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Editors

Murad ESENOV

Editor-in-Chief

Tel./fax: (46) 70 232 16 55; E-mail: m.esenov@gmail.com

Kalamkas
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EDITORIAL OFFICE: CA&C Press AB, Hubertusstigen 9. 97455 Luleå, SWEDEN

WEB ADDRESS: <http://www.ca-c.org>

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- ***Eurasia: Politics Today***
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- begin articles with a brief abstract of 300-500 words and keywords;
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**MOSCOW-ANKARA-TEHRAN:
A TRIPARTITE TACTICAL ALLIANCE
IN THE SYRIAN CRISIS**

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Ahmad Naser VAKHSHITEH

*Assistant Professor, Department of Foreign Languages,
Faculty of Humanitarian and Social Sciences,
Peoples' Friendship University of Russia
(Moscow, Russian Federation)*

Marina LAPENKO

*Ph.D. (Hist.), Associate Professor,
Department of Foreign Policy of Russia and
International Relations, Saratov State University
(Saratov, Russian Federation)*

Aigerim OSPANOVA

*Ph.D., Associate Professor,
Head of the Department of Regional Studies,
Faculty of International Relations,
L.N. Gumilev Eurasian National University
(Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan)*

ABSTRACT

In the last decade, the Syrian civil war, which began as an internal political crisis, developed into an international crisis with all influential world actors involved to different degrees, or even a war of a new type, endowed with the elements of a proxy war, a hybrid war, an irregular war, and an asymmetric war.

The Syrian crisis changed the balance of power in the Middle East; it strongly affected foreign policy strategies of regional and extra-regional players and created new coalitions and alliances that fight terrorism and transnational security threats.

Russia could not stay away from the Syrian settlement: its involvement suited its national interests and the resolution to play a much greater role on the international arena; it was implied by potential threats, the spread of terrorism and extremism, and the changed balance of power in the Middle

East. Having discovered that efficient cooperation with the United States was impossible, Russia set up an operational task group that comprised Russia, Turkey, and Iran, a tripartite alliance of sorts.

The paper examines how the mechanism of interaction between Russia, Turkey, and Iran took shape in the context of crisis resolution in Syria; the authors conclude that this is a tactical union rather than a strategic military alliance. These countries combined forces to prevent Syrian disintegration and its geopolitical weakening, as well as to consolidate their positions in the region. Despite serious disagreements, the allies have achieved compromises on many issues. Russia, Turkey, and Iran have already resolved many ad hoc problems and have positively affected the course of Syrian settlement, bringing peace closer at the negotiation table.

KEYWORDS: Syrian crisis, Russia, Turkey, Iran, Syria, proxy wars, hybrid wars, irregular wars, asymmetric wars, ISIS.

Introduction

The Syrian crisis, one of the most complicated and protracted international crises of the recent times, began as an internal conflict unrelated to other crises in the same region. It has spread far beyond the country's borders and changed the geopolitical architecture of the Middle East to become one of the most real threats to international transborder security due to the activities of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS),¹ the continuation of the civil war in Iraq, and the involvement of the extraregional actors.

It became a watershed of sorts for Russia's foreign policy in the region and in the world. The resolution of the Syrian crisis by means of a military operation and negotiations led Russia to elaborating new approach to the realization of its national interests.

In the years that followed the Soviet Union's disintegration, Russia has lost its former influence in the Middle East along with a clear understanding of the regional agenda and of the development of the international relations system as a whole. As it was reviving its economy and rebuilding its political influence, Moscow was gradually clarifying the nature of its national interests in the region and the ways and means of their realization. The events in the Middle East and North Africa that

¹ Terrorist organization banned in the Russian Federation.

began unfolding in 2011 tipped the balance of regional power. Regional threats around the Syrian crisis were piling up, forcing Russia to formulate new approaches to the Middle East, while analysts and researchers had to look for new dimensions of the regional context and new theoretical explanations of the settlement of the Syrian crisis/conflict.²

To a great extent, Russia's involvement in the Syrian crisis and consolidation of Russia's positions in the Middle East forced Moscow, for the first time in the post-Soviet period, to build up a coalition of regional leaders (Moscow-Ankara-Tehran), which is one of the weightiest factors of Syrian settlement today.

How Russia Became Involved in Syrian Settlement

As one of the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, Russia, which sought much stronger positions as one of the influential centers of the contemporary world, could not remain indifferent to the Syrian conflict and its settlement. Its specifics, namely, the use of force, demanded Russia's armed interference as the only adequate method of helping the Syrian state in its struggle with the armed opposition and terrorist groups. Military victory was an indispensable condition of political settlement.

The so-called Islamic State is a more or less recent phenomenon. Since 2006, this terrorist group has been fighting in Iraq. In 2014, this alliance/group declared an Islamic Caliphate and launched active military actions in Iraq, Libya, and Syria, where internal conflicts and civil wars left parts of their territories uncontrolled.

This transformation of a terrorist group into a quasi-state challenged the United States, which still considers 9/11 as a national tragedy. Washington initiated the first anti-ISIS coalition.³ At different stages it united up to forty countries, yet the composition and functions of its members were never specified and no documents were signed.

Its core, however, is well known: the United States and NATO countries (Belgium, Denmark, Canada, France, and The Netherlands). However, it is the U.S. that is primarily responsible for the most air strikes.

Albania, Israel, Hungary, South Korea, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Sweden, and Japan were involved in intelligence and technical and material assistance. Members of the League of Arab States—Bahrain, Qatar, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE—were also involved. After several months of fighting, the coalition members started doubting the efficiency of air strikes alone. In the absence of a comprehensive approach to the problem of terrorism acute disagreements started cropping up.

In the fall of 2015, Russia set up an anti-ISIS coalition of its own. In 2015, speaking at the 70th session of the U.N. General Assembly, President Putin stated that the world needed a wide anti-terrorist coalition to fight ISIS in Syria and Iraq.⁴ Moscow was convinced that the coalition should be approved by a resolution of the U.N. SC and the official Syrian and Iranian leaders.

² See: V.M. Akhmedov, *Siriyskoe vosstanie: istoria, politika, ideologia*, ed. by A.M. Khazanov, Institute of Oriental Studies, Moscow, 2018; D. Trenin, "Portret Siriyskoy voyny," *Rossia v globalnoy politike*, available at [<https://globalaffairs.ru/book/Portret-siriyskoi-voiny-18818>]; Iu.Iu. Skuratova, "Pozitsia Rossii v siriyskom krizeze," *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta*, Series 21, Upravlenie (gosudarstvo i obshchestvo), No. 1, 2017, pp. 138-150; E. Stepanova, "Russia's Policy on Syria after the Start of Military Engagement," *Russia in Global Affairs*, available at [<https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/PONARS-Eurasia/Russias-Policy-on-Syria-after-the-Start-of-Military-Engagement-18065>], 28 march, 2016.

³ See: V.I. Batyuk, "SShA protiv IGI," *SShA i Kanada: ekonomika, politika, kultura*, No. 6, 2016, pp. 3-19.

⁴ See: "Siriyskaia partiia: kak na initsiativy Putina v OON otreagiroyal Zapad," available at [<https://www.rbc.ru/politics/29/09/2015/560a97849a7947d6af019635>], 20 June, 2019.

Russia discussed the problem at the preliminary meetings with the foreign ministers of the United States, Iran, Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. It contributed to the information center of the struggle against ISIS set up in Bagdad in order to collect, keep, process and analyze relevant operational information. The coalition or, rather, the tactical anti-ISIS group, attracted Turkey and Iran; other countries did not dare to openly oppose the United States.

Moscow invited Washington to join forces in anti-ISIS struggle and form a united front together with the Syrian army, Turkey and Iran. The American administration declined the offer: it disagreed with Russia on the nature of Assad's regime, of the armed Syrian opposition and of certain terrorist groups. Moscow, in its turn, declined an invitation to join the anti-terrorist coalition led by the United States because it was operating without a mandate of the U.N. SC and the permission of the legal Syrian government.

Since the first day of the Syrian crisis, Russia supported the elected president of Syria and its government; from the very first day of the armed struggle it helped official Damascus with armaments, military hardware, and ammunition, trained specialists and military advisors.

On 30 September, 2015, in response to the request of the President of the Syrian Arab Republic Bashar Assad to help his country in its struggle against international terrorism, Russia entered the war on the side of the government forces.

This was Russia's first military operation outside the post-Soviet space; it had no experience of this sort, yet its involvement in the armed conflict in Syria radically changed the nature and the course of the war.

Russia and Turkey in the Context of the Syrian Crisis

Throughout the 2000s, the economic and political relations between Russia and Turkey were very dynamic. Russia's military operation in Syria and its support of President Assad, on the other hand, caused a lot of disagreements between Moscow and Ankara. Up until the fall of 2015, or until 24 November, 2015 to be more exact, when the Turkish armed forces shot down a Russian fighter that allegedly violated Turkey's air space at the Turkish-Syrian border, the sides had remained determined to preserve and develop their political and economic ties.

After the incident, Russia continued building up its military presence in Syria; it closed the Syrian airspace for Turkish aircrafts with the help of air defense S-400 system stationed at the Khmeimim airbase. Moscow gradually improved its political and military relationships with the Syrian Kurds, with the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its armed wing, People's Protection Units (YPG), which Ankara saw as a branch of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Russia pushed Turkey away from the Syrian peace process, accused Ankara of supporting ISIS and other terrorist groups fighting in Syria and launched a wide-scale anti-Turkey propaganda campaign.

Political and economic relations between Russia and Turkey remained frozen for nearly seven months. Turkey continued fighting ISIS and PKK. In February 2016, an offensive of Syrian Kurds in the north that brought them dangerously close to the Syrian-Turkish border changed the military balance in their favor, while Turkey and Saudi Arabia began considering a land operation in Syria.⁵

Turkey's position on Syrian Kurds caused a crisis in the relations between Turkey and the United States. On 9 February, 2016, State Department spokesman John Kirby pointed out that the

⁵ See: "SMI: Saudovskaia Aravia i Turtsia rassmatrivaiut variant vvoda voysk v Siriiu," available at [<https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/2681727>], 20 February, 2016.

U.S. Administration did not regard PYD a terrorist organization.⁶ Irritated, the president of Turkey suggested that Washington should choose between continued relations with Turkey and the Kurdish “terrorists” in Syria.

The Turks were especially concerned about an autonomous Kurdish region in Syria’s north, a possibility that was growing increasingly real. Ankara was worried by the cooperation between the U.S. and the Syrian Kurds; it was even more concerned about the fact that the Kurds came too close to the unification of the Kurdish cantons in the north of Syria—the districts of Afrin, Jezire and Kobani—that in any case were developing relatively independently as soon as they had declared themselves autonomous.⁷

This forced Ankara to seek a normalization of relations with Moscow. The process began in June 2016 with President Erdoğan’s letter to Putin and continued at the personal meeting of the two presidents in St. Petersburg on 9 August, 2016.⁸ The sides set up a three-tier high-level consultation mechanism between the foreign ministries, special services and general staffs.

Iran’s involvement in the process made the regional dialog between Turkey and Russia on Syria much more significant.

On the eve of his meeting with the Turkish president in St. Petersburg, Putin met with President Rouhani in Baku. On 12 August Foreign Minister of Iran Zarif visited Ankara. A week later, the Turkish foreign minister came to Tehran with an official visit. The fact that Moscow and Tehran had supported the Turkish government during the failed coup d’état (the U.S. and the EU offered no comments) helped normalize trilateral relations and brought the three countries closer together.

Operation Euphrates Shield launched by Turkey on 24 August, 2016 together with the Free Syrian Army against ISIS and Kurdish military units was the most important product of the above collaboration.

Generally displeased with the Turkish military operation (mainly because it had not been coordinated with President Assad or the U.N. SC) many Russian political leaders, including President Putin, admitted that the shifting situation in Syria threatened Turkish security. Moscow recommended Ankara to coordinate its operations with Assad and considered the Syrian government the only legitimate source of power in the country.

Since the very beginning, that is, since the fall of 2011, when the Turkish government demonstrated its active support of the Syrian opposition, Moscow and Ankara could not agree on Assad’s future. For a long time, Turkey was one of the loudest critics of Assad’s regime on different international platforms and insisted that as long as he remained in power, the Syrian problem would defy solution. The fight against PKK readjusted many of the Turkish priorities in Syria.

Ankara decided to set up the Moscow-Ankara-Tehran axis mainly because these countries remained devoted to the idea of Syrian territorial integrity. The fact that previously Russia had maintained regular contacts with the Kurdish leaders, invited them to take part in the negotiations with other Syrian forces and even opened a mission of Syrian Kurds in Moscow in April 2015 was balanced out by Russia’s statements that the Kurds were an inalienable part of Syrian society, the fact that it invited them to discuss conflict settlement and never favored a separate Kurdish territory.

In turn, Russia skillfully used the deteriorating relations between Turkey and the United States to influence Ankara’s position on Assad’s regime. The Syrian president, likewise, was concerned about Kurdish territorial acquisitions in the north of Syria and the clashes between the government forces and the Kurdish armed detachments in Al-Hasakah in August 2016.

⁶ See: “Istoria siriyskikh kurdov. Dosie,” available at [<https://tass.ru/info/2685549>], 20 February, 2016.

⁷ See: “Kurdskiy kanton na severe Sirii prinimaet novye zakony,” available at [<https://ru.armeniasputnik.am/world/20160120/1696045>]; “Istoria siriyskikh kurdov. Dosie,” available at [<https://tass.ru/info/2685549>], 20 February, 2016.

⁸ See: “Vladimirov Putinyim polucheno poslanie Prezidenta Turtsii Recepta Tayyipa Erdoğana,” available at [<http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/52282>], 27 June, 2016.

The fact that Ankara indirectly, through Russia, warned Assad about Operation Euphrates Shield and that Prime Minister of Turkey Akbulut Yıldırım hinted that Turkey may accept Assad as one of the official figures during the transition period signified that the Kurdish threat was a much more serious challenge than Assad's involvement in the political future of his country.

Having pooled forces, Turkey, Russia, and Iran arrived fairly promptly at significant results on Syrian settlement: Ankara prevented the unification of three Kurdish districts and forced ISIS away from the north of Syria.

Operation Euphrates Shield allowed Turkey to divide the Kurdish enclave and prevent a Kurdish autonomy at the Syrian border. By the spring of 2017, Turkish armed forces pushed ISIS out of the border area between the cities of Azaz and Jarabulus to set up a buffer zone controlled by Ankara. The final goal was thus achieved.

The Turkish-Russian dialog was very important for settling the humanitarian crisis in Aleppo; thousands of civilians were evacuated, to a great extent due to the fact that Turkey had persuaded Moscow to help organize the departure of rebel units from Aleppo. Foreign Minister of Russia Sergey Lavrov summed up the talks as much more valuable than the months-long negotiations with Washington,⁹ which he dismissed as "fruitless sitting around."

Moscow and Ankara did a lot to launch the negotiations on Syria in Astana. On 14 December, 2016, in a telephone conversation, the Russian and Turkish presidents agreed to offer the sides of the conflict (Russia, to the government of Syria and Turkey, to the armed Syrian opposition) to double up the peace talks in Geneva with peace talks in Astana (currently Nur Sultan). The then President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev supported the initiative and agreed to offer the capital of Kazakhstan as the negotiations venue of the talks.¹⁰

On 20 December, 2016, foreign ministers of Turkey, Russia, and Iran issued the Joint Statement by the Foreign Ministers of Iran, Russia and Turkey on the agreed steps to revitalize the political process aimed at ending the Syrian conflict, the so-called Moscow Declaration. The document demonstrated that the sides had achieved a consensus on ceasefire and a peaceful agreement on Syria. The sides insisted on Syria's territorial integrity and pointed out that "Iran, Russia and Turkey reiterate their determination to fight jointly against ISIL/DAESH and Al-Nusra and to separate from them armed opposition groups," and for the first time expressed "their readiness to facilitate and become the guarantors of the prospective agreement being negotiated between the Syrian Government and the opposition."¹¹

Foreign Minister of Russia Lavrov said at a joint press conference with the foreign ministers of Turkey Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu and Iran Mohammad Javad Zarif that "the most efficient and effective format for solving the Syrian crisis is our current trilateral format."¹²

The Moscow process was very important: for the first time Turkey, Russia, and Iran closed ranks on the same platform to seek a way out of the Syrian crisis. Previously, Russia had organized talks between the Syrian government and the opposition (also known as the Moscow talks) with no avail,

⁹ "Lavrov nazval 'besplodnymi posidelkami' peregovory s SShA po Sirii," available at [<https://ria.ru/20161214/1483558170.html>], 20 December, 2016.

¹⁰ See: "Telephone Conversations between the Presidents of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin and Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan," available in Russian at [http://www.akorda.kz/ru/events/international_community/phone_calls/telefonnyerazgovory-s-prezidentami-rossiiskoi-federacii-vladimiro-putiny-m-i-turcii-redzhepom-taiipom-erdoganom], 10 January, 2018.

¹¹ *Joint Statement by the Foreign Ministers of Iran, Russia and Turkey on agreed steps to revitalize the political process to end the Syrian conflict, Moscow*, available at [<https://www.voltairenet.org/article194669.html>], 20 December, 2016.

¹² Speech and answers to questions of the media of Foreign Minister of Russia S.V. Lavrov in the course of the joint press-conference on the results of tripartite talks with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran M.J. Zarif and Foreign Minister of Turkey M. Çavuşoğlu, Moscow, available in Russian at [http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/meropriyatiya_s_uchastiem_ministra/-/asset_publisher/xK1BhB2bUjd3/content/id/2574870], 20 December, 2016.

since the majority of the Syrian opposition refused to be involved in the process. Turkey's involvement persuaded the opposition leaders to sit down at the negotiation table with representatives of official Damascus. It should be said that the United States that had been present practically in all preceding formats as an important participant was to a great extent excluded from the Moscow process.

Some people in Turkey interpreted the Moscow Declaration as their country's retreat in the face of Russia and Iran mainly because by signing it Turkey moved away from its earlier determination to remove Assad from power. The Turkish opposition was very much dissatisfied with the fact that the Democratic Union Party and the People's Protection Units were not outlawed as terrorist organizations.

Ankara retreated on these two issues to achieve a mutual understanding with Moscow and Tehran on a comprehensive ceasefire.

Iran's position was very specific. In order to have a say in the bilateral Russia-Turkey format and not to be elbowed out of the agreement, Iran used Shi'a volunteers to block the evacuation of the peaceful Shi'a population from the villages of Fua and Kefraya, located near Idlib, and from Aleppo, the areas which were attacked by insurgent units supported by the Turks, until Turkey agreed on a separate deal with Iran.

Iran and other actors present in Syria were aware of the conflict of interests between Ankara and Moscow that may negatively affect the two countries' regional cooperation.

The Turks negatively responded to the siege of Eastern Aleppo by the armed forces of Russia and the army of Bashar Assad.

On 13 December, 2016, hundreds of people came to the Russian consulate in Istanbul to protest against Russian policy in Syria. Several days later, Russian Ambassador to Turkey Andrei Karlov was assassinated in Ankara at an art exhibition by a Turkish policeman who shouted: "Don't forget Aleppo, don't forget Syria."¹³

This, however, did not spoil the relations between the two countries; both governments in unison condemned what had happened as "a provocative terrorist attack" designed to derail the relations between the two countries. The Moscow Declaration was signed a day after the assassination, the fact that speaks volumes.

The "Moscow process" can be assessed as an indubitable sign of a real and considerable shift in the official position of Turkey, which had had very different ideas about Assad's political future in the past. It seems that the murder of the Russian ambassador consolidated Moscow's position in its relations with Ankara. Immediately after the meeting with his Turkish and Iranian colleagues, Lavrov stated to the journalists that Russia was fighting terrorists, rather than trying to remove Assad.¹⁴ However, this shift in the position of Turkey might have been a tactical move of Ankara, which did not completely abandon this goal. Late in November, President Erdoğan claimed that Turkey had interfered in the Syrian crisis "to put an end to the despotic rule of Assad."¹⁵

This statement followed the death of four Turkish soldiers under the bombs allegedly dropped by Assad's forces. When Moscow rejected these accusations despite the convincing evidence supplied by Turkey and asked Erdoğan for clarifications, Ankara softened its position and hastened to assure the Kremlin that Operation Euphrates Shield had been launched to fight terrorists, not to remove the regime of Bashar Assad. This incident, however, can be assessed as another confirmation of the fact that Turkish-Russian cooperation in Syria has its limits, and that Assad is not alien to using the disagreements between Ankara and Moscow in his interests.

¹³ "Ubiystvo rossiyskogo posla v Turtsii i ego vozmozhnye posledstvia," available at [<https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-38373690>], 19 December 2016.

¹⁴ See: Speech and answers to questions of the media by Foreign Minister of Russia S.V. Lavrov...

¹⁵ *Hürriyet Daily News*, available at [<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeyentered-syria-to-end-al-assads-rule-presidenterdogan.aspx?pageID=238&nid=106709>], 29 November, 2016.

On the whole, political scientists and experts agree that the Moscow declaration opened a new stage of political settlement in Syria. Some of them went even further, claiming that it was the starting point of pushing Washington to the margins of the Syrian conflict. Having taken the initiative into their hands, Ankara, Moscow, and Tehran are attempting to exclude the United States from the new peace process. Still others, David Barchard among them, say: “So what we are seeing in Syria seems like a drift towards the emergence of two zones of influence: A Russian-backed littoral state under Assad, claiming to be the sole government of the country, and a ‘Free Syria’ backed by Turkey.”¹⁶

Tripartite summits on the Syrian crisis became another important step towards the Moscow-Is-tanbul-Tehran axis. The first was held in Sochi on 22 November, 2017 and was predated by several important events. On 1 November, President Putin paid an official visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran, during which President Rouhani pointed out: “Our countries (Russia and Iran.—*Authors.*) play an important role in peace and stability in the region, our cooperation made the routing of ISIS possible.”

On 13 November, Putin and Erdoğan met in Sochi; a week later Putin received the president of Syria. President Putin spoke to the American president and leaders of Middle Eastern countries, most importantly, King Salman ben Abdel Aziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia. Foreign ministers and chiefs of the general staffs of Russia, Turkey, and Iran also met to discuss the problems within their competences.

On 22 November, heads of Russia, Turkey, and Iran met in Sochi for a meeting attended by foreign and defense ministers of the three countries. The meeting lasted three hours, during which President Putin pointed to the importance of their concerted efforts to prevent the disintegration of Syria, its occupation by terrorists and a humanitarian catastrophe. The Russian president said that a decisive blow had been delivered to Syrian fighters, making it possible to end the protracted civil war and expressed his special gratitude to the president of Turkey and president of Iran for the valuable contribution to the Astana process.

In their joint statement the sides “reaffirmed their determination to continue their active cooperation on Syria for the achievement of a lasting ceasefire between the conflicting parties and the advancement of the political process envisaged by the U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254”; they fully supported an inter-Syrian dialog between all social and political groups.

The presidents pointed out that “the Astana format had been the only effective international initiative that had helped reduce violence across Syria and had contributed to peace and stability in Syria; that the de-escalation zone lowered the level of tension and violence”; it laid the foundation that allowed to address humanitarian problems and created the “conditions for the safe return of refugees and internally displaced persons.”

The leaders of Russia, Iran and Turkey called on “the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic and the opposition groups that are committed to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria, to have constructive attendance at the Syrian National Dialogue Congress to be held in Sochi in the near future” initiated for the sake of Syria’s sovereignty, independence, unity, territorial integrity and non-factional nature.¹⁷

On 3-4 April, 2018, Putin paid a two-day working visit to Ankara on an invitation of President Erdoğan.

At a press conference held after the first day of the visit Erdoğan said that he had informed President Putin that Operation Olive Branch in Afrin had been carried out to ensure Turkey’s security and territorial integrity and national unity of Syria.¹⁸

¹⁶ D. Barchard, “How Putin and Erdoğan Divided Up Syria,” *Middle East Eye*, available at [<http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/turkey-russia-syria-putin-erdogan-usfrenemies-1670199042>] 24 October, 2016.

¹⁷ See: *Statement by the Presidents of Iran, Russia and Turkey*, available at [<http://www.president.ir/en/101671>].

¹⁸ See: *Joint press conference of Vladimir Putin and Rejep Tayyp Erdoğan*, available in Russian at [<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/57192>], 3 April, 2018.

Putin began the second day of his working visit by meeting with President of Iran Hassan Rouhani and discussing bilateral cooperation and international and regional agenda.¹⁹

The working visit was concluded by a trilateral summit of state leaders that guaranteed the Astana process on Syrian settlement; the sides issued a Joint Statement and gave a joint press conference.²⁰

The third trilateral meeting of the heads of guarantor states took place in Tehran, the capital of the Islamic Republic of Iran, on 7 September, 2018, and focused on “issues related to a set of additional measures to finally eradicate the stronghold of international terrorism, promote the political settlement process and solve humanitarian issues.”²¹

The president of Iran accompanied his statements on Syria with his usual comments on the negative role of the United States and Israel in the Syrian crisis²² and insisted that foreign interference in the Middle East under the false pretext of democratization should be resolutely opposed.²³

The fourth tripartite meeting took place in Sochi on 14 February, 2019: the sides met to discuss a long-term settlement of the conflict in Syria.²⁴

The presidents discussed “a special committee that would be tasked with drafting Syria’s next constitution” including the list of its members and the procedure based on the results of work of the three countries; the demilitarized buffer zone in the Syrian city of Idlib,” the developments in the northeast of Syria in view of the fact that “Washington in December announced the withdrawal of 2,000 U.S. troops from Syria”; humanitarian aid to Syria.²⁵

To sum up: the relations between Moscow and Ankara in the context of the Syrian crisis were gradually changing to arrive at the stage of mutual usefulness. The position of the United States on the Syrian issue and the Kurdish question figured prominently in the bilateral agenda and in the Moscow-Ankara-Tehran axis discussions. Turkey is tied to the United States by NATO membership, yet in Syria the national interests of these two NATO members are different. Turkey tries on the role of the regional leader, demonstrating greater independence with the help of its efficient interaction with Russia and Iran. Russia, in its turn, can directly affect the decisions of the Turkish leaders related to the Syrian crisis.

Russia and Iran in the Context of the Syrian Crisis

Iran has moved to one of the central places in Russia’s Syrian policy. The Kremlin is more or less convinced that many of the external players are not concerned about the interests of common people in Syria: they want to deprive Tehran of its main ally in the Arab world. It is no secret that after the Islamic revolution of 1979, Iran has been chasing regional leadership; it wants to create a “Shi’a Crescent” in which Syria will occupy one of the most important places.

¹⁹ See: *Conversation with President of Iran Hassan Rouhani*, available in Russian at [<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/57197>], 4 April, 2018.

²⁰ See: *Meeting of the Presidents of Russia, Turkey and Iran*, available at [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/57199>] 4 April, 2018.

²¹ *Meeting with President of Iran Hassan Rouhani and President of Turkey Recept Tayyip Erdoğan*, available at [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58482>] 7 September 2018.

²² See: *Ibidem*.

²³ See: *Ibidem*.

²⁴ See: “Putin, Erdoğan, Rouhani talk Syria in Sochi,” available at [<https://www.dw.com/en/putin-erdogan-rouhani-talk-syria-in-sochi/a-47512393>], 14 February, 2019.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

A weaker Syria, or even its disappearance from the world map, will undermine the positions of Iran as a Shi'a leader. Iran had no choice but to enter the Syrian crisis and rely not only on volunteers, but also on the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the elite detachment of the Iranian army.

In the fall of 2015, when Tehran considerably increased its aid to Hezbollah and the Syrian government by increasing the numerical strength of its military ground-based contingents, the Russian-Iranian relations in the context of the Syrian crisis and its settlement acquired a new quality and new meanings.

Russia and Iran drew closer, while their relations reached a higher level mainly because both countries were determined to support Assad and keep Saudi Arabia and the U.S. within certain limits in the Middle East. There were other factors: the Russian and Iranian concepts of the world order, the regional security complex and the role of the U.S. in the Middle East, as well as the crisis of the previous agreements on the Iranian nuclear program and the anti-Iranian and anti-Russian sanctions.²⁶

From the very beginning of the Syrian conflict, Moscow and Tehran occupied relatively similar positions: territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Syrian Arab Republic; their concerted political and military efforts played the main role in Syrian territorial integrity and protection of the Assad regime. So far, the final post-conflict settlement and maintain the key role of Moscow and Tehran look vague. This suggests the following question: is Moscow-Tehran cooperation strategic or tactical; is it a long-term and mutually profitable cooperation or ad hoc interaction?

Treaty on the basis of mutual relations and the principles of cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation enacted on 5 April, 2002 serves as the legal foundation of their bilateral relations.²⁷ The two sides are engaging in comprehensive cooperation, from military-technical, trade and economic (including interregional) to the contacts in the humanitarian sphere.

Moscow and Tehran are equally interested in preserving their influence in the Middle East; in Syria, in particular, they want to retain their military and political presence for a long time and to realize their economic projects.

The Russian-Iranian line can be clearly seen in the settlement of the Syrian crisis in its military and political (talks on political settlement) contexts. Certain aspects of their interrelations, however, do not allow the sides to raise their relations to a strategic level.

Deeply rooted ideological differences are the main problem. As an independent sovereign state Russia has not yet acquired a clear national identity and a national idea, however, it is a secular state where the Church is separated from the state. Following the Islamic revolution, Iran opted to become an Islamic state, where foreign policy is determined by religious rules and missions.

The second problem that is just as significant: there is no more or less common opinion about Russia in the Iranian political establishment. The concept of Iranian foreign policy presupposes an independent foreign policy course; it presumes that the Islamic republic should become not only a regional leader, but also an important international actor. The Supreme Leader of Iran (rahbar), president and the acting political party have very different ideas about the ways and means of realization of this concept.

In 1989, the Assembly of Experts elected Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, a consistent supporter and defender of the Islamic revolution, Supreme Leader. His ideological position is obviously anti-American and anti-Western, which gained further significance after the Arab Spring, as it gave rise to the Islamic Awakening concept. Ayatollah is convinced, "Currently, we can witness the bullying and

²⁶ See: *Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's Statement and Answers to Media Questions at a Joint News Conference Following Talks with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif*, Moscow, 17 August, 2015, available at [<http://en.interaffairs.ru/lavrov/605-foreign-minister-sergey-lavrovs-statement-and-answers-to-media-questions-at-a-joint-news-conference-following-talks-with-iranian-foreign-minister-mohammad-javad-zarif-moscow-august-17-2015.html>], 17 August, 2015.

²⁷ See: *Treaty on the basis for mutual relations and the principles of cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation*, available in Russian at [<http://www.kremlin.ru/supplement/3290>], 12 March, 2001.

interference of America and some of its followers in the region in the countries in which the breeze of awakening has turned into the storm of uprisings and revolutions.” He argues that the Muslims should return to true Islam free from modern distortions. Iran can and should head the movement towards a single Muslim nation.²⁸ Ali Khamenei insists that Iran will invariably side with the suppressed peoples and the states of the “axis of resistance,” Syria being one of them.²⁹

This causes a lot of concerns in the West and among the regional leaders, which explains Washington’s obvious intention to continue its policy of suppressing Tehran’s regional ambitions and its political influence on the Shi’a ummah.

