Approximately 65% of transfers are received from Russia. Remittances play an important social role in contributing to poverty reduction in Armenia.\footnote{Central Bank of Armenia, available at [https://www.cba.am/storage/AM/downloads/stat_data_arm/Remittances.xls].}

Immigrants from Armenia are more active than migrants from other CIS countries in settling in their new place of residence. According to a nationwide survey of labor migrants conducted in 2017 in 19 Russian regions, the majority of migrants who indicated being in a better position in terms of housing availability turned out to be among migrants from Armenia—75.3%, with 67%—among those from Azerbaijan, and 36%—from the republics of Central Asia. At the same time, 9% of labor migrants who arrived from Armenia have their own homes in Russia, since many arrive with their families. 72% of Armenian labor migrants live with family members, which is twice as many as among labor migrants from Central Asia.\footnote{See: A.A. Endriushko, op. cit.} Thus, conditions are emerging for the further aggregation of capital and property, which leads to the strengthening of the diaspora’s position in various sectors of the economy and spheres of influence.

3. **The socio-demographic structure of diasporas as a prerequisite for economic leadership.** Most commonly, a diaspora originates as a result of resettlement from its members’ historical homeland. Analysis shows that in many cases a group of immigrants cannot be regarded simply as a “splinter of an ethnic group,”\footnote{V.A. Tishkov, “Istoricheskiy fenomen diaspory,” *Etnografichesko obozrenie*, No. 2, 2000, pp. 43-64.} its mechanically separated part, the internal struc-
ture of which directly reflects the structure of the original community. Migrants are distinguished by a number of characteristics: age, sex, level of education and professional training, psychological characteristics. The migrant flow is dominated by men of working age, with an above-average level of education and vocational training. There are many creative, enterprising people among them. Thus, migrants are more economically active in comparison with the average member of the community of origin. As a result, the diaspora’s economic role can be higher than the average in the host society. This may specifically manifest itself in the standard of living which can be much higher than in the historical homeland.

Interethnic marriages are an integration factor. However, the influence of interethnic marriages on the diaspora’s socio-economic potential is ambiguous. On the one hand, in interethnic families there is an interpenetration of different cultures and traditions, gifted children are born, tolerance and acceptance towards other ethnic groups is reinforced. At the same time, mixed families contribute to the blurring of boundaries between ethnic groups. The increased mobility of the population during the times of globalization leads to an increased number of interethnic marriages, with a simultaneous rise in fictitious and informal marriages, which do not contribute to the strengthening of the diaspora’s socio-economic potential.16

4. Corporatism as an advantage in economic activity. While most of the individuals in the host environment are socially disunited, diaspora representatives take advantage of corporatism, which can be internal or external. Internal corporatism is manifested in the mutual assistance that diaspora members provide to each other. It also functions in the economic sphere to assist in the adaptation of new arrivals, i.e., in regard to employment, preferential financial loans and business contacts, etc. With the development of international integration, external corporatism is becoming increasingly important. A diaspora may be associated with many different kinds of communities: with the country of origin, the maternal ethnic group, other diasporas of the same ethnic or confessional affiliation. A diaspora is often in contact with other diasporas or communities that are culturally and historically linked to it. This diversity creates the possibility of many options for external corporatism. As a result, diasporas can lobby for the economic interests of associated communities, and, in turn, receive economic assistance from them. However, diasporas are most often focused on specific states and ethnic groups, and these options are the ones usually implemented in the economic sphere. If the maternal ethnic group is a sovereign state, the vectors of the diaspora’s connection with the ethnic group and the state practically coincide. For instance, in the late 19th-early 20th century, Armenian diasporas were focused on the main portion of their ethnic group, which was located within the Ottoman Empire, as well as on other Armenian diasporas, rather than on the Ottoman Empire, which was not a proponent of their political and economic interests.17

5. A diaspora can have significant social capital, which ensures its special influence on socio-economic processes both in the country of origin and in the host society. According to the concept proposed by Inara Zakharyan,18 the role of social capital lies in national and cultural unification as the migrants are included in a region’s socio-cultural space, and also in the reconstruction of ethnic identity. As a result, the stability of the ethnic community is established.


An important component of a diaspora’s social capital is knowledge of Russian as the language of interethnic communication. Based on the materials of the all-Russia survey of labor migrants in 2017, 79.9% of Armenians, 69% of Azerbaijanis and 47-55% of Central Asian migrants know Russian well or very well. At the same time, labor migrants from Armenia use Russian more actively than those who arrived from other CIS countries: at work—67%, against 61% among those who arrived from Azerbaijan and 51%—from Tajikistan; in communication with friends—24, 21.7 and 12.9%, respectively; in the family circle—16, 21.7 and 8.5%, respectively. An active command of the Russian language allows the members of the Armenian diaspora to establish and maintain strong communication ties in order to achieve their goals and to realize their social capital.

In recent years, the concept of ethnic capital has appeared in scientific literature. It manifests in the development of such ethnic community features as the strengthening of ethnic values and traditions, ethnic cohesion, ethnic solidarity, network self-presentation and network virtual ethnic identity. In the framework of the article, it is important to pay attention to the following feature of ethnic capital: it can contribute both to the development of social capital and thus the successful adaptation and integration of migrants, and may act as an alternative to it. The latter case has manifested itself increasingly more often in the recent times, when migrants feel a shortage of social capital and trust from the host society, inequality of social partnership, a rise of xenophobic sentiments, etc.

Thus, a diaspora’s socio-economic potential is a multifaceted concept that includes economic, social, ethnic, cultural and psychophysiological components, and ultimately represents the totality of all resources at its disposal, both those involved in the processes of social production and social development, and those that can be used in the future to foster the economy and improve the quality of life for both diaspora members and the population of both the host country and country of origin.

The general productive indicators of a diaspora’s socio-economic potential include:

- healthy average life expectancy, since this indicator incorporates all life conditions, its quality, which includes both the material side and the socio-psychological conditions;
- social solidarity, the achievement of social unity or social cohesion;
- indicators to assess a diaspora’s contribution to the socio-economic development of the host country and the country of origin.

Institutionalization of the ethnic community and the creation of an appropriate socio-cultural infrastructure are important for the development of the diaspora and its socio-economic potential. The Armenian diaspora has a fairly developed network of public and cultural institutions and organizations in the EAEU countries. Most of them are located in Russia, including 35 churches, 30 schools, preschool and educational institutions, 35 cultural centers and clubs, 10 youth organizations, 25 media outlets, 10 trade unions, 9 Armenian studies departments and centers, 100 public organizations and unions and 3 Armenian foundations. The available information demonstrates that the involvement of Armenians in community life is low. About 70-80% of Armenians do not participate in the life of Armenian communities, and the share of those attending various cultural events in the CIS is about 30%. The core problem of the Armenian diaspora is certainly the preservation of national identity. The younger generation of Armenians is not fluent in Armenian (especially written), approximately 60-70% almost do not speak Armenian. The number of mixed marriages is growing sharply, amounting to 40-45% (especially in Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan).

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19 See: A.A. Endriushko, op. cit.
As a result, the huge human resource of the Armenian diaspora remains unclaimed and not mobilized.\textsuperscript{21}

\textit{Conclusion}

The multigenerational Armenian community that has developed in Russia over the centuries has demonstrated the effectiveness of the state policy in the interethnic relations sphere. New opportunities for the further development of the Armenian diaspora in Russia as an ethnocultural and ethnopolitical phenomenon are opening up within the EAEU. This will be facilitated by the powerful and dynamically developing socio-economic potential of the Armenian diaspora. Peculiarities and stable tendencies of transformation of the Armenian diaspora are revealed, as well as factors of its formation and development. The subsequent research of the problem will result in the development of a methodological strategy and tools for conducting expert surveys and in-depth interviews with representatives of the Armenian diaspora in the Moscow agglomeration and Krasnodar and Stavropol Territories on pressing issues in the life of Armenian communities in the context of EAEU integration processes.

Prospects for the development of diasporas within the EAEU are associated with the growth of territorial, social and professional mobility of the labor force, the development of information and transport communications in combination with the possibilities of legal and illegal crossing of state borders. In the globalization era, the lines between diaspora and non-diaspora ethnic groups are being blurred, which leads to a weakening of ethnic and ethnodiasporal specialization. There is a growing number of people with dual citizenship, who simultaneously participate in the economic life of two or more states, nations and ethnic groups. Thus, after investing labor in the economy of some states, migrants send the earned money to their historical homeland, pay double taxes, etc. The role of the diaspora in the economic, social, cultural and other spheres is on the rise. Thus, the diaspora is becoming one of the most important subjects of the socio-economic processes in our times.

\textsuperscript{21} See: G.A. Pogosyan, op. cit.
TRADE AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION BETWEEN CHINA AND KAZAKHSTAN: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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Tian XIE
Ph.D. student, al-Farabi Kazakh National University
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)

Roza ZHARKYNBAYEVA
D.Sc. (Hist.), Professor, Department of World History, Historiography and Source Studies, al-Farabi Kazakh National University
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)

Gulnara DADABAYEVA
D.Sc. (Hist.), Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, KIMEP University
(Kazakhstan Institute of Management, Economics and Strategic Research)
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)

Leila DELOVAROVA
Lecturer, Department of International Relations and World Economy, al-Farabi Kazakh National University
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)

ABSTRACT

The thirty years of Kazakhstan’s independence have been characterized by rapid growth of trade and economic cooperation with China, one of the world’s largest economies, which has steadily increased its presence in the region.

Based on statistics published by the General Administration of Customs of the People’s Republic of China and the National Bank of Kazakhstan, legal and regulatory documents of the two countries and reports by international organizations, this article examines the specific features and further prospects of bilateral cooperation between China and Kazakhstan in the field of trade, investment, and energy, as well as in implementing integration projects. The authors have identified the main stages of interaction between the two countries, the problems they encounter, and the opportunities for trade and economic cooperation, which has developed rapidly since the turn of the century. Objectively, this process is mutually beneficial for both sides, especially in the...
sphere of energy, promotion of infrastructure projects, establishment of joint ventures, and other long-term plans.

However, despite the positive dynamics of this process, the article identifies a number of negative phenomena in trade and economic relations. Overall, trade declined because of the drop in oil prices and the resultant weakening of Kazakhstan’s national currency tenge, since oil is the basis of the country’s exports. At the same time, when trade indicators began to improve after 2017, some negative phenomena were still in evidence. They were primarily due to the consequences of the pandemic, an increase in Sinophobia, and Kazakhstan’s participation in new regional projects, such as the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). In the authors’ opinion, investment specifics and trade asymmetry are the main areas where both parties should adjust their approaches in order to tap the full potential of cooperation in these sectors.

KEYWORDS: China, Kazakhstan, trade, Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), pandemic.

Introduction

The changes in the geopolitical situation in the world after the collapse of the U.S.S.R. have had a significant effect on the post-Soviet countries. Today, Central Asia is one of the most important focal points for the geostrategic interests of the major world powers. As the American researcher Francis Fukuyama noted in 2016, rather than being at the periphery of the global economy, Central Asia will soon be at its core. In his view, the main driver of this process is China, which is increasingly looking towards Eurasia.¹

Central Asia has been a focus of interest for China ever since the end of the 20th century. China’s purpose is to prevent a redistribution of commodity markets without its participation, gain greater access to national resources in the region, primarily to oil and gas, and open new export markets for its own products.

The authors have tried to summarize the historical experience of cooperation between the two countries and to identify the factors that influence bilateral cooperation.

Specific Features of Trade and Economic Cooperation

According to statistics from the General Administration of Customs of China, trade and economic cooperation with Kazakhstan can be tentatively divided into three stages. Stage one lasted from 1992 to 2001. In that period, the total volume of trade between the two countries was relatively low (it exceeded $1 billion only in 1999). This was mainly due to domestic economic instability in Kazakhstan in the first few years of independence and negative GDP dynamics.

Stage two—from 2002 to 2013—was a period of rapid growth in total trade between the two countries: in 2013, it reached an all-time high of $28.59 billion, or 14.6 times the figure for 2002.

Stage three in trade and economic relations between Kazakhstan and China—since 2014 to date—is characterized by a transition from instability to stability. From 2014 to 2016, bilateral trade declined to $13.1 billion in 2016, or only two-thirds of the figure for 2014. This was due to the fall in global prices for oil, Kazakhstan’s main export item. This factor continued to affect trade relations between the two countries in 2016 as well. Trade began to grow in 2017, once again exceeding $20 billion in 2019. It should be noted that in 2020, under the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, trade remained at the level of 2019: $21.99 in 2019 and $21.45 billion in 2020 (see Table 1).

Table 1

China’s Trade with Kazakhstan: Imports and Exports (1992—2020)

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<th>Year</th>
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<th>Imports ($bn)</th>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>17.552338</td>
<td>9.82451</td>
<td>7.727828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>14.129133</td>
<td>7.833448</td>
<td>6.295685</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total ($bn)</th>
<th>Exports ($bn)</th>
<th>Imports ($bn)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>20.451454</td>
<td>9.320069</td>
<td>11.131385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>24.961234</td>
<td>9.56653</td>
<td>15.394704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>25.681571</td>
<td>11.000728</td>
<td>14.680843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>28.595962</td>
<td>12.545124</td>
<td>16.050838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>22.438578</td>
<td>12.712353</td>
<td>9.726226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>14.296679</td>
<td>8.441919</td>
<td>5.85476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>13.093302</td>
<td>8.289391</td>
<td>4.803911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>18.000553</td>
<td>11.643145</td>
<td>6.357408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>19.885507</td>
<td>11.350275</td>
<td>8.535232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>21.446707</td>
<td>11.707318</td>
<td>9.739389</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled by the authors based on data from the General Administration of Customs of China, available at [http://www.customs.gov.cn/].

What are the problems and prospects of further trade and economic cooperation between China and Kazakhstan?

A study of trade activities between the two countries shows a number of specific features, which are determined by their economic development levels, political strategies, and natural resource endowments.

First of all, bilateral trade is asymmetric. During its 30 years of independence, Kazakhstan has exported to China low value added products, such as oil, gas, and other mineral products, ferrous metals, chemicals, and associated industrial products, while importing footwear, textiles, and other manufactured consumer goods.

Kazakhstan’s exports consist of primary industrial products, while most imports from China are final products. This unbalanced trade situation is due to the different resource endowments of the two countries. On the one hand, Kazakhstan is rich in oil, gas, and other mineral resources. On the other hand, under the impact of the Soviet central planning system, its light industry, designed to meet the everyday needs of people, is insufficiently developed, but there is relatively high demand for light industry products.

As for Chinese light industry, associated with the daily needs of people, it has developed rapidly since the launch of the reform and opening-up policy in view of China’s huge population and political orientation. Owing to cheap labor, which reduces the cost of Chinese products, textiles have been the main product imported by Kazakhstan from China for many years.

Nevertheless, goods traded between the two countries have been diversified in recent years. In 2018 and 2019, the percentage of high-technology goods in Chinese exports to Kazakhstan began to
increase. According to data from TrendEconomy.com, the share of textile exports has somewhat decreased, while products with a high technology component, such as computers and processors, magnetic or optical readers, cameras, scooters, construction equipment, and auto parts, have been added to the list. These products constitute a small share of the total, but the rate of increase is high. In the past, people in Kazakhstan were wary of Chinese goods, whereas today their quality has improved, and Kazakhstan consumers actively purchase not only clothes and food products, but also high-tech industrial equipment and household goods. Many Chinese producers in different areas are already known throughout the world and easily recognizable. For example, brands such as Lenovo, HTC, Acer, Asus, Huawei, and Xiaomi are now just as common in Kazakhstan.

The structure of Chinese imports from Kazakhstan has also undergone serious changes. Hard and soft wheat are the 10th largest import item. Other agricultural products, including rapeseed oil and sunflower seeds, are also exported to China.

However, the increase in bilateral trade is connected with the extension of trade credits, which require the Kazakhstan side to either purchase Chinese goods or establish joint ventures with Chinese companies. The main problem related to China’s trade surplus is that the massive flow of manufactured goods from China does not allow domestic producers to operate in the Kazakhstan market. Kazakhstan, for its part, has been taking steps to mitigate these negative effects.

It should be noted that Kazakhstan, as a member of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), is subject to certain constraints on trade with China in accordance with EAEU policy. Back in 2010, when Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan formed the Customs Union (the predecessor of the EAEU), these member states introduced a common customs policy, and the average level of customs duties in Kazakhstan rose from 6% to 11.8%. The policy being implemented in the EAEU is designed to protect domestic producers and markets in the member countries primarily from low-priced Chinese goods. Since the establishment of the EAEU in 2015, according to zakon.kz, the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) has made a total of 37 decisions on anti-dumping measures, including 20 decisions regarding Chinese goods.

In May 2018, China and the EAEU signed an agreement on trade and economic cooperation. But this agreement is non-preferential and does not include customs tariffs. It is designed to reduce non-tariff barriers, improve customs administration, and simplify trade procedures. The agreement only addresses the convergence of regulatory requirements in the transport, industrial cooperation, and investment sectors.

Investment Instability

Along with trade between the two countries, China’s investment activity in Kazakhstan is also an important part of bilateral trade and economic cooperation. Based on the amount of foreign direct investment (FDI) entering Kazakhstan from China over the years shown in Table 2, we can identify

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4 See: Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation Between the EAEU and the PRC, Eurasian Economic Commission, available in Russian at [http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/act/trade/dotp/Pages/%D0%A1%D0%BE%D0%B3%D0%BB%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%81%D0%9A%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0%B5%D0%BC.aspx], 12 May, 2021.

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three periods. In the first period (1993-1996), the amount of investment was insignificant, totaling only $12 million in the first three years.

The second period (from 1997 to 2007) saw a gradual increase in investment. In that period, investment activity was influenced by political factors, including a deepening of relations between the two countries. In 1997, they signed an Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Oil and Gas. Chinese state-owned enterprises began to invest in Kazakhstan. The China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) entered Kazakhstan’s oil market in 1997 after winning a tender for the privatization of AktobeMunaiGas, and Chinese investment that year amounted to $313 million. In 2003, the CNPC acquired Kazakhstan’s stake (25.12%) for $150.2 million in the Kazakh-Chinese joint venture CNPC-AktobeMunaiGas, and then bought a 35% stake in the North Buzachi Field (Mangystau Region) from Saudi Arabia’s Nimr Petroleum and the remaining 65% stake from the American company ChevronTexaco. With the establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) on 15 June, 2001, a favorable framework was created for economic cooperation between the two countries. Since then, Chinese investment in Kazakhstan gradually began to increase. On 24 September, 2004, a framework agreement on the establishment of an International Center for Border Cooperation Khorgos was signed between the government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the leader of the People’s Republic of China. That year, Chinese investments in Kazakhstan totaled $387.8 million, the highest figure for the second stage.