There is no unity in the ranks of the Iranian elite. In fact, Tehran inherited its close trade and economic cooperation with Europe and the United States from the times of the shah. The Islamic revolution and the sanctions limited its scope to a certain extent, but not its importance. The nuclear agreement reopened the doors to former dimensions of economic cooperation. This explains why today part of the political establishment (the left-wing party, in particular, with a faction in the parliament), on the whole, supports the Western, rather than the Russian, vector. It was the sanctions and the situation in Syria that made Iran’s rapprochement with Russia and China possible.³⁰

Moscow, in its turn, solves its tactical military tasks thanks to Iran’s involvement in the Syrian conflict. The Kremlin stakes on Iran in the negotiations and post-conflict settlement, yet Russian leaders are not ready to support the Islamic Republic completely: Russia coordinates its activity in Syria with the United States; it is involved in consultations with Israel and in negotiations with Saudi Arabia. Russia pursues the role of a mediator in the negotiation process on Syria. It is involved in the Geneva process, launched the mechanism of negotiations in Astana and has raised the status of Iran and Turkey as guarantors of the Syrian ceasefire.³¹

On the other hand, Russia’s support of Iran is not limitless; on certain occasions it might contain its influence in the negotiation process. In October 2018, Tehran was not invited to the talks in Istanbul (the four-partite summit), because Russia, having taken the fairly sharp contradictions between Tehran and Istanbul into account, opted for the summit’s success, which meant that Iran had to be excluded.

The future of negotiations depends to a great extent on Iran’s military presence in Syria. Today, this is the strongest irritant for Israel, the U.S., and European countries. Iran explains that it was invited by the Syrian government and describes its forces as “advisors” and “defenders of the (Shi’a) holy places.”

Tel Aviv repeatedly expressed its disagreement with the Iranian military presence in Syria, sometimes by delivering air strikes at Iranian targets. The United States insists that “all Iranian and Iranian-backed forces” (not the terrorist groups) should be removed from Syria. John Bolton, former National Security Advisor of the United States, never missed the chance to confirm that this was one of Washington’s priorities and a subject of repeated consultations with his Russian colleagues. Israel and the United States are convinced that Russia should “abandon Iran, its situational ally” on Syria.³²

²⁸ *Supreme Leader’s Speech at Inauguration of Islamic Awakening and Ulama Conference*, available at [<http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?p=contentShow- &id=10574>].

²⁹ “Manifestations of the Holy Koran قروئشلا دئاق قرش عب درن س: داعم خوراص لك ىل ع خير اوص قرش عب درن س” available at [<http://www.alalam.ir/news/3601196/%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AB%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A9--%D8%B3%D9%86%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%83%D9%84-%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AE-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AF>].

³⁰ See: A. Vakhshiteh, “Rossia i Iran v syriyskom uregulirovanii: strategicheskoe partnerstvo ili takticheskii soiuz?” *Vlast*, No. 1, 2019, pp. 279-287.

³¹ For more details, see: A. Vakhshiteh, M.V. Lapenko, “Syriyskoe uregulirovanie v ramkakh peregovornogo protsesssa v Astane,” *Sovremennye evraziyskie issledovania*, No. 3, 2017, pp. 24-37.

³² See: “John Bolton predlagaet obmeniat Iran na dialog,” available at [<https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3719136>], 21 August, 2018.

The Kremlin hinted that it could not put pressure on Tehran: continued Iranian presence “on the ground” seemed very important.

The future of bilateral cooperation will depend on the closely intertwined military, diplomatic and economic aspects.³³

Both countries want the speediest possible normalization in Syria with their continued military presence on its territory and are building up the necessary conditions. Moscow has created the legal and material foundations for its military bases in Syria. Iran and Syria signed a “defense and technical agreement that provides for the continued presence and participation of Iran in Syria.”³⁴

There is another component of equal significance—the negotiation process and post-conflict political development of the Syrian Republic. In this context Russia will continue preserving its leading role in the negotiations on Syria and will lobby, to the best of its abilities, the Iranian interests at the international level. Moscow is trying to assume the role of an intermediary in Iranian-American and Iranian-Israeli relations. It stands a very small chance, since Iran is not ready to retreat.

Trade and economic cooperation and economic rehabilitation of the Syrian republic are another very important aspect and the sphere of Tehran’s and Moscow’s long-term interests.

On the whole, the involvement of both countries in the settlement of the Syrian conflict raised the Russian-Iranian relations to a new long-term development level. So far, this cannot be considered a “strategic partnership” (even if officials frequently use this term), rather, it is a mutually advantageous cooperation and a tactical alliance.

On 25 January, 2019, in his exclusive interview to CNN, Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia Sergey Ryabkov relied on diplomatic terminology to answer a direct question about the alliance of Russia and Iran in Syria: “I would not use this type of words to describe where we are with Iran” and added that Russia did not “underestimate the importance of measures that would ensure very strong security of the state of Israel.”³⁵

Over the last decade, Moscow has been trying to occupy a pro-active and central position on the international arena, first and foremost, in the Middle East. It conducts diplomatic consultations and talks with all parties to the international and regional agenda. In the Syrian case, Moscow is involved in an active dialog with Bashar Assad, Iran and Turkey and the Syrian opposition, as well as with Saudi Arabia, the U.S., and Israel.

Moscow is trying to find common points with each of the sides, to avoid confrontation of blocs of states or a conflict of interests with other regional leaders in the Middle East. Moscow’s geopolitical approach may offer Tehran unique opportunities or become a serious challenge.

If Iran, like Russia, joins the “win-win” game according to its national interests, it may somewhat suppress the conflict potential of its relations with other regional and trans-regional players in the Syrian crisis to become Russia’s strong strategic partner.

If, on the other hand, Iran insists on the only successful game to ensure its national interests, conflicts with other players are slated to exacerbate; Russia will become a hostage of its geopolitical plans, Syrian settlement will become even harder to achieve and the Russian-Iranian strategic partnership will be never realized.³⁶

³³ For more details, see: A. Vakhshiteh, op. cit.

³⁴ “Iranian Advisors Will Remain in Syria” available at [<http://www.irna.ir/fa/News/83015249>].

³⁵ “Russia, Iran and the Widening Trust Deficit in Syria,” available at [<https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/russia-iran-and-the-widening-trust-deficit-in-syria-24090>], 12 February, 2019.

³⁶ See: A. Vakhshiteh, “Russia can Solve Certain Problems of Iran with the U.S.” available at [<http://www.russiaviewer.com/gap/6124/%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B3%DB%8C%D9%87-%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%AE%DB%8C->].

C o n c l u s i o n

The Syrian crisis has become a watershed of sorts for Russia's foreign policy in the Middle East: no longer a passive observer of regional processes of the Arab Spring period, Russia became an active participant and mediator. It demonstrated that it was ready for an equal partnership and a new model of American-Russian interaction based on the common interests and shared ideas about the regional challenges and threats. Washington did not reciprocate. From that time on, Russia's stakes in Syrian settlement are on the regional leaders—the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Turkish Republic. Together they form a successful tripartite alliance.

Military-political cooperation between Russia, Turkey and Iran helps settle the Syrian crisis, it ensured successful struggle against ISIS and a ceasefire agreement.

The diplomats of the three countries are successfully cooperating on the Syrian agenda. They have established tripartite summits as a specific format of their cooperation and, at the same time, they actively use the bilateral format of direct negotiations and consultations. The dialog between the three countries at the level of heads of state is highly sustainable; the sides are equally interested in agreements based on compromises.

The Astana negotiation platform initiated by Russia, Turkey, and Iran, the guarantors of a peaceful agreement between the Syrian government and the opposition, played a positive role in the process. So far, thirteen rounds of Astana negotiations have been realized. They made it possible to cut short the fighting on Syrian territory, set up four zones of de-escalation (and close down three of them when peaceful life had been restored); lower the level of violence and make deliveries of humanitarian aid possible. The Congress of the National Dialog achieved an agreement on setting up a Constitutional Council and its composition.

The tripartite alliance of Russia, Iran and Turkey is a tactical arrangement. Today, it is being tested by the situation in Idlib and the buffer zone along the Turkish-Syrian border; the future of the Moscow-Tehran relationships depends on the withdrawal of Iranian troops from Syria.

MAIN FACTORS OF CHINA'S SOFT POWER IN CENTRAL ASIA

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Erzhan KERIMBAEV

*Ph.D. student, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

Nabizhan MUKHAMETKHANULY

*D.Sc. (Hist.), Professor, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

Aynur TURGENBAY

*Senior Lecturer, Chinese Studies Department,
Oriental Studies Faculty, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

Zaure NABIZHANKYZY

*Senior Lecturer, Foreign Languages Department, Philology,
and World Languages Faculty, Al-Farabi Kazakh National
University (Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

ABSTRACT

The strengthening of China's soft power in Central Asia is believed to be closely associated with the process of Chinese language learning. Teaching and learning of the Chinese language in Central Asia began in the times of the Soviet Union. However, it has received a boost after the Central Asian states gained independence, in the context of the development of bilateral and multilateral diplomatic relations between China and Central Asia. Currently, there are two Chinese language learning models in the Central Asian countries:

1) *in higher education institutions of Central Asian countries and in private training centers;*

2) *in Confucius Institutes and classes, as well as in Chinese Language Centers created by the Chinese government.*

Confucius Institutes are not limited to teaching the Chinese language and culture only to students, they have already started teaching in the region's elite secondary schools and other educational and scientific institutions.

Confucius Institutes and classes, as governmental educational institutions of the PRC, are expanding their linguistic and cultural influence on the basis of state finances and technologies. This is facilitated by the development of trade and economic rela-

tions and entrepreneurship between China and Central Asia. Everywhere in the world Chinese enterprises prioritize candidates with knowledge of the Chinese language in employment. Confucius Institutes conduct the official Chinese language examination, as well as the “Chinese Bridge” competition, whose winners have the opportunity to receive a grant for further studies in China. This, in turn, attracts young people.

The activities of Confucius Institutes are mainly aimed at deepening the influence of Chinese culture among its students. As such, they are the drivers of China’s soft power policy. Together with Chinese multinational companies, Confucius Institutes have a great influence on the penetration of

Chinese culture into society through the celebration of Chinese national holidays and the presentation of traditional Chinese customs, songs, dances and poetry. Confucius Institutes exert cultural influence through their own Chinese language textbooks that promote traditional Chinese culture, as well as civilizational and value reference points.

To date, there are sufficient results of the implementation of China’s soft power policy. This situation causes public discontent and criticism of some experts. But the process of learning the Chinese language in Central Asia is bound to continue in the future. However, the region’s population will perceive various elements of Chinese culture in a more selective manner.

KEYWORDS: Central Asia, soft power, Confucius Institute, Chinese language, cultural influence.

Introduction

Central Asia comprises the former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. This region connects the East and the West—the so-called Heartland, located between the North and the South. The English scientist Halford J. Mackinder (1861-1947) described The Heartland Theory (心脏地带) in the following manner: “Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; who rules the World-Island commands the world.”¹

American researcher Nicholas Spykman (1895-1943) believed that “Who controls the rimland rules Eurasia; who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world.”²

In view of this, the struggle of the great powers for Central Asia has not stopped since antiquity. The great empires, ascending from the West, East, South and North, always sought to subjugate Central Asia, and they did succeed at times. Therefore, various civilizations have integrated in Central Asia, and regional cultural and national features have emerged. However, regional culture has not undergone any dramatic changes.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the struggle for the influence of great powers in Central Asia had intensified. Among them, China’s activities focus on Central Asia and the whole world. The impact of China’s soft power policy does not go unnoticed anywhere in the world; Central Asia is no exception. The study of China’s soft power in Central Asia and the factor of Chinese cultural interference is crucial for the formation of the region’s political cultural values. Which system will have greater power in the Central Asian countries when the con-

¹ H.J. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals Reality*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1942, p. 62.

² N.J. Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace*, Harcourt Brace Co., New York, 1944, p. 43.

traditions between the Eastern, proper Chinese totalitarian system and Western democratic values intensify? Which vector of development will the Central Asian countries adopt? The theoretical and practical value of this study is very high.

Despite the importance of this topic, fundamental monographs systematically analyzing the influence of China's soft power in the region have not yet been published in Central Asia. Of course, each country's media publishes articles related to certain aspects of this issue. However, they do not cover the entire process of China's soft power policy in Central Asia and the true state of Chinese cultural influence. In connection with the above, an attempt is made to analyze this topic using the theory and methodology of international relations, as well as cultural integration, based on agreements signed between China and Central Asian states in the educational sphere, using Confucius Institutes and classes as an example.

Penetration of China's Soft Power in Central Asia

The influence of China's soft power in Central Asia began with the spread of the Chinese language and culture, and this process gradually leads young people to assimilate Chinese values. There are two different vectors of the Chinese language teaching in Central Asia. One of them includes local higher education institutions and private language centers. The second is the Confucius Institutes and classes.

First, let us examine the Chinese language learning processes at Central Asian universities. There is a long history of the relations between China and Central Asia, which have at times been interrupted and resumed. Following the collapse of the U.S.S.R. in 1991, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan gained independence and established diplomatic relations with China. Since then, relations between China and Central Asian states have entered a new era of historical development.

During an official visit to Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan in April 1994, Prime Minister Li Peng announced the principles of China's foreign policy towards Central Asian countries for the first time. According to Li Peng, "China and the Central Asian states have established friendly and good-neighborly relations, contributing to common prosperity, respecting each country's own choice of development path, adhering to the principle of non-interference in internal affairs, respecting sovereignty and protecting the stability of the region."³ The visit of the Chinese prime minister gave a new impetus to the development of relations between China and the Central Asian states. Simultaneously, bilateral trade relations began to take shape.

China has focused on trade and economic relations with the Central Asian countries, paying attention to soft power, the development of ties in the educational sphere, and culture in particular. In turn, the Central Asian countries were interested in developing broader ties with China to overcome the economic downturn. Since dialog and intercultural communications are the foundation of cultural ties, this marked the penetration of China's soft power into Central Asian countries.

The Central Asian countries were no strangers to the Chinese language. In Soviet times, it was taught in Uzbekistan. Moreover, Tashkent was home to one of the strongest oriental studies schools

³ Ж. Кәріпжанов, Н. Мұқаметханұлы, *Қытайдың сыртқы саясаты және Қазақстанмен қатынасы (2000-2010 жылдар)*, Қазақ университеті, Алматы, 2013, 180 б. (Zh. Karipzhanov, N. Mukhametkhanuly, *Chinese Foreign Policy and Relations with Kazakhstan (2000-2010)*, Қазақ университеті, Алматы, 2013. 180 pp.)

in the U.S.S.R. The Chinese language was taught at the Institute of Oriental Studies at Tashkent State University and secondary school No. 59 in Tashkent.⁴

In Kazakhstan, the teaching of the Chinese language also began in the Soviet period. In 1989, at the S.M. Kirov Kazakh State University (currently Al-Farabi Kazakh National University) was opened an Oriental Studies Department, which taught Arabic, Chinese and Persian languages. After gaining independence, the teaching of the Chinese language had expanded in connection with the establishment of cooperation between Chinese and Kazakhstani universities.

Soon, due to the comprehensive development of Kazakh-Chinese relations and increased demand from the society, Chinese language departments were opened at the leading universities of Kazakhstan, and Chinese was taught there in a systematic manner. In particular, Chinese is taught as the main or second foreign language at the L.N. Gumilev Eurasian National University, Ablai Khan University of International Relations and World Languages, Abay Kazakh National Pedagogical University, Kazakh State Women's University, and S. Demirel University.

On 31 August, 2016, the Center for Chinese Literature and Culture was opened at the National Library in Almaty, to which 7,200 books were delivered from China.⁵

In Uzbekistan, Chinese is currently taught at the Tashkent Institute of Oriental Studies and the Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages.

Prior to 2017, four universities in Kyrgyzstan received a state license to teach the Chinese language. In the same year, nine institutions were already licensed to teach Chinese. Chinese language schools are available in all areas of the Kyrgyz Republic except the Talas Region.⁶

According to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Chinese language is currently taught at seven of the country's major universities: Bishkek University of the Humanities, Balasagun Kyrgyz National University, Arabaev Kyrgyz State University, Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University, Naryn State University, Osh State University and Osh Humanitarian Pedagogical Institute.

The main educational institution that trains Chinese language specialists in Tajikistan is the Tajik State Institute of Foreign Languages, which has been teaching Chinese since 2000. A separate Chinese language department was established in 2009. Computer science majors here also study the Chinese language. In addition, Chinese is taught in numerous language courses licensed by the Ministry of Education of Tajikistan.⁷

Turkmenistan was the last among the countries of Central Asia to launch the teaching of Chinese. In 2015, with the development of cooperation with China in the oil and gas industry, Chinese began to be taught as an additional subject for students studying economics and oil and gas engineering at the Turkmen State Institute of Economics and Management and the International University of Oil and Gas.

Since 2016, the Chinese language has been taught as a second foreign language at six schools in Ashgabad, at five schools in the Balkan province, at three schools in Lebap, as well as at two schools in each of the Akhal, Dashaguz and Mary provinces.⁸

⁴ See: A. Nogayeva, "Limitations of Chinese 'Soft Power' in its Population and Language Policies in Central Asia," *Geopolitics*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 2015, pp. 583-605, available at [DOI: 10.1080/14650045.2015.1034272].

⁵ See: I. Akchurin, A. Kusainov, V. Shishko, "V Almaty poiavilsia Tsentr kultury i literatury Kitaia," *Arna Press*, 31 August, 2016, available at [<http://www.arnapress.kz/almaty/culture/79666/>], 24 February, 2019.

⁶ See: S. Shamshiev, "Kitayskiy iazyk v Kyrgyzstane: est spros," 24 kg, 20 April, 2017, available at [https://24.kg/obshchestvo/49864_kitayskiy_yazyk_vkyrgyzstane_est_spros/], 24 February, 2019.

⁷ See: A. Mannonov, "Ia kitayskiy by vyuchil tolko za to...," *Asia-Plus*, 11 February, 2017, available at [<https://news.tj/ru/news/tajikistan/society/20170211/ya-kitaiskii-bi-viuchil-tolko-za-to>], 24 February, 2019.

⁸ See: "S novogo uchebnogo goda v riade shkol i vuzov vvodiatsia kitayskiy i iaponskiy iazyki," *Turkmenistan: zolotoy vek*, 27 November, 2015, available at [<http://turkmenistan.gov.tm/?id=9998>], 24 February, 2019.

The above facts demonstrate that over the past twenty years, the teaching of the Chinese language in Central Asia has been developing rapidly. This contributes to a high level of motivation to learn the Chinese language: the expansion of relations between China and Central Asia, which entails an increased interest in communicating with the Chinese people, understanding of the Chinese language and Chinese culture, and a rise in the number of people wishing to get a well-paid job using the Chinese language. In accordance with these social needs, the Chinese government provides financial, technical and teaching assistance in the process of learning the Chinese language in Central Asia. Thanks to these internal and external factors, China has gained a great opportunity to spread its soft power in the region.

Establishment of Confucius Institutes and Manifestation of China's Soft Power Influence

In the 21st century, the influence of China's soft power grew in Central Asian states, reflecting China's efforts to intensify its soft power policy around the world. In the new century, the Chinese government took a new step in its soft power politics and placed greater emphasis on the spread of the Chinese language and culture around the world. Confucius Institutes and classes became the flagship of China's soft power in the international arena.

In 2002, the Office of Chinese Language Council International (Hanban, 国家汉办) under the Ministry of Education of the PRC began to create a network of international cultural and educational centers (Confucius Institutes) in many countries of the world.

In 2004, a draft prepared jointly by the Ministry of Education of China and Hanban was approved by the 4th plenary meeting of the 16th Congress of the CPC Central Committee.

In the summer of 2004, the first experimental CI in Central Asia was opened in Tashkent.⁹ In the same year, the first official Confucius Institute was established in Seoul, the capital of South Korea. In May 2005, the official opening of the Confucius Institute took place in Uzbekistan. The Institute was established at the Tashkent Institute of Oriental Studies in cooperation with the Lanzhou University on the Chinese side. Later, this institution was recognized as the "Best CI in the world."¹⁰

At the 17th Congress of the CPC in October 2007, the spread of the Chinese language and culture in foreign countries was identified as an important part of China's soft power foreign policy. As a result, China began to further cultivate the teaching and dissemination of the Chinese language in Central Asia.

On 3 December, 2014, the second Confucius Institute in Uzbekistan was established at the Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages. The opinion of an anonymous Uzbek expert who commented on the opening of this institute in an interview with the Regnum news agency provides food for thought: Only two countries offer free university education to citizens of Uzbekistan—Russia and China. The Chinese side not only finances the students' studies and dormitory stays, but also provides them with two meals a day. China increases the number of such grants at its higher education

⁹ See: A. Alikberova, "Gumanitarnaia ekspansia KNR na primere funktsionirovaniia Institutov Konfutsia v Rossii," *Materials of XI International Research and Practical Conference "Modern European Science—2014"*, Vol. 5, Sheffield, UK, 2014, pp. 3-8.

¹⁰ A. Nogayeva, op. cit.

institutions on an annual basis. This means that China is not only penetrating our country's economy, but is also struggling to capture the minds of our youth.¹¹

It is not difficult to determine the purpose of this generous act towards other states on the part of the Chinese government, while millions of young people in rural China itself cannot afford to go to school and get an education because of extreme poverty.

The process of opening Confucius Institutes in Uzbekistan is still ongoing. In 2018, a Memorandum on the Establishment of the Confucius Institute at the Tashkent State Agrarian University was signed together with the Xinjiang Agricultural University. The aim of the institute is to provide students with the opportunity to study in China in agricultural specialties; develop academic mobility of students and teachers; as well as establish cooperation in the agricultural research sphere.¹²

Although the establishment of Confucius Institutes in Kazakhstan began later than in Uzbekistan, the process has been much quicker and broader. For instance, a Confucius Institute was established at the L.N. Gumilev Eurasian National University on 5 December, 2007 in Astana. The Minister of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Zhanseit Tuimebayev, and the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China in Kazakhstan, Zhang Xun, gave welcoming addresses at the opening ceremony.¹³

In 2004, the Chinese Language Center was opened at the Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, and in 2009 it was reorganized into a Confucius Institute.¹⁴

In June 2011, the third Confucius Institute in Kazakhstan was opened at the Aktobe State Pedagogical Institute.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, the chief advisor to the Chinese ambassador to Kazakhstan, Cheng Hong, said: "About a quarter of the people on earth speak Chinese. Knowledge of Chinese is like a window into the modern world. The youth of Kazakhstan is very much interested in learning the Chinese language and culture. Chinese students also seek to learn the Kazakh language."¹⁵

On 27 November, 2012, the fourth Confucius Institute was established at the Karaganda State Technical University.¹⁶

On 19 April, 2017 the Ablai Khan Kazakh University of International Relations and World Languages, together with Southwestern University of China, opened the fifth Confucius Institute in Kazakhstan.¹⁷

The Chinese Embassy in Kazakhstan is very active in establishing additional Confucius Institutes in the country. Many applications to Hanban are still pending. For example, in 2015, a memorandum was signed to establish one more CI in Astana by the Saken Seifullin Kazakh Agro-Technical University and Xinjiang Agrarian University, which will train specialists in the agricultural sphere. The Chinese side intends to invest \$80,000 annually in financing the institute.¹⁸

¹¹ See: "V Uzbekistane otkrylsia vtoroy 'Institut Konfutsia'," Regnum Information Agency, 3 December, 2014, available at [<https://regnum.ru/news/polit/1872801.html>], 24 February, 2019.

¹² See: "V Uzbekistane otkroiut filial instituta Konfutsia," repost.uz., 7 February, 2018, available at [<https://repost.uz/Uzbekistan-Konfuciy>], 24 February, 2019.

¹³ See: "V Kazakhstane v 2011 godu otkroiutsia eshche dva instituta Konfutsia," Tengrinews.kz, 8 June, 2011, available at [https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/kazahstane-2011-godu-otkroyutsya-dva-instituta-konfutsiya-190026/], 24 February, 2019.

¹⁴ See: "Institut Konfutsia," kaznu.kz, available at [<http://www.kaznu.kz/kz/14355/page>], 24 February, 2019.

¹⁵ A. Aktleuov, "V Aktobe otkrylsia Institut Konfutsia," Diapazon, 30 June, 2011, available at [<http://www.diapazon.kz/aktobe/aktobe-city/38618-v-aktobe-otkrylsja-institut-konfucija.html>], 24 February, 2019.

¹⁶ See: "V kazakhstanskom gorode Karaganda sostoiias tseremoniia otkrytiia novogo Instituta Konfutsia," Russian.cri.cn, 29 November, 2012, available at [<http://russian.cri.cn/1281/2012/11/29/1s450182.htm>], 24 February, 2019.

¹⁷ See: "Institut Konfutsia," ablaikhan.kz, available at [<http://www.ablaikhan.kz/ru/about-us/our-university/news/university-news/1032.html>], 24 February, 2019.

¹⁸ See: D. Plotnikov, "'Miagkaya sila' KNR v Tsentralnoy Azii," Mir Evrazii, 20 January, 2016, available at [<http://wef.kz/monitoring/myagkaya-sila-knr-v-tsentral-noj-azii/>] 25 February, 2019.

In November 2016, the rector of Sh. Ualikhanov Kokshetau State University and representatives of the Confucius Institute in Urumqi signed an agreement on the opening of a Confucius Institute at Kokshetau University.¹⁹ Thus, new Confucius Institutes may open in Kazakhstan in the future.

The opening of Confucius Institutes in Kyrgyzstan was agreed upon on the eve of the SCO summit in Bishkek in 2007, during the visit of former Chinese President Hu Jintao to Kyrgyzstan.

At a meeting of the Minister of Education and Science of Kyrgyzstan Ishenkul Bolzhurova and the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the People's Republic of China in Kyrgyzstan Zhang Yannian in 2008, an agreement was reached on the establishment of two Confucius Institutes at two Kyrgyz universities—Jusip Balasagun Kyrgyz State University and Kusain Karasaev Bishkek Humanitarian University.²⁰

The third Confucius Institute in Kyrgyzstan was opened in 2013 at Osh State University in southern Kyrgyzstan. In addition, there are clubs functioning in the country, such as kung fu, calligraphy, Chinese art of painting and playing the traditional Chinese musical instrument guzhen.²¹

The fourth Confucius Institute in Kyrgyzstan was opened at the end of 2016 at the University of Dzhahalal-Abad. The agreement was signed by the rector of Dzhahalal-Abad University Akunyan Abdrashev and the director of the CI headquarters Xu Lin.²²

In 2015, the Kyrgyz State Academy of Management and the Confucius Institute signed a Memorandum of Cooperation and created the Chinese Culture and Education Center.²³

According to the 2016 Hanban report, the State Chancellery recognized the Confucius Institute at the Kusain Karasaev Bishkek Humanitarian University in Kyrgyzstan as the best CI in the world.²⁴

The establishment of Confucius Institutes in Tajikistan was launched in accordance with the SCO framework agreement. In 2009, the first Confucius Institute was established at the Tajik National University. The agreement to open the institution was reached during the official visit of President Hu Jintao to Tajikistan in 2008. The second Confucius Institute was established in August 2015 by the China Petroleum University together with the Tajik Mining and Metallurgical Institute in Chkalovsk, Sogd Region. Along with the teaching of the Chinese language, the institute trains mining and oil industries specialists.²⁵

On the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the Confucius Institute in Dushanbe, Chinese Ambassador to Tajikistan Yue Bin said: “The Confucius Institute at the Tajik National University has made great strides over the years.”

According to Nosim Muhammadiyev, director of the Confucius Institute at Tajik National University, “over the eight years of the Institute’s work, 566 students and 197 teachers went to study in China under the state quota in order to increase their knowledge of the Chinese language and culture.”²⁶

¹⁹ See: R. Bekov, “Shkola Konfutsia otkroetsia v KGU im. Sh. Ualikhanova,” *apgazeta.kz*, 28 November, 2016, available at [<http://apgazeta.kz/2016/11/28/shkola-konfuciya-otkroetsya-v-kgu-im-sh-ualixanova/>], 25 February, 2019.

²⁰ See: Zh. Askarbekkyzy, “Institut Konfutsia novyye perspektivy,” *siluxgc.com*, 9 August, 2017, available at [<http://ru.siluxgc.com/html/R1413/201708/8548660212126673931211.shtml>], 25 February, 2019.

²¹ See: “Institut Konfutsia sozdaet perspektivnoe budushchee dlia studentov Kyrgyzstana,” *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, 8 July, 2017, available at [<http://slovo.kg/?p=76715>], 25 February, 2019.

²² See: “V Kyrgyzstane otkroetsia chetvertyy po schetu Institut Konfutsia,” *KazTAG*, 21 April, 2016, available at [<https://kaztag.kz/ru/news/v-kyrgyzstane-otkroetsya-chetvertyy-po-schetu-institut-konfutsiya/>], 25 February, 2019.

²³ See: D. Plotnikov, *op.cit.*

²⁴ See: “Institut Konfutsia BGU priznan organizatsiyei goda v globalnoy seti institutov Konfutsia mira,” *AKI Press*, 14 December, 2016, available at [<http://kg.akipress.org/news:1351005>], 25 February, 2019.

²⁵ See: “V Tadjikistane otkrylsia vtoroy Institut Konfutsia,” *Sputnik Tajikiston*, 21 August, 2015, available at [<https://ru.sputnik-tj.com/education/20150821/1016503961.html>], 25 February, 2019.

²⁶ “V Dushanbe otmekli Den Instituta Konfutsia,” *Asia-Plus*, 29 September, 2016, available at [<http://news.tj/ru/news/life/culture/20160929/v-dushanbe-otmetili-den-instituta-konfutsiya/>], 25 February, 2019.

The number of registered students has reached 3,000. Confucius Institute is publishing a collection of 24 translation and study materials for Tajik students and teachers.”²⁷

To date, 25 Chinese language and cultural educational centers have been created.

The only country in the Central Asian region where a Confucius Institute has not been opened is Turkmenistan. Former Chinese President Hu Jintao proposed establishing a Confucius Institute during his visit to Ashgabad in 2008, but the institute has not yet been opened.

There is a total of 13 Confucius Institutes established in Central Asian countries, with 5 of them in Kazakhstan, 2 in Uzbekistan, 4 in Kyrgyzstan, and 2 in Tajikistan. In addition, there are 12 Confucius classes, all located in Kyrgyzstan.

The number of Confucius Institutes and classes per capita in Central Asian countries is greater than in the rest of the world. Obviously, the Chinese government did not plan to establish Confucius Institutes based on the world’s population. Apparently, China adheres to the principle of “the more, the better” as far as establishing the Institutes. Moreover, economically weak countries are more active in establishing Confucius Institutes.

Since Confucius Institutes are state institutions of the PRC, language and culture textbooks and additional study guides, as well as the study programs, are approved by the Chinese government.

In order to promote Chinese culture, these institutions organize events such as the Oratory Competition, the Chinese Language and Song Contest among students and teachers, the International Education Festival and World Confucius Institute Day. As part of such celebrations, events are regularly held to promote the in-depth penetration of Chinese culture. Such events established comprehensive conditions for recreating the atmosphere of Chinese culture, and the influence of these centers is growing with every passing day.

During the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the founding of international CI, dedicated to the 5th anniversary of the institute in Kyrgyzstan, the director of CI Umut Kultaeva said: “Today, the demand for the Chinese language is growing all over the world, Kyrgyzstan included. In the past, the number of people wishing to pass the Chinese language exam barely reached 30 people. Today, over a thousand people are involved. The Chinese government is providing substantial financial support to the Kyrgyz education sector.”²⁸

According to the positive dynamics in the number of Confucius Institutes and classes and students studying the Chinese language, we can safely say that the influence of China’s soft power in the countries of Central Asia is growing every year.

Penetration of China’s Soft Power in Central Asian Countries

An increase in the number of Confucius Institutes means an increase in the number of students studying there. A large number of students studying the Chinese language and culture marks a surge in the number of young people who accept the Chinese culture, and, moreover, share the cultural values of the Celestial Empire. That is the reason why the Chinese government is working to expand the range of Chinese language teaching services for both young people and adults, as well as for academic, technical, industrial, agricultural workers and engineers. Together with educational and gov-

²⁷ Li Cai, “Po sravneniiu s Evropoy i Amerikoy, Sredniaia Azia bolshe nuzhdaetsia v Institute Konfutsia,” siluxgc.com, 13 April, 2017, available at [<http://ru.siluxgc.com/html/R1653/201704/75449315330354560548.shtml>], 25 February, 2019.

²⁸ “Pervomu Institutu Konfutsia v Kyrgyzstane ispolnilos 5 let,” *Vecherniy Bishkek*, 16 May, 2014, available at [https://www.vb.kg/doc/273208_pervomy_instituty_konfyciia_v_kyrgyzstane_ispolnilos_5_let.html], 25 February, 2019.

ernment institutions, various public organizations and associations, China plans to establish bilateral institutions for joint management and effective coordination of cooperation in the educational sphere.²⁹

Therefore, cultural influence on the Central Asian region is just as important for China as trade and economic influence.

The activities of the Confucius Institutes established by China in Central Asia have already begun to produce results. Over the past decades, the number of persons who speak Chinese, understand Chinese culture and have a Chinese education in Central Asian countries has been growing. In addition, more and more people consciously and unconsciously perceive Chinese culture as non-alien.

Among them, there are young people who associate their future careers, employment and sources of income with China. Since the Chinese language and culture are closely related to trade, economic and business cooperation, it only seems like the natural outcome.

China utilizes Confucius Institutes to strengthen its cultural influence in Central Asia, using the geographical coverage method. For example, CIs in Kazakhstan are located in the east and west, in the south and north, like chess pieces. In Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan they are positioned in large cities.

The Chinese government has begun teaching the Chinese language at the Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools, which are shaping the future elite of Kazakhstan today. It is currently being taught at the Nazarbayev Intellectual School in Aktobe.

Why are universities in Kazakhstan open to the establishment of CI? Because the Chinese government incurs all financial expenses for maintaining the office, outfitting classrooms with the required technical equipment and textbooks, and the salaries of teachers and directors invited from China. Thus, the host partner countries do not face any funding issues, on the contrary, they benefit greatly from the establishment of such institutions. The most urgent issue is to raise the position of educational institutions in national and international ratings as far as the development of external relations is concerned. No institution can reject such financial injections and the opportunity to improve its reputation. These are the mechanism and criteria for evaluating educational institutions that are accepted in the international educational space. Why is China spending a huge amount of funds and resources to spread its culture, language and civilizational values? Questions of this sort are not posed, and the long-term results of this policy are not being examined, since the universities are satisfied with the temporary benefits provided by CI.

The Chinese government has created an exam certification system (HSK), which determines the level of non-native speakers' knowledge of the Chinese language. Applicants must take the exam preparation course at the CI. After their level of language proficiency is determined, they have the opportunity to receive a grant to study in China. This current system and criteria push students to study Chinese language and culture at a high level.

There is a growing number of people who are skeptical about the process of intensive dissemination of the Chinese language and culture in society. The issue of "Chinese language being illegally taught in Almaty schools" arose, causing great resonance in society in the fall of 2011, in the Almaty "Language Protection" program. Parents said that along with the Kazakh, Russian and English languages taught under the state program, Chinese, which is not included in the official program and is an extra burden for the children, is also being taught. The argument was taken into account, and the teaching of Chinese in schools was discontinued.

However, the Chinese language is still being taught in some secondary schools.³⁰

²⁹ See: A. Nogayeva, *op. cit.*

³⁰ See: "Алматы мектептері қытай тілін заңсыз оқытып жүр // Nur.kz, 26 октября 2011, available at [<https://www.nur.kz/199220-almaty-mektepteri-kytaj-tilin-zansyz-okytyp-zhyr.html>], 25 February, 2019. ("Schools in Almaty Teach Chinese without any Permission," Nur.kz, 26 October, 2011, available at [<https://www.nur.kz/199220-almaty-mektepteri-kytaj-tilin-zansyz-okytyp-zhyr.html>], 25 February, 2019.

Every year, the number of students studying the Chinese language in Kazakhstani universities is growing. The reason for this is the increase in the number of educational grants provided by the Chinese government through the CI. The number of students who receive grants through various Chinese projects, as well as study in China at their own expense, is also growing. According to some estimates, in 2012, 9,565 Kazakh students were studying at Chinese universities, in 2014 their number reached 11,764 students,³¹ and in 2018, this number went up to 17,000.

In November 2017, the Consul General of China in Almaty, Zhang Wei, told BNews.kz that about 14,000 Kazakhs were studying in China. Speaking about young people's interest in learning the Chinese language, the Consul General noted: "This interest is associated with future opportunities for young people. They see that the relations between the two countries are very promising, and they will have great future career prospects. This trend primarily emerged due to the rapid development of relations between the two countries, and has intensified even more after the announcement of the Belt and Road project. For us, the implementation of this project is a foremost priority, and a multilateral partnership has been established between the two countries."³²

This statement is justified, because in his speech at the Nazarbayev University Chinese President Xi Jinping, who first visited Astana during his trip to Central Asia in September 2013, proposed "to create a joint Silk Road Economic Belt" and announced that this project will annually provide 30,000 grants for studying in China.³³

2019 was marked by the 30th anniversary of the teaching of the Chinese language in Kazakhstan. Today in Kazakhstan, Chinese language and culture are taught in public and private higher education institutions, colleges, centers for foreign language studies and at Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools. In 2018, with the support of the Consulate General of China, a Chinese language school called Umit also opened in Almaty. No one has analyzed whether the curriculum at such schools corresponds to the state program of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The number of Kazakhstani youth studying the Chinese language through grants in China and at their own expense is increasing. However, taking into account that more than 95% of them major in "Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language" (*dui wai han yu*), they have difficulties finding a job in their sphere, since they return from China solely with the knowledge of the Chinese language, but without a particular profession. If our state does not take steps to resolve this problem, it is not China's intention to deal with it.

This phenomenon exists in all Central Asian states. Worried that Confucius Institutes and classes are expanding every year, scientists began to sound the alarm; publications and articles have appeared that analyze this problem. In addition, the Chinese government expanded the influence of language and culture from civilian to military sphere. For example, in April 2006, a language center was opened at the Ministry of Defense of Kazakhstan, where the teaching of the Chinese language began. The Chinese military attaché in Kazakhstan declared China's readiness to provide assistance in the amount of \$3 million to the Armed Forces of Kazakhstan.³⁴ Undoubtedly, China intends to attract the best cadets to study in China under state grants, where China-centric values and principles will be universally and unobtrusively introduced into their minds.

³¹ "2014 nian quan guo lai hua liu xue sheng shu ji tun ji," Zhonghua Renmin Gong he guo Jiao yu bu ("National Statistics of Foreign Students in 2014," Ministry of Education of the PRC), available at [http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xwfb/gzdt_gzdt/s5987/201503/t20150318_186395.html], 25 February, 2019.

³² A. Mukhambetova, "Pochemu kazakhstanskiye studenty edut na uchebu v Kitay, rasskazal konsul KNR v Almaty," bnews.kz, 14 November, 2014, available at [https://bnews.kz/ru/news/pochemu_kazahstanskije_studentsi_edut_na_uchebu_v_kitai_rasskazal_konsul_knr_v_almati].

³³ See: "Ukrepliat družbu narodov, vmeste otkryt svetloe budushchee. Vystuplenie Predsedatelya KNR Si Tszinpinga v Nazarbayev universitete," 16 September, 2013, available at [kz.china-embassy.org/rus/ztbd/XJPFWHSKST/t1077192.htm].

³⁴ See: Yu. Yakusheva, "Kitayskiy yazyk—delo gosudarstvennoy vazhnosti," ia-centr.ru, 13 November, 2007, available at [http://www.ia-centr.ru/archive/public_detailsc1ca.html?id=983], 25 February, 2019.

Kyrgyz sociologist Mukanmediy Asanbekov revealed the consequences of China’s economic and cultural expansion for Kyrgyzstan in an analytical paper. According to him, “China has made great strides in spreading its language and culture in Kyrgyzstan. Its influence has grown so much that China is trying to turn Chinese into an industry language in Kyrgyzstan.”³⁵

For instance, the Kara-Balta refinery made a decision to only hire personnel fluent in Chinese, or those who have completed a special course in Chinese language. It is likely that when the Chinese investment in industry and production increases to 30% and continues to grow, there will be an influx of Chinese migrant workers and the emergence of the Chinese language as one of the key industry languages. The Chinese language was taught so well that the locals who work in Chinese enterprises and in institutions with Chinese equity or capital are fluent in it. Currently, given the growing interest in learning Chinese among the country’s youth, it is certain that China will achieve its goals. There are over 50 Chinese language centers in the city of Bishkek alone, 3,500 students study Chinese at higher educational institutions, more than 1,000 study in China or have taken various language courses.

The influence of the Chinese language and culture in Kyrgyzstan has become apparent in the public sphere. The researcher believes that Chinese culture is rapidly spreading in Kyrgyzstan along with Chinese goods. In particular, this phenomenon is noticeable in the service sector. Many Chinese culinary habits and rituals have been mastered by local residents. Increasingly greater numbers of diverse Chinese-style entertainment centers, cafes, restaurants and bars are becoming popular every day. Today, it has become common practice to celebrate traditional Chinese holidays in enterprises with Chinese participation and in educational institutions. The traditional Chinese New Year is also becoming a regular holiday. Chinese traditional martial arts and traditional Chinese medicine are the key to Chinese traditions and lifestyle. In short, the influence of Chinese culture in Kyrgyzstan is especially significant.

Undoubtedly, the influence of Chinese culture is apparent not only in Kyrgyzstan, but throughout Central Asia. Attributes of Chinese culture, i.e., traditional Chinese medicine, kung fu art, and Chinese cuisine are very popular among locals. It can be argued that the cultural influence of China in Kyrgyzstan is deeper than in other Central Asian countries.

Chinese language learning is most effective when it takes place in China, when a student is immersed in the cultural and language environment (see Table 1).

Table 1

Number of Central Asian Students Studying in China in 2000-2016

Year	Kazakhstan	Uzbekistan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan
2000	105	46	47	21
2001	109	58	53	20
2002	200	74	70	28
2003	215	70	72	29
2004	386	176	129	40
2005	781	109	248	66
2006	1,825	244	562	140

³⁵ M. Asanbekov, “Preodolenie negativnykh posledstviy evoliutsii interesov Kitaia—vazhneyshee uslovie sokhraneniia ustoychivosti politicheskikh protsessov v Kyrgyzstane,” *Vremya Vostoka*, 8 мая 2014.

Table 1 (continued)

Year	Kazakhstan	Uzbekistan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan
2007	3,827	340	1,157	332
2008	5,666	467	1,324	554
2009	6,497	582	1,283	539
2010	7,874	764	1,441	923
2011	8,287	996	1,901	1,189
2012	9,565	1,347	2,513	1,398
2013	11,165	1,805	3,115	1,944
2014	11,764	2,192	3,063	2,015
2015	13,198	2,450	3,232	2,309
2016	13,996	3,129	3,247	2,606

These quantitative data show Kazakhstan's priorities. Kazakhstan is not only ahead of the other Central Asian countries, but is also likely to be among world leaders in this regard, if calculated per capita.

There are different opinions of this phenomenon. Some insist that these bilateral relations lead to positive results, while others refute this entirely. According to the Russian scientist Dmitry Plotnikov, the incompatible economic and demographic imbalance between China and Central Asian states can lead to major changes in the region. Central Asian states, which share borders with the PRC or are located near it, have a disproportionately small force and capabilities, and are at a disadvantage as a result. China's investment and infrastructure can stimulate the region's economy, but Beijing seeks to satisfy its economic interests rather than support business development in the region.³⁶

It seems that besides economic interests, there is also a threat that national values and the role of the state in the Central Asia countries may shift under the influence of China's soft power.

Conclusion

China's political/diplomatic, trade/economic and educational/cultural relations with the Central Asian states officially began in 1992. Despite the short historical period in question, the development of bilateral and multilateral relations was intense, which can be attributed to the parties' shared interest, complementarity of their economies and China's foreign policy.

The expansion of Chinese cultural influence and the deepening of China's soft power policy in Central Asia stem from China's ubiquitously expanding political and economic influence in the region. After gaining independence, studies of the Chinese language in Central Asian countries developed in accordance with public demand. China's soft power increased significantly after the implementation of China's foreign language policy and the opening of Confucius Institutes and classes in Central Asia.

³⁶ See: D. Plotnikov, *op. cit.*

The spread of the Chinese language in Central Asia can be roughly divided into three stages.

- The first stage falls on the late 1990s-early 2000s, which coincides with the beginning of the study of the Chinese language and the first contacts with Chinese educational institutions.
- The second stage lasted from 2007 to 2013. At the 17th Congress of the CPC in October 2007, the spread of the Chinese language and culture in foreign countries was identified as an important part of China's soft power foreign policy. As a result, China began to cultivate the soft power factors in Central Asia even more actively. This is when Confucius Institutes and classes in Central Asia became increasingly common.
- The third stage was marked by China's proclamation of the Belt and Road initiative. In September 2013, during his first visit to Central Asia, Chinese President Xi Jinping launched the "Creating a New Silk Road Economic Zone" initiative and announced that students from the countries along the Silk Road will receive 30,000 grants per year to study in China. In this regard, cooperation between China and Central Asian states has reached a new level, bolstering the influence of China's soft power in the region.

The establishment of Confucius Institutes and classes, as well as Chinese language learning centers is a modern Chinese project funded by the state and managed by it. Therefore, the Chinese government is not limited to providing material assistance to Chinese language departments and centers in regional higher educational institutions; it also seeks to penetrate both the elite and regular secondary schools. Chinese language training is extended to scientists, specialists, and administrative personnel of enterprises at various levels. This is a manifestation of the strengthening of China's soft power policy in the region.

Today, the processes of globalization and internationalization of education throughout the world contribute to the spread of the Chinese language and culture both in Central Asia and beyond. Since international cooperation is one of the main criteria for evaluating universities' activities by international rating agencies, university leaders in Central Asia are inclined to establish Confucius institutions and classes. However, a comprehensive analysis of the long-term consequences of this trend has yet to be carried out.

The increasing influence of Chinese culture in Central Asia is a dangerous trend that is apparent today. Such accomplishments of the Chinese civilization as traditional Chinese medicine, kung fu and national cuisine were positively received by local residents, while universal and cultural values were ignored, or often even rejected by the peoples of Central Asia. Confucius' humanistic doctrine of "mercy" has not yet spread to Central Asia, because the Chinese themselves do not exhibit these qualities.

Currently, there is a tendency in developed countries to criticize and even close down Confucius Institutes. However, their development trend in Central Asia is stable and positive.

Beijing authorities urge to learn Chinese by "linking the hearts of peoples" (*minxin xiangtong*). In addition, some heads of Central Asian states praise the Chinese language as one of the official languages of the U.N. Thus, the process of teaching the Chinese language in Central Asia will grow and develop. However, the people of the region are still inclined to perceive Chinese culture selectively, through the prism of their national-cultural identity. Moreover, since these countries' national languages are relatively successful in playing the role of the state language, there is no reason to worry that the complex Chinese language will prevail in the region. It is hoped that the Chinese language and elements of Chinese culture will be perceived by our youth in a nuanced manner, critically and analytically.

STRATEGY OF THE GULF COUNTRIES: SPECIAL ASPECTS OF POLICY TOWARDS CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES

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Olga TIMAKOVA

*Ph.D. (Political Science), Senior Lecturer,
Department of Political Science and Political Philosophy,
Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation
(Moscow, Russian Federation)*

ABSTRACT

The study analyzes the policies of the Arab Gulf states in the Central Asian region. Common cultural and religious traditions, solidarity with the Muslim Ummah and historical heritage provided impetus to broaden the development of cooperation between the countries of Central Asia and the Arabian Peninsula after the end of the Cold War.

The Arab Gulf countries, which possess significant foreign exchange reserves, are investing in a promising region. Two of the five Central Asian states, namely Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, which occupy a key geo-economic position in the Caspian region are of the greatest economic importance for the Arab countries. The Arab states seek to expand ties with these countries in the existing regional transport corridors and in the emerging infrastructure of the Belt and Road project, and anticipate an increased significance of their role as major hubs.

The areas of economic cooperation between the Arab monarchies and the countries of Central Asia include infrastructure project financing, development of hydrocarbon deposits and the banking sector, especially Islamic banking.

The agriculture and water security sphere is another area of cooperation. The

countries of the Arabian Peninsula import 60% of their food. The countries of Central Asia, in turn, are the most active food exporters in the region. Due to the geographical conditions, namely the absence of a logistics corridor directly to the countries of the Arabian Peninsula, transport problems, including guarantees of secure supplies by Central Asian countries, need to be resolved.

The social sphere is the third area of cooperation. By providing extensive financial investments, including sponsorship of large-scale educational and healthcare projects, the Arab monarchies planned to gain political solidarity from the Central Asian states. Immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Gulf states established a large number of Arab religious foundations, which aimed to coming closer together with the Muslims in Central Asia through madrasas and religious education programs in the Arabian states. Of particular importance is the confrontation of the Arabian monarchies with Shi'a Iran and relatively secular Turkey in promoting their own "visions of Islam." After the events of the Arab Spring in 2011, the Central Asian states paid more attention to the internal stability, and cooperation with the countries of the Arabian Peninsula was reoriented to other social spheres.

KEYWORDS: *Persian Gulf, Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), Central Asia, cooperation, energy resources, geo-economics.*

Introduction

In the early 1990s, new independent republics appeared on the political map of the world—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. These countries are geopolitically significant because they are located near the world's largest oil and gas field, namely the Persian Gulf, as well as at the intersection of Eurasian land and sea (Caspian Sea) transport corridors.

The Central Asian states hold over 30 billion tons of proven oil reserves and over 20 trillion cu m of gas,¹ which makes the region the second largest resource after the Arabian Peninsula. But the region has economic and strategic importance for some reasons other than the Central Asian countries' resource base. The Greater Eurasia megaproject, which is expected to transform the continent into the largest integrated space, will unite various integration groups with transport and logistics routes and open a direct corridor between Asia, Africa and Europe.² Five of the Central Asian states may become the project's key transport hubs.

The Gulf states were among the first to recognize the independence of the newly established countries. Among the factors that helped to establish the first contacts are common cultural and religious traditions, as well as solidarity with the Muslim Ummah—historical legacy became an impetus for further cooperation after the ideological imperatives of the bipolar confrontation disappeared.

Arabian states compete with other states that share cultural similarities with the region, namely Turkey and Iran. These three centers of power do not conceal the mutual rivalry for influence in the region, which had manifested itself in energy and infrastructure projects, educational programs and cooperation between religious institutions.

The countries of Central Asia are located north of the Arabian Peninsula states, due to which the whole range of foreign policy actions of the latter received the generalized name of Northern Strategy.³ Officially, the governments are developing medium- and long-term strategies. Strategic planning documents outline the main priorities for the states' development, including their relations with neighbors. For example, the Vision 2030 program has been operating in Saudi Arabia since 2016, and the Vision 2040 program has been active in Oman since 2018. Both of them fall under the overall Arab Dream strategy.

Instruments and Cooperation Mechanisms

The policy of the Gulf States is aimed at developing geo-economic relations with countries of Central Asia. First of all, they are pursuing their economic interests in the region. They are drawn by the opportunity to implement both infrastructure projects, including their participation in new Eur-

¹ See: *BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2019*, 68th Edition, BP p.l.c., London, 2019. P. 30.

² See: A. Dynkin, E. Telegina, G. Khalova, "Rol Evraziyskogo ekonomicheskogo soiuza v formirovanii Bolshoy Evrazii," *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia*, Vol. 62, No. 4, 2018, p. 23.

³ See: Th. Karasik, "The UAE's Northern Strategy in Central Asia," *Gulf State Analytics*, 2 May, 2019, available at [<https://gulfstateranalytics.com/the-uaes-northern-strategy-in-central-asia/>].

asian logistics routes, and geopolitical ones, such as opposing the influence of Iran and Turkey. According to experts at *The Economist*, the GCC will grow in importance as an international economic and trading center. In 2020, the GCC is projected to provide nearly one-quarter of the world's oil supplies... As economic weight gradually shifts southwards and eastwards, emerging markets will become increasingly important trading partners and investment destinations.⁴

Oil export revenues allow the Gulf monarchies to form the world's largest sovereign investment funds.⁵ Among the top 10 of such funds are the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (UAE, \$828 billion), Kuwait Investment Authority (Kuwait, \$592 billion), SAMA Foreign Holdings (Saudi Arabia, \$514 billion) and Qatar Investment Authority (Qatar, \$335 billion). First and foremost, the Arabian monarchies invest in energy projects in the Central Asian states.⁶ Analysts say the Arabian monarchies are willing to use their oil wealth to buy shares in private companies, invest in foreign government securities and finance projects that other investors would consider too risky, which contributes to the development of cooperation with Central Asian countries.⁷

Development of economic and specifically investment cooperation with Central Asian states, the Arabian Gulf countries makes use of similar mechanisms—memorandums of cooperation, bilateral commissions under the auspices of chambers of commerce, investment forums and exhibitions. This is how cooperation with the regional states began in the 1990s and early 2000s.

In the course of the 1992 official visit of Crown Prince Saud Al-Faisal to the countries of the region, Saudi Arabia decided to establish diplomatic relations with four Central Asian states—Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan, and two years later, in April 1994, it also signed the Protocol on establishing diplomatic relations with Kazakhstan. Meanwhile, the rest of the countries of the Arabian Peninsula did the same, following the example of the Kingdom. Two of the five Central Asian states—Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, which occupy a key geo-economic position in the Caspian region, hold the greatest economic importance for the Arab countries.

Kyrgyzstan remains the only state with which no strong economic cooperation has yet been established.⁸ This is the case due to the complicated domestic political situation, and the decision of the Bishkek leadership to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

Cooperation is also developing on a multilateral basis in the framework of the Arab Forum on Economics and Social Development, which was founded in 2007 at the 130th session of the Council of the Arab League in Saudi Arabia.

Significant financial and trade ties are reinforced by the strengthening of political relations between state leaders. A number of agreements were reached on visa-free entry of citizens of the Arabian monarchies into the countries of Central Asia for a period of up to 90 days, and establishment of direct air communication. Monarchs and their families often come to Kazakhstan on private visits,⁹ while Arabian elites travel to Central Asia for falconry.¹⁰

⁴ See: "The GCC in 2020. Outlook for the Gulf and the Global Economy," *The Economist. Economist Intelligence Unit*, 2009, p. 3.

⁵ See: E.S. Biriukov, "Investirovanie sredstv suverennykh investitsionnykh fondov: opyt stran araviyskogo poluostrova i rekomendatsii dlia Rossii," *Ekonomika i predprinimatel'stvo*, No. 6-2 (59-2), 2015, pp. 70-75.

⁶ See: *The Rising Gulf. The New Ambitions of the Gulf Monarchies*, ed. by V. Talbot, ISPI, Italy, 2015, p. 63.

⁷ See: F. Lawson, "The Persian Gulf in the Contemporary International Economy," in: *The Political Economy of the Persian Gulf*, ed. by M. Kamrava, Columbia University Press, New York, 2012, pp. 18-19.

⁸ See: M.A. Subkh, "Ob otnosheniakh stran SSAGPZ s gosudarstvami Tsentralnoy Azii," Institut Blizhnego Vostoka, 3 June, 2012, available at [<http://www.iimes.ru/?p=14850>].

⁹ See: Th. Karasik, "The United Arab Emirates in Central Asia," Center for Global Policy, 28 August, 2019, available at [<https://www.cgpolicy.org/articles/the-united-arab-emirates-in-central-asia/>].

¹⁰ See: N. Koch, "Gulf Nationalism and the Geopolitics of Constructing Falconry as a 'Heritage Sport'," *Studies of Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 2015, pp. 522-539.

Energy and Infrastructure Projects

Kazakhstan

The first country to launch a joint government-level economic project with Kazakhstan was Oman. An agreement on cooperation in the spheres of oil and gas deposit surveying, development and operation in Western Kazakhstan was signed in 1992, granting Oman the right to survey hydrocarbon resources in the Caspian Sea. The Caspian Pipeline Consortium was created. Oman also became the first country to provide a \$30-million loan to Kazakhstan, which was approved during the first visit of the Prime Minister of Kazakhstan, Sergey Tereshchenko to Oman.

United Arab Emirates is Kazakhstan's largest economic partner among the Gulf countries. At present, there are more than 200 companies from the UAE operating in the country.

The level of cooperation between Kazakhstan and the Arabian monarchies had remained low until the 2008 global financial crisis. The need to find new sources of financing has become an incentive to further cooperation. The Al-Falah Foundation (a branch of Mubadala, one of the largest UAE private investment companies), established in November 2008, prioritized the financing of energy, infrastructure, construction and the food industry.

One of the key areas of cooperation for the UAE is the banking sector. After the official visit of the former President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev to the UAE in 2009, the first private Islamic bank in the Al-Hilal region was opened in Astana.

Qatar is also interested in Kazakhstan as the new financial center of Central Asia. In 2008, Qatar reached an agreement on a joint Islamic Finance Bank.

The main project of the United Arab Emirates in Kazakhstan is related to the construction of the International Financial Center in Astana in order to position Kazakhstan as the main financial center of Central Asia.¹¹ The center repeats the model of the Dubai International Financial Center, serves Islamic banks and capital markets, and is slated to become one of the 20 leading financial centers in the world. The center is a special zone where a particular legal system operates. Its foundation was laid in 2010 with the adoption of the Law on Amendments and Additions to Certain Legislative Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the Organization of Islamic Banks and Islamic Finance.

UAE is furthering cooperation in the energy sphere. One of the main achievements in this area is the signing of the 2009 agreement between the Mubadala Investment Company and KazMunayGas on gas production on the Caspian Sea shelf.

Another significant project undertaken by the Emirates in Kazakhstan is the acquisition of two special economic zones on the Caspian Sea by DP World as part of the implementation of a phased global system of port access. DP World acquired 51% of the shares in the Khorgos special economic zone and 49% of the shares in Aktau, thereby obtaining a controlling stake and a casting vote. In general, DP World focuses on the development of transport links, which should become part of the infrastructure of China's Belt and Road project.

In 2018, representatives of the UAE announced the plans to increase investments in new sectors of the economy, which will now include not only energy and mining, but also agriculture and food security.¹²

The third important area of cooperation between Kazakhstan and the Arabian states is construction and infrastructure. The largest number of projects in this sphere belongs to Saudi Arabia. A

¹¹ See: *Russia & CIS Relations with the Gulf Region*, ed. by M. Terterov, Gulf Research Center, Dubai, 2009, p. 195.

¹² See: "Kazakhstan can Become Main Trade and Economic Partner of the UAE in Central Asia," *Egemen Qazaqstan*, 4 September, 2018, available at [<http://en.egemen.kz/article/189659-kazakhstan-can-become-main-trade-and-economic-partner-of-the-uae-in-central-asia>].

Saudi investment company was established in 1997 with the support of the Islamic Development Bank to finance infrastructure projects in Kazakhstan.¹³

Significant projects implemented using Saudi Arabian investments include the reconstruction of the Karaganda-Astana highway. Other Arab investors, the Islamic Development Bank and the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development, also took part in the project. The following infrastructure projects were funded by the Islamic Development Bank in Kazakhstan: construction of an alternative route through the Kurdai Pass, construction of the Bailey-Kulsary motorway, reconstruction of the airport in Atyrau, construction of a highway from Astana to Borovoy, water supply for agricultural areas in northern and central Kazakhstan and construction of medical facilities in Astana.

Saudi Arabia has allocated four large grants for the construction of facilities in Kazakhstan—the Parliament building, the cardiology center in Almaty, the Zhas Ulan Military Academy and a large mosque, next to which a hospital and clinic have been built.

The Arabian monarchies have already revealed several potential projects. Saudi Arabia is developing a multilateral project to construct a gas pipeline through Iran to Kazakhstan, as well as a project to build an oil terminal on the Caspian Sea.

UAE's potential projects include the construction of a large petrochemical complex jointly by the Kazakhstan United Chemical Campaign and the Austrian Borealis, another division of Mubadala. An identical project, however, was provided for by the agreement between the Mubadala Investment Company and the Samruk-Kazyna National Welfare Fund of Kazakhstan and should be implemented by 2025.

The plans also include the launch of a joint investment fund with a total capital of \$500 million, with the Baiterek National Management Holding on the side of Kazakhstan.

Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan is an important country in terms of the Arabian states' geopolitical interests—it borders both Iran and Afghanistan. The Persian Gulf countries heed close attention to maintaining regional stability and security.

First of all, the Persian Gulf countries are interested in infrastructure projects related, among others, to the TAPI gas pipeline project, whose launch has been postponed indefinitely. Turkmenistan is of particular importance for the UAE and Saudi Arabia in the context of the China's Belt and Road initiative. The policy pursued by the Arabian monarchies aims to promote their role as the main Persian Gulf hub for transcontinental transit traffic within the framework of the Initiative.¹⁴

If this policy is successfully implemented, the Arab monarchies will gain advantages in ensuring the supply chain within the framework of the Initiative and the existing regional transport and infrastructure corridors, and as a result will strengthen their positions in Central Asia. The implementation of these agreements will require stable and secure infrastructure and transport links through the countries of Central Asia, where the seaports of Turkmenistan play a key role.

Infrastructure projects in Ashgabad will also receive funding from the Mubadala Investment Company. This was agreed upon in August 2019 during the official visit of the President of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov, to the UAE. During the visit, the Mubadala Company signed a special confidentiality agreement with Turkmengaz.