The Inflow of Foreign Direct Investment to Kazakhstan from China (1993-2020)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Gross FDI Inflows from China ($m)</th>
<th>Year-on-Year (%)</th>
<th>Total FDI Inflows ($m)</th>
<th>China’s Share of Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1,271</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>−60</td>
<td>984</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,674</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2,107</td>
<td>14.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>86.7</td>
<td>−72</td>
<td>1,233</td>
<td>7.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>−43</td>
<td>1,852</td>
<td>2.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>90.1</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>2,781</td>
<td>3.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Table 2 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Gross FDI Inflows from China (Sm)</th>
<th>Year-on-Year (%)</th>
<th>Total FDI Inflows (Sm)</th>
<th>China’s Share of Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>211.9</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>4,557</td>
<td>4.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>–69</td>
<td>4,106</td>
<td>1.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>248.6</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>4,624</td>
<td>5.38</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>387.8</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>8,317</td>
<td>4.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>216.1</td>
<td>–44</td>
<td>6,619</td>
<td>3.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>362.9</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>10,624</td>
<td>3.42</td>
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<tr>
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<td>358.2</td>
<td>–1</td>
<td>18,453</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>692.5</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>19,755</td>
<td>3.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>708.7</td>
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<td>18,429</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>1,717.6</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>22,246</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
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<td>–1</td>
<td>26,467</td>
<td>6.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
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<td>43</td>
<td>28,885</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>2,246</td>
<td>–7</td>
<td>24,098</td>
<td>9.32</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>1,861.2</td>
<td>–17</td>
<td>23,726</td>
<td>7.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>441.9</td>
<td>–76</td>
<td>14,752</td>
<td>3.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>960.9</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>20,637</td>
<td>4.66</td>
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<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>1,082.5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20,960</td>
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<td>24,263</td>
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<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>1,677.5</td>
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<td>24,115</td>
<td>6.96</td>
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<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>958.9</td>
<td>–43</td>
<td>17,071</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled by the authors based on data from the National Bank of Kazakhstan, available at [https://www.nationalbank.kz/ru].

The third stage—since 2008 to date—is one of dynamic development: overall Chinese investments in Kazakhstan have increased markedly, but they are subject to significant fluctuations. Al-
though the Chinese government continues to promote the commercial activities of Chinese companies, in particular by initiating the creation of a Silk Road Economic Belt in 2013, the international economic situation has an adverse effect on Chinese FDI in Kazakhstan. In 2015, the international oil crisis caused a sharp drop in the value of the Kazakhstani tenge, which also had an effect on Chinese investments. In 2020, under the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the inflow of investment from China fell dramatically.

At the same time, it should be mentioned that, according to data from the National Bank of Kazakhstan, China’s share in the total amount of foreign direct investment in Kazakhstan remains relatively low. Only in 1997, when Kazakhstan was experiencing the consequences of the Asian financial crisis, it was 14.86%, while in other years China’s share did not exceed 10%: in 2019 and 2020, it was 6.96% and 5.6%, respectively. The leader in foreign direct investment in Kazakhstan is the Netherlands.

From 2009 to 2020, Chinese investment activity in Kazakhstan was mainly concentrated in mining and quarrying (see Fig. 1). Since 2012, Chinese investors have also focused their attention on the transportation and storage sector. With the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, investment in this sector has increased significantly, reaching a peak in 2017. Chinese capital is also present in other sectors, such as construction, wholesale and retail trade, manufacturing, and finance, through on a smaller scale.

Energy cooperation is a historical priority area in cooperation between the two countries. As noted above, Kazakhstan has abundant oil and natural gas reserves, while in China, with its rapidly growing economy, there is a huge demand for energy resources. For reasons of national security, China has been diversifying its energy sources so as to obtain alternative, uninterrupted supply routes and hedge itself against possible energy crises that could potentially be created by other world powers. China’s willingness to invest significant amounts in the Caspian region is partly due to its rapidly increasing demand for energy and partly to its concern about U.S. naval control over the Malacca Straits.

In 2018, Kazakhstan had more than 2,800 enterprises with Chinese investments, which puts China among the top three countries in terms of the number of enterprises with foreign financing registered in Kazakhstan. Most Chinese companies registered in the republic are engaged in the development and use of energy. These include state-owned oil and gas giants CNPC, Sinopec, and CNOOC. In addition, many companies operate in the sector of natural gas supplies, oil refining, chemical engineering, drilling, new energy sources, and other areas.

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Owing to China’s Belt and Road Initiative, Kazakhstan has attracted massive investments to the transportation and storage sector. This is because Kazakhstan serves as a bridge from China to the West and its transportation infrastructure is of great importance for improving transport efficiency. A project for the reconstruction of the highway from Kazakhstan’s capital Nur-Sultan to the city of Pavlodar in the northwest of the country has been fully completed and commissioned. The construction of a new railway and highway between China and Kazakhstan (Urumqi–Almaty) has also been completed. The line runs through the Khorgos dry port, so that transit costs for goods crossing the

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The Dynamics of Chinese Foreign Direct Investment by Economic Activity

Source: Compiled by the authors based on data from the National Bank of Kazakhstan, available at [https://www.nationalbank.kz/ru].

* In 2010 and 2011, this indicator was shown as "Transportation and communication."
border to and from China will be significantly lower. In 2018, the Port of Aktau on the Caspian Sea was put into operation. The Port of Aktau is an important international multimodal transport hub, because it will connect land and sea transport. The government of Kazakhstan is also trying to build a global economic hub in Aktau in order to diversify the economy away from being solely reliant on resource exports. In the same year, the companies Global Project Capital Ltd, AAG Corporate Services Ltd, and China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC) Ltd signed a contract with the akimat (administration) of Mangystau Region under which British and Chinese investors are to build a $2.5 billion eco-city in Aktau.

Intertwining Strategies and Needs

There are many factors that influence cooperation between China and Kazakhstan, including government strategies. From China’s point of view, its long-term economic development is conducive to economic and trade cooperation between the two countries. In 2020, China’s GDP showed positive growth, increasing by 2.3% over the previous year, while the global economy (world output) contracted by 3.3%, according to the latest report of the International Monetary Fund. This means that in the conditions of globalization the Chinese economy has become an important part of the world economy and a major trade and economic partner for most countries.

The Outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development (2021-2025) and Long-Range Objectives Through the Year 2035 (12 March, 2021) notes that China has entered a phase of high-quality development with significant institutional advantages, improved governance capacity, and long-term economic progress... and that it has multiple advantages and conditions for continued development. Xi Jinping said in his report to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (18 October, 2017): “As socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, the principal contradiction facing Chinese society has evolved. What we now face is the contradiction between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people’s ever-growing needs for a better life... The needs to be met for the people to live better lives are increasingly broad. Not only have their material and cultural needs grown; their demands for democracy, rule of law, fairness and justice, security, and a better environment are increasing.”

The expanding demand associated with China’s economic development will have a positive impact on trade and economic cooperation between the two countries. In recent years, plant and animal products exported from Kazakhstan to China have helped to improve the quality of life of Chinese consumers and have provided them with a wider range of choice, while metals and energy resources have helped to meet industrial demand in China.

At the same time, China’s domestic economy is in need of transformation and modernization. Having gone through the stage of rapid economic development, China has to move away from extensive economic growth, enhance economic efficiency, reduce environmental damage and resource consumption, and ultimately improve the quality of economic development. But some production facilities that meet environmental protection requirements and have profit potential cannot bring economic benefits because of political restrictions and reduced market demand. This is why the Chinese government encourages companies to invest abroad or transfer these high-quality production facilities to developing countries depending on local conditions. Thus, the domestic economic situation in China contributes to the further development of bilateral trade and economic cooperation.

On the other hand, considering the completion of the long oil supercycle, Kazakhstan should be prepared for totally new global market conditions. President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev of Kazakhstan said in his State of the Nation Address in September 2020: “The creation of a truly diversified, technological economy is not just a necessity for us, but a scenario where there is no other alternative... To ensure strategic self-sufficiency of the national economy, we must urgently start the development of new process stages in ferrous and non-ferrous metallurgy, petrochemicals, automotive industry and mechanical engineering, the production of construction materials, food products and other sectors.”

Today, these sectors need to be developed in Kazakhstan and are profitable industries in China. This is why, in our view, cooperation between the two countries still has good prospects.

Along with these factors, the strategies of the United States, Russia, and the European Union also influence trade and economic cooperation between the two countries. Russia has traditionally had influence and strategic interests in Central Asia. Although in 2015 the governments of China and Russia signed a joint statement of intent to launch the process of pairing the EAEU and the Silk Road Economic Belt, today the position of Moscow and especially of the Russian expert community on the Belt and Road project is undergoing some changes. At a forum in Beijing in 2017, Russian President Vladimir Putin advocated the idea of a Greater Eurasian Partnership, while that of pairing the EAEU and the Silk Road Economic Belt was not even mentioned. Evidently, Russia fears losing its leading role in Central Asia.

In addition, since 2018 the United States has pursued a policy of containing Chinese and Russian influence in Central Asia in every way. Under the United States Strategy for Central Asia 2019-2025: Advancing Sovereignty and Economic Prosperity, the C5+1 platform (Central Asia plus the United States) is being used to increase security and political influence.
The European Union has issued a document called *The European Union and Central Asia: New Opportunities for a Stronger Partnership*, which outlines its vision for a renewed partnership with the five countries of Central Asia.22

Thus, world powers and regional actors seek to strengthen their presence and position in Central Asia, and Sino-American relations will hardly improve in the near future. As a result, Kazakhstan may take an even more cautious approach to cooperation with China.

Is Sinophobia on the Rise?

In this situation, many people in Kazakhstan have mixed feelings about cooperation with China, which will have a certain effect on the operation of Chinese companies in the country. Anti-Chinese sentiment in Kazakhstan is on the rise, despite assurances from government officials. In an interview on 26 May, 2015, First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev called such concerns about China’s growing influence in the economy “phantom fears.” He noted that Kazakhstan was about to conclude an agreement with China for the construction of a number of enterprises, which would have a positive effect on the development of Kazakhstan’s economy.23 The country’s second president, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, who began his diplomatic career in Beijing and selected China for his third state visit abroad (after Russia and Uzbekistan), has also emphasized that there is no cause for Sinophobia. Concluding his lecture at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences on 11 September, 2019, President Tokayev outlined the country’s position, according to which Kazakhstan and China, as neighbors and strategic partners, should move together towards progress and prosperity. He expressed confidence that stronger cooperation between the think tanks of the two countries, an expansion of the practice of joint conferences and applied research would contribute to the search for new profitable areas of strategic partnership.24

Nevertheless, some Kazakhstanis are dissatisfied with deepening cooperation and China’s investment projects. According to research carried out by the China Center (Kazakhstan), the level of Sinophobia in Almaty city and in the Almaty, East Kazakhstan, and South Kazakhstan (Turkistan) regions is much lower than in other regions. Business here is more developed than in other parts of the country. People travel to China more frequently, order more Chinese equipment and raw materials for their companies, and import more consumer goods. At the same time, a high level of anti-Chinese sentiment is observed in western Kazakhstan, which is associated with its remoteness from China and the lack of direct trade and economic contacts.25

One should take into account the complex history of Kazakh-Chinese relations and the persistent fears of Chinese expansion in the demographic, economic, and political spheres. Kazakhs have a saying (“Қара қытай қаптағанда, сары орыспен жылап көрісесің”) that can be roughly translated as follows: “When the country is flooded with Chinese, you will miss the Russians with tears in

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your eyes.” China’s image has been stereotyped in the public mind and is often identified with the image of the Other, or the Alien. The long break in relations between the U.S.S.R. and China has made this image ominously vague and threatening. The lack of reliable information about “violations of the human rights of Muslims” and assessments of the situation around “re-education camps” is a very strong contributing factor to the rise in anti-Chinese sentiment, while the image of Russia, despite dramatic relations in different periods of history, appears to be more familiar, customary, and preferable.

It is interesting to note that, according so some experts in Kazakhstan and Russia, “an anti-Chinese information campaign has been conducted in the region since 2018” and “anti-Chinese sentiment in Central Asia is an entirely artificial impact from outside.”

At present, most young people in Kazakhstan are attracted by the Western model of government and the ideas of liberalism and democracy associated with the West. At the same time, there is an emerging generally pro-Chinese segment of young people covered by five Confucius Centers at the country’s major universities or receiving an education in China (18,000 Kazakhstanis, according to data for 2019).

The Consequences of the Pandemic

The current situation with the COVID-19 pandemic has had a serious impact on the development of the world economy, particularly on trade and economic cooperation between China and Kazakhstan. First of all, restrictions on the movement of personnel have to some extent increased the operating costs of joint projects and have even led to labor shortages at some project sites. From 2020, Kazakhstan began tightening border controls and gradually cancelled international flights to and from China. Kazakhstan’s Migration Service has stopped issuing invitations for visas. Chinese personnel involved in joint projects can enter Kazakhstan only through a third country. Kazakhstan’s visa policy has led to a situation where Chinese specialists cannot get new visas, so that Chinese employees in Kazakhstan try not to leave the country.

At the same time, the implementation of stringent epidemic-prevention measures has reduced the efficiency of customs clearance at ports and has somewhat complicated trade between the two countries. For example, truck drivers entering Kazakhstan from abroad are only allowed to move from the border to bonded warehouses and back in order to minimize contacts with the population. Before the epidemic, Kazakhstan transport vehicles could enter China and deliver goods to warehouses in China. Chinese-funded enterprises in Kazakhstan have increased their investments in the prevention of COVID-19, and their operating costs have risen. Large amounts of Chinese machinery, equipment, and other goods cannot cross the border because of delays at customs and thus cannot be delivered to building sites, which slows down the implementation of joint projects.

In addition, the Kazakhstani tenge has weakened significantly because of fluctuations in world oil prices, the lockdown imposed in the country, and the resulting slowdown in economic activity. From the beginning of 2020 to mid-November, the tenge fell 12.5% against the dollar. As a result,
Chinese-funded enterprises and transactions in tenge face increasing risk of exchange losses, and capital-intensive enterprises are exposed to higher foreign exchange risks. Finally, under the impact of the pandemic Kazakhstan’s short-term economic indicators have declined: lockdown policy has led to a drop in national income and hence in the demand for imported Chinese goods. From January to August 2020, Chinese exports to Kazakhstan totaled $6,367 million, down 10.5% from the same period of 2019.29 Thus, amid the spreading coronavirus pandemic, trade and economic cooperation between the two countries in 2020 could not escape the impact of quarantine measures and the global economic recession.

**Is the RCEP in Conflict with the BRI?**

While the world is in quarantine awaiting a return to normal life we have witnessed a very important event of global proportions. At a virtual ASEAN Summit on 15 November, 2020, fifteen countries of Asia and Oceania signed an agreement establishing the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the largest free trade pact in history. The RCEP includes China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and 10 ASEAN member countries (Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, and Brunei). These countries have formed the world’s biggest trade bloc, which accounts for about 30% of the world’s population and global GDP (2.2 billion people and 26.2 trillion dollars).30 The treaty provides for a reduction in tariffs and the establishment of common trade rules, which will also make it possible to optimize supply chains. It applies to trade, services, e-commerce, telecommunications, and copyright.

Will the signing of this agreement affect cooperation between China and Kazakhstan? To answer this question, let us first consider the Belt and Road Initiative, which has been popular in recent years. In a speech at Nazarbayev University in Astana in September 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping set out China’s vision of engaging the world in the recreation of the historical Silk Road. This plan is known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Its purpose is to develop closer economic ties in the Eurasian region, deepen cooperation, and stimulate growth points. That speech and the subsequent statement provided the formal basis for expanding networks of railways, highways, gas and oil pipelines, ports, and city communications, as well as investment in modern infrastructure in order to revive the Silk Road in the 21st century as a successful route.

As of January 2021, 140 countries of Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America have signed documents on cooperation with China in the joint construction of the Belt and Road.31 Compared to the BRI, the RCEP covers a different geographic area. Its 15 members are mainly countries of East and Southeast Asia. One should note that Beijing’s purposes on these two platforms are different. The BRI is broader in scope: it includes political coordination, infrastructure connectivity, unimpeded trade, free movement of capital, and closer people-to-people bonds. As for the RCEP,

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it seeks to reduce trade tariffs between its member countries and create a liberal, facilitative, and competitive investment environment. According to UNCTAD, the RCEP is a major and growing source of FDI in the world. In 2019, the group accounted for 36% of global FDI outflows, up from just 17% in 2010. By 2030, the Agreement is projected to add about 0.2 percentage points to GDP growth in the region. It is also expected to boost member countries’ exports by more than 10% by 2025.32

In Kazakhstan, the Belt and Road Initiative is being implemented more than successfully. The two countries have completed numerous projects in infrastructure building and industrialization. The Aktogay copper processing plant is a demonstration project that successfully combines the Belt and Road Initiative and the New Economic Policy Nurly Zhol (an infrastructure project in Kazakhstan). It was completed and commissioned on 3 March, 2017.

The key project of energy cooperation between the two countries—the Beineu-Bozoy-Shymkent gas pipeline with an annual capacity of 5 bcm of natural gas—was also completed in 2017.33 At the end of 2018, China’s CITIC Construction helped to implement two renewable energy projects in Almaty Region and to build a 5 MW wind power plant and a 1 MW solar plant in the south of the country.34 Current BRI projects in Kazakhstan include a railroad around the capital Nur Sultan, the wind power plant (WPP) Ybyrai in Kostanay Region,35 and the reconstruction of the Balkhash-Karaganda and Taldykorgan-Ust-Kamenogorsk highways. The two countries are also cooperating in traditional areas, such as energy, finance, and agriculture.

Thus, the RCEP and the Belt and Road Initiative are not in conflict with each other, but are two different platforms of China. The RCEP can increase Chinese exports and attract investment to Southeast Asian countries. But this does not affect the further development of China’s trade and economic cooperation with Central Asia as a whole and Kazakhstan in particular, because these two initiatives with China’s participation are, in fact, two different tools of its soft power, whose purpose is to consolidate its leading position in the region and the world. These are two complementary initiatives, because the BRI is a political tool and infrastructure project (diversification of export routes, development of overland logistics for Chinese exports as an alternative to the sea route, which is controlled to a greater extent by the United States), while the RCEP is more of a production project with export-oriented products (to be delivered to consumers using the Belt and Road).

**Conclusion**

The implementation of the above two initiatives is part of China’s foreign policy and foreign economic strategy designed to form stable states around its borders, which is why Beijing seeks to implement investment projects at the regional level. And since the border with Kazakhstan is the longest one in the Central Asia region, the existence of a large Uighur diaspora in the country and its mainly Muslim population require a great deal of effort on the part of China and the use of different

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tools to establish cooperation with Kazakhstan and implement joint projects in the country. In addition, Kazakhstan is one of the main channels for diversifying energy supplies to China.

It should also be pointed out that China has met with some difficulties in expanding its economic and political influence in the region because of the EAEU’s protectionist policy and Russia’s concern about losing its position in the strategically important region of Central Asia. However, Western sanctions against Russia, the global economic slowdown caused by the pandemic, and the decline in world energy prices have created a situation where even Russia has become interested in cooperation with China. Clearly, China’s influence in the region as a whole and in Kazakhstan in particular will increase and, consequently, trade and economic cooperation between the two countries will develop.

In the New Great Game between the West, Russia, and China, special note should be taken of China’s increased diplomatic efforts to find and initiate advantageous modes of relations with states in the region.

Today, Chinese initiatives have both supporters and skeptics in all countries of Central Asia, as well as those who fear the potential negative consequences of Chinese projects. There are also concerns about China’s expanding and strengthening influence in the region and fears of territorial concessions to the powerful neighbor, of its territorial and migratory expansion.

Objectively, cooperation between China and the Central Asian republics is gaining momentum and can both bring benefits to the region and pose certain challenges and risks.
IDENTITY OF THE POPULATION OF THE MULTIETHNIC SOUTH OF RUSSIA IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIETAL INTEGRATION OF THE MACROREGION

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Liudmila KLIMENKO
D.Sc. (Sociol.), Professor,
Higher School of Business, Southern Federal University;
Professor, Faculty of Media Communications and Multimedia Technologies,
Don State Technical University (ORCID ID: 0000-0001-7696-7830)
(Rostov-on-Don, Russian Federation)

Zuriet ZHADE
D.Sc. (Political Science), Professor, Department of the Theory and History of the State, Law and Political Science, Law Faculty,
Adyghe State University (ORCID ID: 0000-0002-7888-8885)
(Maykop, Russian Federation)

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Irina PETRULEVICH
D.Sc. (Sociol.), Professor,
Institute of History and International Relations,
Southern Federal University (ORCID: 0000-0002-8314-8857)
(Rostov-on-Don, Russian Federation)

ABSTRACT
The South of Russia is characterized by a complex structure, a contradictory history of interethnic relations and active migration processes. All of the above creates difficulties for the region’s societal integration and strengthening of macroregional ties. The state’s national strategy presupposes the formation of a positive civic identity of Russia’s population while preserving its ethnocultural diversity. The self-determination processes of ethnosocial groups in the post-Soviet space have revealed a competition between the civic and ethnic components in the identity of the national republics’ population. Therefore, the structural and dynamic dimension of the identity of the multiethnic population in the South of Russia is being actualized.

The article empirically characterizes the complex identity of the population in the multiethnic subregions of the Russian South in terms of the region’s societal (macrolevel) integration. Based on the sociological research conducted in early 2021 in the Rostov region, the Republic of Adygea and the Republic of Daghestan, the nature of the local residents’ identity along the following axes is analyzed:

1. civic, regional and ethnic identifications;
2. I- and we-identifications;
3. primordial and constructed forms of identity.

Modern sociological measurements demonstrate that in the structure of cognitive I-identifications of the population of the Russian South, primordial (gender, marital status) and constructed civic (Russian citizen) identity components prevail. In the Rostov region, the core of the respondents’ identity comprises a macroregional component (resident of the South of Russia). Whereas in the North Caucasian republics in question, ethnic (in Adygea and Daghestan), confessional and republican (in Daghestan) identifications compete with the all-Russian identity.

At the emotional we-identity level, residents of the Russian South most often indicate affinity with groups of everyday communication (people of the same generation and occupation) and supra-ethnic constructed communities (citizens of Russia). A strong orientation towards the South Russian identity is also manifested among the Rostov residents, while ethnic, religious and republican identification complexes have greater significance in the national republics of the Northern Caucasus.

Comparative analysis with the results of 2010-2011 studies (conducted using identical instruments in the Rostov region and Adygea) shows a stable predominance of constructed civic and macroregional identities in the subregions dominated by the Russian population, and ethnic and North Caucasian identities—in the republican segment.

The continuing discrepancy in the identity content structure in the ethnoterritorial segments of the Russian South may have disintegration potential and slow down the formation of a supra-ethnic societal integrity of a multi-component macroregion.
Introduction

Problem Statement

The persisting national, linguistic and religious heterogeneity of the modern world determines the relevance of the search and strengthening of resources and mechanisms for the integration of multi-component societies. The ethnic and confessional diversity of the population traditionally distinguishes the South of Russia, where the South and North Caucasian federal districts are located. Different levels of socio-economic development of the subregions, the dynamics of the ethnic and socio-demographic population structure and the peculiarities of the macroregion’s geopolitical position (adjacent to Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Abkhazia and Kazakhstan) determine the increased risks of disunity and conflicts in the South of Russia.

The task of strengthening the societal integrity of Russian society is reflected in the Strategy of the State National Policy of the Russian Federation and is formulated as maintaining a single “civilization code” that preserves the socio-cultural community of the multinational people of Russia. One of the most important resources for social consolidation is the formation and reproduction of the all-Russian civic identity, which is also reflected in the national strategy. Under conditions of ethno-territorially segmented state formations, the population’s identity is characterized by a combination of civic, ethnic, regional and other components that may compete or complement each other. The stable development of Russia’s multi-component regions is largely associated with a coherent configuration of these components, with the dominance of the all-Russian civic identity. Moreover, “the formation...”


of an integrating connection between citizens is not only the task of the state, but also the need of a society concerned with self-understanding, and sometimes—with meaningful solidarity.”

Therefore, within the framework of this article, the authors will examine the specifics of the multi-level identity of the population in the multiethnic Russian South.

Conceptual Framework, Methods and Empirical Research Base

Long-term study of social identity reveals the complex nature of this phenomenon. Traditionally, social identity is seen as “a set of attribution of a person to various social categories: race, nationality, class, gender, etc.” Both individuals and groups may be identity bearers. However, individual identity is constructed and modified only in group interaction. According to George H. Mead, the individual acknowledges himself as such in experience, not directly, but only indirectly, from the distinct points of view of other individual members of his social group, or from the generalized point of view of this social group as a whole.

Cognitive and affective dimensions are distinguished in social identity. Assuming that an individual’s awareness and articulation of identity is based to a greater extent on rational processes of self-determination in social space, we also need to consider the importance of affective experiences in identification processes. “Lastly, we have to note that identity processes are, first and foremost, cognitive-emotional processes associated with the social construction of self-image and self-esteem.” In addition, modern research based on the works of George H. Mead, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, emphasizes the constructed nature of identity, which is subject to modifications due to the dynamism of the socio-political life and the flexibility of one’s social trajectory and self-determination.

The conceptual framework of this study is also determined by the ideas of Samuel Huntington, Zygmunt Bauman and Mikhail Guboglo, who interpret identity as a process and result of an individual’s self-reference in relation to various social communities. These communities are most often

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11 See: G.H. Mead, Selected Works: Collection of Translations, INION RAS, Center for Social and Scientific and Information Studies, Department of Sociology and Social Psychology, Compiled and translated by V.G. Nikolayev, ed. by D.V. Efremenko, Moscow, 2009, 290 pp. (in Russian); Idem, “Ya i organizm; Ya i sub’ektivnoe; ... pp. 162-195.
14 See: S.P. Huntington, op. cit.
primordial or ascriptive groups (family, age and gender, racial), which, depending on the socio-psychological comfort and intensity of contacts, can form the so-called primary communities. Numerous other communities (socio-professional, ethnocultural, religious, civic, regional, etc.) can be attributed to constructed (imaginary) or secondary identification groups.

A wide range of ethnosociological works is devoted to discussions of the nature of ethnos and the impact of ethnic diversity on social cohesion. Leaving this scientific discussion out of our analysis, we concur with the view of the constructed, mobile nature of ethnic identity in modern society, and multi-ethnicity as a factor in the disintegration of regional communities. The study of the multilevel identity of the population in a multi-component society leads us to the search for grounds for people’s solidarization. Many researchers and representatives of public administration name civic identity as a condition of unity and harmony in society as such grounds. In addition, the supra-ethnic nature of this identity is emphasized, based on the construct of supranational (multinational/transnational citizenship).

In our study, civic identity is viewed as a complex of ideas “based on a sense of belonging to the Russian state.” In turn, ethnic identity “is emotionally and cognitively significant to the individual, and ascribed by self and others. It is about the sense of belonging, in many (though not all) cases a people with common language, traditions and in some cases also territory”.

The measurement of the effects of the population’s identity in a multiethnic region is also based on the concept of societality, which is characterized by the macro-level integration of society through values, meanings and behavioral norms. Societal integrity presupposes the systemic social integration and stability and forms a dynamic balance in the development of multi-component regions. Societal processes characterize a state of social cohesion and solidarity that is in contrast with the “conflictogenic pathology” of social development.


21 Different correlations exist between the terms national and ethnic in scientific literature and public space. In certain cases, the national is identical with the ethnocultural, in others, the national is linked to the civic (see: L.M. Drobitsheva, “Rosssiskaia identichnost: poiski opredeleniia i dinamika rasprostraneniia,” Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia, No. 8, 2020, pp. 37-50).


23 G.S. Denisova, L.V. Klimenko, op. cit., p. 25.


The self-determination processes of ethnosocial groups in the South of Russia in the late 1990s-early 2000s showed a competing ratio of the civic and ethnic components of the population’s identity in this multiethnic macroregion. During this period, the increased importance of ethnocultural affiliation was actualized, and the discrepancy between the legal norms of the Russian Federation and the national republics was manifested along with the priority of ethnic over the all-Russian identity. Later, in the context of the stabilizing political situation and the strengthening of civic identity, the latter still did not act as a powerful deterrent during domestic interethic conflicts. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the societal and dynamic dimensions of the population of the multiethnic South of Russia.

The empirical basis of the study is formed by the results of a sociological survey conducted in three sub-regions of the South of Russia (the Rostov region, the Republic of Adygea and the Republic of Daghestan) in early 2021. To analyze the structural transformations of the population’s identity, we used materials from sociological studies conducted with the participation of the authors using a unified methodology in 2010–2011.

The toolkit of the sociological survey included confirming the structure of social identity in the residents of Southern Russia along the following axes:

1. civic, regional and ethnic identifications;
2. I- and we- identifications;
3. primordial and constructed forms of identity.

The empirical study applied an adapted methodology for measuring I-identifications, developed by Krzysztof Kosela, Magdalena Grabowska and others to analyze the ratio between the structural components of personal identity. The method of analyzing we-identifications, which reveal the correlation of people with different types of communities, is contained in the works of Vladimir Yadov and other authors, and illustrates the emotional aspects of intimacy with or distance from the surrounding people, groups and imaginary communities. In addition, the study involved the verification of the social identity structure along the axes of civic, regional and ethnic identifications.

Research Results

The materials of long-term all-Russian polls reveal a strengthening civic identity of Russian citizens. According to the research results of the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences in 2004, ethnicity (“I am Russian”) was the most important in the overall structure of the


29 A standardized questionnaire was used to interview 329 people in the Republic of Adygea (92%—Adyghe), 400—in the Rostov region (91%—Russians), 413—in the Republic of Daghestan (29%—Avars, 20%—Lezgins, 17%—Dargins, 15%—Kumyks, 9%—Laks, 4%—Tabasaran). The population of the capitals of the republics and regional centers was interviewed. The survey sample was proportional to the main socio-demographic subgroups of the population.

30 431 people were interviewed in the Rostov region in 2010, 398 people—in the Republic of Adygea in 2011. The survey sample was proportional to the main socio-demographic subgroups.


personal identity of the country’s population. A decade later, civic identity (“I am a citizen of Russia”) became dominant for the majority of the population (over 70%).\textsuperscript{33} and in 2018, this indicator was even higher—84% (which is reflected in the amended text of the Strategy of State National Policy).\textsuperscript{34} In sociological polls conducted by the Federal Agency for Ethnic Affairs, together with the All-Russia Center for the Study of Public Opinion (VTsIOM), the prevalence and strength of civic identity is also growing (“the number of people responding that they ‘often feel affinity’ with Russian citizens is growing: 36% in 2016, 67% in 2019”).\textsuperscript{35} However, it should be noted that the Russian population dominates in the research sample.

Meanwhile, in multiethnic territories, the ethnic factor may remain a priority in the self-determination of local residents. Therefore, the ability of a supra-ethnic civic identity to consolidate a multicultural population is of particular importance in multiethnic macroregions. The choice in the study conducted in the three sub-regions of Southern Russia is determined by the different degree of influence of the ethnic factor on socio-political processes.\textsuperscript{36}

The results of the research conducted in 2021 in the South of Russia demonstrate that primordial (gender, age, marital status) and constructed civic (citizen of Russia) identity components prevail in the structure of cognitive self-identification in the South of Russia. In the Rostov region, the first places in the rating of references are taken by gender group (89%), civic community (82%), family status (74%), social prospects (“a person with a future”—53%) and macro-regional community (resident of Southern Russia—52%). The top five personal identifications among the surveyed residents of Adygea also include civic (76%) and socio-demographic characteristics (gender—71%, matrimonial status—54%). Self-identification to the ethnic group (49%) also occupies an important place in this group. In Daghestan, confessional (69%) and civic (69%) identifications produce the largest number of references. Primary human identities (gender, age, family role) are noted by 67% to 43% of respondents. The ethnic component in the i-identifications of Daghestan’s residents is also significant, it ranks 6th and is 41% of the answers (see Fig. 1).

As you can see, the Southern Russian identity is one of the core cognitive identifications of the Rostov region residents (5th place against 11th and 15th places in RA and RD). Their North Caucasian regional identity is clearly significant for the residents of Daghestan (7th place and 38%, which is two times higher than in the RA and more than seven times higher than that of the RR). Identification with the inhabitants of their region or republic is typical of one-fifth of the respondents in the Rostov region and one-fourth of the respondents in the Adyghe and Daghestan subgroups (see Fig. 1).

The study of we-identity shows the degree of people’s involvement in different types of communities, which has a rather emotional coloring. Currently, residents of the South of Russia most often indicate affinity with groups of everyday communication and with supra-ethnic constructed communities. Self-identification with generational (56%), civic (52%) and professional (48%) “we-groups” is more pronounced in respondents from the Rostov region. Among the territorial communities, the latter more often correlate themselves with other residents of their region (29%) and of the South of Russia as a whole (23%) (see Fig. 2).


\textsuperscript{34} See: \textit{Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of 6 December, 2018 No. 703 On Amendments to the Strategy of the State National Policy of the Russian Federation for the Period until 2025, approved by the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 1666 of 19 December, 2012.}


\textsuperscript{36} The Rostov region is characterized by a higher degree of urbanization (two-thirds of the population lives in cities) and a high level of ethnocultural homogeneity (about 90% of the population is Russian). More than half of the population in the Republic of Adygea lives in rural areas and the agricultural sector dominates the economy. About a third of the inhabitants are Adyghe, who historically lived in these territories. Representatives of numerous ethnic groups live in Daghestan, of which 14 peoples are officially classified as indigenous. The population of the republic is dominated by Avars, Dargins, Kumyks and Lezgins.
In the Adyghe subgroup, affinity with people of the same age (71%) and occupation (54%) is noted more often; ethnic identity is also among the top three answers (34%). In Daghestan, the proportion of generational (62%) and religious (52%) self-identifications is higher. Approximately the same number of respondents in this group choose people of the same profession, citizenship and residence in the Northern Caucasus as close communities (47%—49%). Ethnicity is noted in 34% of cases (see Fig. 2).

A comparative analysis of the materials of the current survey with the results of decade-old research shows a stable predominance of constructed civic and macroregional identities in the subregions dominated by the Russian population, and the ethnic and North Caucasian identities—in the republican segment. In 2010-2011, the all-Russian identity dominated the responses of the residents...
of the Rostov region (76% and 83%, respectively). Meanwhile, the core of the personal identification in the Republic of Adygea comprised primordial (family and gender statuses) and ethnic components. Real groups of everyday communication were referred to as “we-groups” most frequently, regardless of territorial affiliation. Secondly, the residents of the Rostov region pointed to a civic community, and the population of Adygea—to regional and ethnic groups.

The macro-regional identity is acquiring greater importance at the I- and we-identification level in the Rostov region, and republican (in the I-identity structure) and North Caucasian (among we-groups) identities—in Adygea.

The study investigated the perception of the foundations of the region’s societal integrity by the inhabitants of the South of Russia. At the two stages of the survey, common territory, language and customs were often named as integrative factors in the Rostov segment. Residents of Adygea also most often indicated similar traditions and a common language. Over the past decade, the significance of territorial affiliation as the basis of the solidarity of the local population has decreased, but the role of common historical fate in the Adyghe segment has increased (see Fig. 3).

**Conclusion**

The societal integration in the South of Russia is hampered by its complex ethnocultural, linguistic, confessional and socio-economic structure and a complicated history of interethnic interactions. In these conditions, the formation of a unified macroregional socio-cultural space is largely associated with the actualization of civic dominants among the multiethnic population. The results of sociological

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37 See: G.S. Denisova, L.V. Klimenko, op. cit.
Figure 3

“What Unites You with People Living in Your Region?”
(You can choose several responses) (%)

Common territory: 64% (RR 2010), 45% (RR 2021), 48% (RA 2011), 36% (RA 2021)
Language: 21% (RR 2010), 48% (RR 2021), 28% (RA 2011), 41% (RA 2021)
Traditions and customs: 6% (RR 2010), 22% (RR 2021), 15% (RA 2011), 12% (RA 2021)
Lifestyle: 3% (RR 2010), 48% (RR 2021), 42% (RA 2011), 22% (RA 2021)
Historical fate: 30% (RR 2010), 22% (RR 2021), 16% (RA 2011), 23% (RA 2021)
Personality traits: 22% (RR 2010), 12% (RR 2021), 13% (RA 2011), 15% (RA 2021)
Common troubles: 8% (RR 2010), 4% (RR 2021), 6% (RA 2011), 6% (RA 2021)
Nothing: 6% (RR 2010), 6% (RR 2021), 3% (RA 2011), 0% (RA 2021)
Religion: 6% (RR 2010), 5% (RR 2021), 8% (RA 2011), 20% (RA 2021)
External features: 2% (RR 2010), 3% (RR 2021), 4% (RA 2011), 2% (RA 2021)
surveys conducted in 2010–2021 demonstrate a steady predominance of civic and macroregional identities in the subregions dominated by the Russian population (Rostov region), and ethnic and republican identities—in Adygea. Current polls conducted in Dagestan reveal the importance of confessional affiliation and affinity with the inhabitants of the North Caucasus for its population.

The task of preserving the non-confrontational ethno-cultural diversity of Russian society involves tracking and accounting for changes in the public consciousness, the aggregate indicator of which is social identity. The continuing discrepancy in the identity structure in the ethno-territorial segments of the South of Russia may have disintegration potential and slow down the formation of a supra-ethnic societal integrity of a multi-component macro-region. Therefore, a well-thought-out and balanced policy is required to scale up the integrative effect of civic identifications in multiethnic regions.

TAJIK-AFGHAN BORDER AREAS
AS A SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND ETHNOCULTURAL CONTACT ZONE

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Sergey RYAZANTSEV
D.Sc. (Econ.), Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences; Professor, Director, Institute for Demographic Studies of the Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IDR FCTAS RAS) (Moscow, Russian Federation)

Farzona GARIBOVA
Junior Research Assistant, Institute for Demographic Studies of the Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IDR FCTAS RAS) (Moscow, Russian Federation)

ABSTRACT

In the modern world, borders are often no longer perceived as a barrier, but, on the contrary, become a contact zone for border regions, engaging nations and peoples, their cultures and economies. Presumably, at present the remoteness of any area

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from a country’s center does not imply its cultural or economic backwardness; conversely, it most likely offers additional opportunities for economic and socio-cultural development. This article examines the border regions of the Republic of Tajikistan and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, their cooperation and the consequences of these ties for their socio-economic development. The beginning of the post-Soviet period was characterized by weak economic ties between Tajikistan and Afghanistan due to the civil wars that affected both countries at the time. The countries also lacked the transport infrastructure required for cross-border trade and cooperation. Subsequently, through the efforts of the authorities of the two countries and international organizations, these problems began to be resolved.