¹³ See: Mai-Yamani, "Saudi Arabia and Central Asia: The Islamic Connection," in: *From the Gulf to Central Asia*, ed. by A. Ehteshami, University of Exeter Press, Exeter, 1994, p. 55.

¹⁴ See: E. Yeranian, "UAE Crown Prince Ben Zayed Visits China to Boost Ties," *Voice of America*, 23 July, 2019, available at [<https://www.voanews.com/middle-east/uae-crown-prince-ben-zayed-visits-china-boost-ties>].

Ashgabad had also entered into a five-year contract worth \$100 million to develop its offshore hydrocarbon resources. Dragon Oil, a division of the Emirates National Oil Company that is registered in Ireland but based in Dubai, acted as a contractor. The company operates in two offshore fields of the Cheleken contract area—Dzheitune (Lam) and Dzhygalybeg (Zhdanov).

Uzbekistan

The countries of the Arabian Peninsula are developing cooperation with Uzbekistan along similar lines. Monarchies invest in energy and infrastructure, but overall trade remains insignificant.

The first cooperation agreements between Saudi Arabia and Uzbekistan were concluded in the 1990s: in 1995, the Joint Commission for Trade Cooperation was established, and in 1996, the Saudi oil company Delta Oil entered into an oil field development agreement with the Uzbekneftegaz national oil company.

In 2008, the Arab Coordination Group visited Uzbekistan, comprising representatives from the Islamic Development Bank, the Saudi Fund for Development, the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development and the OPEC Fund. During the visit, investment projects were approved for funding by the countries of the Arabian Peninsula in the amount of over \$1.5 billion. In addition to the development of infrastructure and the energy sector, projects include social educational programs, including those in the religious sphere, and water and agricultural security projects, which are of utmost importance to GCC states.

A special achievement is the signing in 2011 of a quadripartite agreement on the construction of a transport corridor between Oman, Iran, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The implementation of this project will allow to establish a duty-free zone.

Also interested in broadening cooperation, the UAE organized a new joint investment fund in Uzbekistan in 2018 through the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development with a total capital of over \$1 billion. An international oil investment company is developing gas fields in the western part of Uzbekistan, and financing the construction of a synthetic fuel production plant in the amount of over \$1 billion. Mubadala Company invested \$600 million in a fertilizer plant in Uzbekistan.

Tajikistan

Relations between Tajikistan and the countries of the Arabian Peninsula are largely influenced by the former's relations with Iran. When Dushanbe-Tehran relations deteriorated due to Iran's support of opposition parties in Tajikistan, both the influence of the Arabian states and the size of their investments experienced an increase.

At the end of 2017, the UAE proposed to create a common investment fund in Tajikistan to further economic ties between the two countries.¹⁵

The Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development has provided a 25-million investment for the reconstruction of the Kulob-Kalai Humb corridor in Tajikistan. The Islamic Development Bank and the OPEC Fund for International Development also joined the project.

Qatar sponsors few projects in Tajikistan. One of them is the Diar Dushanbe elite residential complex, which is operated by the Qatar Diar company.

¹⁵ See: F. Rahman, "UAE, Tajikistan Plan to Create Joint Investment Fund," Gulf News, 26 December, 2017, available at [<https://gulfnews.com/business/uae-tajikistan-plan-to-create-joint-investment-fund-1.2147397>].

During an official visit to Doha in 2017, President Rakhmon proposed a large number of investment projects—from energy and infrastructure to agriculture and water. But the political and economic elite of the Arabian monarchies does not seek to launch large-scale projects in Tajikistan because of the complicated military-political situation.

The positive trends in the development of cooperation did not last long. In the summer of 2019, the Ambassador of Tajikistan to Iran called for investment in the Tajik economy during his first meeting with Gholam-Hossein Shafeie, the head of ICCIMA, an organization that unites Iran's leading commercial, industrial, mining and agricultural business structures.¹⁶

Food and Water Security

The countries of the Arabian Peninsula have a predominantly arid climate. Bahrain has the largest percentage of arable land and areas occupied by perennial crops (4.35% of the country's territory). Meanwhile, Oman has the lowest percentage of arable land (0.12% of the country's territory), and Saudi Arabia has the lowest percentage of land occupied by perennial crops (0.09% of potentially arable land). The remaining territory is arid, unused and/or used for other purposes—between 90% and 99% of the areas of the Arabian Peninsula states.¹⁷ These countries import 60% of the food they require.¹⁸ Accordingly, the problem of water scarcity is another factor that impedes the successful development of proprietary agriculture or livestock farming. Water resources of all Arab countries are estimated at only 0.9% of the total world reserves, and renewable water sources do not exceed 1% of the global potential.¹⁹ As a result, the volume of water per capita here is steadily falling: in 1960 it was equal to 3,300 cu m per person, and in 1990 it equaled 1,300 cu m. The forecast for 2025 is even more disappointing: only 0.7 thousand cu m, which translates into a fivefold reduction of the norm.²⁰

Current water consumption in the absence of permanent water arteries is 9 times higher in Saudi Arabia than the level of natural replenishment of underground water resources in its territory, 7.64 times higher in Kuwait, 18.6 times higher in the UAE. The total renewable water resources in KSA are equal to only 2.34 cu km per year. The total groundwater reserves (including fossil groundwater) are estimated at about 500 cu km, with 340 cu km of them are difficult to access.²¹

Saudi Arabia decided to stop growing staple foods by 2016 due to water shortages. Due to falling groundwater levels and the drying out of 80,000 wells, the United Arab Emirates has banned the export of water from the country and is actively using desalination plants.

The countries of the Arabian Peninsula are faced with the need to ensure the safety of transportation due to their need for agricultural products. But while maritime traffic from Pakistan is safe,

¹⁶ See: "Tajikistan Willing to Revive Economic Relations with Iran," *Tehran Times*, 26 July, 2019, available at [<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/438567/Tajikistan-willing-to-revive-economic-relations-with-Iran>].

¹⁷ See: G. Kosach, "Saudovskaia Aravia: transformatsiia vlasti i politiki," *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia*, Vol. 63, No. 4, 2019, p. 60.

¹⁸ See: R. Zurayk, J. Chaaban, A. Sabra, *Ensuring that Potential Gulf Farmland Investments in Developing Countries are Pro-Poor and Sustainable*, Science+Business Media B.V. & International Society for Plant Pathology, Springer, 2011, pp. 129-137.

¹⁹ See: O.P. Bibikova, et al., *Arabskiy mir: kontrasty vodnogo balanssa*, ed. by Z.A. Solovieva, A.O. Filonik, Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, 2018, p. 293.

²⁰ See: *Water Resources of the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, Prepared for, and under the guidance of, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, United Nations, New York, 1992, U.N. document A/AC.183, p. 39.

²¹ See: *Saudi Arabia*, Aquastat, Survey 2008. 14 pp.

deliveries from Central Asian countries are associated with resolving both transportation and security problems.²²

In turn, the countries of Central Asia are the most active regional states in terms of food export. Direct deliveries to the countries of the Arabian Peninsula are impossible due to the geographical setting, since logistics routes traverse Iran or Afghanistan.²³

Under these circumstances, the Central Asian states are no longer a valuable partner in the sphere of food supplies to the countries of the Arabian Peninsula; in fact, cooperation with the countries of Europe, Latin America and, in some respects, Africa on this matter is more profitable. Development of cooperation with the Central Asian countries will require investments in trading companies and the creation of infrastructure and logistics routes, as well as food security assistance within the states themselves.

The Arab Gulf countries decided to purchase agricultural land abroad to ensure their own food security. To uphold this strategy, as well as to maintain stability in the Central Asian countries, the monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula are implementing the projects listed below in the Central Asian region.

A joint Saudi-Kazakhstani mineral water bottling enterprise was established in the Sary-Agach district in Southern Kazakhstan. Kuwait is investing in water security projects. It sponsored a World Bank project to supply the Aral region through the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development. Kuwait also allocated a grant of \$1 million to examine a heating infrastructure project in Astana. In 1997 the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development invested in a water supply project in Nukus and Urgench regions of Uzbekistan. In 2004, the same fund launched 9 projects worth more than \$200 million in land reclamation, water supply and healthcare.

Soft Power of Islam

In exchange for financial investments, the Arab monarchies expect political solidarity from the Central Asia countries. All of them are members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and support the idea of Islamic solidarity.

Immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf contributed to the establishment of numerous Arab religious foundations, which were supposed to unite local Muslims through madrassas and religious education programs in the Arabian states.²⁴ Most of the 1990s investments by the Saudi Fund for Development were aimed specifically at developing this area.²⁵

Based on geopolitical and geo-economic interests, the Arab Gulf countries seek, on the one hand, to resist the influence exerted on the regional states by Russia and China, and on the other hand, to prevent their regional neighbors—Turkey, Iran and even other Gulf countries—from gaining a foothold there.

For example, the policy pursued by UAE in Tajikistan acquires a vivid ethno-confessional connotation. If we take into account the Persian ethnic identity of Tajik society and the common histori-

²² See: *Potential for GCC Agro-investments in Africa and Central Asia*, Gulf Research Center, 2008, pp. 21-22.

²³ See: *Strategic Nodes and Regional Interactions in Southern Eurasia*, ed. by M. Laruelle. Georgetown University Press, Washington D.C., 2017, 87 pp.

²⁴ See: R. Sattarov, "Razocharovannye v umme. Pochemu Tsentralnaia Azia otkazalas ot sblizheniia s islamskim mirom," Moscow Carnegie Center, 31 July, 2018, available at [<https://carnegie.ru/commentary/76947>].

²⁵ See: G. Fuller, "The Impact of Central Asia on the 'New Middle East'," in: *Central Asia Meets the Middle East*, ed. by D. Menashri, Frank Cass Publishers, London, 1998, p. 222.

cal past connecting it with Iran, maintaining friendly relations with Dushanbe helps to counteract the expansion of Iran's regional presence. As for the confrontation between the UAE and Turkey, it is largely associated to the influence on the region's religious future and occurs in the context of the struggle between different "visions of Islam." Turkey is promoting the modernization and evolutionary transformation of traditional religious norms, while the UAE, like other Persian Gulf states, advocates the classical and even radical traditional forms of Islam.

Relations between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Uzbekistan on this issue are of particular importance due to the fact that the Kingdom has the largest Uzbek diaspora among other countries of the region. According to research, about 500,000 ethnic Uzbeks live on the Arabian Peninsula, and most of them are concentrated in Saudi Arabia.²⁶ It was through influencing this diaspora that Saudi Arabia sought to strengthen the positions of Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia. Agreements have been established with religious institutions, which provide for training imams in Saudi Arabia.

Meanwhile, the solidarity of the Islamic Ummah and Pan-Turkism is being gradually replaced by pragmatism. According to the Russian Asian studies scholar Irina Zvyagelskaya, the 2011 Arab Spring had played its role in this process.²⁷ Central Asian states are attempting to avoid falling under the control of any of the adversaries and to protect their own neutrality, and repeatedly emphasize their religious tolerance and interethnic harmony. Moreover, the countries of Central Asia are expanding their cooperation with Israel, which is causing dissatisfaction on the part of the Arabian monarchies.²⁸ A rapport with Central Asia is also of great importance to Israel.

The countries of the Arabian Peninsula promote soft power by investing in other social projects. In 1998, the Sultanate of Oman and Kuwait allocated \$10 million each for the construction of the Saltanat Sarayi (Palace) and other administrative buildings in Astana (now Nur-Sultan), while the UAE funneled financial assistance in the amount of \$15 million for the construction of the Presidential Palace in the Kazakh capital. In 2003, Saudi Arabia allocated \$350,000 for the construction of the Center for Reproductive Medicine in Uzbekistan. Qatar sponsored the construction of the Islamic Cultural Center in Astana. In addition to the cultural center project, Qatar supported the construction projects of Sheikh Tamim secondary school in Astana, a rehabilitation center for victims of nuclear weapon testing in Semey (near the former Semipalatinsk ground), as well as cooperation to preserve wildlife in the Andasay State Natural Reserve.

Significant investments were also made in the construction of social facilities in Tajikistan, including schools, medical centers, and diagnostic centers. In addition to the construction of an elite residential complex by a Qatar company, Qatar is also involved in building the largest mosque in Central Asia in Dushanbe worth over \$100 million.

However, Qatar does not utilize the potential of its Al-Jazeera channel, whose audience in Central Asia remains insignificant, because the channel is broadcast only in Arabic and English.²⁹ Meanwhile, the channel itself is one of the Arab countries' key influential resources.

In 1999, the emir of Kuwait donated \$10 million to Kazakhstan for the construction of government buildings in Astana through the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development. In November 1999, Kuwaiti private donors founded the Kazakh-Kuwaiti University in Shymkent, which is now the South Kazakhstan Humanitarian Academy managed by the State Kuwait Fund of the Society for

²⁶ See: Z.I. Muravvanov, "Uzbekistan and the Gulf Cooperation Council," in: *From the Gulf to Central Asia*, p. 88.

²⁷ See: I.D. Zvyagelskaya, "Blizhniy Vostok i Tsentralnaia Azia. Globalnye trendy v regionalnom ispolnenii," Aspekt Press, 2018, p. 95.

²⁸ See: E.M. Savicheva, M.O. Shaar, "Otnosheniia arabskikh stran Persidskogo zaliva s tsentralnoaziatskimi gosudarstvami SNG," *Vestnik RUDN*, Series *Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia*, No. 4, 2014, p. 164.

²⁹ See: A. Ibrahim, "Otnosheniia arabskogo mira so stranami Tsentralnoy Azii," 15 July, 2007, available at [<http://www.aljazeera.net/specialfiles/pages/a2e8f771-1f1e-417f-a748-fc4e3504ad0>] (in Arabic).

Social Reforms. As of 2019, the Saudi Fund for Development has implemented nearly 60 social projects in Central Asia amounting to a total of \$1.2 billion.³⁰

Conclusion

In the medium term, the Arab Gulf countries will continue to implement their strategic priorities in Central Asia. Their interests will still be focused on infrastructure projects, as well as on the energy and finance spheres. The expansion of cooperation with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan will still retain the greatest importance for the countries of the Arabian Peninsula because of their energy potential. In addition, there is a huge resource for the development of cultural and educational ties, given the historical and common spiritual heritage. The security and defense spheres can also be developed in connection with the complicated international situation.

However, the confrontation of the Arabian monarchies with Turkey and Iran for influence in the region will continue. Central Asia itself prefers to remain neutral on this issue and implement a multi-vector policy.

³⁰ See: "Projects and Countries," Saudi Fund for Development, available at [<https://www.sfd.gov.sa/ar/web/guest/countries>] (in Arabic).

JAPAN'S POLICY IN CENTRAL ASIA AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

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Sergey ZHILTSOV

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

ABSTRACT

After the breakup of the U.S.S.R., Japan began developing and implementing its foreign policy towards Central Asia (CA). Japan's attention to countries in the region was determined by its long-term economic and political interests. First and foremost, Japan was interested in gaining access to the assets of CA countries: their

fuel and energy complex and mineral deposits. The need to address this problem was dictated by the country's limited natural resources and its heavy dependence on hydrocarbon imports. Accordingly, Japanese policy was aimed to gain unimpeded access to the hydrocarbon resources of CA countries and create reliable export routes for oil and gas in the interests of its own economy. This is why the creation of alternative pipeline routes for transporting oil and gas from Central Asia was a key goal for Japan. But its achievement was hindered by Central Asia's geographical remoteness. As a result, Japan lost out to China, which borders on CA countries. Nevertheless, Japan proposed a number of pipeline projects that should have given it access to Central Asian resources, mainly through Chinese territory.

Japan tried to create multilateral formats of cooperation with CA countries by launching various initiatives. But Tokyo's efforts failed to produce a positive result in

view of the disunity and heterogeneity of countries in the region, which did not constitute a single geopolitical unit. Domestic political processes in the CA countries developed differently as they faced a set of economic and social problems. As a result, Japan built its policy regarding the Central Asian countries mainly on a bilateral basis. Of particular interest to Japan were Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, which have significant oil and gas reserves.

Although Japan's long-term goals have practically not changed over time, its Central Asia policy can be divided into several stages, each of which has its own specific features determined by the development of the geopolitical situation in Central Asia, the influence of other extra-regional states on countries in the region, and the interests of the Central Asian countries. In recent years, Japan has actively implemented its policy by expanding bilateral cooperation while retaining an interest in multilateral cooperation formats.

KEYWORDS: Japan, Central Asia, EU, the U.S., Russia, energy, hydrocarbon resources, pipelines.

Introduction

Japan's policy in Central Asia, like that of other extra-regional states, began after the breakup of the U.S.S.R., although even before that, in October 1991, Japan decided to provide \$2.5 billion worth of grants to the post-Soviet countries.¹

After gaining independence, the former Soviet republics were subjected to the massive influence of various external actors such as the United States, Turkey, Iran, South Korea, China, and Japan.² But, in contrast to other countries, Tokyo's policy was restrained and, in a way, ambiguous. On the one hand, Japan showed a heightened interest in Central Asian energy resources. Given its technologies and financial capacity, the shortage of raw materials created the conditions for Tokyo's active participation in the development of Central Asian economies.³ Japan also hoped to expand its

¹ See: F.P. Urazayeva, "Otnosheniya Yaponii so stranami Tsentralnoi Azii," *Voprosy natsionalnykh i federativnykh otnosheni*, No. 1, 2017, pp. 180-188.

² See: K. Darabi, Sh. Nabati, "Vneshniaia politika Kitaia v Tsentralnoi Azii v perekhodnoi ere," *The Caspian Region: Politics, Economics, Culture*, No. 3, 2018, pp. 109-119.

³ See: M.Yu. Igitian, "Geopoliticheskaia strategiiia vedushchikh i regionalnykh gosudarstv v Tsentralnoi Azii," *Etnosotsium i mezhnatsionalnaia kultura*, No. 12, 2017, pp. 163-175.

economic presence in Central Asia. In 1992, for example, Japan's Foreign Minister Michio Watanabe visited Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. There were also plans to provide economic assistance to other CA countries. Japan's efforts in this area were spurred by the active policy of China, which sought to gain a dominant position in the CA countries. Japan was also attracted by the natural resources of these countries. On the other hand, its policy was passive because of the geographical remoteness of Central Asia and its poor exploration. Accordingly, Japan opened only two embassies in the region: in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

The combination of caution in expanding into Central Asia and a desire to assert the Japanese presence in the region has led to a situation where Tokyo's policy has been marked by periods of heightened activity and interest alternating with long periods of "political slack."

The Desire for Central Asian Hydrocarbons

The lack of a clear vision of its policy in Central Asia, whose countries had just gained independence, did not prevent Japan from going after the region's hydrocarbon resources or joining the debate on export pipeline projects, especially since the United States, the EU, and China were among the competitors in the pipeline race.⁴

One of the projects developed and discussed back in 1992 was the Turkmenistan-China-Japan gas pipeline, an 8,000 km-long mega pipeline with a capacity of 30 bcm of gas per year. Initially, the pipeline was designed by the China Petroleum Engineering & Construction Corporation (CPECC), which was later joined by Mitsubishi Corporation (Japan) and Exxon (U.S.), whose management believed that transportation of gas from Turkmenistan to Southeast Asia was a safer and more profitable option than gas supplies from Siberia. The pipeline was to have become part of the extensive gas pipeline network linking Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan with users in China, South Korea, and Japan.⁵ At that time, the Turkmenistan-Western China-Japan pipeline project, like other large-scale projects, was deemed unprofitable because of low global gas prices in that period and the high cost of the project (about \$9 billion). As a result, work on the project was suspended. At the same time, the problem of gaining access to hydrocarbon resources continued to be a focus of Japanese policy. For example, a white paper on energy policy issued in 1993 emphasized the importance of oil and gas resources, including those located in Central Asia. In March 1993, it was announced that the Japan National Oil Corporation was ready to launch a full-fledged feasibility study for the commercial production of oil and gas in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan.⁶

Japan has long been interested in gas transportation routes from different parts of the former Soviet Union. At a conference called Perspectives of Eurasia as a Field of Global Communication in 1993, the National Pipeline Research Society of Japan (established in 1989) presented its conclusions and proposals for the construction of a Trans-Asia Gas Pipeline. This document considered, among many other options of international pipeline routes, a gas pipeline route called Northeast Asia and North Pacific. The Turkmenistan-Western China-Japan gas pipeline was conceived as part of this route.

However, Japan's plans were not implemented in practice. The development of new gas pipelines in the eastern direction was associated with the hydrocarbon resources of Kazakhstan and Turkmeni-

⁴ See: *Central Asia: Its Strategic Importance and Future Prospects*, ed. M. Hafeez, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1994, 337 pp.

⁵ See: I.S. Zonn, "Veliki Sholkovyi put stanovitsia velikim neftegazovym putem," *Problemy postsovetskogo prostranstva*, No. 2, 2015, pp. 34-44.

⁶ See: O.A. Dobrinskaya, "Energeticheskaya diplomatiya Yaponii i Tsentralnaia Azia," *Ezhegodnik Yaponia*, No. 40, 2011, pp. 38-51.

stan. One of the potential users of natural gas from the Caspian countries was China, which had followed an active policy towards Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan from the beginning of the 1990s.⁷ Moreover, in the first half of the 1990s the Central Asian countries were a target of China's trade and economic expansion because of their economic and political weakness. The uncontrolled development of trade relations allowed China to tap the raw material, mineral, and human resources of these countries.

Tokyo took into account the desire of Central Asian countries to develop economic relations with Japan. Kazakhstan, for example, considered the possibility of expanding the geography of oil supplies towards China and then on to Japan. At the same time, Central Asia was of no interest to Japan as a market for its goods because of its small population, while the transfer of production to Central Asia did not make economic sense for Japanese companies considering its remoteness from export markets and its underdeveloped infrastructure. Nevertheless, the Japanese side was in favor of developing economic relations with the CA countries.⁸ It focused on Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. Apart from political stability, these countries attracted Tokyo by their natural resources. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were of less interest to Japan. In the early 1990s, Tajikistan was the scene of intense political struggle. In Kyrgyzstan, which positioned itself as an "island of democracy" in the region, the political elites of the north and south of the country were also locked in a fierce battle for power.

Tokyo's efforts to expand trade and economic relations with the CA countries were spurred by China's intensified Central Asia policy, which underwent a change in the second half of the 1990s. Beijing focused its efforts on the further development of economic relations, backing them by geopolitical considerations. These policy changes were caused by the intensifying competition for the hydrocarbon resources of the Caspian region and routes for their delivery to foreign markets. China was interested in preventing the CA countries from coming under the influence or control of states that could pursue an unfriendly policy towards it.

A primary task of Chinese policy in that situation was to prevent the establishment of any political, let alone military, alliances or organizations directed against China. In addition, China was obliged to take into account the appearance of military bases in Central Asia. Their deployment changed the geopolitical situation in the region. There was concern in Beijing that, in the event of tensions in Sino-American relations, the CA countries could turn into a springboard for attacks against China. Given the growing role of hydrocarbons in the Chinese economy, Beijing was faced with the task of ensuring guaranteed access to these resources.

As a result, Japan reviewed and adjusted its approaches to the CA countries. In 1995, for example, Tokyo granted preferential treatment to Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, which made it possible to increase the supply of mineral resources to Japan.⁹

New Initiatives

Despite China's leadership in expanding its presence in Central Asia, Japan did not abandon its plans to strengthen ties with the CA countries. Relations between the main external forces were strained,¹⁰ which compelled them to launch various initiatives in order to strengthen their positions in

⁷ See: S.S. Zhiltsov, I.S. Zonn, *Kaspiiskaia truboprovodnaia geopolitika*, Vostok-Zapad, Moscow, 2011, 320 pp.

⁸ See: D.A. Mileev, "Vneshniaia politika Yaponii v Tsentralnoi Azii," in: *Strany SNG v sisteme mezhdunarodnykh ot-noshenii* (collected articles), Institute of Oriental Studies, Moscow, 2008, pp. 523-543.

⁹ See: E.A. Gavrilina, "Prioritety vneshnei politiki Yaponii v stranakh Tsentralnoi Azii na sovremennom etape," *Armia i obshchestvo*, No. 2, 2012, pp. 120-125.

¹⁰ See: V.V. Yevseev, "Tsentralnaia Azia: igra na protivorechiakh osnovnykh vneshnepoliticheskikh igrokov," *Vostok, Afro-aziatskie obshchestva: istoria i sovremennost*, No. 4, 2013, pp. 70-83.

Central Asia. It was partly for this reason that Japan's foreign policy strategy towards Central Asia was conceptualized in 1997.¹¹ For example, Japan's Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto launched his Eurasian (Silk Road) Diplomacy initiative. The idea behind it was to expand political dialog and economic relations, promote democracy, and develop natural resources in CA countries. The final provision of this initiative was of particular interest to Tokyo, because Japan was badly in need of alternative suppliers of natural resources.

In 1997-1998, the region was visited by numerous Japanese delegations, which discussed issues of economic cooperation and wider participation in oil and gas development projects. In March 1998, Japan presented its Silk Road Action Plan, which addressed issues of politics, economics, and stability. But economic interests related to ensuring Japan's energy security were at the root of the document. Japan's long-term plans included the exploration and exploitation of natural resources in Central Asia and the Caspian and their safe delivery to the global market and directly to Japan.¹²

Considering the difficulties in implementing energy projects, Japan adjusted its policy in Central Asia, focusing attention on trade and economic cooperation. In the first decade after the breakup of the U.S.S.R., it provided economic assistance to Central Asian countries. In 1992-2000, this assistance amounted to \$1 billion, with most of it going to three countries: Uzbekistan (\$396 million), Kazakhstan (\$306 million), and Kyrgyzstan (\$290 million). They were granted soft loans for modernizing their transport infrastructure.¹³ It should be noted that Japan viewed this assistance as an important tool in promoting its long-term interests: projecting a positive image of the country in Central Asia and establishing stable economic relations.

Overall, Japanese policy in the region began to change in the early 2000s. Tokyo opened embassies in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan. Trade and economic cooperation with Uzbekistan was expanded, which allowed the two countries to announce a strategic partnership in 2002.

Japan's increased activity in the region was associated with the Chinese and U.S. expansion into Central Asia. The EU was also active in the region, while Russia continued to exert a strong influence in Central Asia, since the region was of considerable interest to it. Japan sought to strengthen its position in the CA countries, particularly in the energy sector. In 2002, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi announced plans to develop energy cooperation with Central Asia.¹⁴

Moving Towards Multilateral Formats

In 2004, Japan proposed a new framework for cooperation known as the Central Asia plus Japan Dialog, for the first time putting forward the idea of cooperation in a multilateral format. In contrast to the Hashimoto doctrine, the new initiative was directed only towards the Central Asian countries.¹⁵

That event coincided with China's increased activity in Central Asia as Beijing began to implement its energy projects in the region, primarily seeking to step up the discussion and subsequent

¹¹ See: O.Ya. Dobrinskaya, "Yaponia-Tsentrlnaia Azija: v poiskakh nefi i statusa," *Azja i Afrika segodnja*, No. 8, 2011, pp. 45-50.

¹² See: EA. Borodin, "Ofitsialnaia pomoshch razvitiuu kak osnova razvitiia otnoshenii Yaponii so stranami Tsentrlnoi Azii," *Kazanskaia nauka*, No. 4, 2013, pp. 15-19.

¹³ See: EF. Troitsky, M.Yu. Kim, "Politika Yaponii v Tsentrlnoi Azii (1992-2016)," *Vestnik Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Istorija*, No. 50, 2017, pp. 84-88.

¹⁴ See: O.A. Dobrinskaya, "Energeticheskaia diplomatia Yaponii i Tsentrlnaia Azia."

¹⁵ See: O.Ya. Dobrinskaya, "Yaponia-Tsentrlnaia Azia: v poiskakh nefi i statusa."

construction of the Turkmenistan-China gas pipeline. In that period, the CA countries were also being drawn into Russian integration projects, some of which involved China. For example, Russia promoted the project of the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) and, jointly with Beijing, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The Central Asian countries took an active part in both projects. Accordingly, Japan believed that the new format would help to contain the aspirations of Russia and China.

The format suggested by Japan was approved by all CA countries except Turkmenistan, which in that period was reorienting its foreign policy to China. In August 2004, the foreign ministers of four CA countries (without Turkmenistan) and Japan met for the first time in Astana (Kazakhstan). The Japanese side focused attention on the need to develop the multilateral framework for cooperation in Central Asia, emphasizing that its goals were long-term. These ideas were elaborated in 2006, at the second foreign ministers' meeting in Tokyo in the Central Asia plus Japan format. The meeting adopted an Action Plan that provided for the development of political dialog along with economic cooperation.

Japan's efforts were aimed at addressing a number of key problems, primarily that of ensuring energy security. It was planned to achieve this by gaining access to the energy resources of Central Asian countries. It is no accident that in 2006 Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry developed a national energy strategy that emphasized the need to expand ties with countries rich in energy resources.¹⁶

In that period, Tokyo paid increasing attention to hydrocarbon resources. This was partly due to high global energy prices, which sharply increased the profitability of hydrocarbon production and stimulated investment, including from Japan, in the production and transportation of hydrocarbons.¹⁷ Thus, Japan saw the need to diversify its energy sources.¹⁸

Japan did not rule out the possibility of participating in the Turkmenistan-Western China gas pipeline project, which could be extended to reach Japan. By that time, however, the situation had changed. In 2003-2005, Chinese companies conducted exploration works on the right bank of the Amu Darya River in Turkmenistan, confirming the existence of promising gas fields in this area.¹⁹ Besides, China was in need of significant amounts of additional hydrocarbons, so that it was less interested in extending the gas pipeline to Japan.

Along with addressing issues related to hydrocarbon development and exports from the region, Tokyo was concerned about the strengthening positions of Russia and China, which had managed to build their own models of cooperation with the Central Asian countries.

In August 2006, the Japanese Prime Minister paid a visit to CA countries, which showed the region's increasing role in Japanese policy. That same year, Japan's policy was supplemented with the concept called Arc of Freedom and Prosperity. The new initiative of Japanese diplomacy was designed to promote universal values: freedom, democracy, and the rule of law.²⁰ Such ideas did not find support in the CA countries, which formally supported the course for expanding and introducing democratic procedures and principles, but in practice followed traditional approaches specific to Central Asian societies.

¹⁶ See: M. Nurgaliev, T. Shaymergenov, "Japanese Diplomacy Makes New Headway in Central Asia: Its Problems, Expectations, and Prospects," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 6 (48), 2007, pp. 125-135.

¹⁷ See: I. Tomberg, "Central Asia and the Caspian: A New Stage in the Great Energy Game," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 5 (41), 2006, pp. 20-34.

¹⁸ See: G.N. Kim, "Interesy stran ATR na Kaspii," in: *Tsentrlnaya Aziya i Kaspiiski region: riski, vyzovy, ugrozy*, ed. B.K. Sultanov, KISI, Almaty, 2012, p. 170.

¹⁹ See: K.L. Syroyezhkin, *Kazakhstan-Kitai: ot prigranichnoi trgovli k strategicheskomu partnerstvu*, Vol. 2, KISI, Almaty, 2010, p. 117.

²⁰ See: G. Ismayilzada, "A New Pillar of Japanese Foreign Policy: The Arc of Freedom and Prosperity—Japanese Policy Toward the Guam Organization," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 3-4 (51-52), 2008, pp. 196-202.

The Japanese initiative had little effect on the positions of countries in the region, primarily because of their disunity and serious contradictions in the sphere of water and energy. In addition, the cooperation format suggested by Japan was not supported by specific large-scale projects, as in the case of China.

Nevertheless, Japan continued to focus on expanding cooperation with CA countries in the development of resources, particularly in the joint development of uranium deposits in Kazakhstan and oil and gas deposits in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

The third foreign ministers' meeting in 2010 was attended by Turkmenistan, which was faced with the ever more urgent task of diversifying both political and economic contacts. Despite the efforts of Japanese diplomacy, the proposed format ("5+1") did nothing either to promote Japan's interests or to advance the development of Central Asia. Economic relations between countries in the region remained at a low level, while the expansion of political contacts was hindered by mutual claims and unresolved conflicts, including in the water and energy sector. For this reason, Japan built its relations with the CA countries on a bilateral basis. This situation suited the CA countries, which were able to attract Japanese investments and technologies. Besides, Japan did not criticize them for violations of human rights while implementing investment projects and providing assistance. In 2001-2015, the total amount of Japanese economic aid to countries in the region reached \$1.6 billion. As before, its main recipients were Uzbekistan (\$609 million), Kazakhstan (\$444 million), and Kyrgyzstan (\$295 million).²¹

Despite Japan's heightened activity and its desire to achieve concrete results, its actual involvement in the affairs of CA countries remained quite modest. The influence of Japanese diplomacy was limited because of objective factors, geographical remoteness, and a low level of economic cooperation compared to China and Russia, especially since Japan's leaders realized that in the following decade Central Asia would be strongly influenced by Chinese and Russian interests.²²

In 2014, following in the wake of U.S. policy, Japan organized a ministerial meeting that was attended by the foreign ministers of all five CA countries. The Joint Statement adopted at the meeting was designed to contain Beijing's ambitions in the region.²³ But the Statement had no effect on China's relations with the CA countries, because by that time it had gained a strong foothold in their economies, implementing large-scale infrastructure projects and providing significant loans. In particular, China promoted its interests through the Belt and Road infrastructure project, which naturally caused concern among other extra-regional states.²⁴

Banking on the Economy

Japanese policy in Central Asia was given a new boost in 2015, when Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited all five CA countries, signing \$27 billion worth of agreements. Tokyo's activity in the Central Asian region was characterized not so much by big initiatives as by the gradual development of practical projects, primarily of economic interest.²⁵

²¹ See: EF. Troitsky, M.Yu. Kim, op. cit.

²² See: Ya.O. Zakhariev, "Yaponia v Tsentralnoi Azii v nachale XXI veka: izuchenie problemy ekonomicheskogo vlianiia kitaiskimi spetsialistami," *Ekonomika Tsentralnoi Azii*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2017, pp. 11-18.

²³ See: Ibidem.

²⁴ See: M. Glyants, "Kitaiskaia initsiativa 'Odin poias—odin put': chto mozhet sdelat brend," *Problemy postsovetetskogo prostranstva*, No. 1, 2017, pp. 8-19.

²⁵ See: N. Murashkin, I. Akylbaev, "Yaponia i Tsentralnaia Azia. 'Tikhoye' partnerstvo s privlecheniem vneregionalnykh igrokov," 20 June, 2017, available at: [<https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/yaponiya-i-tsentralnaia-aziya-tikhoe-partnerstvo-s-privlecheniem-vneregionalnykh-igrokov/>], 8 November, 2019.

In particular, the Japanese Prime Minister visited Turkmenistan, where the parties signed agreements totaling \$18 billion²⁶ related to cooperation in the energy sector, primarily investments by Japanese companies in the development of the Galkynysh gas field.²⁷ Agreements on the implementation of joint investment projects were also reached during meetings with the President of Uzbekistan. They were concerned with the automotive industry, telecommunications, transport, and energy. Japan planned to invest in the development of new hydrocarbon deposits. Uzbekistan, in turn, was interested in attracting Japanese investment, which would also enable it to obtain new technologies.

Tokyo's activity took place as other states expanded their efforts in the region, proposing their own multilateral cooperation formats to the CA countries. In October-November 2015, the U.S. Secretary of State paid a visit to Central Asia, where he toured all five countries in the region. During his visit to Samarkand (Uzbekistan), he met for the first time with the five foreign ministers of the CA countries. They signed what is known as the Samarkand Declaration, which initiated ministerial meetings in the "5+1" format. In the same period, the European Union revised its Central Asia Strategy (2007). It assumed that since EU-Central Asia relations were built on a bilateral basis, there was no point in talking about relations in the "5+1" format.

In 2017, the foreign ministers of the CA countries and Japan met in Ashgabat (Turkmenistan). The meeting adopted a Roadmap for expanding trade and economic cooperation and implementing projects in the field of transport. Overall, Tokyo continued to pursue its policy in the Central Asia plus Japan format,²⁸ although these efforts were in large part wasted. The Central Asian countries, in turn, welcomed the appearance of various multilateral formats. As part of their multi-vector foreign policy, they could cooperate with several major players at once, including the EU, Japan, the United States, and India.²⁹

In the last decade, political processes in Central Asia and economic development in CA countries have been influenced by Iran, Turkey, India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Japan.³⁰ Japan has provided a significant amount of investment and strengthened its position in some sectors of the CA countries. By 2017, Japanese outward FDI stock in Uzbekistan reached \$2.5 billion, while the figure for Kazakhstan was \$4.5 billion (the largest in the region).³¹ Japanese companies have been investing in various sectors of the economy, including the automotive industry, telecommunications, textiles, and oil and gas production.

Japan's political interaction with the CA countries has increased in recent years. In October 2018, President Emomali Rakhmon of Tajikistan made his first official visit to Japan, during which the parties discussed the prospects of expanding economic cooperation.

Japan has not abandoned its plans to develop political contacts in Central Asia, particularly in the implementation of multilateral projects. In mid-2019, Japan took part in discussing the creation of a trans-Central Asia economic corridor that would run through Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. It is seen as an element of Central Asian integration.³²

²⁶ See: E.S. Alekseenkova, "Srvnitelnyi analiz deiatelnosti sozdannykh v Tsentralnoi Azii formatov '5+1' (s uchastiem SShA, Yuzhnoi Korei, Yaponii i EES)," *Mezhdunarodnaya analitika*, No. 1 (19), 2017, pp. 29-41.

²⁷ See: A. Katkova, "Strategicheskie initsiativy Yaponii v stranakh Tsentralnoi Azii," *Mirovye i natsionalnoe khoziaistvo*, No. 1, 2018.

²⁸ See: V. Mozebakh, "Investitsionnaia deiatelnost Yaponii v stranakh Tsentralnoi Azii," *Mirovye i natsionalnoe khoziaistvo*, No. 1, 2018, pp. 1-3.

²⁹ See: A.A. Kazantsev, I.D. Zviagelskaia, E.M. Kuzmina, S.G. Luzianin, *Perspektivy sotrudnichestva Rossii i Kitaia v Tsentralnoi Azii. Doklad No. 28*, 2016, Russian International Affairs Council, RSMD, Moscow, 2016, 52 pp.

³⁰ See: "Takoe vkusnoe bliudo, pod nazvaniem Tsentralnaia Azia," 1 September, 2019, available at [<https://polit-asia.kz/takoe-vkusnoe-blyudo-pod-nazvaniem-czentrlnaya-aziya/>], 11 November, 2019.

³¹ See: F.P. Urazaeva, op. cit.

³² See: "Novyi ekonomicheskii koridor v Tsentralnoi Azii—alternativa evraziiskoi integratsii?" 6 June, 2019, available at [<https://www.ritmeurasia.org/news--2019-06-04--novyj-ekonomicheskij-koridor-v-ca-alternativa-evrazijskoj-integratsii-43021>], 12 November, 2019.

Conclusion

Overall, Japanese policy in Central Asia is characterized by continuity. Japan is involved in modernizing and building industrial facilities in CA countries and is expanding its presence in the regional energy sector. This is part of long-term plans to tap the region's hydrocarbon potential in the future. At the same time, Japanese policy in Central Asia is noted for its restraint. In contrast to the economic expansion of China, which has implemented pipeline projects designed to carry oil and gas in the direction of Chinese territory and has "bound" the CA countries to itself by loans, or the United States, which makes active use of political tools to realize its interests, Tokyo focuses on concrete projects, supporting its policy by educational projects, primarily by opening Japanese language centers and providing assistance in the implementation of social projects.

Russia and China, which are geographic neighbors of Central Asia and seek to maintain their geopolitical influence in the region, have kept a close watch on Tokyo's activities. Japanese policy is in the shadow of Moscow and Beijing, but the CA countries' interest in expanding cooperation with Tokyo has increased significantly in recent years. They seek to attract Japanese investments, which simultaneously increase competition in the region. The Central Asian countries have a positive view of Japan's continued interest in the region, as it provides additional opportunities for implementing a multi-vector policy.

SYRIAN CRISIS AND THE SOUTH CAUCASUS STATES

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Araz ASLANLI

*Doctoral Candidate, Head of Department, Academy of State Customs Committee;
Lecturer, Department of Economics and Management,
Azerbaijan State University of Economics (UNEC)
(Baku, Azerbaijan)*

Nazim JAFAROV

*Ph.D. (Political Science), Lecturer, Department of Economics and Management,
Azerbaijan State University of Economics (UNEC)
(Baku, Azerbaijan)*

ABSTRACT

The Syrian civil war continues to be one of the most pressing issues in international politics. This war created different risks and threats for different regions. Europe has been in the headlines as the region affected the most by the humani-

tarian consequences of the crisis. However, not only wealthier European states, but also the already conflict-ridden and relatively less developed states in the Caucasus were also directly affected.

These effects stem primarily from this region's geopolitical location amid the three countries that are heavily involved in the crisis, namely Turkey, Iran and Russia. The civil war at the heart of the crisis and its consequences are being felt in all of the countries of the South Caucasus, especially throughout two spheres: in terms of their population's participation on the side of the fighters, and the refugees escaping the war zone to the South Caucasus.

This study aims to review the relations between South Caucasus states and Syria from a historical perspective, as well as to analyze the impact of the crisis both on the South Caucasus region in general, and on each republic in particular. To this end, the foreign policies of the South Caucasus states in regard to the crisis will be evaluated. The perception of the crisis in the states of the region and the effect on their foreign policies will be further detailed; Azerbaijan's attitude towards the crisis in its position as a non-permanent member of the U.N. Security Council and the security risks emerging from the civil war in Syria for the countries of the South Caucasus will also be analyzed.

KEYWORDS: Syrian crisis, South Caucasus, Turkey, Russia, Iran.

Introduction

This study focuses on the impact of the Syrian crisis both on the South Caucasus region in general, and on the region's republics in particular, for which purpose the place of the crisis in the foreign policies of the South Caucasus states will be evaluated. The latest developments in Syria have sent ripples through the South Caucasus, as well as other regions. The effects of the crisis in the South Caucasus stem primarily from the region's location between the three countries (Turkey, Iran and Russia) that are closely involved in the crisis. The three republics of the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) have certain historical ties with Syria, however, they also heed close attention to the policies of Turkey, Iran and Russia when determining their own position and policies regarding Syria. The fluctuations in the bilateral and trilateral relationships among Turkey, Iran and Russia in relation to the crisis are being carefully monitored in the South Caucasus, which sometimes leaves South Caucasus states in a difficult position when formulating their own foreign policies.¹ Also a major concern in the region is the small group of refugees leaving Syria to settle in the South Caucasus region.

Going into more detail, the paper will discuss the perception of the crisis in the three regional states and the effects on their foreign policies; Azerbaijan's attitude towards the crisis as a non-permanent member of the U.N. Security Council; and the security risks emerging from the civil war in Syria for the countries of the South Caucasus will be analyzed.

¹ See: F.H. Lawson, "Syria's Mutating Civil War and its Impact on Turkey, Iraq and Iran," *International Affairs*, Vol. 90, Issue 6, November 2014, pp. 1351-1365; Z. Öniş, Ş. Yılmaz, "Turkey and Russia in a Shifting Global Order: Cooperation, Conflict and Asymmetric Interdependence in a Turbulent Region," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 37, Issue 1, 2016, pp. 71-95; R. Allison, "Russia and Syria: Explaining Alignment with a Regime in Crisis," *International Affairs*, Vol. 89, Issue 4, 2013, pp. 795-823.

Syrian Crisis and Azerbaijan

Of all the countries in the South Caucasus, Azerbaijan has been the most affected by the Syrian crisis, given its location bordering three countries (Turkey, Iran and Russia) that are heavily involved in the crisis, and with which it maintains bilateral relations. In addition, Azerbaijan is the only South Caucasus country that has been a non-permanent member of the U.N. Security Council during the crisis period.

There is little doubt that the perception of the crisis in Azerbaijan and its impact on foreign policy has been reflected in the country's overall foreign policy, particularly in its relations with Turkey, Russia, Iran, the United States, the European Union and China (the recent development of Azerbaijan's relations with the Arab states can also be included on this list), and in its non-permanent membership in the U.N. Security Council. Azerbaijan is following this process carefully in terms of the impact of the crisis on the Nagorno-Karabakh problem and the energy markets (as well as the Azerbaijan's energy policy), with a particular eye on the settlement of some of the Armenian families displaced from Syria on the Azerbaijani territories that are occupied by Armenia.

The historic and cultural ties and relations with Syria that were established during the Soviet Union maintain an important place in Azerbaijan's relations with Syria. Short-term shared history after the spread of Islam, the grave of the famous poet Imadeddin Nesimi (born in the Shamakhi region of Azerbaijan) in Aleppo, Syria, and the presence of religious sanctuaries in Syria (which are special from the perspective of the Muslim population in Azerbaijan, especially the predominant Shi'a community) are just some of the factors contributing to the countries' cultural and historical ties. The Soviet period saw developments in the bilateral relations under the influence of the historical-cultural ties that were supported by the rapport between the U.S.S.R. and Syria.

However, the quadrilateral Russia-Armenia-Iran-Syria relationship, with its geopolitical competitive nature vis-à-vis the Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey triangle (which maintained a rapport with the West during the 1990s) had an adverse effect on Azerbaijani-Syrian bilateral relations.² Allegations relating to the settlement of Syrian terrorist organizations on the Azerbaijani territories occupied by Armenia have caused a harsh reaction in Baku.³ In addition, scientists from Iran, Saudi Arabia, Armenia, and Syria all took part in archeological excavations in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, without obtaining permission from Baku.⁴ It is for this reason that the mutual high-level visits between Azerbaijan and Syria were made only in the second half of the 2000s, after Syria's relations with Turkey had improved. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad made an official visit to Azerbaijan on 8-9 July, 2009,⁵ and a total of 20 agreements were signed between Azerbaijan and Syria during this visit.

Azerbaijan attached special importance to its relations with Syria during this period, with joint cultural events being organized and direct flights launched between Baku and Aleppo. With the rapprochement of Turkey-Syria relations, shortly before the outbreak of civil war in Syria, Azerbaijan's then Minister of Industry and Energy Natig Aliyev even signed an agreement during his visit to Syria on 1-4 March, 2010 for the sale to Syria of 1.5 billion cubic meters of Azerbaijani natural gas every year. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan supported Syria in the U.N. and in other international organiza-

² See: B. Aras, "Post-Cold War Realities: Israel's Strategy in Azerbaijan and Central Asia," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 5, Issue 4, 1998, pp. 68-82.

³ See: T. Gaffarov, *Azerbaijan History: Volume VII (1941-2002)*, Elm, Baku, 2008, p. 268 (in Azerbaijani).

⁴ See: *Ibid.*, p. 269.

⁵ See: "Azerbaijan-Syria Relations," available at [http://mfa.gov.az/files/file/Azerbaijan_-_Suriya_munasibetleri.pdf], 24 February, 2017 (in Azerbaijani).

tions on the issue of “Syria’s occupied Golan Heights,”⁶ and Syria has continuously supported the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan in the framework of the U.N. and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), although bilateral relations were broken off with the rise in internal tension and the outbreak of civil war in Syria.

Azerbaijan, in line with the spirit of its foreign policy, has taken a cautious approach to the crisis from the very beginning, trying not to become involved in a problem that was not particularly relevant to it. The first statements to come out of Azerbaijan about the developments in Syria were very general, while the general framework of Azerbaijan’s policy regarding Syria is that the country supports the position of the Arab League, rather than that of any party to the Syrian crisis.⁷ Azerbaijan’s former Foreign Ministry spokesperson Elman Abdullayev said: “Azerbaijan fully supports the efforts of the League of Arab States to resolve the situation in Syria, and at the same time, eliminate the crisis from the ground and ensure political stability.” Abdullayev went on to emphasize that Azerbaijan’s policy regarding the Syrian issue was based on tight solidarity and historical and cultural ties with the Arab world.

After the crisis started to threaten the territorial integrity of Syria, a declaration on “territorial integrity and stability” came to the forefront in Azerbaijan’s statements. It is notable that this change in Azerbaijan’s attitude towards the crisis occurred while the country was a non-permanent member and the president of the U.N. Security Council.⁸ It was unclear what the attitude of Azerbaijan would be towards the crisis when on 24 October, 2011 the country was elected a non-permanent member of the U.N. Security Council for the 2012-2013 period. The two proposals regarding the Syrian issue presented to the U.N. Security Council in 2012 failed to become a “decision” as Russia and China were in opposition. The first of these two proposals—entitled “Situation in the Middle East—Syria (S/2012/77)” —was presented to the U.N. Security Council for voting on 4 February, 2012⁹ and the second (S/2012/538) on 19 July, 2012.¹⁰ Azerbaijan, which does not usually vote against the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, particularly Russia, on issues that are not related directly to Azerbaijan, voted in favor of the proposals.

Azerbaijan’s support of international initiatives is aimed at bringing peace to Syria, although at the same time it favors the solution of the problem within the framework of international law. In this regard, its endorsement of a non-intervention approach to Syria is appropriate to the current geopolitical climate and the spirit of Azerbaijani foreign policy. This prudent attitude allows Azerbaijan to maintain an equal distance from all parties to the conflict, while also maintaining diplomatic relations with Syria, even in the event of political regime change in the country.¹¹

⁶ “On Fourth Committee’s Recommendation, General Assembly Adopts 26 Texts On Mines, Decolonization, Atomic Radiation, Israeli Practices, Among Other Topics,” available at [<http://www.un.org/press/en/2007/ga10677.doc.htm>], 24 February, 2017; “General Assembly Adopts Broad Range of Texts, 26 in All, On Recommendation of its Fourth Committee, Including On Decolonization, Information, Palestine Refugees,” available at [<http://www.un.org/press/en/2008/ga10794.doc.htm>], 24 February, 2017.

⁷ See: “Azerbaijan’s Foreign Ministry: Azerbaijan Fully Supports the Efforts of the League of Arab States on Syria,” 31 January, 2012, available at [http://m.apa.az/az/xarici_siyaset/azerbaycan-xarici-isler-nazirliyi-azerbaycan-suriya-mesele-sinde-ereb-dovletleri-liqasinin-seylerini-tam-destekleyir], 25 February, 2017 (in Azerbaijani).

⁸ See: K. Guliyev, “Azerbaijan’s Activities in the U.N. Security Council in 2012,” 21 January, 2013, available at [<http://qafsam.org/page/402/az>], 25 February, 2017 (in Azerbaijani).

⁹ For detailed information on this resolution, please see: “Security Council Sixty-Seventh Year 6711th Meeting Saturday, 4 February, 2012, 10 a.m. New York”, available at [<http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Syria%20SPV%206711.pdf>], 25 February, 2017.

¹⁰ For detailed information on this resolution, please see: “Security Council, Distr.: General 19 July 2012”, available at [<http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Syria%20S2012%20538.pdf>], 25 February, 2017.

¹¹ See: K. Guliyev, *op. cit.*

In fact, since Azerbaijan is generally highly sensitive to internal conflicts and the external support of such conflicts, Baku took Turkey's policy into account and has tried to remain neutral to the civil war in Syria. From time to time, Azerbaijan has voiced its position regarding humanitarian issues by putting its support behind the non-use of force against the civilian population, and the need to provide all kinds of aid to the people of Syria and its refugees. This issue has been emphasized on several occasions by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other officials, deputies and intellectuals.¹²

In February 2016, however, Azerbaijan's Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov gave a slightly different explanation of Azerbaijan's general foreign policy. In his statement, published in Austria's famous *Die Presse* on 15 February, 2016, Azimov said: "Bashar al-Assad as president is the only guarantee of Syria's sovereignty and security," stirring debate in Azerbaijan.¹³ On 17 February, 2016, the Azerbaijani Ministry of Foreign Affairs made an official statement following the reactions to Azimov's statements. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesman Hikmet Hajiyev stated that Azerbaijan's stance had already been expressed by President Ilham Aliyev, emphasizing that "the most important thing for Azerbaijan is to ensure peace and ceasefire in the region, and to support the political resolution of the crisis in the direction of the will of the Syrian people."¹⁴ Meanwhile, Azerbaijan was invited to join the coalition of Islamic countries that was brought together to intervene in Syria in recent years, yet Azerbaijan has not warmly welcomed the invitation.¹⁵

The biggest problem faced by Azerbaijan in the overall process has been the downing by Turkey of the Russian "Su-24" military aircraft involved in operations in Syria.¹⁶ The deterioration of Russia-Turkey relations made it difficult for the Azerbaijani government to determine its political stance. Although there was a lack of public consensus in Azerbaijan on whether to support the Turkey's or Russia's stance in Syria, Turkey's side outweighed significantly. That said, following the substantial resolution of the problem between the two countries, and in particular, with the convergence of their positions on Syria (like the statement of Turkey's former Foreign Minister Yaşar Yakaş says: "The cooperation with Russia brought Turkey one step closer to the Russian orbit") the pressure on Azerbaijan on this issue has decreased.¹⁷

Azerbaijan voiced support for Turkey's Operation Peace Spring in northern Syria in October 2019.¹⁸

The participation of Azerbaijani citizens in the civil war in Syria is considered to be a serious security risk by the Azerbaijani authorities, and many people who return to Azerbaijan after taking part in the war, including those who recruited others to fight in Syria, have been arrested.¹⁹

¹² See: "London Conference: Peace and Peace Challenges of Azerbaijani President," 12 February, 2016, available at [<http://newtimes.az/az/organisations/4201/>], 25 February, 2017 (in Azerbaijani).

¹³ See: "Tolerieren das nicht: Baku verlangt Entschuldigung von OSZE," 15 February, 2016, available at [http://diepresse.com/home/politik/aussenpolitik/4926415/Tolerieren-das-nicht_Baku-verlangt-Entschuldigung-von-OSZE], 25 February, 2017.

¹⁴ "The Foreign Ministry Voiced Objections to Araz Azimov's Statement on Assad," *Yeni Musavat*, 18 February, 2016 (in Azerbaijani).

¹⁵ See: Z. Shiriyev, "Azerbaijan and the Syrian Anti-Terror Coalition," 12 April, 2016, available at [<http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13349-azerbaijan-and-the-syrian-anti-terror-coalition.html>], 25 February, 2017.

¹⁶ See: D.G. Bdoyan, "Problemy Rossiysko-Turetskikh otnosheniy na sovremennom etape," *Vlast*, Vol. 25, Issue 8, 2017, p. 193.

¹⁷ See: Y. Yakaş, "Syria, Role of Russia," 12 December, 2017, available at [<http://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/syria-role-of-russia/>], 25 February, 2017.

¹⁸ See: "Azerbaijan Voices Support for Operation Peace Spring," 11 October, 2019, available at [<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/azerbaijan-voices-support-for-operation-peace-spring/1610244>].

¹⁹ See: E. Souleimanov, "Azerbaijanis Volunteer in Syria Conflict," *The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 5 February, 2014, available at [<https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/12908-azerbaijanis-volunteer-in-syria-conflict.html>], 24 February, 2017.

Syrian Crisis and Armenia

When compared to Azerbaijan, Armenia has maintained a considerable distance from the Syrian crisis. The policies of Russia and the West related to the crisis, Turkey's Syria policy, and both the Armenians living in Syria and those that have left have all strongly influenced Armenia's perception of the Syrian crisis and its foreign policy. Some Armenian historians have brought up the ties between Armenia and Syria at the end of 7th century and the beginning of the 8th century, recalling the meeting between Caliph Al-Walid I and the Armenians.²⁰

As a second important factor, a number of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire were sent to Syria during World War I, with most of them settling in Aleppo and its environs.²¹ In fact, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, the first president of Armenia, was born in Aleppo (1945), but emigrated to the U.S.S.R. with his family in 1946.

Like Azerbaijan, Armenia also maintained ties with Syria in the Soviet era. On 6 March, 1992, within the framework of the visit of Armenia's former Foreign Minister Raffi Hovhannissian to Syria, an agreement was signed on the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in Damascus, and immediately afterwards, Armenia's former President Levon Ter-Petrosyan visited Syria in March 1992.²² Furthermore, Armenia opened an embassy (in Damascus) and a consulate (in Aleppo) in Syria, where over 150,000 Armenians are living.²³

The embassy of Syria in Armenia was opened in 1997, and Syria's first high-level visit to Armenia was made by former Foreign Minister Faruk al-Shara in March 1992, while the most recent high-level visit to Armenia was made by Syrian President Bashar Assad in June 2009.²⁴

As already mentioned, the Russia-Armenia-Iran-Syria axis was considered to be anti-Western in the 1990s, and Armenian-Syrian relations at this time were generally positive. According to some Armenian experts, however, simultaneously with the rapprochement between Turkey and Syria in the early 2000s, Syrian-Armenian relations have gradually cooled.²⁵ Nevertheless, bilateral relations continued and Armenia even facilitated a visa regime for Syrian citizens in 2005, and supported Syria's proposal regarding "Syria's occupied Golan Heights" at the U.N. General Assembly.²⁶

Armenia refrained from voicing its position regarding the Syrian civil war in the early days, but as Bashar Assad began to regain power, the Armenian authorities started to talk to the Syrian authorities again and express their support for a united Syria (to a certain extent, meaning the Assad administration).²⁷

At the same time, Armenia was keeping a close eye on the situation of the Armenians living in Syria and tried to help those in a difficult predicament. The most important issue in Armenia's view

²⁰ See: A.N. Ter-Gevondyan, *Armenia i Arabskiy Khalifat*, The National Academy of Sciences of the Armenia S.S.R., Erevan, 1977, pp. 73, 78.

²¹ See: "Syria," Virtual Museum of the Armenian Diaspora, available at [<http://armdiasporamuseum.com/%D5%BD%D5%AB%D6%80%D5%AB%D5%A1-3/>], 26 February, 2017 (in Armenian).

²² See: "Bilateral Relations: Syrian Arab Republic," available at [<http://www.mfa.am/en/country-by-country/sy/>].

²³ See: N. Migliorino, *(Re)constructing Armenia in Lebanon and Syria: Ethno-cultural Diversity and the State in the Aftermath of a Refugee Crisis*, Berghahn Books, New York, 2008.

²⁴ See: "Bilateral Relations: Syrian Arab Republic."

²⁵ See: "Armenian-Syrian Relations Should Develop," 2 June, 2009, available at [<http://www.panarmenian.net/eng/news/32361/>], 26 February, 2017.

²⁶ "On Fourth Committee's Recommendation, General Assembly Adopts 26 Texts On Mines, Decolonization, Atomic Radiation, Israeli Practices, Among Other Topics"; "General Assembly Adopts Broad Range of Texts, 26 in All, On Recommendation of its Fourth Committee, Including On Decolonization, Information, Palestine Refugees."

²⁷ See: A. Ismail, "Armenian, Syrian Foreign Ministers Discuss Situation in War-Torn Country," 24 September, 2016, available at [<https://sputniknews.com/world/201609241045666214-armenia-syria-war/>], 26 February, 2017; "Armenian Ambassador Meets with Speaker of the Syria's Parliament," 21 June, 2017, available at [<https://armenianweekly.com/2017/06/21/armenian-ambassador-meets-with-speaker-of-the-syrias-parliament/>].

of the Syrian crisis was the displacement of the Armenian population from Syria.²⁸ According to the official figures of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, the number of refugees that had fled to Armenia to escape the war in Syria exceeded 17,000 by 2016,²⁹ although unofficial data indicates that this figure may exceed 20,000.³⁰ Many of the Armenians who left Syria settled in Armenia, and especially in the Armenia-occupied Azerbaijani territories.³¹ Naturally, Azerbaijan has criticized Armenia's "settlement policy" in its occupied territories, and has voiced its concerns in reports to international organizations.

The troubles experienced by Turkey as a result of the crisis, especially the rising tensions in its relations with Russia and Iran, have been seen as positive developments in the Armenian media.³² It was even presumed that Armenia would be involved in the Turkey-Russia tensions that emerged due to the Syrian crisis. It meant Russia could use its military bases in Armenia against Turkey; as Russia had increased military aid to Armenia recently.³³

Armenia condemns the invasion of Syria by the Turkish armed forces in October 2019.³⁴

Another interesting claim related to Syria's possible recognition of the so-called "Armenian genocide" in response to Turkey,³⁵ and a similar statement was given by the President of the Syrian Parliament Jihad al-Laham, who attended the so-called "genocide commemoration" ceremonies in Armenia in 2015.

Syrian Crisis and Georgia

Relations between Georgia and Syria have been more strained compared to other South Caucasus countries. Similarly, the consequences of the Syrian crisis for Georgia were also more severe.

Diplomatic relations between Georgia and Syria were established on 18 May, 1994³⁶, although neither country opened an embassy. Georgia accredited its Embassy in Egypt in 1997 to represent official Tbilisi in Syria, and likewise, the Syria's Embassy to Armenia has been mandated to manage the relations with Georgia since 1996.

Reciprocal visits between the two countries have also been limited. The last visit paid to Syria by a Georgian official was on 2 May, 2010, when Georgia's former Foreign Minister Grigol Vasadze

²⁸ See: A. Nigmatulia, "Syrian Refugees in Armenia: A Warm Welcome," 20 April, 2015, available at [<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/04/syrians-armenia-refugee-story-150412132753714.html>], 26 February, 2017.

²⁹ See: L. Atamian, H. Nahapetyan, "Armenia and the Syrian Refugee Crisis," 2 March, 2016 [<https://www.uidnl.org/single-post/2017/12/05/Armenia-and-the-Syrian-Refugee-Crisis>], 26 February, 2017.

³⁰ See: A. Babajanyan, "The Syrian Refugees Coming Home to Armenia," available at [<http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/03/20/the-syrian-refugees-coming-home-to-armenia-migration-syria/>], 26 February, 2017.