The article’s scientific novelty lies in the analysis of the socio-demographic development of the border areas in Tajikistan and Afghanistan and the identification of the key forms of ethnocultural interaction of the border population. As a result of the study, the authors identify and characterize the forms of socio-economic and ethnocultural contacts that occur through border trade, commercial migration, education and the integration of refugees into the Tajik community. The significant role of these contacts plays a significant role in the life of the population of the border areas, which are cut off from the centers of their countries. First, it is a mutually complementary process that involves obtaining new knowledge and strengthening ties. Secondly, cross-border trade and commercial migration between Tajikistan and Afghanistan play a vital role in the livelihoods of the respective communities and support the development of border regions, contributing to the development of friendly relations between countries and act as effective methods of fighting poverty, creating new jobs and providing income for the population of the border regions. In addition, the study examined the programs and projects of international organizations that contribute to the development and strengthening of border relations between Tajikistan and Afghanistan in the sphere of border trade and strengthening of security. The authors conducted an observation and a survey at the border market, where residents of the neighboring territories of Tajikistan and Afghanistan come together. The observation revealed that for many households, border markets are the only platforms for earning money.

**KEYWORDS:** border regions, border markets, socio-economic consequences, ethnocultural contacts.

**Introduction**

The establishment of the Republic of Tajikistan at the end of 1991 coincided with the coming of the Mujahideen regime to power in Afghanistan in early 1992. As a result, Tajikistan became one of the first countries to recognize the Mujahideen regime, which was headed by ethnic Tajiks.

Since the beginning of the anti-terrorist operation in October 2001 in Afghanistan, Tajikistan has assumed the responsibility of ensuring the transit delivery of international humanitarian aid to the population of Afghanistan, simplifying customs and border procedures, and allowing its air and ground space to be used for the execution of rescue and humanitarian operations by the international coalition forces.

Since then, the development of relations with Afghanistan has always been and still is at the core of the policy conducted by the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan. This is due to the fact
that since the late 1990s, the threat of the spread of Islamic extremism and terrorism and the smuggling of drugs from Afghanistan has hung over Tajikistan. Therefore, the search for a peaceful solution to the Afghan conflict and assisting in the earliest possible stabilization of the situation in this country was of great importance for Tajikistan’s foreign policy. The Republic of Tajikistan has become one of the active participants in the resolution of the situation in Afghanistan and in establishing peace and stability.

Issues related to the development of Tajik-Afghan border trade in the 1990s were repeatedly raised in various resolutions of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan. This was due to the challenging economic and social conditions that arose in both countries as a result of the civil war in Tajikistan and the fighting in Afghanistan. In particular, the situation deteriorated in the mountainous regions of Tajikistan and Afghanistan, which were cut off from the centers of their respective countries and experienced great difficulties in providing the population with goods, especially food.

Research Goals and Methods

This study aims to identify the role of the Tajik-Afghan border for the development of external socio-economic and ethnocultural ties and to identify the forms and consequences of these interactions in the border regions of Tajikistan and Afghanistan. The main sources of information were data from the Statistical Agency under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan and the National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA, Afghanistan). In addition, data from surveys of international organizations, such as the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), UNHCR and scientific works on Tajik-Afghan relations were used. Various statements by the heads of international organizations and the border population were explored using media content analysis. As part of the study, the authors conducted an observation and a survey in the border town of Khorog, Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAR) of the Republic of Tajikistan in 2019.

Afghanistan and Tajikistan: Cross-Border Regions

All the prerequisites for the development of good-neighborly relations between the Republic of Tajikistan and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan are in place: a common border spanning 1,344 km, common historical past and cultural values, traditions and customs, a single religion and language. Tajiks comprise approximately 30% of Afghanistan’s population. One of the two official languages of Afghanistan (Dari) is mutually intelligible with Tajik, and, according to individual researchers, Dari and Tajik languages are dialects of the Persian language.

From 2005 to 2012, at the initiative of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Aga Khan Development Organization, five bridges were built across the Panj River to ensure communication between Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

In 2013, an intergovernmental agreement was reached between the countries regarding state border checkpoints. As a result, along with the existing five checkpoints of international status, two more checkpoints were opened in the Shurabad district and in the Vanj district, to connect Tajikistan and the Badakhshan province on the Afghan side. As a result, the Vanj-Jomarj bridge across the Panj River in the town of Khumrogi (Vanj region, Republic of Tajikistan) and Jomarj (Afghanistan) were launched into operation. The $6 million construction project was funded by the Aga Khan Develop-
ment Foundation. The bridge span is 216 meters, which makes it the longest suspension bridge in Tajikistan. The 162-meter Shohon-Khokhon bridge was commissioned in 2015 and connected Shokhon (Shurabad district, Khatlon region, Tajikistan) with the Khokhon province (Afghanistan). The project was implemented by the Aga Khan Foundation with financial support from the German government through the KfW agency.¹

In 2019, a project was launched with the participation of the EU delegation to build a new 180-meter bridge (Farkhor-Tahor Bridge) in the Farkhor region of the Republic of Tajikistan, and to restore the roads on the border with Afghanistan. The project will be implemented by the Aga Khan Foundation and the PATRIP Foundation (Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan Regional Integration Program). The European Union has allocated a grant of approximately 16 million euros for the construction of the bridge. The project is expected to contribute to the development of the local private sector and markets, contributing to peace, sustainability and trade facilitation in the region.²

Provinces such as Badakhshan, Takhar, Kunduz and Balkh, located in the north of Afghanistan, border Tajikistan. On the Tajik side, the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region and the Khatlon Region, which are located in the south and southwest of the country, respectively, are adjacent to the state border. Table 1 shows the adjacent border areas of Afghanistan and Tajikistan, and their population.

As can be seen from the table, 7 districts of Tajikistan’s Khatlon region border Afghanistan, as do all 7 districts of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region and its administrative center, the town of Khorog. GBAR occupies 62,900 sq. km of Tajikistan’s territory, and accounts for 44.5% of its total area. The area of the Khatlon region is 24,700 sq. km, which is 17.5% of the total area of Tajikistan.³

The population of the Republic of Tajikistan as of 1 January, 2020 was 9,313,800 people. The Khatlon region accounted for 35.9% of the total population with 3,348,300 people, while the population of GBAR was 228,900 people, 2.5% of the total population of the country.

The total population of Afghanistan’s regions bordering Tajikistan in 2020 was 4.7 million people, of which 1.5 million people live in the Balkh province, 1.1 million people—in the Takhar province, 1.1 million people in Kunduz and 1.05 million people in Badakhshan.⁴

Table 1

| Administrative Territories on the Border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan and the Size of their Population (2020, thousands) |
|--------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| **Tajikistan** | **Population** | **Afghanistan** | **Population** |
| Khatlon Region: |   | Balkh Province: | 1,509 |
| Nosiri Khusrov District | 39.3 | Qubodiyan District: | 188.1 |
| Qubodiyan District | 139 | Panj District: | 119.7 |
| Jayhun District | 1,136 |


² See: “Tajikistan and Afghanistan will be connected by another bridge,” 27 April, 2021, Sputnik Tajikistan, available in Russian at [https://tj.sputniknews.ru/20170715/tadzhikistan-afganistan-most-stroitelstvo-1022817808.html].


A significant difference in the demographic potential of the population in the border regions of Tajikistan and Afghanistan was revealed in the course of analysis of socio-demographic development.

**Ethnocultural Communication**

Ethnocultural communication refers to direct interaction between ethnic groups. In the case of Tajikistan and Afghanistan, the process of mutual influence occurs mainly through trade, education and migration, is reflected in spiritual and material culture, and is based on mutually beneficial economic factors.

The historical territory of Badakhshan, which comprises districts in the southeast of Tajikistan (Gorno-Badakhshan region) and the northeast of Afghanistan (the Badakhshan province), was divided into these two parts in 1895 under an agreement between the Russian and British empires. As a result, people with the same cultural values and the same language were separated.

A significant part of the population of Badakhshan, or about 80%, are Tajiks who speak Dari (Afghan side) and Tajik (Tajik side). These two languages are almost identical, and differ only in writing, since Tajik uses the Cyrillic alphabet as a script, while Dari uses its own script, slightly different from the Persian (Farsi). However, it is important to note that speakers of these two languages understand each other without any difficulties. At the same time, there are peoples who speak the Pamir dialects: Shugnan, Rushan, Mundjan, Vakhan and Ishkashim in GBAR of the Republic of Tajikistan, numbering approximately 180,000 people.

Another form of ethnocultural contact in border areas is the so-called Afghan bazaar organized by the authorities of the two countries for the residents of these territories, a kind of event for which...
the citizens of Afghanistan do not need to apply for a visa, although there are certain official restrictions on Afghan citizens’ access to Tajik entry visas. In order to participate in the market, Afghans only need to receive passes, which is a simpler procedure than obtaining a visa, and are thoroughly checked by the relevant local authorities before entering the market. At the market, Afghans present handicrafts and home-grown vegetables and fruits. Tajiks mostly sell goods of Chinese origin, that is, the entrepreneurs import goods from China and sell them at this market. These marketplaces have been held for many years, thus, both sides are well-aware of what goods or products the opposite side needs. In addition, this channel establishes contacts between entrepreneurs of the two countries and expands their opportunities.

Presumably, these markets were created, on the one hand, to maintain at least some kind of contacts between the Badakhshan people, since the historical ties were severed more than 100 years ago, and on the other hand, to bring economic benefits to these territories.

At present, relations in the cultural and educational spheres are developing most actively between the two countries. Musical groups regularly travel from Tajikistan to Afghanistan, meetings and conferences of cultural and art workers and film screenings are conducted. One of the universities, the University of Central Asia, was established in 2000 by the Presidents of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Afghanistan. The School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE) was established on the basis of the University in 2006, thereby providing youth and adults with the opportunity to obtain professional qualifications. According to official data, since 2006, more than 150,000 people have graduated from SPCE, of whom 53% are women. SPCE training centers are located in four countries: Dushanbe (3 centers), Bokhtar and Khorog (2 centers) (Tajikistan); Bishkek and Naryn (Kyrgyzstan); Tekeli (Kazakhstan); and Darvaz, Ishkashim, Faizabad (2 centers) and Shugnan (Afghanistan), that is, in the border areas. The school conducts programs and courses in business and entrepreneurship that allow graduates to create a source of income for themselves and start their own enterprises. Since 2014, more than 7,000 people have graduated from SPCE courses and programs in Afghanistan (over 50% of them are women).

Ethnocultural ties are also manifested in the integration of refugees into Tajik society. Due to the unstable situation in their country, Afghans are seeking refuge in neighboring Tajikistan. Currently, about 4,000 Afghan refugees are registered in Tajikistan. The refugees who arrive in Tajikistan have a lot in common, specifically religion, culture, traditions and language, which contributes to a favorable integration in Tajikistan. However, Afghan refugees face difficulties in finding jobs and sources of income. Since Tajikistan has a high unemployment rate and the economy is largely dependent on remittances from migrants, refugees face financial difficulties. In addition, another obstacle to finding a job is the ban on Afghan refugees living in the capital, Dushanbe.

In 2002, a law was passed to prohibit refugees from Afghanistan from settling in the capital and border areas, due to fear of infiltration by militants disguised as migrants. As a rule, there are fewer job opportunities in the regions where refugees are typically sent to settle. Compared to the capital, the local population there is in need of employment. Although persons with a refugee status are formally guaranteed full access to employment, in reality they still face difficulties. Many refugees from Afghanistan hope that in the future they will be able to move to a third, more developed country, but the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Tajikistan notes that there are no such opportunities. The UNHCR declares that it does not provide financial assistance to all refugees, only to the most vulnerable and needy, since the budget of the Mission is limited. Nev-

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See: “School of Professional and Continuing Education,” University of Central Asia, available at [https://ucentralasia.org/Schools/Spce/RU].

Nevertheless, in order to somehow improve the refugees’ predicament, programs are being developed to train refugees so that they can provide for themselves and their families. For example, courses for hairdressers, seamstresses and pastry chefs have been opened.8

Through content analysis of the Tajik press, it was revealed that Afghan refugees are nevertheless grateful for the warm welcome of the Tajik community, and appreciate the opportunity to live in a peaceful and secure environment; in any case, despite the socio-economic difficulties, Afghan refugees have certain advantages, given the cultural and linguistic affinity.9

During the civil war in Tajikistan, about 70,000 Tajik refugees lived in refugee camps in Afghanistan (Mazori Sharif, Sherkhan Bandar, Kunduz, Tashkurgan, Talukan). Since 1993, the Tajik government has sent working groups to deal with the refugee problem, and as a result, Tajik refugees were returned from Afghanistan to their homeland between 1993 and 1997.

Ethnocultural communication plays a significant role in the socio-economic development of the border areas, which are in a vulnerable position and are cut off from the centers of their respective countries.

**Socio-Economic Interaction**

The socio-economic component is important in the development of relations between the border areas of Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

The bridges built in the border regions of Tajikistan and Afghanistan across the Panj River, which were mentioned at the beginning of the article, facilitated communication between the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region of Tajikistan and Aghan Badakhshan. Providing communities on both sides of the Afghan-Tajik border with access to an expanded market greatly enhances their entrepreneurial potential and increases their income. In addition, it improves the quality of medical care for the Afghan Badakhshan communities, creating conditions for the work of doctors from Tajikistan in the Shugnan clinic and other nearby community health centers in Afghanistan.10

As a result of the civil war in Tajikistan and the fighting in Afghanistan, difficult economic and social conditions have developed in both countries. They were aggravated in the mountainous regions, which in Tajikistan and Afghanistan were cut off from the centers and suffered great difficulties associated with providing the population with goods, primarily food. Since in those years the Tajik and Afghan authorities were busy with internal problems, they could not solve the problems of economic cooperation. Nevertheless, since the mid-1990s, attempts have been made to establish border trade in Gorno-Badakhshan. For instance, since 1995, border trade has been organized at the crossing between Tajikistan and Afghanistan in the Ishkashim region.11

When the authors visited one of the markets in the border town of Khorog in 2019, the market was open one day a week from 9 am to 4 pm, with 600-1,000 sellers. Trade turnover ranged from USD 3,000 to 5,000 per day. Trade was carried out in the Tajik currency—somoni.

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The following results were obtained in the course of observation and conversations with market participants.

Every Saturday Afghans travel to the border market in Khorog to purchase essential supplies. It is more convenient for Afghans to wait for Saturday and buy food at the border market than to go to the regional center, as it turned out to be closer and cheaper.

In order for Afghan traders and buyers to enter the market, they need to go through customs, border post guards, and sanitary and veterinary inspections who check their goods, if necessary, after which they are allowed to enter the Tajik market.

In the Tajik-Afghan markets, butter, fruits, vegetables, pasta and other food products are sold. In addition, everyone sells something that is not available in the adjacent territory. For example, there is an oversupply of apples in the Tajik Pamir mountains, but there is basically no fruit in Afghan territory. Afghans bring their textiles and cast-iron dishes to the market. Tajiks mainly buy cauldrons, and mostly resell Chinese goods to their neighbors.

- One of the respondents noted that he comes to the market every Saturday, pays 5 somoni for his spot, while his daily income equals 1,000-1,200 somoni.
- The second respondent comes to the market 3 times a month and pays 10-15 somoni for his spot (depending on the location: the larger the spot, the higher the payment), and his income equals 1,000 somoni.
- The third respondent comes every Saturday to sell soap and tablecloths and earns 200 somoni, of which 20 is spent on transportation.

In addition, when crossing the border, Afghans receive a pass, and upon entering the market they are assigned a number to settle in a specific spot and conduct trade. One of the respondents noted that she has been visiting the market for 15 years, almost every week, selling national jewelry and dresses. Working in the market is her family’s main source of income.

In connection with the latest events and the spread of coronavirus infection around the world, Tajikistan has tightened control on the Tajik-Afghan border. During the pandemic, the market was closed several times, but the Afghans turned to their own and Tajik authorities with a request to reopen the market, since residents of remote border areas were practically left without food supplies.

Cross-border trade promotes friendly relations between neighboring countries by strengthening commercial ties, cultural understanding and deepening relations between the population of the regions.

Measures that Stimulate the Development of Border Relations between Tajikistan and Afghanistan

Diplomatic relations between the Republic of Tajikistan and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan were established on 15 July, 1992.

A wide range of issues of interest, including political, trade and economic, water and energy, industrial, cultural and health care issues related to border stabilization and resolution of internal conflicts in Afghanistan, have been addressed during 28 years of relations within the framework of the Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Good Neighborliness between the Republic of Tajikistan and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.
Year after year, the regulatory and legal framework of bilateral relations between Tajikistan and Afghanistan is being strengthened. Over 90 bilateral cooperation documents have been signed to date in various spheres.12

Tajikistan fears a repetition of the events of the 1990s, when the conflict in Afghanistan largely contributed to the emergence of confrontations in Tajikistan. As a result, certain restrictions remain for citizens of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in obtaining Tajik entry visas.

In order to create the conditions required for the expansion of trade and economic relations on a mutually beneficial basis, further development and strengthening of good-neighborly and friendly relations between the Republic of Tajikistan and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan passed the following two resolutions: No. 638 On the Organization of Border Trade with the Islamic State of Afghanistan, dated 20 October, 1995, which opened border trade points with the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in the Khatlon region, and No. 68 On the Organization of Border Trade with the Islamic State of Afghanistan, dated 21 February, 1996, which opened border trade points with the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in GBAR.

The Resolution of the Government of Tajikistan No. 397 On Measures to Improve the Organization of Border Trade in the Republic of Tajikistan, dated 2 October, 2002, developed and approved the Regulation on the Procedure for the Implementation of Border Trade in the Republic of Tajikistan, which covers all aspects of border trade point activity regulation in the republic.

In accordance with the approved Regulation, the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade of the Republic of Tajikistan is the coordinating body that organizes and operates border trade points in the Republic of Tajikistan.

At the same time, the task of border trade point control is directly assigned to: the State Committee for National Security of the Republic of Tajikistan on security and border issues; to the Customs Service under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan on customs issues; to the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Tajikistan on issues of sanitary and epidemiological control and control over imported medical, preventive and cosmetic products; to the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Tajikistan on veterinary, phytosanitary and quarantine issues; to the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade of the Republic of Tajikistan and the Republican Union of Consumer Societies Tajikmatlubot on trade and catering; to the Agency for Standardization, Metrology, Certification and Trade Inspection under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan on quality control and safety of imported consumer products; to the Agency for Construction and Architecture under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan on construction and architecture issues.

The total value of goods, works and services transferred by individuals across the customs border of the Republic of Tajikistan and purchased and sold at border trade points, should not exceed an amount equivalent to $1,000 per participant per day.

In 2015, the countries signed a Protocol on Cooperation between the Foreign Ministries of the Republic of Tajikistan and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, which covered the issues of border trade regulation, customs cooperation and transit of goods and services.

Instability and security remain a serious problem for border areas, which are dealing with illegal trade and organized crime. To address these challenges, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has implemented a number of programs, such as the Border Management Program for Central Asia and Livelihood Promotion in Tajik-Afghan Cross-border Areas. Also, infrastructure projects of the Aga Khan Development Organization have improved the access of border communities to

health services and markets, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and ideas between people from neighboring countries.