³¹ See: "Armenia: Syrian Refugees Resettling in Occupied Azerbaijani Territory," 28 January, 2013, available at [<http://www.eurasianet.org/node/66461>], 26 February, 2017; "Armenians Who Escaped from Syria to Erivan: As We Live Our Second Genocide," 14 April, 2015, available at [http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2015/04/150414_independent_erivan], 26 February, 2017.

³² See: "Russia Urges Closing Turkey Border to Bar Extremists' Flow to Syria," 15 April, 2016, available at [<http://www.panarmenian.net/eng/news/210317/>], 26 February, 2017; "Turkey Strikes on Syria 'absolute lawlessness'—Russia," 17 February, 2016, available at [<http://www.panarmenian.net/eng/news/206278/>], 26 February, 2017.

³³ See: G. Taylor, "Armenia pulled into Russia-Turkey clash in Syria," *The Washington Times*, 2 March, 2016.

³⁴ See: "Statement by the MFA of Armenia on the Military Invasion by Turkey in the North-Eastern Syria," available at [https://www.mfa.am/en/interviews-articles-and-comments/2019/10/10/mfa_statement_syria/9886], 10 October, 2019.

³⁵ See: "Syria Recognizes the Armenian Genocide Committed by the Ottoman Empire, Parliament Speaker says," 22 April, 2015, available at [<http://www.armradio.am/en/2015/04/22/syria-recognizes-the-armenian-genocide-committed-by-the-ottoman-empire-parliament-speaker-says/>], 26 February, 2017.

³⁶ See: "Relations between Georgia and the Syrian Arab Republic," 20 July, 2016, available at [http://embassy.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=272&info_id=11798], 26 February, 2017.

met the Syrian President and other officials,³⁷ and the last high-level contact between the two countries was the meeting between Georgia's former Foreign Minister Grigol Vasadze and Syria's Foreign Minister Walid al-Muallem in September 2010 at the U.N. General Assembly.

Like the two other South Caucasus countries, Georgia has also sided with Syria in the "Syria's occupied Golan Heights" issue, raised at the U.N. General Assembly.³⁸

Among the South Caucasus countries, Georgia is the least involved in the Syrian crisis, with the main concerns regarding the crisis in Georgia being the effect on its relations with the West and the troubles emerging in this context in its relations with Syria. Even before the onset of the Syrian crisis after the events of August 2008, Syria was among the few countries that fully supported Russia during the Russia-Georgia war.³⁹ Furthermore, Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad accused Georgia of provocation at the time and stated that Russia should respond to this provocation.

Later, there were claims that Syria planned to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the break-away Georgian territories occupied by Russia, as independent states, which raised tensions between the two countries.⁴⁰ The most recent high-level visits between Syria and Abkhazia have once again put a strain on Georgian-Syrian relations. On 16-22 August, 2017, a delegation from Abkhazia went to Syria to meet with senior officials, including Syrian Prime Minister Imad Khamis, Foreign Minister Walid Muallem, Economy Minister Samar al-Khalil and People's Assembly President Najdat Anzour. Then, on 27 September, 2017, a seven-strong Syrian delegation, including Parliament members, visited Abkhazia, spurring a harsh reaction from the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁴¹

After the escalation of the crisis in Syria, the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed concerns about deaths of civilians in an official statement (30 August, 2013) and emphasized the importance of human rights. The statement also called on the U.N. and the Arab League to work towards a solution to the crisis, appealing to all sides to support this endeavor.⁴²

Georgia refrained from voicing its position regarding the Syrian civil war. But, in October 2019 Georgian Foreign Minister declared: "We also recognize the interest of our strategic partner Turkey in ensuring a secure environment along its borders."⁴³

Another aspect of the Syrian crisis that concerns Georgia is the participation of Chechens living in Georgia in the civil war in Syria. They went to fight in the war and returned to Georgia from time to time, just as they used to do in the case of Azerbaijan. In this context, they constitute a security concern for Georgia,⁴⁴ with some of those who have been granted Georgian citizenship identified as having carried out bloody acts of terrorism in Turkey.

³⁷ See: "Georgia, Syria Discuss Bilateral Relations," 3 May, 2010, available at [<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=22251>], 26 February, 2017.

³⁸ "On Fourth Committee's Recommendation, General Assembly Adopts 26 Texts On Mines, Decolonization, Atomic Radiation, Israeli Practices, Among Other Topics"; "General Assembly Adopts Broad Range of Texts, 26 in All, On Recommendation of its Fourth Committee, Including On Decolonization, Information, Palestine Refugees."

³⁹ See: "Angry over Libya, Russia Takes Hard Stance on Ally Syria," AFP, 29 April, 2011, available at [<http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2011/04/29/foreign/angry-over-libya-russia-takes-hard-stance-on-ally-syria/>], 26 February, 2017.

⁴⁰ See: "Syria can Recognize Abkhazia's Independence," 21 December, 2015, available at [<http://tr.sputniknews.com/politika/20151221/1019782932/gurcistan-abhazya-cirikba-suriye.html>], 26 February, 2017.

⁴¹ See: "Georgia Protests Syrian Visit to Abkhazia," *Civil.Ge*, 5 October, 2017, available at [<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=30493>].

⁴² See: "Comment of the Georgian Foreign Minister on the Developments in Syria," available at [http://turkey.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=193&info_id=20350], 26 February, 2017.

⁴³ G. Menabde, "Turkish Military Operation in Syria Complicates Georgia's Foreign Policy," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* [<https://jamestown.org/program/turkish-military-operation-in-syria-complicates-georgias-foreign-policy/>], 23 October, 2019.

⁴⁴ See: "Georgia's Syria Problem," 16 November, 2015, available at [<http://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Georgia/Georgia-s-Syria-Problem-165635>], 26 February, 2017; "Chechen-born Georgian Citizen Killed in Syria," 12 April, 2016, available at [<http://georgiatoday.ge/news/3525/Chechen-born-Georgian-Citizen-Killed-in-Syria>], 26 February, 2017; A. Sikharulidze, M. Urushadze, "Islam v Gruzii i politika integratsii," *Puti k miru i bezopasnosti*, Issue 51, 2016, p. 73.

Russia, which has particularly troublesome relations with Georgia, has made claims that some radical groups in Syria are receiving support through Georgia, and the Russian media and some Russian academics have even claimed that there is evidence that Georgia has made use of chemical weapons during the civil war in Syria.⁴⁵

Georgia has not been affected much by the Syrian crisis in terms of refugees, although nearly 400 refugees from Syria and Iraq have been granted asylum in the country.⁴⁶ As is the case in most countries where Syrian refugees have been granted asylum, the acceptance of refugees in Georgia is considered a humanitarian issue, as well as a security risk.⁴⁷

Conclusion

When the general effects of the Syrian crisis on the countries of the South Caucasus and the role they play in the crisis is analyzed, it is apparent that they have little influence on the crisis due to their size and geographical location. In other words, the countries of the South Caucasus cannot be considered the determinants of the crisis, although they are compelled to protect themselves from the resulting risks and to take advantage of the opportunities that the crisis offers. The most important dimension of the crisis for the South Caucasus countries is the region's location. It is flanked by Russia, Turkey and Iran, which have been at the very "forefront" of the crisis since the very beginning, and have even come to the brink of war as a result. That said, as Turkey dramatically changed its position, the three regional countries started to act collectively, and have described themselves as "three guarantor countries" in the efforts to find a solution to the Syrian problem.⁴⁸ This has directly affected the countries of the South Caucasus, which live under the constant influence of these three regional forces.

In general, the Syrian crisis has affected the security of all South Caucasus countries, and their foreign policies and relations with other countries at different levels. Among them, Azerbaijan has been the most affected by the Syrian crisis, in that Azerbaijani nationals have gone to fight in Syria, while the country as a whole has faced difficulties in its foreign policies and security while trying to maintain a balance between three important neighbors—Turkey, Russia and Iran. In the period following the downing of a Turkish military jet in Syria, and similarly, the downing of a Russian military aircraft by Turkey, Azerbaijan's maneuverability in its foreign policy was further restricted. Azerbaijan has been linked closely to the Syrian crisis due to its non-permanent membership and its two-month presidency at the U.N. Security Council, but throughout all these processes, Baku has sought to act within the framework of a balanced foreign policy approach, and has to a great extent succeeded in its efforts.

Armenia and Georgia have been less affected by the Syrian crisis than Azerbaijan. Armenia has sought to benefit from Turkey's foreign policy problems arising from the Syrian crisis, and has tried to improve its relations with Russia while assessing the opportunities afforded by the turmoil (the difficulties in Turkey-Syria and Turkey-Russia relations) surrounding the crisis in order to gain support in its "genocide recognition" efforts.

⁴⁵ See: M.V. Tarasova, "Vneshnepoliticheskie vyzovy i ugrozy regionalnoy bezopasnosti na iuge Rossii," *Teoria i praktika sovremennoy nauki*, Vol. 1, Issue 5, 2015, p. 621.

⁴⁶ See: "Georgia May Host Syrian Refugees from EU," available at [<http://georgiatoday.ge/news/1900/Georgia-May-Host-Syrian-Refugees-from-EU>], 26 February, 2017.

⁴⁷ See: Z. Mchedlishvili, "Arab Refugees—To Georgia in Search of Security," 9 February, 2016, available at [<http://newcaucasus.com/in-english/7417-arab-refugees-to-georgia-in-search-of-security.html>], 26 February, 2017.

⁴⁸ See: "Lidery RF, Irana i Turtsii isklyuchili podryv edinstva Sirii sozdaniem zon deeskalatsii," 22 November, 2017, available at [<http://www.interfax.ru/world/588612>].

Syria's need for Russian support due to the crisis and Georgia's rapport with the West have worsened the already strained relationship between Syria and Georgia.

GEOPOLITICAL REGIONALISTICS: THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST AS THE "HEARTLAND" OF THE 21ST-CENTURY WORLD-SYSTEM

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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 author has applied the geopolitical regionalistics concept to the Greater Middle East as the new heartland within the geopolitical theory of Halford Mackinder and offered the following arguments: this region directly affects the political and economic processes unfolding in the world which, in their turn, are products of entangled interests of the great and regional powers and the much wider scopes of globalization-related interaction and interconnection of the countries of Central Asia, Transcaucasia and the Middle East. The Greater Middle East is a new geopolitical phenomenon

created by the end of the Cold War and the Soviet Union's disintegration, which allowed the main actors of world politics to reformat the regional space to the south of the Russian borders.

Inspired by the new horizons, Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia are waging an uncompromising struggle for regional leadership. Having analyzed the local situation and assessed the trends that will shape the future political context of the Greater Middle East, the author has offered his own forecasts of the future of the geopolitical situation in the region.

KEYWORDS: *geopolitical regionalistics, Greater Middle East, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, forecasts of the geopolitical situation in the region.*

Introduction

Geopolitical regionalistics, a new scholarly trend, is a symbiosis of geopolitics and regional studies, and their mutual enrichment. This article was written as an attempt to apply this new approach to the studies of the regional problems in the context of the struggle among the actors in international politics for the spheres of influence and regional leadership.

In the scholarly-applied context, geopolitical regionalistics as a new field of knowledge should analyze the military, political, social, and economic aspects to forecast possible development trends on the basis of which the desired future is predicted and the ways and means by which the regional states will ensure their national interests identified. Any expert working in this field needs a relatively clear idea of how the events will unfold in the multi-factor, turbulent, and non-linear regional and international processes. Regional trends unfolding in the global information society can be forecasted by an expert or an analyst with a predictive mindset on the basis of pre-history and the emerging trends of the regional geopolitical context.¹

The author has selected the Greater Middle East and the politics of the actors in regional policies as an object of study. Known for many centuries as the Middle East, it included the countries of the Arabian Peninsula and the Eastern Mediterranean. In the early 21st century the radically changed situation made the region's old name too narrow for ongoing geopolitical studies: today, the sphere of cooperation of and competition among the local states has spread to Central Asia, Transcaucasia, and North Africa.

The Central Asian countries became part of the region due to their close and growing economic and political involvement in the relations with the above actors in international politics and the considerable interest in the region displayed by the great powers. They are attracted by the region's strategically important geographic location and its rich natural resources. The countries of Central Asia, however, are geographically isolated, which makes them dependent on the transit of goods across the neighboring territories. China with its New Silk Road project, which it expects to use to reach the world markets, is one of the countries ready to profit from the Central Asian states' geographical disadvantage.

The above suggests that this regional space should acquire new geopolitical qualities. The Greater Middle East can be regarded as a new geopolitical phenomenon originating in the end of the Cold War and the Soviet Union's disintegration. The leading world and regional actors rushed in to divide the "Soviet legacy" by launching cardinal transformations. The world and regional countries hastened to confirm their geopolitical influence in what looked to them as an economic and political void. The U.S., China, Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran were the most active.

With the Soviet Union out of the way, it became possible to reformat the region's politics and economies. Disoriented by the unexpected independence that came like a bolt from the blue, the leaders of the newly independent states of Transcaucasia and Central Asia could not find their bearings far too long. When they finally regained their senses, the countries were already in political and economic disarray. Their ruined economics, the logical result of severed economic ties with Russia, forced their leaders to seek ways and means to join the world economic and political system through cooperation with the United States, Russia, China, and the European Union that, in their turn, tried to use the situation in their geopolitical interests.

Each of the leading actors in international politics followed its own way. Russia relied on the still existent cultural and economic ties coupled with economic, financial, and military-technical instruments of influence and capitalized on its extremely advantageous geographic location and common borders. Turkey came up with a model of state organization that combined the European politi-

¹ See: V.V. Karyakin, "Dikhotomia khaosa i poriadka—sreda formirovania mekhanizmov samoorganizatsii sovremennykh mezhdunarodnykh system," *Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya*, No. 1, 2016, pp. 7-12.

cal system and Islamic ideology along with pan-Turkism, a concept based on the religious and cultural similarities between the Turkic-speaking peoples. Iran tried to tempt the newly independent states with a civilizational model of a Shi'a state. China preferred economic expansion and the active promotion of its civilizational project and a concept of joint flourishing of peoples under the aegis of the 21st-century Middle Empire.

When realized, these approaches made the region a different geopolitical unit, the fact that often looks like a purely technical political and economic transformation to the expert community. This superficial approach ignores the fact that the region is acquiring a new geopolitical reality, namely, the rivalry between the United States, China, and Russia against the background of the military-political and economic interests of Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia.

It should be said that the number of actors in regional politics is steadily growing, because of the multi-vector policy of the European Union. The leading EU members spare no effort in implementing their policy independent of that pursued by the United States, while the consolidating regional impact of Russia and China is not obvious enough. On the other hand, the region torn apart by deep-cutting contradictions is not an integral civilizational and political entity; there are deep-cutting contradictions between the countries of the Arab-Sunni world, the Shi'a ummah led by Iran, Turkey that preaches pan-Turkism and neo-Ottomanism, the Central Asian countries with their multi-vector policies and the Kurds that are fighting for national independence.

Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan are developing into new centers of power; they are building up the region's future configuration, defining their roles in the new regional world order and getting involved in large-scale economic projects, including China's New Silk Road.

Among these projects is the North-South transportation corridor that will connect India and Iran with Kazakhstan and Russia and the Greater Middle East with Europe (see Fig. 1).

A navigation canal that will connect the Caspian Sea with the Persian Gulf will cross Iran (the Iranian Suez, see Fig. 1). Russia is expected to join the project, the cost of which is estimated at \$7 billion and which will be commissioned in 2030. This means that the Caspian states (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Russia, and Iran) will move oil and gas by water, enlivening the economies of Transcaucasia and the Caspian states.

Eurasia, the canal that will connect the Caspian and the Azov-Black Sea basin will become a useful addition to the "Iranian Suez" (see Fig. 2). In 2007, in his annual address to the Federal Assembly President Putin pointed out: "This new transport artery ... would not only give the Caspian Sea countries a route to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, thus providing them with access to the World Ocean, it would also radically change the geopolitical situation of the countries of the Central Asian region by enabling them to become sea powers."

In recent years, Russian, Chinese and Kazakhstani scientists and politicians have been actively discussing the project at bilateral and trilateral economic forums. The then President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev deemed it necessary to point out that, due to its importance, the Eurasia Canal should be implemented by the Eurasian Economic Union. Analysts from Kazakhstan believe that the canal, as an important rival of the Suez Canal and an important route for Chinese goods, will consolidate the geopolitical positions of their country.²

The Chinese Sinohydro company that conducts the project feasibility study insists that the "trans-Eurasian transportation corridor that incorporates the Eurasia Canal will become a convenient, safe and highly efficient route from China to Europe ... it will lower transportation costs and stimulate regional economies and sustainable development of China's trade with Europe." The results obtained by Sinohydro will re-orient the trade routes from the traditional maritime trade route by which China

² See: N.S. Bekturganov, A.V. Balaev, "Perspektivy i puti realizatsii proekta stroitelstva kanala Evrazia," *Ediny vsereossiyskiy nauchny vestnik*, No. 1, 2015, pp. 125-131.

Figure 1

The North-South Transportation Corridor

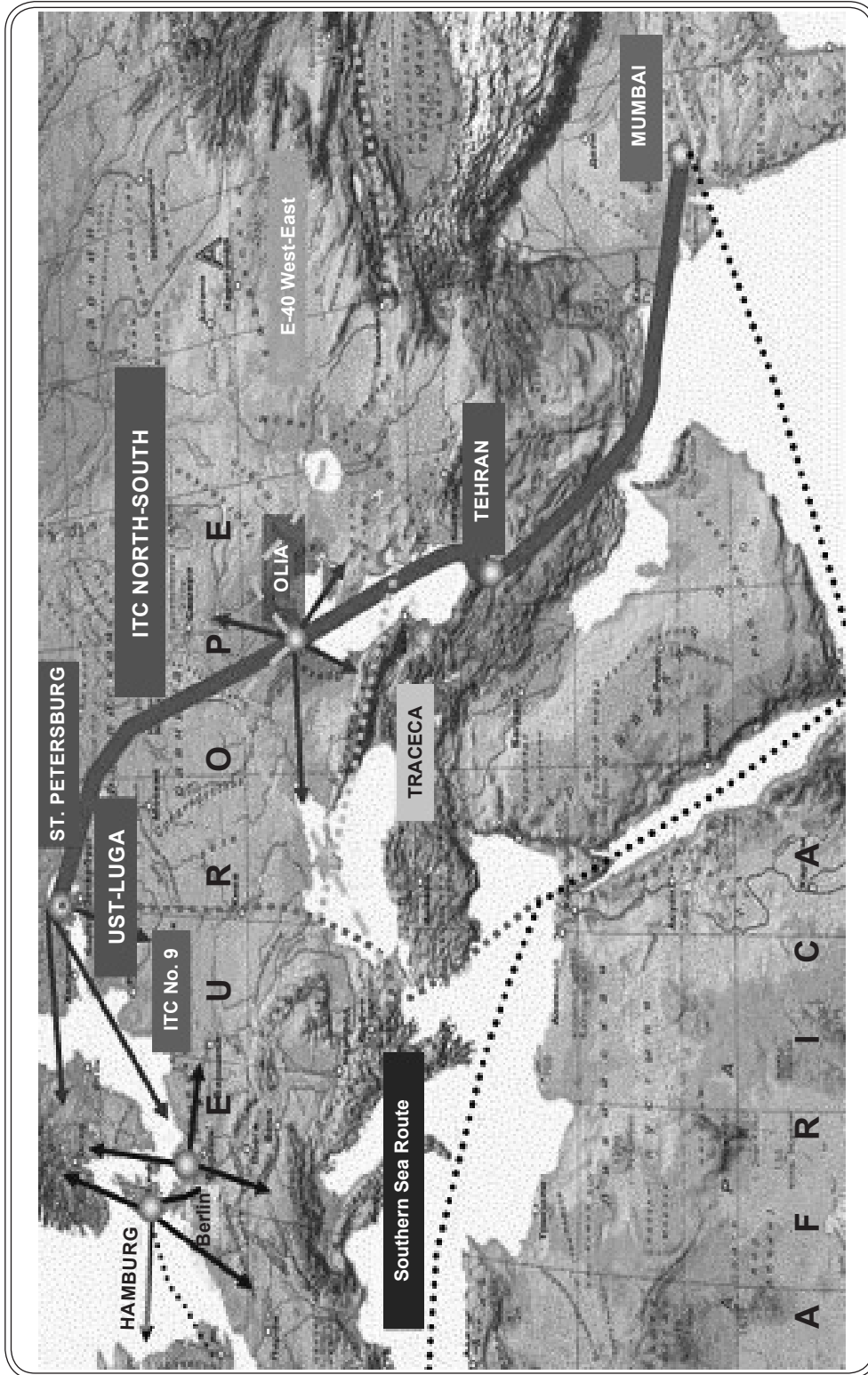
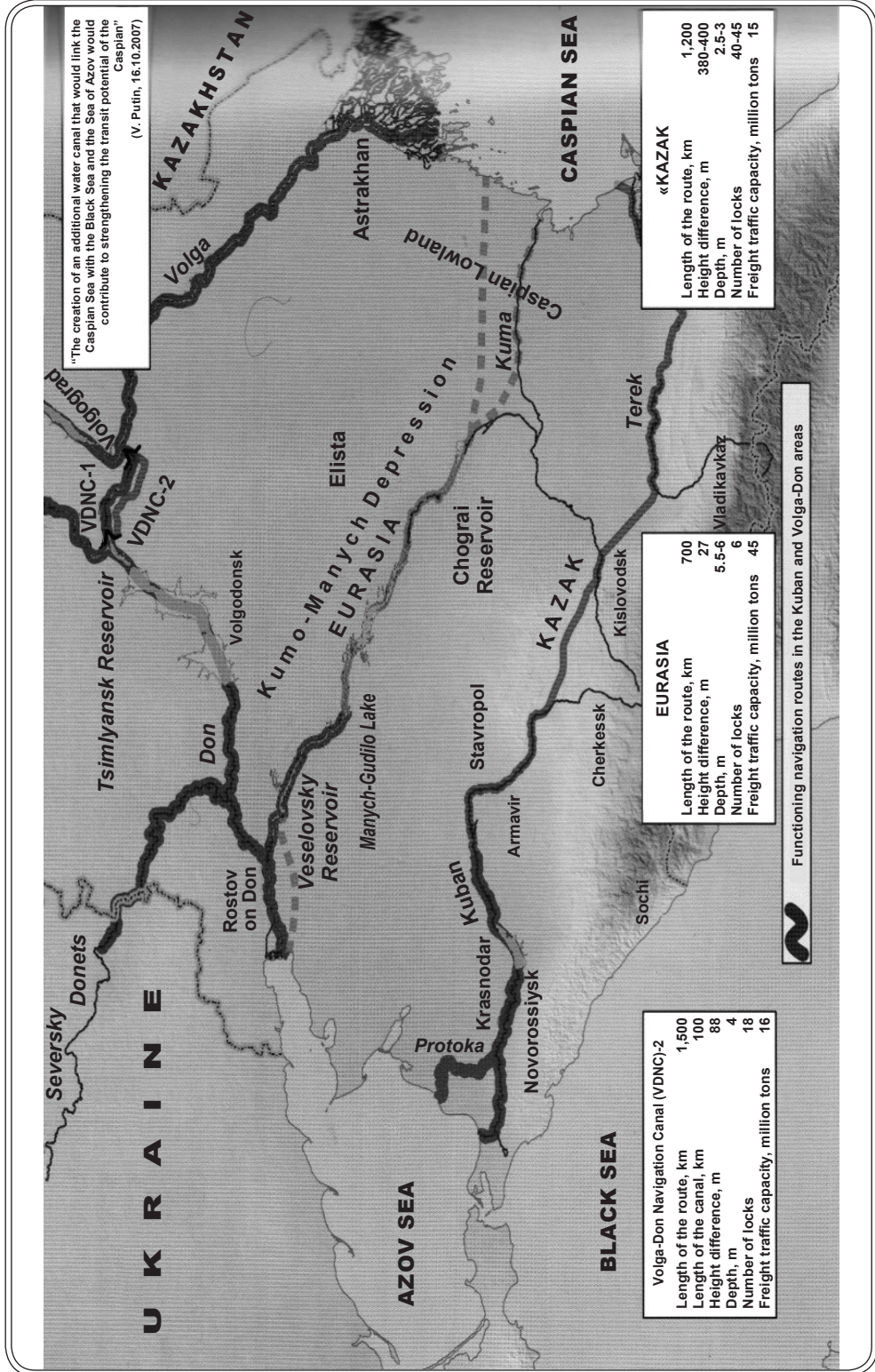


Figure 2

Eurasia Navigation Canal Project



moves its goods to Europe. This will increase the annual volumes of transit of Chinese goods by 24-30 million tons by 2030 and by 43-51 million tons by 2050.³

The geopolitical factors that determine the transformations in the Middle East are explained by the politics of Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, the main moderators of the region's political developments.

Turkey's Regional Politics

Turkey's geopolitical location on the border of Europe and Asia and of the corresponding cultural and civilizational platforms gives it every chance to develop relationships with different states and peoples. Throughout its history, the Turkish ruling elite alternated between the East and the West and the relevant foreign policy preferences, while remaining loyal to the idea of an "in-between" state and a "bridge between Europe and Asia."

Since the early 21st century Turkey, driven by its ambition to become a regional power, has been demonstrating significant diplomatic activity in the Middle East. Its dynamic economic growth, considerable demographic potential and sustainable political system allowed Ankara to build up its international influence and inspired its leaders to move to an even more important place on the international arena.

Turkey, however, had to admit that the Kurdish factor was a spoiler. In the past, Turks and Kurds had been fighting side by side for the national interests of the Turkish Republic. Having won the struggle for independence and territorial integrity, the pro-Kemal elite pushed the Kurds and their interests away. The elite was building up the republic based on the idea of political citizenship, rather than on ethnic affiliation, which meant that all ethnicities, Kurds being no exception, should be assimilated. The armed resistance of 1984 and the appearance of the de-facto independent Kurdistan in the federative Iraq in 2003 pushed the Kurdish factor to the fore. It became abundantly clear that the Kurds would never be dissolved in the titular nations of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, or Syria. The armed struggle of the Workers' Party of Kurdistan played a great role in shaping the Kurds' self-awareness and their desire to set up an independent state they called Greater Kurdistan as a united Kurdish state with a total population of about 30-40 million.⁴

Greater Kurdistan meant a national emancipation and a consolidation of the Kurds into a unified state; so far they remain on the social and political margins in Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria. The Kurds, the region's intrinsic ethnicity with a long history could have, if they wanted, laid claim to much vaster territories than the potential Kurdish government claims today. These territories are "patches" of other ethnicities that live side by side with Kurdish majorities⁵ (see Fig. 3).

The Arab Spring has moved Turkey's hypocritical Kurdish policy to the foreground of the political process. Ankara supported the rioters to consolidate its influence in the region. The Turkish government treats these riots as the people's legitimate demand for social, political, and economic changes and the price that the Middle Eastern countries and their leaders had to pay for their procrastination: the situation should have been readjusted to the post-Cold War realities back in the 1990s. To achieve the sought-after status of a democratic outpost in the Middle East, Ankara insisted that it sided with the peoples, not with the regimes: it desperately needed profitable relations with the new regimes.

³ See: N.S. Bekturganov, A.V. Balaev, op. cit.

⁴ See: T.A. Ganiev, V.V. Karyakin, "Kurdskiy faktor i ego rol v formirovaniy geopoliticheskoy obstanovki na Blizhnem Vostoke," *Arkhot*, No. 2 (5), 2018.

⁵ See: T.A. Ganiev, V.V. Karyakin, "Problema sozdania nezavisimogo kurdsogo gosudarstva i realnye vozmozhnosti," *Informatsionnye voyny*, No. 2 (46), 2018 [<http://pstmprint.ru/2018/07/09/информационные-войны-№2-2018>].

Figure 3

The Borders of the Kurdish Settlement Which May Potentially Give Rise to the Greater Kurdistan Project



The Arab Spring caused a sudden change of the Turkish foreign policy vector. It moved to the conventional South. In mid-September 2011, the Prime Minister of Turkey Erdoğan visited the “liberated” Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia, where he was greeted as the “savior of Islam” and “new Salah ad-Din” (famous 12th-century Muslim commander, the first sultan of Egypt).

Turkey’s attitude to Syria has changed considerably: Damascus, formerly Turkey’s closest military and economic ally, had become its main foe. On 24 September Turkish ships captured a Syrian ship with a load of weapons supplied by Iran. The Syrian side described Ankara’s foreign policy as a “severe case of schizophrenia” that did nothing good to their bilateral relations.

In the fall of 2011, the relations between Turkey and Iran, its eastern neighbor, have worsened: Turkey confirmed its agreement to station an American ABM system targeted at Iran in its southeast. Tehran deemed it necessary to warn Ankara that this would raise the degree of regional tension.

This means that Turkish political meandering is complicating the already convoluted geopolitical situation in the Greater Middle East. On the one hand, Turkey is a NATO member and a strategic partner of the U.S. On the other, it speaks of itself as an enemy of Israel, Washington’s best friend in the region and is opposed to Iran, an enemy of Israel and the United States. Indeed, there are none, nor can there be any permanent friends or permanent enemies in the world.⁶

The Turkish leaders hoped that Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia would adopt the Turkish political system. This did not happen and could not happen because the Turkish and Arab understandings of the role of political Islam are very different. In Turkey Islam is a modernizing force; the Turkish business elite was raised in the Islamic context; Turkish businessmen associate Islam with progress and are actively involved in the country’s economic, social and political development. In the Arab world Islam is seen not as a modernizing, but as a conservative force that protects traditional society.

There are no reasons, therefore, to expect that Turkey will realize its ambitious foreign policy aims to become the leading power in the Greater Middle East. The West, first and foremost the United States, however, will have to take Turkey, its independent foreign policy and its growing regional role, into account.

Iran’s Regional Policies

Due to its strategic military location of a Mid-Eastern, Caucasian, Central Asian and Caspian country Iran (also one of the Persian and Oman Gulfs littoral states) plays a very important role in the Greater Middle East and, in one way or another, is involved in all regional struggles, and has a decisive say on the region’s internal (ethnic, religious, military or economic) issues: the problems created by migrants, drug trafficking, terrorism and separatism. The Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) cannot be excluded from the collective efforts needed to cope with these problems.

Its geopolitical importance as a source of hydrogen natural resources cannot be overestimated. Its proven reserves of crude oil are 90 billion barrels, which makes it one of the world leaders in oil extraction (cheap because of high productivity). It comes second among the OPEC countries in oil extraction and is the world’s second biggest gas producer after Russia. Today, the proven natural gas reserves that are ready for extraction constitute 21 trillion cubic meters, or about 14% of the total world reserves.

Following the revolution of 1979, Iran armed itself with the idea of regional hegemony inherited from Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who was deposed by radical Shi’a. Under Khomeini the idea of a world Islamic revolution was transformed into an idea of regional domination of Shi’a

⁶ See: T.A. Ganiev, V.V. Karyakin, “Problema sozdania nezavisimogo kurdsogo gosudarstva i realnye vozmozhnosti.”