Another UNDP program for integrated border management is Border Management in Northern Afghanistan. This project has contributed to enhancing the ability of the Afghan Border Police to ensure the security of Afghanistan’s borders, as well as to enhance internal coordination and cross-border cooperation. These programs play an important role in ensuring security and border control, improving infrastructure and services at border crossing points to facilitate legal movement of people and cross-border trade.

The UNDP project on Livelihood Promotion in Tajik-Afghan Cross-border Areas (LITACA) covers eight districts in the Khatlon region of Tajikistan. In Afghanistan, a project is being carried out in Kunduz and Takhar provinces to support the development and growth of cross-border trade.\(^{13}\)

The project was launched in 2014 with financial support from the Government of Japan. It was originally a three-year initiative to ensure stability and security in target communities in Tajikistan and Afghanistan in partnership with relevant specialized ministries. The second phase, LITACA II (2018-2020), also funded by Japan, aims to increase the potential of local government, build basic infrastructure and promote economic activity in 12 border provinces and areas between Tajikistan and Afghanistan.\(^{14}\)

The Aga Khan Development Organization (AKDN) is an international non-governmental organization that implements a number of programs to improve the living conditions and opportunities for communities in disadvantaged and remote areas. AKDN has been conducting various cross-border development projects for many years in both Tajikistan and Afghanistan, some of which have been mentioned above. Cross-border programs are based on an integrated approach to territorial development and are primarily aimed at isolated areas and vulnerable communities in the north of Afghanistan and in Tajikistan. The programs were launched simultaneously with the construction of the first border bridge in 2006, which connected the Badakhshan province of Afghanistan and the city of Khorog in Tajikistan.

The Law of the Republic of Tajikistan on Refugees was adopted on 10 May, 2002 (No. 50), and the latest amendments were made on 26 July, 2014 (the Law No. 1124).

The Law on Refugees provides for the basic definitions and fundamental rights of refugees, including access to health care, education, livelihoods, and the right to work on an equal basis with Tajik citizens.

In accordance with the Law of the Republic of Tajikistan on Refugees, measures are being taken annually to register asylum seekers and refugees in order to determine their actual number.

When crossing the state border of the Republic of Tajikistan, an asylum seeker is obliged to declare his intention to obtain asylum in the republic. Then, border control authorities transfer these persons to the territorial body of internal affairs to fill out an asylum application.

Asylum seekers arriving in the republic apply to the Citizenship and Refugee Assistance Department of the Passport and Registration Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Tajikistan is developing two programs for refugees, which entail integration into the local community and assistance in voluntary return. According to the head of the mission, about 100 refugees return from Tajikistan to Afghanistan every year, forced to come back for family reasons or due to being expelled from the country.


\(^{14}\) See: “Proekt po uluchsheniu blagosostoianiia naseleniia, prozhivaiushchego na tadzhiksko-afganskoy prigranichnoy territorii (Phase II),” available at [https://www.jica.go.jp/tajikistan/russian/activities/agriculture_01.html].
Conclusion

Afghanistan and Tajikistan have a close relationship, which is associated with the presence of cultural, historical and linguistic ties between these countries. Evidently, the Afghan-Tajik border region has certain cultural characteristics. In particular, the northeastern region of Afghanistan along the border with Tajikistan is better connected to Tajikistan than to the rest of Afghanistan.

The bridges linking these countries have opened up access to border markets and important social services, such as emergency medical care, hospitals and health posts in Tajikistan’s border regions for Afghans, and opened efficient channels for the delivery of humanitarian aid to hard-to-reach areas. Over time, the number of people who use the bridges on both the Afghan and Tajik sides is increasing, which strengthens the relationship between the communities in the two countries and allows to benefit from the exchange of knowledge and experience. One cannot but agree with the speech of the founder and chairman of the Aga Khan Development Organization Karim Aga Khan IV at the bridge opening ceremony in the Ishkashim region of Tajikistan on 31 October, 2006: “It has always seemed to me that bridges are among the most powerful and important symbols in human society—symbols of connection, of cooperation and of harmony.” Indeed, bridges act as a link between communities and local societies of two border areas, in this case, Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Cross-border trade between Tajikistan and Afghanistan plays a critical role in providing livelihoods for border populations and supports prosperity in poor regions. It promotes friendly relations between neighboring countries by strengthening trade ties, cultural understanding and deepening relations between the regional populations.

Of course, the borders were designated primarily in order to act as a barrier and a tool to control the movement of people and goods, but they can also influence regional development. As we already know, they play an important role in the socio-economic development of border areas and their communities.

Cross-border trade increases the employment rate among the population of remote areas, being the only place to earn money, and contributes to the reduction of poverty at the local level. A significant role is played by cross-border markets, which allow entrepreneurs of the two countries to conduct trade and negotiations, thereby creating an opportunity to find trading partners and new ties, and also act as a re-export platform.

Finally, cross-border markets contribute to the improvement of socio-economic conditions in the border areas, in particular, rural communities, and act as a platform for ethnocultural contact on both sides of the border.

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15 See: “Nalazhivanie sviazey mezhdu soobshchestvami. Mosty mezhdu Afganistanom i Tadzhikistanom.”
IRAN, SAUDI ARABIA AND TURKEY:
EMERGING RELIGIOUS IDENTITY OF
AZERBAIJAN

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Askar BATTALOV
Ph.D. Student, Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan)

Svetlana KOZHIROVA
D.Sc. (Political Science), Professor, International Scientific Complex Astana (Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan)

Tleutai SULEIMENOV
D.Sc. (Political Science), Academician, Professor of the Institute of Diplomacy of the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan)

ABSTRACT
The authors discuss the evolution of religious identity of Azerbaijan and the impact of Middle Eastern actors (Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey) on the process. Today, the pro-Islamic leaders of the Middle East are attempting, with the persis-
tence that can hardly be overestimated, to move into the Southern Caucasus, one of the world’s strategically important regions. Thus, the uncompromising rivalry of religious ideologies is hardly surprising. It means that the national and religious identities of post-Soviet Azerbaijan have come to the fore in the context of Iranian-Turkic, Iranian-Arab and Shi’a-Sunni confrontation.

Today, there are enough drivers behind the already obvious awareness of their religious identity among young Azeris. The complicated search for national and religious identities in independent Azerbaijan is driven by an outburst of national and religious sentiments during the protracted Karabakh conflict and two wars with Armenia (1992-1994 and 2020).

The process is unfolding under the huge influence of theocratic Shi’a Iran, the closest neighbor with its twenty-five million-strong Azeri diaspora; proliferation of the puritanical Wahhabi teaching of Saudi Arabia and Salafism as its export variant throughout the Caucasus, and, last but not least, strategic rapprochement with Turkey that is moving away from nationalism towards Islamism. This has made Azerbaijan a fertile soil for a confrontation within the multipolar Islamic world, which is expanding the geography of its conflicts to the Southern Caucasus. The proxy wars in Syria and Iraq, in which the Shi’a-Sunni confrontation is also obvious may destabilize the Caucasus in the future.

Here the authors assess the impact of the Middle Eastern heavyweights—Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey—on the process of shaping the Azeri religious identity as an Islamic political factor.

**KEYWORDS:** religious identity, the Southern Caucasus, increasing religiosity in Azerbaijan, influence of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, Shi’a-Sunni conflict; Karabakh conflict; political Islam, Khomeinism, Muslim Brotherhood, Salafism.

**Introduction**

Since the mid-2000s, the level of religiosity in Azerbaijan has been steadily rising, first and foremost, in the younger generation. In 1991, the Soviet Union disappeared together with Communist ideology and atheism, leaving Azerbaijan, and all the post-Soviet states for that matter, with an urgent task of restoring the old values. Predictably, the reawakened nationalistic feelings and the turn to national history and traditions stirred up religiosity which ultimately contributed to the formation of national identity emerging among the younger generations.

At the same time, as Emil Souleimanov and Maya Ehrmann and some of their colleagues have pointed out, despite the positive impacts of national resurrection in Azerbaijan, the number of those with preference for certain Islamic trends that have never been popular in the Southern Caucasus is increasing. Its favorable geopolitical and strategic location stirred a lot of interest in Iran, Saudi

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Arabia, and Turkey, the main Middle Eastern actors, each with a foreign policy agenda of its own realized through their main instrument—religious rhetoric. The problem is that in full conformity with their interests, they appeal to different poles of Islamic ideology.

Theocratic Iran of our days as the pinnacle of the Islamic Revolution of 1979 inspired by Ayatollah Khomeini is, on the whole, conservative, even if its religious zeal may cool down only to become heated again. According to Tadeusz Świętochowski, in full conformity with Khomeinism, Iran, which pursues a relatively pragmatic policy in its relations with Azerbaijan, tries to impose its religious identity on the population of a secular state.3 Iranian agenda in the Caucasus consists in consolidating its positions by exporting its Shi’a ideology, as opposed to the mounting ambitions of Turkey and Saudi Arabia, its Sunni rivals.

As the main exporter of Salafism, the radical variant of Sunni Islam and the main geopolitical rival of Iran in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia is successfully planting Salafism in the Northern Caucasus and Central Asia. It is especially successful in Azerbaijan, which is highly responsive to these efforts because of the Karabakh War, an ethnic conflict that may develop into a confessional conflict between the Christian and Muslim communities of the Caucasus.4

Due to historical reasons and ethnic closeness, Turkey has invariably played a special role in the Caucasus. As Arif Asalyoglu has pointed out, today, when Ankara is becoming a regional leader, the country’s leaders are gradually moving away from the ideology of Kemalism with its fairly long history in an effort to formulate an ideology of neo-Ottomanism. In plain words, this means that nationalism and secularity are being gradually replaced by religious traditionalism.5 Nobel Prize winner Orhan Pamuk has defined the decision of the Parliament of Turkey to change the status of Hagia Sophia from museum to mosque as the end of secular Turkey.6

According to Elan Eshba, however, the ambitions of Turkey’s leading party have spread far and wide: it wants to become the leader of the Sunni world, like the Ottoman Empire in the past.7 This explains why Turkey pays particular attention to the religious identity of Sunni Islam, which differs from the Saudi variant in many respects. The Islamic doctrine of contemporary Turkey presumes a reunification of the Islamic world with its traditional ideological schools (religious-philosophical ideas) and classical Shari’a madhabs (legal schools), including the numerous tariqats (schools) of Sufism traditional of the Ottoman epoch. This religious bias is fully compatible with the secular electoral legislation that allows the pro-Islamic political forces to join the power struggle, an objective feature of Turkey’s ruling party that resembles the Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt’s religious party.

Wahhabism of the Saudis, though one of the trends in Sunni Islam, stands apart from all other trends and doctrines of both Sunni and Shi’a Islam; it rejects them and exists in a permanent confrontation with them. According to Gilles Kepel, it is a successful destructive force in the traditional Islamic space.8

This means that the Muslim community of Azerbaijan will become increasingly politicized; it may become small change in the complicated geopolitical games of the key Middle Eastern actors.

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4 See: E. Souleimanov, M. Ehrmann, op. cit.
6 Ibidem.
Today, however, for certain reasons (more details below) the Sunni element is gaining popularity among the population of Azerbaijan, where Turkey and Saudi Arabia are strengthening the positions to balance out Iran’s Shi’a influence. This means that in the future the Sunni element may become a core of political Islam in Azerbaijan and across the Caucasus and a trigger of a new Shi’a-Sunni confrontation.

Islamization and Growth of Political Islam

The great actors of the Islamic world, however, could have found it much harder to realize their influence in Azerbaijan without the growing religious consciousness in the newly independent state. Several of the expected reasons of Islamization of the post-Communist society of Azerbaijan deserve closer scrutiny.

Reasons of Islamization in Domestic Processes Unfolding in Azerbaijan

Reason #1. We have already written that the revived traditional values raised an interest in religion. This also happened in all post-Soviet Central Asian countries where national revival was unthinkable without some sort of an appeal to the region’s religious norms.

The Moscow-imposed Communist ideology and the anti-clerical values formulated by local intellectuals pushed Islam far behind the feelings that appealed to nationalism. This is why even though the Soviet Union’s disintegration did not provoke a surge of political Islam in Azerbaijan, it left an ideological vacuum to be filled with religious ideas. In these conditions, the number of those interested in religion increased among non-those practitioners who treated it as important heritage. Up until the 20th century, all those who lived in Azerbaijani territory considered themselves Muslims rather than Azeris or Turks. Today, this fact obviously dominates the quest for real national and religious identities.⁹

By the end of the 1990s, the effect of the freedom of religion became obvious in the country, which had become independent in 1991. On 18 August, 1992, the parliament passed the Law on the Freedom of Worship, which permitted religious rituals; it was probably the weightiest reason for increasing religiosity at the initial stage of Azerbaijan’s independence. People started attending mosques and became interested in religious education, seen as a return to their traditions. Svante Cornell wrote in 2006 in his Politicization of Islam in Azerbaijan that “Azerbaijani society is simply returning to a normal level of religiosity as compared with the unnatural condition during Soviet rule, developing into a secular country with a significant number of believers, comparable to the United States or Turkey.”¹⁰ In the first years of independence, the state machine did not interfere in the quest for national identity, in which religion was gradually moved to the fore.

Similar processes were unfolding across the post-Soviet space. On the one hand, countries were shedding off the ideological fetters of Communist Russia, an indispensable condition for acquiring national identity. On the other, they found themselves at a crossroads: the choice of the optimal ideological route based on the history for the sake of the future proved to be a difficult one. In Azerbaijan it took the form of a question: What does it mean to be an Azeri: a Muslim, an ethnic Turk or a cultured Soviet person? The choice between Sunni and Shi’a heritage made the choice even harder: this allowed for the interference of Iran and Turkey, two states equally important for Azerbaijan.

Ethnically, socially and linguistically Azerbaijan looked at secular Turkey and, in fact, copied its ways. Historically, religiously and due to a big ethnic Azeri population in Iran, Baku was closely connected with Tehran, which rejected secularism and insisted on the idea of a theocratic state. An absolute majority of the Azeris rejected and still reject this form of statehood. At the same time, the theocratic state in Iran did somewhat affect the quest for national identity in Azerbaijan, mostly in its southern regions, where people were traditionally pro-Shi’a and sympathized with Iran.

This means that the quest for national identity, freedom of worship and reestablishment of traditional values played the leading role in the currently growing religiosity in Azerbaijan. The second, and just as important, reason is the Islamization of the younger generations proceeding against the background of the protracted conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Having begun as ethnic clashes in 1988-1991, continued as a full-scale Karabakh War of 1992-1994 and ended with Armenian occupation of certain parts of the territory of Azerbaijan, it caused a lot of disappointment in Azeri society and invigorated the quest for post-Soviet national identity.

Lack of a feasible peaceful solution and the failed peace negotiations between the Armenian and Azeri presidents in Paris in 2006 intensified disappointment and skepticism among common people. Neither the Madrid Principles of the Minsk Group of OSCE of 2007, nor the 2008 Declaration on Nagorno-Karabakh signed by the presidents of Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, nor the 2011 and 2016 meetings of the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan initiated by the president of Russia to finally settle the problem produced any results. Four resolutions of the U.N. SC, a huge number of declarations and a resolution passed by the U.N. GA, OSCE, OIC and other big international organizations that condemned Armenian occupation of part of the Azeri territory and demanded immediate withdrawal of Armenian forces to restore territorial integrity of Azerbaijan remained on paper: the international community had no instruments to put pressure on Armenia.

For over twenty years now Baku has been trying, in vain, to improve the situation through talks, which added new failures to the old ones and raised another wave of public disappointment. The hopes of a peaceful settlement were shrinking by the day, while the resolve of those who stood for a radical solution was rising. Predictably, the new generation that entered the stage in the last 20-odd years is more keenly aware of the national and religious specifics of the much stronger independent state than their parents. Armed clashes became more frequent and more vehement. The large-scale skirmishes in Nagorno-Karabakh of 2 April, 2016 revealed the exhaustion of patience. On 12 June, 2020, the armed conflict at Tavush led to a full-scale Karabakh War of 2020. The fighting that began in September and ended in November allowed Azerbaijan to reestablish its control over seven regions and occupy Shusha, a city of strategic importance. Baku established control over the Azeri-Iranian

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border. Under the peace agreement, Armenia returned control over three more districts to Azerbaijan (with the exception of the 5 km-wide Lachin Corridor controlled by Russian peacemakers).14

The Karabakh conflict per se cannot be identified as a trigger of intensified Islamization or political Islam, or a reason for jihadist groups of Islamic fighters multiplying in Azerbaijan. At no time was religion pushed to the fore in this conflict, despite Tehran’s attempt to promote religious radicalism among forced migrants who had left the occupied territories after the First Karabakh War. The conflict did not lead to a sudden growth of Islamic radicalism among the younger generation in the 1990s and 2000s. It did stir up a lot of deep disappointment and humiliation during the years of occupation. Later, skillfully used by Islamic radicals, these feelings led to religious protests. The Karabakh War, therefore, contributed, albeit indirectly, to consolidation of Sunni and Shi’a movements in Azerbaijan.

**Islamization: External Factors**

The first factor comprised the processes that unfolded across the Russian entities of the Northern Caucasus: self-identification of Ichkeria under Djokhar Dudaev when the Soviet Union fell apart; the related events of the 1990s that led to two Chechen wars and the predictable growth of ethnic self-identification and Islamic radicalism of Wahhabi ideology in neighboring Dagestan and Ingushetia influenced, to an extent, Islamization of the northern regions of Azerbaijan.

Early in the 1990s, the Salafi ideology was not very popular in Azerbaijan, even if the younger generation sympathized with Chechen jihadists. Their popularity increased when they joined the Karabakh War on the side of Azerbaijan. Involvement of Chechen Shamil Basaev, a widely known field commander, and Afghan mujahidin is no secret.15 In Azerbaijan, the younger generation wholeheartedly approved the fight against the “infidels.”

Salafis intensified their ideological expansion in Azerbaijan after the second Chechen war. The Russian troops tried to force Chechen militants out of the Northern Caucasus to Georgia and Azerbaijan. According to Galib Bashirov, this was synchronized with the missionary efforts of the Gulf countries.16

These favorable conditions led to the export of Salafism from Saudi Arabia as the second external factor of Islamization of Azerbaijan. Introduced from Arabic countries (Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in particular), Salafism was stimulated in the form of beneficiary Islamic funds. According to Shireen Hunter, Saudi Arabia was spreading Wahhabism in the Caucasus to achieve immunity against the Shi’a doctrine of Khomeinism within the “cold war” unfolding in the region between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran and unite countries to contain Iran’s influence in the Southern Caucasus.17

Missionaries raised the first wave of Salafism in Azerbaijan as soon as the Soviet Union had fallen apart. In the 1990s, they came mainly from Chechnia and Dagestan, were supported by Sunni Muslims mainly of Dagestani ethnicities (Avars, Lezgins, Tsukhurs, Rutuls) in the northern regions

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bordering on Daghestan. Later, missionaries funded from abroad played an important role in encouraging the growth of Salafism in Azerbaijan, which acquired a new lease on life when highly successful preaching began at the Mosque Abu Bakr built in Baku in 1997. Its administration extended all kinds of social assistance to its consistent followers; this attracted many relatively young believers wishing to learn more about their faith and to learn Arabic to be able to continue education in the Gulf countries. Missionary activities, the funds and success of the mosque in social networks increased Salafis’ ideological and material support.