Persians. The regional component of this idea was pragmatically tied to nationalist ideas. After a while, pragmatism in state policies pushed aside ideological considerations, primarily, as far as the issue of unconditional support of all Shi'a Muslims was concerned. Tehran abandoned the idea of export of the Islamic revolution by the use of force; discontinued its unconcealed propaganda of Islamic fundamentalism and corrected its foreign policy (its pro-Armenian position in the Armenian-Azeri conflict serves as the best confirmation).

However, Iran, just as before, relies on the Shi'a factor within the region: it helps the Hazaras of Afghanistan, who are Shi'ites, and the Lebanese Hezbollah, and, at opportune moments side with Hamas, a Palestinian Sunni organization. Tehran skillfully exploits the fact that the Shi'a clergy in Iraq traditionally aligned with Iran.

Despite the still felt American influence in Afghanistan, Iran has preserved its positions and its influence there; this indicates that it plans to remain in the country and realize its interests there. Certain circles in the Iranian political establishment still look at Afghanistan not as an important political partner in the region, but as an important part of the Greater Middle East. Today, Iran can put pressure on various parties, movements and ethnic groups (mainly Tajiks and Hazaras). This interaction is primarily ideological, its economic aspects are secondary. The concept of Arian unity presupposes that in the future the Iranian-speaking countries of the Middle East will create an ethnic axis Tehran-Kabul-Dushanbe.⁷

Iran belongs to a small group of countries that refuse to accept the very possibility of Israel's existence, which forms the foundation of its Palestinian policy. It refused to endorse the Roadmap elaborated by Russia, the U.S., the European Union and the U.N. as a path towards a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. The continued peace process might damage the Iranian position in the region and tip the balance of power.

Iran wants to avoid isolation and remain included in all important political processes unfolding in the Middle East (including those related to the Palestinian issue) and, on the other, to acquire more weight in regional affairs. It confirmed that it was determined to support the Islamic opposition in the south of Lebanon and in Palestine, which is, in fact, one of the methods of demonstrating its influence. The world, however, treats the armed groups supported by Iran as terrorist or national-liberatory depending on their political orientation and the methods of struggle.⁸

Iran relies on the armed detachments of Lebanese Hezbollah to realize its policy related to the Palestinian-Israeli relations. According to different sources, they are between 3,000 and 5,000 strong; there is also a certain number of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) soldiers. The relationship between Hezbollah and Iran is based on the shared Shi'a doctrine and their refusal to recognize the state of Israel. Iran extends financial assistance to its Lebanese allies along with diplomatic and political support; it trains its ideological and military leaders, supplies them with weapons, armaments and extends humanitarian aid.⁹

We should not expect changes in Tehran's position on the Israeli-Palestinian issue any time soon: it will stubbornly oppose any agreement that will take Israel's interests into account, even to the slightest extent.

There is another important factor of the country's foreign policy activities in the above directions: in recent years, the country has found itself surrounded by instability and conflicts—the Armenian-Azeri (Nagorno-Karabakh) conflict in the north; continued instability in Afghanistan in the east; ongoing squabbles over the islands in the Persian Gulf; instability in Yemen with a vague outcome

⁷ See: T.A. Ganiev, "Regionalnaia politika Islamskoy Respubliki Iran," available at [<http://csef.ru/ru/politica-i-geopolitica/484/regionalnaya-politika-islamskoj-respubliki-iran-4203>], 23 July, 2018.

⁸ See: *Ibidem*.

⁹ See: V.I. Iurtaev, "Osobennosti sovremennoy vneshney politiki Irana," available at [<https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/osobennosti-sovremennoy-vneshney-politiki-irana>], 23 July, 2018.

in the south of the Arabian Peninsula; conflict-entangled Iraq and the war in Syria in the west. Tehran's interests are affected by this to different degrees.

The revolutions in the Arab countries consolidate Iran's political and military positions and undermine the positions of its rivals in the struggle for regional leadership. If Iran consolidates its military and political position in the region, it may try to recover those parts of the territories of Iraq, Bahrain, and Oman that were parts of the Persian Empire a long time ago.

Regional Policies of Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia pursues its foreign policy in full conformity with its declared principles—good-neighborly coexistence, non-interference in domestic affairs of other states, development of contacts with all Gulf countries and the Islamic world as a whole, cooperation with friendly countries and involvement in international and regional organizations.

The Kingdom speaks of itself as a “conservative state” guided by the ideological norms of Islam. The country helps promote these norms and defend them. The religious foundation of this policy is firm to the extent that the rest of the world looks at the country as a carrier of the “grace of God” and, consequently, the custodian of Islamic holy places. Its monarch, the King of Saudi Arabia, has the title of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques (Mecca and Medina). Within the kingdom, religion is an instrument of ethnic mobilization; at the regional scale religion consolidates the unity of all “conservative” Arab and Muslim states.

King Faisal was convinced that the alliance of Communism and Zionism, which was based on similar aims and tasks, one of which was to destroy Islam and create a permanent threat to the Muslim and Christian communities, was an important element of the international relations system. The system itself was painted in the colors of the Muslim political thought: the land of peace—the Arab-Muslim community; the land of truce—the Western community, the mutually profitable cooperation with which was a must, and the land of war—the camp of Islam's enemies: the Soviet Union, its satellites and Israel.

The unprecedented growth of oil prices in the 1970s-early 1980s brought two important repercussions: Saudi Arabia entered the path of accelerated modernization to become the biggest donor of the Arab-Muslim region states. This created a large and socially diverse educated class that transformed the country into a business and intellectual center of attraction.

Its foreign policy includes four basic trends arranged according to their significance:

- The Gulf countries;
- The Arab countries;
- The Muslim world;
- International community.

The Gulf countries are treated as a foreign policy priority because of their geographic location, contacts rooted in the past, similar state and economic systems, common or similar aims of preserving security and resolution of conflicts and crises. It was with this purpose in mind that Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, the UAE, Oman and Saudi Arabia set up the Gulf Cooperation Council in 1981 in order to promote regional cooperation in the economic, social, political and military spheres.¹⁰

¹⁰ See: I.V. Kriuchkov, “Vneshniaia politika Saudovskoy Aravii na Blizhnem Vostoke v nachale XXI veka,” available at [<https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/vneshnyaya-politika-saudovskoy-aravii-na-blizhnem-vostoke-v-nachale-xxi-veka>], 23 July, 2018.

Diplomatic relations with the rest of the world are no less important: Riyadh as an equal member of the international community fulfills its obligations and behaves within its rights in full conformity with the U.N. Charter. It wants to achieve peace all over the world and preserve it. As a matter of principle, the Kingdom strives to achieve transparency and fairness of its foreign policies and calls on other members of the world community to do the same. Very much in line with its strategy, Saudi Arabia recognized the right of self-defense as one of the principles of international law. As a member of numerous international organizations, Riyadh does everything in its power to preserve international security.

Conclusion

It was two hundred years ago that the French campaign in Egypt and Syria led by Napoleon Bonaparte opened up an era of the contemporary Middle East; the Ottoman Empire disintegrated some 100 years ago; the era of colonialism ended half a century ago; the Cold War—thirty years ago. The era of American domination in the Middle East is approaching its end; the West, which expected the region to embrace the Western democratic model and follow the politics of the United States and its allies, is disappointed. The Greater Middle East will probably follow its own road determined by its destiny.

This brings to mind the Heartland concept formulated by Halford Mackinder to define Western geopolitics on the Eurasian continent. The river of history has changed its waters. Mackinder's concept can be dismissed as outdated, as it no longer reflects contemporary political realities. Indeed, back in 1904, when he formulated it, he could not predict what would happen to the world 100 years later. His Eurasian Heartland is still a natural fortress despite the collapse of two great powers: czarist Russia in 1917 and the Soviet Union in 1991. Today, it has become more or less clear that in the foreseeable future the West will not occupy it.

The Greater Middle East is gradually turning into the center of world politics, its real heartland and, it seems, the cradle of a world order based on the principles of multi-polarity, which will determine the mankind's development paths:

- The United States will retain a lot of its present influence in the regional political and economic processes and will be opposed by the strong non-regional players (China, Russia and India) that will insist on their national interests, and by the influential regional actors (Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia). This region will become a “gravedigger” of the unipolar world order. The rivalry of international and regional powers for regional leadership and the spheres of influence is a “midwife” of sorts of the multipolar world. Today, the famous Mackinder's formula should run as “who rules the Greater Middle East, commands the world.” Multi-polarity will unlock the “coil of anaconda” around Eurasia. This is confirmed by the policy pursued by Russia, Turkey, and Iran in the Middle East, which aims to end the Syrian crisis;
- Iran will consistently move towards a stronger role in the region. Its natural riches and high moral, military and economic potential is a serious factor of influence in the Greater Middle East;
- Israel, with its competitive international-level economy, nuclear arsenal and the armed forces unrivaled in the region, will remain one of the influential factors. In the course of time it will find it much harder to oppose the security threats at different fronts, which will weaken its positions in the long-run. If Iran creates nuclear arms of its own and reliable delivery means, the situation will become even more complicated. At the same time, the example of India and Pakistan testifies that nuclear powers prefer well-balanced and reasonable policies;

- Oil prices will rise because of the growing demand of China, India, and the Asian-Pacific countries. It seems that it might go up to \$100, rather than drop below \$40 per barrel.
- Islam will remain the cornerstone of political and cultural life of region's states. Iran's ideological influence will become stronger, leading to additional tension in the Sunni/Shi'a relations in Bahrain, Lebanon, Syria and Saudi Arabia;
- The political regimes of the Greater Middle East will remain totalitarian behind the screen of democratic state institutions. Egypt and Saudi Arabia will set the trend and move further away from the United States due to the anti-American sentiments in these countries.

These are the main factors that will determine the world order of the Greater Middle East in the 21st century and the positions of great and regional powers. The World-System is moving away from America's global leadership towards multi-polarity. A steadily growing number of countries is turning into independent entities of international politics in line with their geopolitical potentials and civilizational principles. The World-System, however, will hardly be able to avoid the next stage of unipolarity based on the Chinese concept of joint flourishing and development. This issue, however, requires special studies.

BELT AND ROAD: BENEFITS AND PROSPECTS FOR KAZAKHSTAN

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Assel TOKEYEVA

*Ph.D. Candidate, MA, Lecturer,
Department of Languages and Translation Studies of China and
the Asia-Pacific Region, Kazakh Ablai Khan University of
International Relations and World Languages
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

Dauletbek RAYEV

*D.Sc. (Philos.), Professor, Faculty of International Relations,
Kazakh Ablai Khan University of International Relations and World Languages
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

Dinara DAUEN

*Ph.D. (Oriental Studies), Associate Professor, Dean, Faculty of Oriental Studies,
Kazakh Ablai Khan University of International Relations and World Languages
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

A B S T R A C T

The novelty of this article is determined, first, by the very topic of research, because the object of study is cooperation between Kazakhstan and China under the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), while the initiative itself is a new research topic for the scientific community as its implementation began only five or six years ago. Second, we consider the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative from the perspective of the in-

terests of Kazakhstan, with a comprehensive analysis of the implementation, problems, and prospects of integration of China's Silk Road Economic Belt and Kazakhstan's Nury Zhol (Bright Path) projects. And third, an assessment is made of the successes achieved in the implementation of this integration project in the Central Asian region, as well as its political risks and potential threats to Kazakhstan's reindustrialization plans.

KEYWORDS: *China-Kazakhstan relations, sinology, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB).*

I n t r o d u c t i o n

Diplomatic relations between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Kazakhstan were first established in 1992. For more than a quarter-century, China-Kazakhstan relations have stood the test of time and international turbulence. From good neighborliness and friendship, followed by all-round strategic partnership, our bilateral relations have developed rapidly, reaching the highest level in their entire history. In an article entitled "China-Kazakhstan Relations Soar on the Wings of a Dream," Chinese President Xi Jinping noted: "During my first visit to Kazakhstan in 2013, I launched an initiative to build a Silk Road Economic Belt, and that was the starting point of cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative. In the last four years, the construction of the Belt and Road has already moved from initiative to action, from idea to practice. It has become a platform for open and inclusive cooperation, a global social product enjoying wide support in the international community... It is necessary to promote cooperation in the joint construction of the Belt and Road, accelerate the integration of development strategies, and jointly implement the results of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation."¹

Methods and Methodology

The methodological framework of this article is a set of classical approaches to studying international relations. The method used in the research process was that of comparative analysis. In the context of the research topic, a comparison was made of conflicting opinions and assessments of international experts and public figures regarding the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Another method used was that of content analysis, particularly an analysis of state regulatory acts of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Kazakhstan, articles about the Belt and

¹ Xi Jinping, "Vzletaiut na kryliakh mechty kitaisko-kazakhstanskiye otnosheniia," *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 2017, pp. 1-2.

Road project, and interviews with Kazakhstan's political leaders and public figures on the revival of the Silk Road and implementation of the initiative.

Results

On 15 May, 2017, Nursultan Nazarbayev took part in the first Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing, where he spoke, among other things, about the strengths of the new model of regional cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative. In particular, he noted that “the proclaimed approach ‘stability through joint development’ is currently an attractive form of international cooperation reflecting the economic interests of dozens of countries. At present, when certain contours of the Silk Road are already evident, there is a need for joint strategic coordination of this macroregional cooperation. The implementation of the Silk Road initiative also makes it possible to reposition entire regions, including Central Asia, in a global context. Central Asia has regained strategic importance, becoming the main bridge between the world's largest markets.”²

At the Forum, Nursultan Nazarbayev suggested a number of concrete steps to implement the Belt and Road Initiative:

1. In order to effectively develop the growing transit potential of the Silk Road Economic Belt, it is necessary to facilitate commodity flows in a consistent way by improving service levels and removing administrative barriers. This requires expertise and appropriate funding, which is why the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) should finance such programs more actively.
2. It is necessary to develop agricultural cooperation with a view to ensuring the food security of countries located along the new Silk Road.
3. To develop cooperation in the field of innovation, science, and technology.
4. To consider issues of co-financing of projects and establishment of R&D and technology transfer centers, innovative companies, and venture funds.
5. To address the whole set of environmental problems, including those of rational management of the water resources of transboundary continental rivers, which can serve as traffic arteries.
6. To build mutual trust between the countries involved and foster their willingness to engage in equal and comprehensive cooperation for the successful development of the Belt and Road idea.³

During a visit to the Chinese pavilion at the EXPO 2017 international exhibition in Astana on 8 June, 2017, Nursultan Nazarbayev and Xi Jinping took part in a teleconference entitled “Kazakhstan and China: Transit Bridge of Eurasia.” Nazarbayev noted the importance of launching the new Khorgos-Lianyungang transport route and called this project a graphic example of effective cooperation between the two countries in “docking” the Silk Road Economic Belt and Nurly Zhol (Bright Path) programs. During that event, the first trains carrying sea containers set off from Lianyungang Port for Central Asia and Turkey. Another project launched by the two leaders was a container service from the Khorgos Gateway dry port to the Chinese city of Chengdu. Let us recall that the above-mentioned

² N. Nazarbayev, *Speech at the 2017 Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation*, 2017, Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, available in Russian at [http://www.akorda.kz/ru/events/international_communitu/foreign_visits/uchastie-v-forume-mezhdunarodnogo-sotrudnichestva-odin-poyas-odin-put?q].

³ See: Ibidem.

joint logistics project in Lianyungang was not the only one. At the Belt and Road Forum in Beijing on 15 May, 2017, Kazakhstan’s national company NC KTZ JSC, China’s COSCO Shipping and Lianyungang Port signed a trilateral agreement on the joint development of the KTZE-Khorgos Gateway dry port located in the Khorgos Eastern Gate Special Economic Zone (SEZ).⁴

In our research, we conducted a content analysis of official media and compiled a chronology of cooperation between China and Kazakhstan under the Belt and Road Initiative, which clearly shows that the proclaimed strategic cooperation between the two countries has been developing dynamically (see Table 1).

Table 1

Timeline of Kazakhstan-China Summit and High-Level Meetings on the Issue of BRI Cooperation

	Date	Event	Results
1	06.09-07.09.2013	Chinese President Xi Jinping paid an official visit to the Republic of Kazakhstan.	Xi Jinping first announced the initiative to create a Silk Road Economic Belt in a speech at Nazarbayev University. The two presidents signed a joint declaration on further deepening the comprehensive strategic partnership between China and Kazakhstan.
2	19.03.2014	Kazakhstan Foreign Minister Erlan Idrissov paid an official visit to China.	The minister spoke at the China Institute of International Studies and took part in the unveiling of a monument to Abai Kunanbayev, Kazakh poet and thinker, in Beijing.
3	24.03.2014	Chinese President Xi Jinping met with Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev at the Nuclear Security Summit in the Netherlands.	The two leaders considered the main areas of bilateral cooperation and the progress made in implementing the agreements reached as a result of Xi Jinping’s state visit to Kazakhstan.
4	19.05.2014	President Nursultan Nazarbayev paid a state visit to China.	Nursultan Nazarbayev was awarded the Silk Road peace prize and took part in the opening of the Lianyungang logistics terminal.
5	14.12.2014	Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and Kazakhstan Prime Minister Karim Massimov held the second regular meeting of prime ministers of China and Kazakhstan.	The parties signed a memorandum of understanding between Kazakhstan’s Ministry of National Economy and China’s National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) for the joint development of the Silk Road Economic Belt.
6	26.12.2014	Talks were held between Kazakhstan’s Investment and Development Minister Asset Issekeshov and the head of China’s National Development and Reform Commission Xu Shaoshi.	The two ministers discussed 50 economic projects worth a total of \$60 billion.
7	07.05.2015	Chinese President Xi Jinping’s state visit to Kazakhstan.	Further development of the strategic partnership.

⁴ See: E. Kagazbayeva, Problemy i perspektivy sopryazheniya “Odin poyas—odin put” s kazakhstanskim proektom “Nurly zhol,” *Materialy 1-oi Mezhdunarodnoi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii “Kitayevedeniy v Kazakhstane i za rubezhom*, 2018, pp. 195-203.

Table 1 (continued)

	Date	Event	Results
8	30.08-03.09.2015	President Nursultan Nazarbayev's state visit to China.	A total of 33 documents were signed during the visit, including 28 documents in the sphere of industrialization and investment worth \$23.4 billion.
9	13.12.-14.12.2015	Kazakhstan Prime Minister Karim Massimov visited China and had an official meeting with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang.	The parties adopted a Program of Cross-Border Cooperation between Kazakhstan and China for 2015-2020.
10	12.07.2016	First Deputy Prime Minister of Kazakhstan, Bakhytzhan Sagintayev, met in Beijing with Zhang Gaoli, member of the Politburo Standing Committee of the Communist Party of China and Vice Premier of the PRC.	The parties discussed the implementation of projects under the Nuryl Zhol new economic policy, announced by Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev, and Chinese President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative.
11	02.09.2016	Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev's working visit to China (city of Hangzhou).	A Cooperation Plan for integrating the Nuryl Zhol program with the construction of the Silk Road Economic Belt was signed between the governments of Kazakhstan and China. An agreement was reached on 51 projects worth a total of more than \$20 billion.
12	03.11.2016	Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev held a meeting with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang.	As a result of the meeting, a number of documents were signed in the sphere of trade, investment, and economic cooperation.
13	29.11.2016	First Deputy Prime Minister of Kazakhstan, Askar Mamin, held talks with Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli.	The parties discussed the implementation of 51 large-scale joint projects in industry, innovation, transport, and logistics.
14	24.04.2017	Bilateral talks were held between Kazakhstan's Foreign Minister Kairat Abdrakhmanov and China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi.	The ministers signed a Memorandum of Cooperation between the Foreign Ministries of Kazakhstan and China for 2017-2019. The document provides for regular meetings and consultations on relevant issues of bilateral partnership and international affairs.
15	14.05.-15.05.2017	Nursultan Nazarbayev took part in the first Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing.	A trilateral agreement was signed between Kazakhstan's national company NC KTZ JSC, China's COSCO Shipping and Lianyungang Port on the joint development of the KTZE-Khorgos Gateway dry port in the Khorgos Eastern Gate SEZ.
16	08.06.2017	Chinese President Xi Jinping paid a state visit to Kazakhstan.	President Xi Jinping visited the Chinese pavilion at EXPO 2017 and took part in a teleconference entitled "Kazakhstan and China: Transit Bridge of Eurasia." The parties launched a new transport route between Khorgos and Lianyungang.

Source: Compiled by the author.

Thus, the peaceful, friendly relations between our countries are confirmed by frequent mutual summit and high-level meetings, which have brought bilateral relations to a new stage of strategic partnership. Since China's President Xi Jinping announced the Silk Road Economic Belt initiative in Astana in September 2013, state-level meetings have become more dynamic. This is confirmed, among other things, by our research. Since September 2013, as Table 1 shows, there have been more than 15 summit and high-level meetings where the parties have discussed issues of integrating China's Belt and Road Initiative with Kazakhstan's Nurlı Zhol program. The Kazakhstan-China Business Council has held four meetings. Since taking office as head of state, President Xi Jinping has made three state visits to Kazakhstan: in 2013, 2015, and 2017. President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan has visited China four times: in 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017.

In fact, such intensive contacts between the two heads of state have become not so much habitual as not very surprising. Given the comprehensive strategic partnership between Kazakhstan and China, it is quite natural that the leaders of the two countries have closely monitored the implementation of previously reached agreements and have been working to further deepen and strengthen cooperation for the mutual benefit of both parties. Thus, Kazakhstan not only supports China's BRI at the official level, but also takes an active part in it.

Sinologist Ruslan Izimov notes that China's offer of significant financial resources to its BRI partners is one of the strengths of the project. Today, China is indeed the largest creditor and investor for the Central Asian economies. Graphic evidence of this is provided by Xi Jinping's tour of Central Asian countries in September 2013, during which 22 contracts worth a total of \$30 billion were signed in Kazakhstan; 9 documents totaling \$3 billion in Kyrgyzstan, with bilateral cooperation raised to the level of "strategic partnership"; 13 documents in Turkmenistan, where Xi Jinping took part in the ceremony to launch the Galkynysh Gas Field; and 31 agreements in Uzbekistan totaling \$15 billion (new agreements worth another \$6 billion were signed during a visit to Beijing by Uzbekistan President Islam Karimov).⁵

According to Ruslan Izimov, "convenient geographical location is another strength of the project."⁶ China borders on three Central Asian countries. Moreover, the Chinese integration project assumes the inclusion of the countries of Transcaucasia, that is, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia, as well as Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

China's SREB project also provides certain opportunities for Kazakhstan. First, this means cooperation in transport and logistics. Kazakhstan is a transit area. From the perspective of the economy and opportunities to develop transport and logistics cooperation, the Chinese initiative is of great interest to this country. Second, there are opportunities to develop cooperation in the non-primary sector, the power industry, agribusiness, knowledge-based industries, and the cultural and humanitarian sphere. And third, involvement in the project helps to increase interest in Kazakhstan among the world powers.

Like any other project, the Chinese initiative has its advantages, as well as certain risks and challenges for Kazakhstan. In the view of sinologist Konstantin Syroyezhkin, one of these challenges is that Kazakhstan could turn into a raw materials appendage and a market for Chinese goods, since raw materials (oil and metals) predominate in its exports to China, while Chinese exports to the republic consist of industrial goods and equipment. Another challenge for Kazakhstan is the construction of Chinese industrial enterprises in the republic. The Chinese technologies that come with these enterprises will have to be adopted, and this requires engineering personnel. International cooperation under the SREB project often implies the use of Chinese equipment and other capital goods in the

⁵ See: R. Izimov, "Kitaiski Sholkovyi put i rol Kazakhstana," 2014, available at [https://www.kursiv.kz/news/vlast/kitayskiy_shelkovyy_put_i_rol_kazakhstana_/].

⁶ Ibidem.

implementation of various projects abroad rather than integration of local producers into the value chains of Chinese companies.⁷ The idea is that exports of excess capacity will be followed by exports of Chinese standards, technologies, and brands.

In order to acquaint the general public in Kazakhstan with the BRI, various centers and expert clubs are being set up in the country. In 2016, for example, the first professional think tank for systemic study of China and its development prospects was established in Kazakhstan. The mission of the China Studies Center is to provide comprehensive expert, information, and analytical support for political, trade, economic, and cultural cooperation of Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries with the People's Republic of China, as well as practical intellectual assistance in implementing the Silk Road Economic Belt initiative. The Center is a research structure of the Kazakhstan Strategy and Development Society. On 28 November, 2017, the Institute for International and Regional Cooperation of the Kazakh-German University (Deutsch-Kasachische Universität) hosted the founding meeting of the Belt and Road Expert Club. Its establishment was initiated by Kazakhstan's prominent scholars and experts, including well-known sinologists K.L. Syroyezhkin, N.A. Aldabek, A.S. Kaukenov, K.Sh. Khafizova, and others. The Club's Regulations approved at the meeting formulate its main goals and objectives: to promote deeper cooperation between Kazakhstan and China, successful implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, and integration of Kazakhstan's Nurly Zhol program with the SREB concept, as well as to acquaint the public in Kazakhstan with the main areas of China's foreign and domestic policy.

One should note that Kazakhstan's expert community and business circles see the BRI as an opportunity to develop trade and investment and improve bilateral cooperation needed by both countries. Although the SREB project is driven by China's national interests, the Belt has the potential to provide the lacking infrastructure in Central Asia, improve the transport network, and spur economic growth.

Field of Application

During Nursultan Nazarbayev's visit to China in September 2015, Kazakhstan's national management holding company Baiterek NMH JSC and China's CITIC Group signed an agreement on joint participation in the Kazakhstan Infrastructure Fund. In addition, Kazakhstan's National Export and Investment Agency Kaznex Invest JSC and China's Silk Road Fund (SRF) signed a memorandum of understanding and cooperation in creating a special investment fund for industrial and innovation projects. The Bank of China pledged to provide \$5 billion through Baiterek NMH JSC for the purposes of Kazakhstan's industrial development. Kazakhstan also concluded a partnership agreement with the Silk Road Fund in the field of industrial and innovation development, information technologies, and other sectors of primary importance to the republic. The Fund considered the possibility of concluding an agreement to finance industrial projects in Kazakhstan worth a total of \$2-3 billion. In a speech at the Central Party School of the Communist Party of China, Nursultan Nazarbayev made special mention of the BRI, noting the steps that had already been taken to implement this initiative, such as the opening of the logistics terminal in Lianyungang Port, the construction of the Western China-Western Europe Highway, and the operation of the Khorgos international center.⁸ Thus, a concrete result of the visit was the signing of a large package of documents (over 30), includ-

⁷ K. Syroyezhkin, "Kazakhstan i geopoliticheskiye proekty SShA i Kitaia v Tsentralnoi Azii," 2016, available at [<https://365info.kz/2016/04/kazahstan-i-geopoliticheskie-proekty-ssha-i-kitaya-v-tsentralnoj-azii/>].

⁸ See: Yu. Mager, "Materialy o vizite Prezidenta RK v Kitaiskuiu Narodnuiu Respubliku (g. Pekin, 31 avgusta-3 sentiabria 2015), *Kazhstanskaia pravda*, 4 September, 2015, pp. 1-2.

ing the Joint Declaration of the two heads of state on a new stage in the development of the comprehensive strategic partnership and a number of agreements between the governments of the two countries in the field of industrialization, investment, and cultural and humanitarian cooperation. Most of the agreements reached are of a commercial nature.

There is no denying the fact that Kazakhstan has been actively implementing its reindustrialization program precisely with China's assistance. The Intergovernmental Framework Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Production Capacity and Investment, signed in August 2015, is already being implemented in practice. In fact, it is quite clear to Kazakhstan's leaders and its expert community that China today has significant competitive advantages. This is due to a number of factors:

- China's strategy designed to develop mutually beneficial investment projects avoids any debates on the domestic policies of the partner states, and this is what makes China a more attractive international partner;
- China firmly adheres to the principle of non-interference in internal affairs; in contrast to Russia, it does not seek to control the political decision-making process or to impose political integration; in contrast to the United States, it does not pressure the leaders of the Central Asian countries over political modernization or domestic reform schedules;
- China has a common border not with one, but with three Central Asian countries, which gives it a decided advantage in the development of transport and logistics projects;
- given the increasing number of transport, infrastructure, and other regionally significant facilities in which China is the largest shareholder, as well as the growing dependence of states in the region on Chinese loans, their choice in favor of China has virtually no alternative;
- it is very significant that the countries along the Silk Road Economic Belt are also interested in the implementation of these projects: this means not only increased revenue from transit fees and injection of funds into the regional economies, but also an improvement in transport connectivity between countries in the region;
- China is willing to compromise not only with Russia, but also with other countries of the Silk Road Economic Belt;
- funding for the SREB project has already been secured.

In the opinion of Kazakh researcher Elmira Kagazbayeva, "economic cooperation between Kazakhstan and China is mutually beneficial. For China, Kazakhstan becomes the 'main transportation gateway' to the Central Asian region and is seen by the Chinese leadership as the key element of the future Eurasian transcontinental transit artery. For Kazakhstan, China is a 'window of opportunity' in the process of the republic's further economic modernization. Kazakhstan will have new opportunities to develop its transit potential in the context of the revival of the Great Silk Road in the new conditions of the 21st century, as this unique megaproject is in the interests of many Eurasian countries. For Kazakhstan, this project means a new level of relations with many countries in economics, trade, and culture."⁹

But despite significant benefits for the implementation of the Nurlı Zhol State Program accruing from its integration with China's Silk Road Economic Belt program, this integration could also encounter various threats and challenges. The pairing of the two programs must and can take into account existing uncertainty factors and potential threats and challenges.

In assessing cooperation between Kazakhstan and China under the Belt and Road Initiative, one of Kazakhstan's leading sinologists, Konstantin Syroyezhkin, is more cautious: his advice is to act in

⁹ E. Kagazbayeva, *op. cit.*

strict accordance with national interests and explore the threats and challenges of the practical implementation of the Silk Road Economic Belt in Kazakhstan.¹⁰

The first and main uncertainty factor is that up to now the goals of the SREB have not been clearly defined by the Chinese side. This leaves unanswered quite a few questions posed by experts.

- First, it is unclear whether the SREB is a geopolitical concept of China's "fifth-generation" leaders or a project of economic integration under the auspices of and funded by China. Judging by the latest highlights in the speeches of Chinese leaders and recent assessments made by Chinese experts, the SREB is more of a geopolitical concept (which naturally does not exclude its economic component). The declared goal of the project is to strengthen regional economic interaction in Eurasia and create a "new model of international cooperation and global management." Hence the main problem for Kazakhstan and other states in the region: the need to choose their foreign policy priority.
- Second, could the practical implementation of the SREB project turn China into the region's dominant player not only in the economy, but also in politics?
- Third, who will be in charge of this super project and contacts with foreign partners on the Chinese side: a government agency or non-governmental structures, such as the Silk Road Fund?

Another important point that remains unclear is how the SREB concept will be combined with the project of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). One should bear in mind that each of the two concepts pursues its own goals. The EAEU seeks to reindustrialize the member countries, primarily Kazakhstan, which is virtually impossible without limiting the import of Chinese goods. The SREB, on the contrary, implies the promotion of Chinese goods in the markets of Central Asian countries and Russia and through them in Europe and the Middle East, with the prospect of creating a free trade area in Central Asia, which is totally in conflict with the EAEU's main goal at the present stage of its development.