Brought to Azerbaijan from abroad, Salafism was spreading and radicalizing in the younger generation as an absolutely local phenomenon. In the country that was looking for its religious identity, Salafi Islam became a symbol of sorts of local religious resurrection in some of the northern regions of Azerbaijan. The Azeri youth learned to view Salafism as an ideological alternative to the state regime, the ideological banner of the political opposition, and this also contributed to an increase in the number of adherents of the Sunni branch of Islam. In the late 2000s, the state amended the laws related to religion and faiths to limit the rights of believers; today it is moving in the same direction. The protest sentiments among the younger generations are increasing together with radicalization of both Sunnis and Shi’a.

The successful export of Salafi ideology from the Gulf countries became possible because Iran and Turkey, two main rivals for domination in the Southern Caucasus, could not act promptly due to certain misunderstandings with the Aliev family.

The Turkish influence as the third factor of Islamization. Turkey could not act fast in Azerbaijan, which allowed Saudi Arabia to promote its Salafi doctrine. In the 1990s, the Kurdish issue and the origins of the clan of the Azeri ruling elites were the main stumbling blocks. Heydar Aliev’s family originated from a mountainous region of Nakhchivan that borders on Armenia and belonged to the clans that had migrated from Erevan. Due to geographic location and history it had good relations with the Armenian elite, the Russian Empire and Persian monarchs and belonged to the Shi’a trend of Islam. Alexander Murinson has pointed out that many among the Turkish Kemalist politicians, including Prime Minister Tansu Çiller, did not trust Heydar Aliev. They negatively perceived the seize of power in Azerbaijan by a Nakhchivan clan and were convinced that in the future Turkey’s relationship with Azerbaijan would not go in the desired direction. In 1995, the right-wing Turkish forces extended considerable support to the opposition in Azerbaijan that tried to remove Heydar Aliev. This strongly aggravated the relationship between the two countries.

They pursued different Kurdish policies: while the Turkish government continued fighting Kurdish separatists, Baku supported them. In fact, the relationship between Azeris and Kurds remained close at all stages: in the 1920s, Kurds had their Red Kurdistan autonomy in Nagorno-Karabakh; during the Karabakh War of 1992-1994 Kurds were one of the strongest forces that fought the Armenian occupation. During the hardest years in the history of Azerbaijan, when it was learning to be an independent state, influential Kurdish business elites that lived in Turkey consistently supported Baku with money and investments.

Official Turkey was not overjoyed; certain Turkish politicians accused Heydar Aliev of contacts with the leaders of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, registered as a terrorist organization in Turkey and in many European countries.

19 Ibidem.
22 Ibid., pp. 124-126.
23 Ibid., pp. 127-128.
The new era of bilateral relations between Baku and Ankara began in 2002 when the Justice and Development Party came to power in Turkey. The new people at the helm started from scratch. The new foreign policy inspired and organized by Ahmet Davutoğlu and his “zero problems with neighbors” policy proved amazingly successful. Turkey revived and consolidated its relationship with Azerbaijan and even started a dialog with Armenia. Today, the current Turkish government that represents the forces of political Islam has acquired a powerful and loyal lobby in Azerbaijan, a result of huge investments into the economy of Turkey’s “Caucasian brother,” consistent support through cultural centers, educational establishments, traditional Sunni Islam, skillful and subtle propaganda of the Ottoman traditions and encouraging integration processes unfolding among Turkic peoples. Having reset their relationship when Recep Tayyip Erdoğan came to power in Ankara, the two countries are developing according to the “two states-one nation” formula. Turkey’s contribution to the victory of Azerbaijan in the Karabakh War of 2020 cannot be underestimated.24 On 10 December, 2020, Erdoğan was present at the victory parade in Baku.

Today, Turkish influence and presence in the Southern Caucasus are big enough to suggest that sooner or later Azerbaijan will become part of the Republic of Turkey.25

The role of the Turkish Sufi schools of Islam that operate on a non-governmental basis in the Sunni community of Azerbaijan is unquestionably big. They represent the Nur (adepts of the teaching of Said Nursi) and Gülen (followers of Fethullah Gülen) movements.26 The missionaries are mostly active in education: there are Turkish lyceums, universities and funds which give Azeri youth a chance to continue their education in Turkey. In was in the 1990s, against the background of a fairly bad relationship between the two countries, when adepts and employees of these two movements shouldered the task of promoting the Turkic variant of Sunni Islam in Azerbaijan.

Iranian influence as the fourth external factor. From the very first days of Azerbaijan’s independence and later, throughout the 2000s, Iran was actively supporting the Shi’a population and clergy, by relying on certain elements of soft power, and radical Shi’a groups as an instrument of impact on secular Azerbaijan, which at that time tried to present itself as a supporter of liberal values, to influence its internal and external policies.

The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran positively responded to the independence of Azerbaijan as a chance to promote its religious ideology in the newly independent state. In 1992, the Popular Front that came to power in Azerbaijan with the mounting nationalist rhetoric of the Abulfaz Elchibey government stirred up a lot of concerns in Iran with its huge (approximately 25 million) ethnic Azeri diaspora. In fact, Azeris are the second largest nationality in Iran after ethnic Iranians/Persians. Tehran has all reasons to interpret the influence of pan-Turkism in Azerbaijan as a potential threat to its national security and territorial integrity.27 This explains the fairly strained and complicated relations between them in the 1990s.

Iran selected Azerbaijan’s southern, more conservative, regions that border on Iran and where Shi’a Islam traditionally predominates as a field of its religious activities. Shi’a clerics paid special attention to the refugees who fled Azerbaijan in great numbers after the Karabakh War of 1992-1994.28 In the early 2000s, when Baku tightened its religious policy towards missionaries, Iranian mullahs learned to use Azeri Shi’a preachers who sympathized with Iran and Azeri students who

26 See: S.E. Cornell, op. cit., pp. 49-52.
28 Ibidem.
studied in Qom. Iran was pursuing a clear aim of endowing the population of Azerbaijan with a Shi’a religious identity.

In the 1990s, Khomeini followers tried to create a Shi’a political Islam core in Azerbaijan by funding, among others, the (later banned) Islamic Party of Azerbaijan and supporting certain radical Shi’a groups, including Jeysullah and Hezbollah. Tehran skillfully used religious education facilities—madrassah, seminars and higher educational establishments—to promote its ideology; it funded the religious education of Azeri students in Iran and allotted them places at higher religious educational establishments.

There are so-called cultural bureaus in Iran, which pursue foreign policy in the name of supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei and are unrelated to the official diplomatic channels. They promote Shi’a in Azerbaijan, fund cultural events and support local clergy. This means that Iranian influence as soft power was incredibly strong in certain Azerbaijani districts and provinces; potentially it can be used to put political pressure on Baku.

It should be said that Nakhchivan, an autonomous district of Azerbaijan, depends to a great extent on Iran. Geographically removed from the center of Azerbaijan, it is squeezed between Armenia and Iran, which has led Paul Goble, a well-known analyst of the Caucasian region to a conclusion that Nakhchivan’s energy and water dependence on Iran makes Azerbaijan geopolitically highly vulnerable and dependent on the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Conclusions and Forecasts

Islamization of Azerbaijan stirred up by the quest for national identity is highly important, yet it is an element of state construction and politicization of religious feelings set by much larger-scale processes unfolding outside the efforts of nation-building. Politicization of Islam is closely connected with the influence of religious movements extended from abroad. The influence of political Islamic movements and soft power instruments of Turkey, Iran and the Gulf monarchies is especially obvious. Azerbaijan’s geographic location and the general globalization processes are partly responsible for their bitter rivalry for the influence in the Southern Caucasus.

- First, Azerbaijan practically shares a common information space with its neighbors. While the Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) live under strong influence of Russia’s media, Azerbaijan is functioning in the information space of Turkey and Iran, thus it is not surprising that its population assesses information as interpreted by foreign media.

- Second, the gradually increasing number of religious figures in Azerbaijan are trained abroad—in Arab countries, Iran and Turkey.

- Third, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and certain foreign Islamic movements spare no money and efforts to spread the influence of political Islam in Azerbaijan exporting the idea of Shi’a revolution preached by Khomeini or the political ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood.

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30 See: T. Świętochowski, op. cit.,
32 Ibidem.
Fourth, Azerbaijan has kindled a lot of interest amid international jihadist Islamic groups both Shi'a (Jeyshullah and Hezbollah) and Sunni (ISIS, Al-Qa'eda) which try to impose their religious agenda on the younger generations of Azerbaijani.

Fifth, geographically Azerbaijan’s is a strategically important location. China is interested in the transit potential of the Southern Caucasus within the Belt and Road initiative. The United States, as China’s opponent in the unfolding “cold war,” is doing its best to destabilize this logistic hub in order to lower the level of China’s influence in the region.

The Russian Federation is irritated by the strategically important oil and gas pipelines (Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan being one of them) that traverse Azerbaijan. As an alternative route of oil and gas for Turkey and the EU countries it contradicts Russia’s foreign policy interests in the EU and interferes with its attempts to put pressure on the European countries through hydrocarbon supplies. For the reasons of its own, Moscow tries to destabilize the region through Shi’a vs. Sunni and Armenia vs. Azerbaijan confrontations to justify its military presence in the region achieved after the Karabakh War of 2020 and consolidate it.

It is absolutely clear that radical and political Islam in Azerbaijan is developing under the influence of Iran and Turkey, the main sources of political Islam in the Southern Caucasus.

At the same time, the years of tension (early 1990s-mid-2000s) between Azerbaijan and Turkey and between Iran and Azerbaijan left their mark in the form of stronger positions of the Gulf monarchies in the religious sphere and of Salafism as a form of radical Sunnism. In the future, moderate Salafis may agree to join the core of pro-Turkish political Islam as a compromise of sorts. This will expand the already increasing pool of the Sunni wing in Azerbaijan’s legal field. This is happening due to the ideological impact of the pro-Turkish segment of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Stronger positions and politicization of the Sunni minority will, in the course of time, irritate the Shi’a part of the elite and common people. Ready to defend any traditionally Shi’a positions throughout the world (which it has already demonstrated in the Middle East), Iran will increase its activities in the Southern Caucasus.

The growing Shi’a-Sunni enmity in Azerbaijan means that a possibility of Shi’a-Sunni conflicts in the Middle East should be taken into account. The civil war in Syria and clashes in Iraq may strongly affect Azerbaijan. In fact, its younger generations pay particular attention to the war between the Sunni opposition and the government Alawi and Iranian Shi’a proxy sector in Syria. In the future, the dynamics of the civil war between Shi’a and Sunnis may complicate the religious situation in Azerbaijan, which is still searching for its national and religious identity.

We should bear in mind that the civil war in Syria is rooted in the so-called Arab Spring of 2011. The revolutions or, rather, the regime changes in several Arab countries launched to replace the old dictatorial regimes echoed fairly loudly in the Middle East. The concerned Azerbaijani elite demonstrated a lot of caution when talking about the events unfolding in the region. Democratic and radical religious groups were equally optimistic: the riots in the Arab world were targeted at authoritarian regimes similar to those that had struck root in the post-Soviet Caucasian and Central Asian states.

When political Sunni Islam came to power in Egypt and Tunisia in the form of obviously religious parties, the Sunni sector was inspired: revolutions became a call to regime changes in other Islamic countries.

After a couple of years of the civil war in Syria the conflict, with the help of the Iranian proxy and Gulf monarchies, was gradually transformed into a Shi’a-Sunni confrontation, which could not but worry the Shi’ites of Azerbaijan. They became even more worried when moderate Sunnis of

political Islam and radical Sunni Salafis represented by terrorist organizations started building up their influence in the Middle East.35

This immediately stirred up uncompromising discussions among the faithful across the Caucasus, Azerbaijan being no exception. Recruited through Caucasian radical groups and social networks, Sunnis from Azerbaijan, the Northern Caucasus and Central Asia joined the religious war in Syria in great numbers in response to the calls of jihadist terrorist organizations.36

According to available information, dozens of Azeri jihadists perished in Syria where they fought the Assad regime alongside Sunni rebels. Several hundreds of them are still fighting there.37

There is information that a certain number of Azeri Shi’ites, trained and organized in Iran, were moved to Syria through a network of the Iranian Hezbollah fighters.38

Azeri Shi’ites consider the struggle against Sunni Salafis who fight on the side of ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra their religious duty. In fact, Sunnis, as much as Shi’ites, are guilty of mass murders and genocide of Syria’s civilian population.

So far, the Sunni-Shi’a relations in Azerbaijan are generally restrained. It remains to be seen what will happen when those who fought in Syria come back. Defeated by the coalition forces, ISIS is losing considerable territories and influence in Iraq and Syria. Today, its fighters are scattering across Central Asia, Afghanistan, Turkey, the Caucasus, including Azerbaijan. In 2015, ISIS announced for the first time that it put together its group in Azerbaijan.39

If this happens, and in view of the current strengthening of political Sunni Islam, further radicalization of Salafism and of Shi’a as a response to the predictably growing displeasure, the Southern Caucasus will find itself in a red zone of the Shi’a-Sunni confrontation. It may become a geopolitical center of global interests and processes that could destabilize the Caucasus as a whole with catastrophic effects.

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38 Ibidem.
ISLAMIC REVIVAL IN KAZAKHSTAN:
STATE POLICY

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Ruslan SARSEMBAYEV
Ph.D. Student, al-Farabi Kazakh National University (Almaty, Kazakhstan)

Nurken AITYMBETOV
Ph.D., Senior Lecturer, Department of Political Science and Political Technologies, al-Farabi Kazakh National University (Almaty, Kazakhstan)

Seraly TLEUBAYEV
Ph.D., Professor, M. Auezov South Kazakhstan University (Shymkent, Kazakhstan)

Zhanat ALDIYAROVA
Ph.D. Student, Egyptian University of Islamic Culture Nur-Mubarak (Almaty, Kazakhstan)

ABSTRACT

It is widely known that Islamic revival is behind numerous national security threats, religious tension and political challenges. This is confirmed by the fact that practically all terrorist acts are committed by extremist and terrorist groups, which reproduce and execute specific projects of Islamic revival, the Islamic Caliphate being one of the pertinent examples. Fully aware of the threats rooted in the radical and extremist ideas of Islamic revival, the state has no choice but an active and determined opposition. In the 2005-2020, Kazakhstan adopted several normative legal program documents and took certain organizational measures to improve the regulation of the religious situation in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Many of these laws and organizational measures, however, stirred up heated discussions: the opposition insisted that the state should secularize the society, securitize Islam, etc. Much has been said about the efficiency of opposition to radical and extremist models of Islamic revival. Together, this creates a varied and even contradictory background for the state policy related to Islamic revival and calls for closer attention to the situation unfolding among the Muslims of Kazakhstan.

We are already in the third decade of the 21st century, an important stage at which the religious and political environment cre-
ated by Islamic revival and the relations between the state and confessions should be assessed. In this article, we analyze the state policy in the context of Islamic revival and offer its conceptual analysis as a multifaceted phenomenon. A modernist trend, which often prevails, is developing along with the fundamentalist trend within the framework of the Islamic revival. Accordingly, the authors argue that state policy is not directed against the Islamic revival as such and does not aim for the securitization of Islam or the secularization of society; on the contrary, it seeks to preserve the historically formed recontextualized Islam, which is rooted in the fundamentals of Islam and is simultaneously consistent with modernization and national heritage.

In the concluding part of the article the authors touch upon a scholarly discussion of whether state policy of opposing the extremist Islamic revival models is efficient and to which extent. Our discussion and conclusions are supported by sociological data on the religious situation in the Muslim community, obtained through comparison of the religiosity level and the extent of people’s respect for the country’s authorities.

**KEYWORDS:** contextualization of Islam, religious situation, Islam in Kazakhstan, politicization of Islam, securitization of Islam.

**Introduction**

Disintegration of the Soviet Union that ended the Cold War shifted the world to a new paradigm of political relations, where religious identity acquired political dimensions and was exacerbated by globalization. The Internet and the global economic systems diversified and widened the channels for religious value propagation. In the political space, the states acquired new neighbors and transnational organizations that actively promote state or quasi-state interests through virtual or real social networks. The concept of security has become multidimensional and, therefore, much more complicated.1 Samuel Huntington, in turn, was convinced that “in the modern world, religion is a central, perhaps the central force that motivates and mobilizes people.”2 Bryan Turner has written that religion is gradually moving to the fore in the process of formulating political ideologies and political identities.3 In the same way, religion has climbed high on the political agenda.

While the state has its own governance experience, religion also has its own historical experience that warrants social management. Many organizations have predictably relied on religion in pursuit of political aims, as widely used in the Muslim countries. As a consolidating ideology, Islam contributed to the rise of certain political figures or organizations to power, Iran being one of the best examples. It inspired the Islamic world and promoted the idea of Islamic revival. Different organizations, i.e., the Muslim Brotherhood, Al-Qaeda, Hizb ut-Tahrir, etc., promoted their radical or modernist ideas as the best models of Islamic revival. This stirred up competition or even fierce opposition between those who supported the contextualization and purification of Islam. Prof. Abdulkader Tayob has the following to say on the issue: “The return to a point of origin, a new beginning, promises

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unity of purpose and vision, but has in practice led to greater complexity, disunity and conflict... The return to origins in revival movements has taken on many different forms in the last two to three hundred years. Focusing only on the major trends and tendencies, the turn to the origins of Islam created anti-Sufi movements, new Sufi Movements, modernisms, religious ideologies and individualized religious paths. The search for revival, it seems, has no end-point and will probably generate more variety and complexity in the future."

On the whole, the ideas of Islamic revival driven by migration, globalization and digitalization reached different sociocultural spaces, where Muslims remained divided into two main groups. Turner has pointed out that the struggle between those who support “pure global Islam” and “local traditional Islam” became an everyday phenomenon. This is what is going on in Kazakhstan, which has acquired all sorts of radical and modernist organizations that are actively promoting their Islamic revival models. In 2011, the state was confronted by several extremist and terrorist religious organizations of the Soldiers of the Caliphate type, who tried to realize their ideas through terrorist acts in Kazakhstan.

This means that Islamic revival requires a careful study of the Kazakhstani sociocultural and political space. Here we attempt to identify the current state of Islamic revival and interpret the response of the state.

Conceptual Analysis of Islamic Revival

Islamic scholars interpret Islamic revival as a phenomenon in its own right which, contrary to the earlier predictions, is spreading through the Muslim world. Reza Aslan, Tariq Ramadan, Ziauddin Sardar, Hamza Yusuf and hundreds of their colleagues all over the world have made Islamic revival the center of their scholarly studies. Prof. Tayob, for example, states that revival presupposes the dialectics of three different approaches: return to origins, deconstructivism and contextualism which, however, do not exhaust its meanings. Revival points rather to crisis, to resolution and repeated crisis. Syed Farid Alatas has proposed a very interesting idea: he interprets the trends around the unfolding Muslim revival as a call to Protestant-type reformation in the Muslim world. Muslim scholars are generally convinced that Islamic revival improves the Muslim countries through reforms. Osman Bakar believes that reforms are inevitable: they will open new horizons for the religious community. Those who share this opinion do not demand any changes in the sources or the basic religious principles. Balandas Ghoshal, however, recommends a careful approach; he is convinced that Arabization does not lead to the needed revival.

Islamic revival as a subject of scholarly studies is not limited to the Muslim world; it is the subject of an active academic discussion all over the world. In the post-Cold War period and, to an

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8 See: A. Tayob op. cit.
even greater extent, after the Bosnian War, this phenomenon attracted a lot of interest in the West. Numerous related subjects were discussed in connection with revived religiosity in the secular society; its interaction with secular culture and inter-religious dialogs and conflicts. In the West this concept is largely explained through the clash of civilizations (S. Huntington), desecularization (P. Berger), multi-cultural dialog (J. Habermas) and post-secular society (B. Turner).

Bryan Turner associates the phenomenon of Islamic revival with an attempt to reconfirm Islamic identity in a society under the pressure of urban secularism.

Samuel Huntington provided a systemic description of Islamic revival: an attempt of the Muslim community to find its own path to modernization, but not to Westernization. “It is a broad intellectual, cultural, social, and political movement prevalent throughout the Islamic world.” Islamic fundamentalism, understood as political Islam, is a part of a multilateral process of the Islamic idea resurgence. “The Resurgence is mainstream not extremist, pervasive not isolated.”

Generally, Huntington did not separate Islamic revival and modernism, yet opposed it to Westernization, which makes modernist Islam and radical Islam two Islamic revival projects.

Ermin Sinanović, likewise, points at the plurality of projects within Islamic revival as a phenomenon intertwined with modernism, on the one hand, and a development program, on the other. Very much like democracy, it is not a one-sided anti-modernist radical phenomenon attached to a certain tradition; both have many variants.

The doctrines of Islamic revival reflect differing ideas about the ways and prospects of Islam in the modern world. Today, there are two main types of Islamic revival: “modernist Islam,” on the one hand, and “radical Islam,” on the other. All other models are variants of these two types in the same way that different models of conceptualized Islam are but varieties of Islamic revival.

### Islamic Revival in the Post-Soviet Political and Sociocultural Processes in Kazakhstan

According to Erkin Baydarov, Elena Burova, and Anatoli Kosichenko, the history of state-confessional relations consists of three main periods: 1992-2005, 2005-2011 and 2011 to present time.

- The first period can be described as liberal;
- the second, the beginning of state regulation of the sphere of religion,
- while the third began in 2011 when the Law on Religious Activity and Religious Associations was adopted.

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13 See: S. Huntington, op. cit.
19 Ibidem.
An analysis of the history of political and sociocultural life in Kazakhstan revealed that these stages affected the process of Islamic revival in Kazakhstan.

- The first was associated with Islamic recontextualization;
- the second, with institutionalization of different models of Islamic revival;
- the third, with an active state policy designed to preserve recontextualized Islam and oppose all radical and extremist models of Islamic revival in Kazakhstan.

Islamic Revival and Recontextualization of Islam

According to Alma Sultangalieva,23 Raushan Mustafina,24 Shirin Akiner,25 and Saule Isabaeva,26 in the early 1990s, Islamic revival and the revival of ethnic culture and national identity were closely connected. State sovereignty promoted self-identification; post-colonialism revived national values in people’s minds. These authors have pointed out that at that time Islam was perceived by the autochthonous population as a part of their cultural heritage, a symbol of cultural revival and an element of an emerging national identity. Saodat Olimova has pointed out that this Islamic revival trend in the ethnically and culturally isolated nation became possible because “Islam existed as a way of life and as an identification of the indigenous population of Central Asia” during the Soviet period. In other words, she insists that this was a school “characterized by being moderate and deliberately separated from political power.” 27 It was this Islam that re-emerged in the region in the post-Soviet period. Sultan Akimbekov has arrived at a similar conclusion: Islamic revival is a product of civilizational coexistence between Islam and the Soviet ideology.28 Zaur Djalilov, in turn, has summed up Islamic revival in the early period of Independence: “As distinct from traditional Islamic societies in which Islamic revival described restoration of values of the earliest Muslim community, in Kazakhstan everything was done to revive the values of ‘people’s Islam’ connected with national traditions and customs.”29 The concept of “people’s Islam” invariably attracts attention as highly logical. It points to the presence of Islam in everyday life; on the other hand, it pushes aside the change of political principles of the time, which made Islam part of the democratic system and prompted the adoption of the Law of 1992 On the Freedom of Religion and Religious Associations. Islam re-orientated its loyalty from atheism to the secular principle, which explained its active recontextualization of the early 1990s: religion was reviving not only along with local traditions, but also with secular policy and democratic modernist values.

According to many experts, the demand for Islam was revived on both ethno-cultural and social foundations. Elena Burova, Kadyrjan Smagulov, and Anastasia Reshetnyak treated Islamic revival as a result of social vulnerability and the lost trust in the state.

**Institutionalization of the Islamic Revival Models**

The spiritual, moral, social, ethnic and traditional connotations of Islam contributed to its organization and institutionalization (see Table 1).

### Table 1

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<td>Islamic associations</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>729</td>
<td>826</td>
<td>922</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>1,172</td>
<td>1,295</td>
<td>1,373</td>
<td>1,648</td>
<td>2,144</td>
<td>2,337</td>
<td>2,811</td>
<td>2,229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious associations of all confessions</td>
<td>642</td>
<td>1,004</td>
<td>1,373</td>
<td>1,537</td>
<td>1,932</td>
<td>2,618</td>
<td>2,750</td>
<td>2,844</td>
<td>3,783</td>
<td>4,200</td>
<td>4,551</td>
<td>4,584</td>
<td>3,738</td>
<td>3,818</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the years of Independence, the country acquired 2,610 new mosques; a 39-fold increase from the 1991 figure of 68 mosques to the 2020 (3rd quarter) figure of 2,678 mosques (see Table 2).
Organizational institutionalization of Islam followed two trends: on the one hand, the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan (DUMK) consolidated traditional Islam based on the Hanafi maddhab; on the other, the number of non-traditional Islamic organizations established with foreign influence was steadily growing. In the latter half of the 1990s we became aware of active foreign influence, which has not disappeared. Dina Vilkovsky has pointed out that practically all big mosques and spiritual organizations appeared thanks to huge financial support of Muslim countries.35 Pilgrimage and education in Muslim countries were, likewise, generously encouraged. Some of the recipients became representatives of all sorts of Muslim religious movements and began actively promoting their ideas. According to Elena Burova, newcomers were mainly interested in social support.36 Nao Taker, an expert from Central Asia, has offered a very interesting opinion: people grew more religious when entangled in economic problems or exposed to foreign influence.37 These two factors strongly affected the Central Asian societies, where Islamic revival became a pluralistic phenomenon.

Foreign influence brought a wide variety of Islamic movements of radical and modernist types to Kazakhstan: Hizb ut-Tahrir, Tablighi Jamaat, Jihad, Salafiyya, Ismatullah Mahsum, Suleymenshi, Hazrat Ibrahim, Nurcular, The Soldiers of the Caliphate, Traikatiyshlar, etc, which competed with the DUMK for the hearts and minds of local Muslims. This meant that Islam returned to its context of harmonic coexistence with tradition and the secular state was confronted by different models of Islamic revival, which pushed aside traditions and the idea of a secular state.

Many experts have pointed out that Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 15 January, 1992, On the Freedom of Religion and Religious Associations as the main source of religious pluralism strongly affected Islamic revival represented by a fairly large number of Islamic associations and mosques. Elena Burova, Dina Vilkovsky, Oksana Shakhnovskaya, Zaur Djalilov and others pointed at the liberal nature of the old law. Konstantin Sokolovsky quoted Serikjan Ismailov as saying: “At the same time, in the early 2000s the liberal nature of the laws deprived the corresponding state structures of all means of legal control over destructive cults.”38 Olga Shakhnovskaya offered her own weighty arguments related to the highly liberal law of 1992, which offered no legal instruments: in the 1990s and 2000s missionary activities were not regulated, at least efficiently regulated, in Kazakhstan.39

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36 See: E. Burova, op. cit.
State Policy of Opposition to the Radical and Extremist Models of Islamic Revival

Certain events related to Islamic revival in Kazakhstan stirred up a lot of concerns in the corridors of power in general, and the DUMK in particular. In fact, the plurality of the Islamic revival models threatened the country’s security; the war in Afghanistan added tension to the already problematic situation. Between 2005 and 2010, courts of different instances banned 17 terrorist and extremist organizations in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Practically all of them promoted the ideas of Islamic revival.

The 2010s turned out to be a very special period: the state acquired sufficient determination to take legal and organizational measures against the radical and extremist models of Islamic revival. According to our analysis, the state realized its intention through several basic trends.

- First, it consolidated the institutional foundations of recontextualized Islam; the DUMK was transformed into a centralized hierarchy that relied on the Hanafi maddhab. The state and the DUMK fortified their cooperation on many social and cultural issues; the state clarified the main point: recontextualized Islam was highly important for Kazakhstan, and any attempt at changing it is a serious threat to the spiritual ecosystem and, therefore, the harmony of the traditional, civic and humanitarian values of Kazakhstan society.

- Second, legal regulation of the religious sphere was readjusted to limit the possible propagation of extremist and radical Islamic revival models. The Law of 2011 On Religious Activities and Religious Associations, much stricter and much more extensive than its predecessor, was the main product of the new political trend. It limited, to a great extent, propaganda and distribution of religious literature. As distinct from the old law, the new one is much more specific in this respect.

- Third, the state promoted its secular principles by adopting the Concept of State Policy in the Religious Sphere for 2017-2020, which said the following: “The attempts to undermine the principles and pillars of a secular state, civic identity by ideologists of religious extremism are fraught with a mounting conflict potential, an increase of the number of followers of radical religious teachings, including those who plan to join the ranks of international terrorist organizations.” This means that the secular principles of the state suppressed, to an extent, inter-confessional conflicts and created immunity to extremist and radical models of Islamic revival.

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Fourth, the state was determined to oppose extremist and radical models of Islamic revival through the state program of opposition to religious extremism and terrorism in the Republic of Kazakhstan for the years 2013-2017. A similar program was elaborated for 2018-2022 in order to realize comprehensive and efficient measures of opposition to religious extremism and terrorism. This was also done to prevent the emergence of extremist and radical versions of Islamic revival.43

Fifth, consolidation of national identity through the Ruhani Zhangyru program based on the article of First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev “The Course Towards Future: Modernization of Public Consciousness” and realized on a grand scale in all educational establishments and state organizations of Kazakhstan. Put in a nutshell, it aimed for the revival of spiritual and national values of the peoples of Kazakhstan with due account for the risks and challenges of the day.44

On the whole, the state was determined to consolidate the foundations of recontextualized Islamic revival model by paying more attention to the spirituality of Hanafi maddhab, national identity, the secularity level and the struggle against radical movements. This policy has found its place in the speech of President Nazarbayev, in which he revealed Kazakhstan’s initiative to show the world that “Islam, progress and democracy are compatible.” As Zarema Shaukenova has pointed out: “In Kazakhstan a very special model of dialectical consciousness is realized: society tends to unity and increase rather than to division and deprivation.”45 Recontextualized Islam is a product of the unique Kazakhstan model.

Assessment of State Policies of Opposition to the Extremist and Radical Models of Islamic Revival

Experts cannot agree whether the measures taken by the state to oppose the radical and extremist models of Islamic revival should be assessed as positive or not. Ivan Tarasevich was dissatisfied with the new law; he insisted that it created a collision of sorts. On the one hand, the traditional religions found themselves in a less comfortable situation, on the other, the law does not protect the country’s population from extremist movements such as Hizb ut-Tahrir al Islami. The much stricter registration rules are absolutely useless: unlike the legal religious associations, extremist movements practically never register themselves and operate clandestinely. The new law, which intensified the secularization process, also increased the confrontation between the state and the radical Islamic movements. This trend may consolidate radical movements and their followers.46

Maria Omelicheva, who described the toughening of the registration rules as securitization of Islam, has arrived at identical conclusions. Repressive measures and the efforts to squeeze religions into the fairly restrictive frames will not have a positive effect on the religious situation in Kazakhst-
Division of Islam into traditional and non-traditional, moderate and radical might split society. Through its interference in the religious sphere, the state has become an opponent of radical, foreign Islam. The efforts to keep radicalization within certain limits might stir up indignation among the conservative supporters of Islam.  

Alma Sultangalieva points out that by interfering in the religious sphere the state undermines its own stability. Kadyrjan Smagulov interpreted normative novelties as attempts to put Islam under state control. He states that radicalization of Islam begins at the lower levels and is caused primarily by social and economic vulnerability of the younger generation. Tougher measures that rely on the law and power structures when dealing with non-traditional religious associations may negatively affect the relations between the state and society: younger generations turn to all sorts of religious teachings in search of alternative ideologies. This means that the measures realized by the state exacerbate, rather than suppress disagreements.

Anastasia Reshetnyak is of a similar opinion, and points out that those who associate Islamization with radicalization are wrong. Islam is radicalized by the worsening social and economic prospects for the youth. So far, tougher legal norms have not improved the social and economic predicament of the younger generation. This makes the efficiency of these measures highly doubtful.

On the other hand, the official religious policy is approved by many state organizations and their supporters from among regular people and public institutions. Konstantin Sokolovsky, for example, has quoted the following expert opinion: “The reform of the relations between the state and confessions carried out in 2011 can be described as an overdue measure taken to bring the multitude of non-traditional religious movements into the legal field and limit the destructive impacts of some of them.”

Associates of the Institute of Philosophy, Political Science and Religious Studies of the MON RK were among the active supporters of the new law and offered their arguments. They said, in particular, that Kazakhstan’s unique model of interconfessional harmony and people’s unity should be preserved; that national unity stems from the harmonious coexistence of Islam and Orthodoxy and that by consolidating the role of traditional religions the state consolidates national unity. This is quite logical: by the efforts to draw as many people as possible into their tenets, non-traditional religions undermine interconfessional harmony. According to sociological polls carried out among youth in 2009, about 56% of the polled have met members of non-traditional religions in the streets; 16.1% said that they came to their homes; 1.7% met them in cafes. On the whole, these experts were convinced that the measures taken by the state ensured law and order in the religious sphere.

The Academy of Political Management at the Nur Otan Party has the following to say about the new law, its realization and the political measures in this context: “The measures adopted in a timely manner and realized by the state from 2011 to 2017 prevented 78 extremist terrorist acts. Since 2016, there have been no terrorist acts in Kazakhstan; from 2017 on, citizens of Kazakhstan have no longer been leaving the country for the Syrian-Iraqi zone. According to the public opinion poll, 80% of Kazakhstani citizens are firm in their rejection of destructive religious ideas.”

The sociological studies carried across the republic in three quarters of 2020 on the initiative of the Committee of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan revealed that 89% of the respondents supported the state policy, 76.9% are aware of the measures taken to prevent extremism and...
terrorism; 83% of the respondents positively assessed the situation in the religious sphere. The respondents belonged to different confessions: 70.2% of them were Muslims; 26%, Orthodox Christians (see Table 3). Out of the total number of the polled, 13% strictly followed all religious injunctions; 66% were believers who followed religious rules only during religious holidays and at religious ceremonies; 19% spoke of themselves as agnostics and unbelievers. A fairly big share (63.4%) supported the secular nature of the state; 40.6% of the polled positively spoke of religious clothing; 20.7% were indifferent; 28.3% were negative, while 10.9% remained undecided.

### Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Islam</th>
<th>Orthodoxy</th>
<th>Catholicism</th>
<th>Protestantism</th>
<th>Buddhism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>50.3</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020 (3rd quarter)</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Adapted from the data of 6-7 waves of World Values Survey (WVS) and Gaziz Telebaev’s article.

The sociological data presented above confirms the positive nature of state policy in the religious sphere; the picture, however, is a mosaic of opinions of respondents from a variety of confessions. In Islam the situation is different. Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Uyghurs, Kurds and Tatars have become considerably more religious: in 2002, religious people constituted 64.7% of the total, in 2011, 78.6%, while it has risen to 87% by 2018. In 2018, the share of Muslims among representatives of European ethnicities (Russians, Ukrainians and Belorussians) was 1.6%. On the whole, religious pluralism corresponds to ethnicities (see Table 4).

The results of sociological studies of 2011 and 2018, which sought to find out to which extent Muslims respect power showed that those of them who prayed several times a day were more loyal to the authorities than those who never prayed. For instance, in 2018, 55% of praying Muslims highly respected the authorities, 27.6% respected it to an extent. The following shares were identified among the non-praying Muslims: 41.9% of them highly respected the authorities, while 40.5% respected them to an extent. The correlation between these two categories reveals the fact that the religiosity level is not a factor of positive/negative attitude to power. We should take into account the

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55 See: G. Telebaev, op. cit.

56 See: E. Inglehart, op. cit.

57 EVS / WVS.
fact that in 2018 only 13.4% of the polled prayed several times a day, while 61.4% prayed on holidays, at religious ceremonies or never. This generally speaks of the fairly low impact level of radical Islamic movements on the Muslims’ political ideas. The fairly high share of those who completely respected authorities in 2018 is much lower than it was in 2011 (see Table 5).\textsuperscript{59} The results of a 2011 sociological survey revealed that 57.5% of the total number of Muslims fully respected power, while 4.9% respected it to an extent. The same can be said about members of other confessions.\textsuperscript{60}

### Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicities</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhs</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russians</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uyghurs</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>81.7</td>
<td>88.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbeks</td>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>97.3</td>
<td>96.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tatars</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurds</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>82.2</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainians</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belorussians</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from the data of 6-7 waves of WVS and Gaziz Telebaev’s article.

### Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Level of Respect</th>
<th>Islam</th>
<th>Orthodoxy</th>
<th>Catholicism</th>
<th>Protestantism</th>
<th>Non-Members of Any Confession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>46.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>45.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from the data of 6-7 waves of WVS.

The trend demonstrates that the number of dissatisfied Muslims was increasing for non-religious reasons. Sociological data testify that the state religious policy is efficient and its anti-extremist and anti-terrorist vectors are supported by the country’s population.

\textsuperscript{59} EVS / WVS (2020).
\textsuperscript{60} See: R.C. Inglehart, op. cit.
Conclusion

Having analyzed the situation in Kazakhstan, the authors concluded that the country is living in the process of Islamic revival and that we should not equate this process to the re-emergence of Islamic fundamentalism. This phenomenon is primarily related to the revival of modernist Islam. In Kazakhstan the share of recontextualized Islam is fairly large, which corresponds to the principles of modernism and secularity, as well as to the cultural and historical values of the citizens of Kazakhstan. In the religious sphere, the state sees preservation of this type of Islam as the task of prime importance.

RELIGION IN THE AXIOLOGICAL STRUCTURE OF KAZAKHSTANI YOUTH

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Aigerim ZHAMPETOVA

Ph.D. Student, Department of Political Science and Political Technology, al-Farabi Kazakh National University (Almaty, Kazakhstan)

ABSTRACT

Together with independence, the Republic of Kazakhstan reacquired its lost traditional values; religion, controlled and suppressed by the Soviet atheist ideology, being one of the most important elements along with the growing number of religious communities and associations, as well as places of public worship. Today, religiosity is on the rise, especially among the younger generation: everyday religious practices are observed by individuals or groups of people at workplaces and homes and in the course of communication. The author has analyzed the role of religion in axiological orientation and the level of religious feelings of the young people aged 18-22 on the basis of sociological poll results.

KEYWORDS: religion, youth, Kazakhstan, values, Islam, radicalism.
Introduction

The Soviet Union’s disintegration led to significant changes in the economic, political, social and ideological spheres of everyday life of the Kazakhstani society. The time has come to seek and discover its own identity: the Soviet Union provided a stable albeit incomplete foundation of people’s identity by protecting them against a variety of ideas outside its borders.¹

The Constitution of Kazakhstan defines it as “a democratic, secular, legal and social state”.² The 1992 Law on the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations became the legal foundation for the relationships in the religious sphere. It was subsequently replaced by the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 11 October, 2011 On Religious Activity and Religious Associations. According to Art 3.6 “Everybody shall have the right to hold religious or other creed, promulgate it or to participate in the activity of religious associations and carry out missionary activity in compliance with the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan.”³ As could be expected, greater rights in the religious sphere increased the number of religious communities and associations, as well as the number of new and restored old mosques and other public worship buildings. Islamic faith was revived, the number of Muslims and places of worship increased. According to official statistics, in 2003 there were 1,652 Muslim communities in Kazakhstan; and their number is on the rise.

Today, there are 3,808 religious associations in the country. They belong 18 confessions: 2,673 of them belong to Islam; 343 are Orthodox; 592, Protestant; 86, Catholic; 60 belong to Jehovah’s Witnesses; 24, to the New Apostolic Church; 12, to the International Society of Krishna Consciousness; 7 are Judaic; 6, Bahai: 2 belong to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons); 1 is created by Moonies. There are 3,592 functioning cultic buildings; 2,683 of them are mosques, 302, Orthodox churches; 108, Catholic Churches; 407, Protestant praying houses; 57 praying houses belong to Jehovah’s Witnesses; 24, to the New Apostolic Church; 6 are synagogues; 2, praying houses of Bahai; 2, praying houses of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness; 1 praying house belongs to the local Buddhists.⁴

Non-traditional religious associations, clandestine religious organizations of destructive nature that teach their members to violate Kazakhstani laws are also active.

The role of religion in the social and political life of Kazakhstan is rising by the year. We have already learned from global experience that religion may become an independent political force that oversteps the bounds of religious activities proper, with a result that is not necessarily positive. Amid the plummeting socio-economic standards of everyday life, dissatisfaction with the authorities’ actions and politics and the spiritual and moral disorientation, people rely on religion as one of the forms of self-identification, socialization and, possibly, radicalization.⁵

This is fraught with all sorts of dangers since the youth, as the most vulnerable part of any society, with no firm axiological values and social statuses often falls into the trap of the most radical forms in search of new ideas and their realization. The absence of firm ideas and practical experience makes the younger generation easy prey to manipulations of all sorts.

² Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan (with amendments and additions as of 23.03.2019).
Quintan Wiktorowicz, a well-known expert, has identified “four key processes that enhance the likelihood that a potential joiner will be drawn to a radical Islamic group and eventually persuaded to participate:

(1) cognitive opening—an individual becomes receptive to the possibility of new ideas and worldviews;
(2) religious seeking—the individual seeks meaning through a religious idiom;
(3) frame alignment—the public representation proffered by the radical group ‘makes sense’ to the seeker and attracts his or her initial interest;
(4) socialization—the individual experiences religious lessons and activities that facilitate indoctrination, identity-construction, and value changes.”\(^6\)

On the whole, society and its younger segment in particular, has been displaying a significant interest in religion as an element of their culture, which strongly affects their behavior. I have tasked myself with analyzing the level of religiosity and perception of religion by the younger generation; the role of religion in axiological orientation, the level of knowledge about the religious situation in the country, the mechanism of influence on young people’s religious convictions and assessing the general level of religious culture of this generation. I hypothesized that religion among these age groups is presented at the level of identity, religious traditions are accepted practically from birth and, to a much lesser extent, in the form of religious practices.

**Method of Studies**

I relied on sociological polls carried out among young people aged between 18 and 22, who are far more responsive than other age groups to all sorts of manipulations used by fake religious associations, fake convictions, etc. The 200-respondent sample consists of students of Almaty higher educational establishments; the poll was carried out online with the help of Survey Monkey.

The Law on the State Youth Policy adopted in 2015 refers to citizens between 14 and 29 as youth. In 2020, this group comprised 3,765,383 members. In the city of Almaty, the number of youth for the same period amounted to 393,845 people.

![Table 1](image)

**Population by Religious and Age (15-29) Groups in 2009**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Of Them Those Who Disclosed Their Religious Affiliation</th>
<th>Refused to Disclose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>1,544,995</td>
<td>Islam 1,208,368</td>
<td>Christianity 287,641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>1,605,090</td>
<td>Islam 1,175,293</td>
<td>Christianity 374,506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>1,342,309</td>
<td>Islam 949,888</td>
<td>Christianity 344,867</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Analititcheskiy otchet “Itogi Natsionalnoy Perepisi Naseleniya Respubliki Kazakhstan 2009 goda”.

On 1 February, 2021, there were 18,897,898 people living in Kazakhstan. According to the 2009 population census the population was 16,009,597 people strong among whom 11,239,176 (72.2%) were Muslims; 4,214,232 (26.3%), Christians; 5,281 (0.03%), Judaists; 14,663 (0.09%), Buddhists; 451,547 (2.82%) were unbelievers.\(^7\)

Since the majority of the believers among the younger population of Kazakhstan are Muslims the threats of radicalization are connected with the spread of non-traditional versions of Islam among younger people, we will discuss mainly young Muslims even if the data of public opinion polls shown in diagrams and tables are related to all young people irrespective of religious convictions or their absence.

### Religiosity in Kazakhstan in the Past

Martha Brill Olcott has written in her *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise* that traditional Kazakh Islam has preserved many more pre-Islamic features than Islam practiced in the cities of Uzbekistan and in the south of Kyrgyzstan, since the process of Islamization among the Kazakhs went on until the 18th century, while their nomadic life style made it a ritual rather than a doctrine. Kazakhs had no complicated system of educational establishments, holy places and Muslim street committees typical of the faithful to the south of Kazakhstan.\(^8\)

The main role in spreading Islam among Kazakhs belonged to Arab missionaries who gradually taught the local people to see Sunni Islam as a flexible and liberal teaching, which widely applied the norms of adat, the local common law. Their descendants—Sayyids and Khoja—became hereditary nomad aristocracy in the traditional Kazakh society of the 16th-19th centuries. In the 18th-20th centuries they merged into one Khoja group.\(^9\)

In the 16th century, Kazakh khans and their retinue abandoned shamanism to adopt Islam, yet the main groups of their followers remained indifferent to the new religion until the end of the 18th-early 19th century when they fell under the spell of Tatar clerics. At the early stages, czarist bureaucrats did not oppose Islamization. Later, however, convinced that it contradicted the interests of the Russian Empire, they made unsuccessful attempts to replace it with Russian Orthodoxy.\(^10\) Mosques were built under the supervision of reliable Tatar mullahs. Their number increased, while the intensified propaganda of Islam made fanatics out of the local nomads. Since the latter half of the 19th century, Islam has spread far and wide. For instance, Syrym-batytyr was captured while praying; batyr Jankhoja was also killed during prayer.\(^11\)

Soviet power relied on the Red Army and security forces to suppress organized religion across Central Asia as a threat to regional security and outlawed all Islamic structures. The 1920s remained in the memory of common people as a “cultural offensive.” “Mosques were closed and the property of Islamic authorities was confiscated. Sufis bore the brunt of this harsh repression, so much so that one can talk of a resulting ‘loss of the collective memory of Sufism in Central Asia’. Sufi leaders were arrested, and many were executed. Furthermore, the religious schools in which they transmitted

knowledge were closed, and Sufi texts banned. Instead, Muslim children were indoctrinated with anti-Islamic material as an integral part of Soviet education policy.\textsuperscript{12}

After World War II, the Soviet government permitted religious rites and religious education as an inalienable part of nationality policy, which led to a stronger ethnic/religious correlation. The Muslim identity of the Kazakhs blended with their national identity; traditional Muslim practices became part of the Soviet concept of culture, and the Kazakhs’ religious identity—an aspect of their national cultural heritage. In Soviet times, those religious practices that existed outside the sphere that was sanctioned and controlled by the state and spiritual administrations were defined as “parallel” Islam and outlawed.\textsuperscript{13}

According to Dosym Satpaev, a prominent political scientist from Kazakhstan, the ideological vacuum left by the Soviet Union became a fertile soil for religious extremism. He has defined three waves of religious extremism.

- The first rose in the 1990s, when students from Kazakhstan went to Islamic countries to continue their religious education.
- The second arrived in the early 2000s from the west, Russia’s North Caucasian region which was earlier in a state of military conflict with Moscow.
- The third wave is connected with Al-Qa’eda and the Islamic State and their fairly successful propaganda on social media and messengers.

To a certain extent, they look fashionable and attractive to the younger generations, especially to the uneducated and jobless youths.\textsuperscript{14} According to official information, over 20,000 in Kazakhstan are associated with destructive religious ideologies; the greatest numbers being registered in Atyrau, South Kazakhstan, Aktobe and Karaganda regions and the cities of Almaty and Nur-Sultan.\textsuperscript{15}

Erlan Karin, one of the best security experts in Kazakhstan, who heads the Center for Antiterrorist Programs, is convinced that radical cells in Kazakhstan are a combination of criminal and religious communities and groups. He has pointed out social and political factors (unemployment, low incomes, criminalization, marginalization of the younger generation, corruption and lower role of many social and political institutions) as increasing social injustice, stirring up radicalism and supplying those who preach radicalism with arguments.\textsuperscript{16}

The following factors are the most significant when it comes to the spread of radicalism in Kazakhstan:

1. Marginalization of society, dramatic changes in the social and cultural milieu (urbanization of rural population, a change in occupation or enrollment at an educational establishment);
2. Criminalization of the minds and social relationships (lowered trust in the law and power structures, heroization of leaders of criminal organizations, proliferation of “criminal” ideas among the younger generation);

Results and Discussions

It should be said that the changing role of religion is accompanied by the altered value orientations of the individual and society as a whole. Secularism, modernization and other global trends affect the religious sphere; in fact, in this context religion becomes a social institution and a value per se. This makes the studies of the role of religion in the lives of younger generations who grew up in an independent country and in conditions of religious pluralism especially important.

### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which Religion Do You Yourself Identify With?</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox Christian</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atheist</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to our studies, the majority of respondents (36.5%) considered themselves religious; they, however, rarely observe religious norms; 26% are rarely involved in religious life; 14% of the polled are involved in the life of their religious communities and observe religious norms; 6.5% do not believe in religion, but respect the faithful; 8% of the young Kazakhstanis do not consider themselves religious, yet sometimes attend religious services and observe religious norms; 3.5% are indifferent to religion; 1.5% are atheists (see Fig. 1).

We have received the following answers to the statement that “In recent years increasingly more young people have been turning to religion. What do you think of this fact?” 38.5% answered that they approved, rather than disapproved; 20.5% completely approved; 17.5% were undecided; 11%, rather disapproved and 9.5% of the young respondents disapproved completely (see Fig. 2).

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As an atheist, I am against religion
I am indifferent to religion
I am not a believer, but I respect the faithful
I am not religious, but sometimes go to the mosque/church and observe religious norms
I am a religious person, but I do not take part in religious life
I am a religious person, but rarely observe religious norms and only go to mosque/church on holidays
I am a religious person, I participate in the life of my religious community and observe religious norms

Figure 1
Do You Consider Yourself a Religious Person? %
In Kazakhstan, there are 229 regional information groups established to clarify religious issues. Twenty of them are operating in regions, 49, in cities and 160, in districts. In the fourth quarter of 2020, their 2,605 experts carried out 4,737 events of various scopes in which 349,807 people were involved; 2,042 of them were carried out among young people with 112,407 participants.

These groups deal mainly with their target population groups: young people, believers, unemployed, convicts and members of their families, people employed by private enterprises, those who work in trade and the services sphere, etc.

According to our poll, the majority of young Kazakhstanis do not have complete information about the religious situation in the country; 46% of the polled, however, know something, while 23% said that they learn quite a lot from the media; 17% were not interested at all, while 8.5% have no information and no time to obtain it (see Fig. 3).
The question “Do you know of the laws that regulate the religious sphere in Kazakhstan?” invited the following responses: 58.5% said that they have heard something, but do not have enough information; 25.5% knew nothing about the laws; 12.5%, were aware of such laws, while 3.5% were undecided (see Fig. 4).

![Figure 4](image)

In Kazakhstan, opposition to terrorism and religious extremism are deeply rooted in the laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan, viz. On National Security adopted in 1998 and On Anti-Terrorist Struggle of 1999, which were further supported by the laws On Opposition to Extremism of 2005, On Opposition to Legalization (Laundering) of Incomes Acquired by Illegal Means and Funding Terrorism of 2009 and On Religious Activities and Religious Associations of 2011.

In the fourth quarter of 2020, the law and order structures uncovered 76 administrative offenses in the religious sphere. For 34 of them, law enforcement agencies opened cases under Arts 453 and 489 of the Code of Administrative Offenses.

The responses to the question “How do you assess the religious policy of your state?” revealed that slightly more than half of the respondents assessed it as efficient to different degrees (67% in all); 17% of the young respondents assessed it as inefficient, while a fairly big share (16%) were undecided (see Fig. 5).

Today, youth is the most active user of the Internet and social networks, which explains why those who are gathering new members under the banners of radical religious teachings and in the ranks of radical religious organizations mainly rely on information technologies. Online radicalization, therefore, requires urgent action. Indeed, a large share of our respondents (34.5%) said that they received information about religion from the Internet; 33.5% obtain information from close relatives; 17%, from religious figures; 5.5%, from religious literature; 3.5%, from TV; 6% were undecided (see Fig. 6).

We have studied the extent to which the social environment affects religious views of the younger generation in Kazakhstan by analyzing their responses to the question “Who or what affects your religious convictions to the greatest extent?” Forty percent of the polled named close relatives and family members; 27% answered “nothing”, 10.5% pointed at religious associations, discussions with imams or priests yet described their influence as insignificant; 10% are influenced by religious literature and the Internet; 6.5%, by friends and acquaintances; 6% were undecided (see Fig. 7).
Our question “Why do people join terrorist extremist groups?” invited the following answers: 26.5% pointed at the low educational level; 21%, the low level of religious culture and education; 16.5%, religious fanaticism, 10%, the plummeting standard of living; 3% were convinced that people are driven to religious extremism by ethnic discrimination and the ideological vacuum (see Fig. 8).

According to our poll, when asked “Do you frequently attend religious services?” the majority (42.5%) answered that they do it on special days; 33%, practically never; the rest of the polled group (7%) answered that they participate once a week; less than once a year (6.5%); once a year (5.5%), once a month (4.5%); a small share of the respondents (1%) attend religious services more often than once a week. The majority of our respondents considered themselves religious people, yet most of them did not attend religious services (see Fig. 9).
Forty-seven percent fully agree with the statement that religion affects the spiritual and moral education; 28% are convinced that it depends on the individual; 15% agreed that religion influences human lives and helps in certain situations; 7% are convinced that other socialization institutions should promote spiritual and moral education; 2.5% were unable to respond (see Fig. 10).

According to sociological studies, religion holds a great degree of public confidence in Kazakhstan. We have established this fact on the basis of responses to the question “To which extent do you trust religious organizations (mosques, churches)?” It turned out that 76.5% trust them completely or generally, with a very big share among youth; 8% do not wholly trust them; 9% preferred not to answer; 3% have no trust in them at all; 3.5% were undecided (see Fig. 11).

We received the following answers to the question about importance of religion in the lives of young people: 42.5% said that it is fairly important; 29.5%, very important; 14%, not very important;
Do You Frequently Attend Religious Services? %

- More than once a week: 42.5%
- Once a week: 6.5%
- Once a month: 4.5%
- Only on holidays: 1%
- Once a year: 5.5%
- Less than once a year: 33%
- Never or almost never: 7.5%

7.5%, not important at all; 6.5% were not sure. This means that religion plays an important role in the lives of a very large share of young people (see Fig. 12).

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completely agree</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completely disagree</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The answers to the question “With which of the following groups do you feel united? allowed us to acquire a better understanding of religious identities.

The biggest share of the young people of Kazakhstan feel united with the citizens of Kazakhstan—30.5%; with relatives, 21.5%; friends, 13.5%; 7.5% pointed at ethnic identity; 6% at members of the same generation; 4% feel no unity with none of the mentioned groups; 3.5% feel unity with the followers of the same religion.

This means that so far it is too early to talk about sustained religious identity among the members of the younger generation (see Fig. 13).
Do You Agree That the Faith and Attending Places of Worship Contribute to Spiritual and Moral Education of the Youth of Kazakhstan? %

- Not sure: 2.5%
- Other: 0.5%
- Depends on the individual: 28%
- No, spiritual and moral education of young people is the duty of the family, the system of education and the state: 7%
- It may help in certain cases (criminal activities among the youth, alcoholism, drugs, etc.): 15%
- Yes, it has an effect: 47%
Figure 11

To Which Extent Do You Trust Religious Organizations (Mosques, Churches)? %

- Not sure: 3.5%
- Refused to answer: 9%
- Do not trust at all: 3%
- Do not fully trust: 8%
- Trust to a certain extent: 37.5%
- Trust completely: 39%
Figure 12

How Important Is Religion For You? %

- Not sure: 6.5%
- Not important at all: 7.5%
- Not very important: 14%
- Fairly important: 42.5%
- Very important: 29.5%
Conclusion

The number of religious associations and buildings of cultic worship has been growing in Kazakhstan during the years of independence. Religious sentiment was spreading far and wide among youth and other groups. Our poll has produced the following results.

- First, a fairly large share of the younger generation speaks of itself as religious, yet they do not observe religious norms and do not participate in religious life. Thirty-three percent practically never attend religious services, while 42.5% limit their involvement by observing religious holidays.

- Second, young people obtain information about religion from the Internet; close relatives are the second most important source of such information; religious organizations and religious literature are less important in this respect. It seems that in the future the Internet will acquire even more consequence, which will increase the risks of online radicalization, promotion of false religious ideas and more active involvement of religious organizations. This means that the level of legal culture in relation to religion among the young people should be raised.

A fairly large share of the polled (72%) pointed out that religion is important to them, albeit to different degrees. At the same time, the religious convictions of the younger generations are shaped
by the Internet, the family and close relatives, which means that socialization institutions have no role in the process.

We have discovered that our youth has acquired a civic identity and that the second largest group feels unity with relatives. Only 1% pointed to unity with members of their clans/zhuzes, one of the historically important traditional values. This means that religion occupies a fairly important place in the life of the younger generation which perceive it as an element of culture. Young people speak of themselves as religious, yet are not actively involved in religious activities. It seems that this trend will manifest even more clearly, yet it is hard to say whether religious feeling will become more profound.