This is precisely why the main task today is to step up the search for real points of contact between the SREB and the EAEU, identify the possible integration areas, and develop appropriate mechanisms to integrate the two projects. A number of documents have been signed, but so far no real progress has been made. Unless this problem is resolved in the near future, the Central Asian states will be faced with quite a difficult choice between Russia and China, while Russian-Chinese relations could be strained. In these conditions, effective implementation of the SREB project in Central Asia will hardly be possible. Quite obviously, the practical implementation of the project will be blocked by Russia.

The second factor is that the Central Asian region is a very complex geopolitical arena. It is not only that Russia, the United States, Europe, China, India, Iran, and Turkey have intertwined and conflicting interests in the region, but also that relations between the Central Asian countries themselves leave much to be desired.

This is why China, as the initiator of the new project, should act as a skillful moderator of these relations and contradictions.

The third factor is the need to find an answer to the question of how to interpret China's proclaimed principle of "common benefit" with regard to trade and economic relations, which are imbued with the spirit of intense competition. The SREB is not based on concern for industrial development in the countries through which it will pass, but primarily on the intensive development of China's western regions so as to turn them into a transport, logistics, foreign economic, and eventually financial hub of "Greater Central Asia." This means that the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region

¹⁰ See: K. Syroyezhkin, *op. cit.*

(XUAR), which already successfully functions as the “workshop” of the Central Asian countries, giving them no chance to develop a more or less significant manufacturing sector, will play an increasing role in China’s economic contacts with the Central Asian countries, while the situation in these countries (from the perspective of their reindustrialization) will worsen. But the main element of uncertainty relates not so much to the Central Asian countries’ willingness to develop the real sector of the economy jointly with China as to the dilemma facing China: whether to invest in the reindustrialization of the region and thus to provide a competitor for Chinese industrial exports.

Conclusions

To summarize this article, we can draw the following conclusions.

- First, Kazakhstan’s Nurly Zhol (Bright Path) project and China’s Belt and Road Initiative have much in common; both projects are consistent with the strategic development goals of states. This includes the development of infrastructure to promote economic growth; cooperation with neighboring countries and regions to improve the economic environment; improvement in people’s quality of life as the main goal of both projects; and mutually beneficial cooperation to achieve general progress and prosperity.
- Second, the parties have defined four priority areas for the strategic docking of the Silk Road Economic Belt and Nurly Zhol: development of bilateral trade; accelerated expansion and modernization of infrastructure; development of cooperation in production; and deeper cooperation in the financial sphere. These areas have not only been named, but have actually taken shape in the form of concrete projects and, most importantly, have already secured the necessary funding.
- Third, China’s creation of corridors via the existing connection with the Central Asian rail network (in which Kazakhstan plays a special role) allows China to diversify the directions of continental transit rail flows.
- And fourth, despite significant benefits for the implementation of Kazakhstan’s Nurly Zhol State Program accruing from its integration with China’s Silk Road Economic Belt program, there are also threats and challenges that could arise in the process of integration. Among these threats, Kazakhstan’s expert community includes mass labor migration in connection with the transfer and construction of Chinese enterprises in Kazakhstan. In addition, a possible economic decline in China or Kazakhstan could lead to the stagnation of the Belt and Road Initiative. The threats and challenges of the integration process are also associated with the low competitiveness of Kazakhstan’s enterprises, which could result in the replacement of local companies by Chinese ones. Another possibility is an increase in anti-Chinese sentiment in Kazakhstan caused by the relocation of China’s excess production capacity to the republic and transfer of agricultural land to Chinese companies. Even rumors about the possible lease of agricultural land to foreigners (Chinese) has already caused a wave of protest in Kazakhstan and has required a special warning from the Prosecutor General’s Office and a statement by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Finally, the potential threats and challenges of integration between the SREB and the EAEU include the prospect of competition between the two projects.

Thus, we can conclude that economic cooperation between Kazakhstan and China is mutually beneficial. For China, Kazakhstan becomes the “main transportation gateway” to the Central Asian region and is seen by the Chinese leadership as the key element of the future Eurasian transconti-

mental transit artery. For Kazakhstan, China offers a window of opportunity for economic modernization.

ISSUES IN FORMATION AND FUNCTIONING OF POLITICAL CULTURE IN POST-SOVIET KAZAKHSTAN

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Kulipa B AISULTANOVA

*Ph.D. (Political Science), Professor, Department of Oriental Studies,
Kazakh Ablai Khan University of International Relations and World Languages
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

Elmira KAGAZBAEVA

*Ph.D. (Political Science), Head of Department of Oriental Studies,
Kazakh Ablai Khan University of International Relations and World Languages
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

Dinara DAUEN

*Ph.D. (Oriental Studies), Assistant Professor, Department of Oriental Studies,
Kazakh Ablai Khan University of International Relations and World Languages
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

Zhanar YESSERKEPOVA

*Ph.D. (Hist.), Assistant Professor, Department of Oriental Studies,
Kazakh Ablai Khan University of International Relations and World Languages
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

ABSTRACT

Politics is shaped by people's ideas and perceptions of how society should be organized and how the state should function. People's values are influenced by the traditions, mentality and worldview of a social group. Their attitudes to the state, politics and power constitute a political culture. Political culture determines the norms

of human behavior in the political sphere, establishes a certain framework, members of society either accept this form or contribute to the formation of a new vector. The

authors share the views of those scientists who believe that political culture cannot be isolated from the context of socio-political relations and socio-economic activities.

KEYWORDS: *political culture, history, state, symbols, political symbols, politics, independence, flag, anthem, coat of arms.*

Introduction

The main goal of this work is to delineate the features of the political culture of the Republic of Kazakhstan in historical perspective. The need to examine the substantive portion of the concept of political culture is dictated by a variety of definitions and fundamental generalizations of the identified problem in domestic historical, cultural and political science-related corpus of literature. Researching the values in the political life of Kazakhstani population is important both from a scientific point of view, as well as that of state interests. This article examines political culture as a historical and political issue, that is, the features of the phenomenon in question are discussed in the context of the historical development of Kazakhstan after independence.

Theoretical and Methodological Foundations

The concept of political culture can be understood in a variety of ways: some consider it a manifestation of internal culture, others associate it with the level of education, still others think of it as active participation in political life. The theoretical foundations of the analysis of political culture are sufficiently reflected in political science. Throughout the twentieth century, entire scientific directions have been formed in association with political culture studies. An examination in historical retrospective demonstrates that the scientific study of this issue began in the 1950s-1960s. Among the scientists who founded the political culture theory are Talcott Parsons, David Easton, Gabriel Almond, Sidney Verba, Walter Rosenbaum and others. Parsons, an American sociologist, examines political culture in the framework of structural functionalism; in his opinion, values are the highest principles, based on which harmony is achieved in society and in smaller groups.¹ The psychological approach of Almond and Verba, which considers political culture a system of political alignments and beliefs of a particular person, is very important for its formation. They believe that these values may not be shared by the majority of a society's members, or even interfere with its functioning. The essential point is that they are in place.² The content of national values of various peoples is determined by the mode of production of material and spiritual goods and types of social relations. The spiritual and moral values usually include categories related to an individual's attitude to the most important areas of human life: responsibility, justice, security, love of work, nature, family, other people, the environment. The spiritual foundations of the national values reflect the desire and ability of all population segments to resolve the existing political problems in the country.

¹ See: T.P. Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action*, The Free Press, Glencoe, Illinois, 1949.

² See: *The Civic Culture Revisited*, ed. by G. Almond, S. Verba, Little, Brown, Boston, MA, 1980.

According to the normative paradigm proposed by Lucian Pye and David Paul, political culture is defined as the totality of norms and patterns of political behavior adopted by a political system.³

American scientist Samuel Huntington understands political culture as a hypothetical normative model of desired behavior.⁴

As can be easily observed, there are many definitions of political culture and methodological approaches today, however, it is universally recognized that political culture is part of the general and national culture. Political culture is formed in the process of historical development, affects the political system and depends on political transformations.

Thinkers of the past have recognized the enormous role of morality and value beliefs in the development of society and politics. Scientific interest in political culture increased with the use of new research methods. Using these methods, they have sought to find out the factors that influence people's political behavior, and the role played by the interests of the political elite in the formation of a society's political culture. One of the features of political culture studies is the complexity and fragmentation of scientific discussions. Some consider political culture a part of the national culture, others—the result of ideological influence, still others—accumulated experience in the political sphere.

In the context of the history of formation of political culture, it can be noted that it acquires a systemic character precisely at the national level. It is based on historically established political traditions, orientation, system of values, and a model of political behavior. The national political tradition is in constant flux, and is influenced by both external and internal factors. This process involves changes to the individual constituent elements of political culture: the transformation of views takes place and new attitudes appear in relation to the political life of the state. However, the basic national culture model, which is the identifying factor of an individual nation, is preserved.

Research Methods

Historical and comparative research methods were used in the study of political culture. The historical method was applied, making it possible to analyze political culture in its temporal development, to reveal the connection between Kazakhstan's past, present and future in the political sphere. The systems approach has contributed to the study of political culture as a system and revealed its integrity, making it possible to create a unified image of Kazakhstani political culture and to define its subsystems. The comparative method was used to analyze the role of political culture in society and in the political system of Kazakhstan. It also made it possible to evaluate the development of the political culture of Kazakhstani society and obtain a more accurate description of it after independence. This study is based on the principle of theoretical and empirical unity, which has allowed to carry out a practical verification of the initial theoretical principles of political culture.

Results

In this context, it can be noted that Kazakhstan traversed a complex path full of various events, the path of socio-economic, political and spiritual/historical development in the twentieth century. With Kazakhstan's declaration of independence and sovereignty, there was a surge in national iden-

³ See: L.K. Bayrachnaya, "Politicheskaya kultura kak predposylka legitimnosti vlasti: k teorii voprosa," *Gumanitarniy chasopis* (Humanitarian Journal), No. 4, 2013, pp. 11-18.

⁴ See: S.P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Touchstone, New York, 1997.

tity and culture, a rethinking of the ongoing changes. In Kazakhstan, just as in other post-Soviet countries, the transformation process took place under difficult and contradictory conditions. The political culture in Kazakhstan was formed on the basis of historically established values, attitudes and behavior patterns. Its development was significantly influenced by fundamental changes in the socio-economic, political and spiritual life of society associated with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the emergence of new social groups, changes in the social stratification of the population, reorientation of values as a result of adaptation to a market economy, and other important events in the country's socio-political development.

The formation of political culture in Kazakhstan is influenced by the multi-ethnic nature of Kazakhstani society. The main goals of a culture of interethnic communication in a multinational society are to find ways to arrive at a dialog, to create the same conditions for representatives of all ethnic groups, to form the rules of social harmony, establish and preserve peace within the country. The Kazakhstani society is a community of values that unites representatives of all peoples. The purpose of the adopted Doctrine of National Unity of Kazakhstan is to determine priorities and provide a mechanism to reinforce the national values of the peoples of Kazakhstan based on civic identity, patriotism, the spiritual and cultural community, maintaining stability, interethnic and interfaith harmony in society. Moral issues, such as veneration of elders, respect for the institution of the family, and the tradition of hospitality are deeply rooted in our society. The spiritual foundations of the national values of the Kazakhstani peoples are aimed at building a democratic and civilized state. Thus, we can conclude that people of Kazakhstan advocate tolerance, preservation of the traditions of individual ethnic groups, freedom and the exercise of constitutional rights, while stability is important in all respects, which affects the political behavior of individuals and the political culture of the population in general.

Discussion

As mentioned above, one of the characteristics of the Kazakhstani society is the diversity of ethnic cultures, which influenced the formation of the Kazakhstanis' national consciousness, their worldviews, value and norm foundations, as well as the general political culture. Today, representatives of more than 100 nationalities and 40 religious denominations live in Kazakhstan, preserving their linguistic, historical and cultural values. These include: Kazakhs comprising 63% of the population, Russians (25%), Ukrainians (2.9%), Uzbeks (2.8%), Germans (1.5%), Tatars (1.5%), and Uyghurs (1.5%), as well as representatives of other nationalities.⁵ According to experts from the Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Research, a special culture of interethnic communication was formed in Kazakhstan in the first two decades of independence, reliably preventing the transition of interpersonal, economic, and other conflicts to an interethnic plane. This is what allows us to talk about the "Kazakhstan model" of interethnic and interfaith tolerance. It was what largely allowed to resolve strategically important tasks such as maintaining the country's independence and territorial integrity, achieving a lasting interethnic and interfaith accord, and economic and political stability.⁶

As is widely known, the concepts of culture and morality are closely interconnected. Kazakh scientist Dmitry Men considers political culture from the point of view of morality. He identifies three such main foundations of the national values of Kazakhstan's peoples as common history, common

⁵ See: "Kazakhstan—chislennost naseleniia i etniceskiy sostav," available at [<http://www.advantour.com/rus/kazakhstan/people.htm>].

⁶ See: *Kazakhstan: 20 let nezavisimosti: A Monograph*, ed. by B.K. Sultanov, KISI under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Almaty, 2011, 408 pp.

values for all Kazakhstanis and a common future, and focuses on strengthening the national values of the peoples of Kazakhstan.⁷ In her discussion of the category of morality in politics, researcher Zhazira Kuanyshbaeva concludes that in modern political life, moral values are every society's main resource, and that moral values are based on universal values.⁸

The opinion of the Kazakhstani researcher Serik Nurmuratov is also of interest. He believes that there is sufficient potential for the development of a democratic political culture in Kazakhstan despite the numerous difficulties of the transition period, namely the economic, social, cultural and spiritual experience in adapting to the hardships of life. Democratic values, principles of non-violence and humanism have to be introduced to further the development of political culture among citizens. In regard to this issue, our country should focus not only on Western models, but also proceed with regard to the characteristics of national reality.⁹

In the studies conducted by Kazakhstani scientists, political orientation and beliefs are examined from a historical point of view; in their opinion, the phenomenon in question has deep historical roots.

Doctor of Political Science Karlygash Nugmanova proposes to divide the development of the political culture of Kazakhstan into three stages:

- the first stage is an integrative political culture of the Soviet type,
- the second stage is a fragmentary political culture of a transitional type,
- the third stage is an integrative political culture of a civil society.

The researcher associates political culture with the formation and development of the civil society, which is one of the main directions of political modernization in Kazakhstan.¹⁰ Such basic signs of the development of civil society as civil liberty, the protection of individual rights, trust and cooperation between social institutions, active participation of citizens in resolving all the pressing issues of the development of their country characterize the political culture of a society. Since the first days of independence, the Republic of Kazakhstan has been paying special attention to promoting the democratization of Kazakhstani society. Various civil society institutions have been created and are dynamically developing. There are currently 6 political parties, 5,820 non-governmental organizations of various alignments, 3,340 public foundations, 1,072 associations of legal entities, 471 national culture centers, 3,340 religious associations representing over 40 faiths and denominations, 6,645 media with various forms of ownership. The formation of civil society is a very important stage on the path to democratization and building a market economy in Kazakhstan. This has allowed to increase citizen activity and improve the general culture of behavior, which undoubtedly contributed to the effectiveness of political and economic reforms in the country. In our opinion, there is a growing demand for the actual expansion of non-governmental organizations' presence as the country's socio-political development progresses. The state considers them a reliable partner in solving the constantly intensifying problems of a social, economic and legal nature. Non-governmental institutions aim to protecting basic rights, including the inviolability of individuals and property, which are designed to create conditions that ensure the development of human capital. Civil society institutions, as the main tools of market-democratic transformations, contribute to the state's modernization policy, the fight against corruption, raising civic initiatives, ensuring political stability and economic growth.

⁷ See: D.V. Men, "Etnopolitika v Kazakhstane v kontekste kultury mezhetnicheskogo obshcheniia," in: *Materialy mezhdunarodnoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii "Sotsialno-politicheskie nauki: problemy i suzhdeniia,"* 2012, p. 185.

⁸ See: Zh.Zh. Kuanyshbaeva, "Rol nraivstvennosti v politike," in: *Materialy mezhdunarodnoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii "Sotsialno-politicheskie nauki: problemy i suzhdeniia,"* 2012, p. 22.

⁹ See: S.E. Nurmuratov, "Izmenenie tsennostno-normativnykh ustanovok v polietnicheskoy kulture sovremennogo Kazakhstana," available at [<http://www.ca-c.org/datarus>].

¹⁰ See: K.Zh. Nugmanova, "Politicheskaia kultura kazakhstantsev v kontekste stanovleniia grazhdanskogo obshchestva," in: *Sbornik materialov 1-go Evraziyskogo kongressa politologov,* 2011, p. 443.

According to American political scientists Almond and Verba, political culture should be considered as a system of political alignments and beliefs inherent in a particular person. These preferences may not be shared by most members of society, and even oppose the functioning of the regime.¹¹

The rejection of communist ideology and the introduction of market mechanisms have brought certain values to the fore of Kazakhstan's political culture, including the priority of individual interests over public interests, a rethinking of the role of the state and non-governmental bodies, and respect for state laws.

At the same time, the results of a sociological study of value alignments carried out by the Association of Sociologists of Kazakhstan demonstrate that Kazakhstanis' values have recently undergone a change, and a rethinking of the foundations of morality is underway. In socio-cultural terms, two types of mentality can be observed in Kazakhstan, namely, Western and Eastern. I would like to note that the distinctive features of the Western model, such as individualism, and the priority of individual interest are not alien to our population, especially among Kazakhstani youth. The world-views and value alignments of young people and other social groups were influenced by the conducted reforms, the political situation in the country, the form and nature of the state governance, and the socio-economic state of the population. The change in the values that youth adheres to can also be explained by the influence of globalization. There is currently a growing trend of Westernized thinking and behavior, which gradually affects the political behavior and culture of both young people and other members of society. This manifests itself as criticism of the reforms being conducted, state administration and the activities of political parties and individual officials. The experience of other countries demonstrates that, on the one hand, it is useful for further development of a reasonable critical view of political decisions, on the other hand, people's protest moods sometimes result in serious unrest, which causes instability in society. It should be noted that such political behavior is not characteristic of Kazakhstani citizens, and we believe that the state needs to make more effort to understand young people and to pay attention to their opinions and needs. It is also necessary to focus on the promotion, as well as preservation and enrichment of national traditions, values and their harmonious integration in the political life of modern Kazakhstan.

Political symbols are one of the elements of political culture and an important part of national identity. They reflect the political course of a state. They are the semantic and figurative constructs of the country's socio-political reality. An interpretation of modern reality by the public consciousness takes place through political symbolism, ensuring the ideological, political and practical restructuring of the political space. Political symbolism is an integral part of politics and associated ideologies. Politics as a social process cannot take place without symbolism, or outside of the symbolic field.¹²

Political symbolism is created in order to draw the attention of other nations and to consolidate the image of their state in people's memory. It plays a unifying role within the country, acts as a call for rallying around a national idea, personifies the unity and the spirit of the people living in a country. Naturally, every nation forms political symbols in its own way, attempting to demonstrate its unique image. Political symbolism reflects a state's distinctive features, people's centuries-old traditions and history that characterize political culture.

The importance of political symbolism in the formation of political culture is noted by the German philosopher and historian Oswald Spengler, who believes that the integrity of a culture is based on the common language of its symbolism. A symbol is simultaneously a specific means of communication between people, it helps them recognize their belonging to a specific social community, and assimilate the central idea that pervades this community.¹³ Respect for state symbols means love for

¹¹ *The Civic Culture Revisited*.

¹² See: D.A. Misyurov, *Politika i simvol'y v Rossii*, MAKS Press, Moscow, 2004, 144 pp.

¹³ See: K.S. Gadzhiev, *Politicheskaya nauka*, Eksmo, Moscow, 2015, 620 pp.

your homeland, for your people, its history and tradition. Symbols are a certain code for communication between the people of one state both domestically and abroad.

The Russian scientist Gadzhiev writes that some political symbols are formed spontaneously by all or most members of a cultural and political community, and others are created and purposefully introduced by the elites.¹⁴ In the history of the Kazakh people, signs, symbols and *urans* (battle cry of a clan or tribe) played a huge role in the fight against outside invasion. In ancient times, the tribes and clans that became part of the Kazakh people had special signs, *tamgas* (a sign of the clan or tribe, its coat of arms), and war cries, *urans*, which made it possible to distinguish tribes from each other. Kazakh tribes put the image of a *tamga* on their banners, which they took into battle. Warriors shouted their *urans*, which often signified the name of a distant ancestor, the leader of a tribe or clan. For the Kazakhs, their tribe's *tamgas* and *urans* became an expression of their common spirit, their connection with their ancestors, and the latter's support in daily life and wars with other tribes, and therefore had special sacred significance for them.¹⁵

Since Kazakhstan has gained its independence, Kazakhstan's state leaders have worked to establish the political symbols of the republic that reflect the political traditions, culture and spirit of the Kazakh people. Initially, the state symbols of Kazakhstan were made official on 4 June, 1992 by three separate laws, then the provisions of these documents were summarized in a special Decree of the Head of State dated 24 January, 1996 On State Symbols of the Republic of Kazakhstan, which had the force of a constitutional law. In 2006, a new Law on State Symbols of the Republic of Kazakhstan was published, in which, in particular, Art 11.1 was supplemented with the words: "when playing the Anthem, put the palm of your right hand to the left side of the chest."¹⁶

The national flag represents the independence of the people and the place of the state on the world stage. It occupies a special place in the political life of any nation. According to the political practice, the newly elected president takes an oath of allegiance to his people with the flag raised, and, according to tradition, the flag flies at half-staff if tragic events occur in a country, signifying national mourning. When official and national events are conducted, the flag takes a central place and is hung outside in public places.

Artist Shaken Niyazbekov is the author of the state flag of independent Kazakhstan. The flag of our Republic is sky blue, the sun and its rays are in the center, above it is a soaring golden eagle. A vertical strip with a national ornament is drawn adjacent to the pole. The sky blue color symbolizes honesty, loyalty and impeccability. Kazakhs are a Turkic people, and in Turkic culture the sky-blue color has a special meaning. The ancient Türks always revered the sky as their father god, and the sky-blue banner symbolized devotion to the ancestor. On the national flag of Kazakhstan, the sky-blue color symbolizes a clear sky, peace and prosperity, and the uniformity of the background is the unity of our country.¹⁷

The importance of state symbols in the sports life of any state is of special importance and has a direct impact on the formation of political culture and national consciousness. It is impossible not to notice that in recent times sport has become an important part of countries' political life, with political authorities providing significant support to outstanding athletes, and athletes becoming involved in politics after completing their sports careers. Compatriots' sports achievements are a subject of special pride for any nation, since they increase the country's visibility in the world. Athletes'

¹⁴ See: Ibidem.

¹⁵ See: R. Kadyrzhanov, *Ethno-Cultural Symbolism and National Identity of Kazakhstan*, ed. by Z.K. Shaukenova, Institute of Philosophy, Political Science and Religious Studies, KS MES ROK, Almaty, 2014, 168 pp.

¹⁶ "Gosudarstvennyye simvoly otrazhaiut dukhovnye tsennosti naroda Kazakhstana, bogatstva ego zemli i nezyblemost istorii," kazinform, available at [<http://www.inform.kz/>].

¹⁷ See: Ibidem.

victories in the final tournament of significant sporting events causes a powerful wave of patriotism, the national flag is raised in their honor, embodying the unity of all of the country's peoples, and the hymn sounds as an expression of the national spirit, increasing the positive emotion and patriotic feelings of compatriots.

Meanwhile, the Kazakhs have a special tradition of throwing a *chapan* (national gown) on the shoulders of a respected person, a guest or a hero. *Chapans*, embroidered with Kazakh ornaments, on the shoulders of athletes cause representatives of other countries to associate them with Kazakhstan, and Kazakhstanis in this case feel love, national pride and respect for their people. Professional boxer Gennady Golovkin enters the ring wearing a national Kazakh *chapan*, and covers himself with the blue Kazakhstani flag after a victory. Each new victory achieved by Gennady Golovkin on the world sports arena leads to tremendous joy for all Kazakhstanis, this joy turns into national jubilation, and such a manifestation of feelings is evidence of interethnic consent in Kazakhstan. In general, the use of national symbols by athletes positively affects the image of Kazakhstan, contributes to its increased political "weight" on the world stage, and gives Kazakhstanis an additional impetus to achieve new victories.

The national emblem represents the country along with the state flag. In many countries, images of powerful animals or plants with special properties appear on national emblems. The national emblem of Kazakhstan was developed by famous architects Zhandarbek Malibekov and Shot-Aman Ualikhanov. It has the shape of a circle (wheel), a symbol of life and eternity. The central element in the coat of arms is the image of a *shanyrak* (the upper part of the traditional dwelling of the Kazakhs) on a blue background, from which the *uyks* (supports) diverge in all directions, similar to the rays of the sun. To the right and left of the *shanyrak* are images of mythical winged horses. In the upper part there is a three-dimensional five-pointed star, and the word "Kazakhstan" is inscribed in the lower part. All images are drawn using a golden color. *Shanyrak* is a symbol of a common home and a single motherland of all peoples in the country. The image of a horse personifies concepts of courage, loyalty and strength. The wings symbolize the centuries-old dream of the people to build a strong and prosperous state. The wings of the horses also resemble golden wheat ears and embody the hard work of the Kazakhstanis and the material well-being of the country. The five-pointed star personifies people's perpetual desire for the light of truth, for everything sublime and eternal. The emblem is also sky blue, like the flag, which is in harmony with the golden color and symbolizes the clear sky, peace and prosperity.¹⁸

It is interesting that the structure of the modern emblem is apparently a repetition of the structure of the emblem of the Soviet Kazakhstan, with only the symbols replaced. So, winged horses are painted instead of ears of wheat, and a *shanyrak* replaced the globe. Just as before, a star and other symbols are drawn in the upper part of the emblem.

While the emblem has retained the Soviet structure, the country's anthem, unlike that of Russia, was completely replaced. The favorite song of the Kazakhs, "Menin Kazakhstan" to the words of Zhumaken Nazhmedenov, became the new hymn. It should be noted that the President of Kazakhstan made adjustments to the text of the anthem.

In addition, the capital of the state and the unique architecture can also become national symbols. The love for them shapes the culture and an attitude to political ideas and views. An example is the Statue of Liberty in the United States, which embodies the American dream and welcomes everyone arriving in America. The Statue of Liberty is a symbol of independence, of dreams coming true. A similar symbol recognizable to all Kazakhstanis is *Baiterek* (the tree of life, *arbor mundi*). The monument represents the idea of the Kazakh people about the universe and is identified with the capital of Kazakhstan—Nur-Sultan. According to legend, *Baiterek* is the tree of life that the sacred bird Samruk aims to reach. The *Baiterek* Monument was opened in 2002, becoming a sign of a new

¹⁸ See: "Gosudarstvennaia simbolika Respubliki Kazakhstan," available at [<http://www.pa-academy.kz/>].

stage in the history of Kazakhstan. Today *Baiterek* evokes strong associations not only with the capital, but with the whole country in the world community. It has become a symbol of both the city and the entire Kazakh people, preserving its historical roots and gazing into the future.¹⁹

Thus, it can be stated that political symbols are an essential structural element that reflects the foundation of political ideas and views. The political symbols of our republic testify to the inextricable link between the history of the Kazakhs and the path of modern Kazakhstan, the unity of the people living in the country, the independence of the state and the openness of the policies being pursued.

Kazakh researcher Timur Bigozhanov believes that the foundation of Kazakhstan's political culture is tolerance and respectful attitude on the part of the state towards the principles and programs of all political parties, public, national and religious associations operating within the framework of the constitution and laws of the republic, ensuring and supporting the equal rights of all peoples to language development, culture, traditions and customs, concern for the unity and integrity of the homeland, love for the homeland, respect and reverence for state symbols, state guarantee of personal safety of citizens, humanism, freedom and moral duty to society, the development of spiritual and moral traditions of the multinational people of Kazakhstan, and, finally, the democratic ideology aimed at consolidating the society on the basis of the achievements of world culture and civilization and universal values.²⁰ In our opinion, it is necessary to form a patriotic attitude of society to the national flag, emblem, anthem, architectural and sculptural structures, political toponymy, awards, etc. As we know, people's attitudes towards state symbols characterize political culture and directly affect the formation and strengthening of civil society. The attitude of the population to state attributes allows us to recognize the political position and mood of the people, that is, to determine whether the people support the existing state policy or not. It is not without reason that symbols are considered to be a cementing element of any political system. Moreover, promoting loyalty to common political symbols is an essential prerequisite for the formation of a national state.²¹ This issue is of particular relevance in educating youth and in shaping their correct political behavior.

Young citizens comprise 26.2% of the total population of the modern Kazakhstani society. In Kazakhstan, young people represent a significant part (40%) of the able-bodied population. They are employed in the information sector, culture and art, commerce, education, healthcare and politics. Young people adapt more quickly to new conditions, are mobile, and it is mainly they who represent the new social group. The attitude of young people to the symbols of their state should express their respect, pride in their homeland and an understanding of the importance of the events taking place in the country and in the world, thereby recognizing their role in the development of society.

Thus, we can conclude that a person becomes involved in the political system and political activity through political culture. State symbols play a mobilizing role as norms of people's behavior oriented towards political values and ideals. In this context, we can say that, despite the different ethnic and social composition of the Kazakhstani population and a diverse age structure, their value alignments are similar. This indicates the stability of the socio-political state of society.

Conclusions

Summing up, we can conclude that at the present stage, the political culture of Kazakhstan is manifested in the attitude of the Kazakhstani people to the constitution, government, parties and

¹⁹ See: *Ibidem*.

²⁰ See: T.K. Bigozhanov, *Politicheskie aspekty formirovaniia u molodezhi kultury mezhnatsionalnogo obshchenia v Respublike Kazakhstan*, Summary of Ph.D. Thesis in Political Science, Almaty, 1998, 22 pp.

²¹ See: V.A. Melnik, *Gosudarstvennaia ideologiia: poniatie, elementy, funktsii*, Minsk, 2002.

public organizations, expressed in their political positions. Political culture is formed under the influence of numerous factors, which also determines the diversity of its types and models. Different authors diverge in their characteristics of the components of political culture. Historiographic analysis shows that issues related to the examination of the essence of political culture are generally diverse. We can also conclude that there is neither a single point of view on the problem under consideration in modern Kazakh science, nor a well-established conceptual or categorical apparatus and research methodology; there are also discrepancies in understanding of life values and political behavior by scientists, etc. At the same time, there is much in common between them in their historical development, in the formation and development of political culture and its components. The disclosure of the content, essence, typological features of political culture would allow us not only to better understand our own past and present, but also to determine the future, since political culture reflects the interests and characteristics of a nation's historical development.

REGIONAL INTEGRATION

THE CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY: THE CHALLENGES OF ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

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Aidarbek AMIRBEK

*D.Sc. (International Relations),
Scientific Researcher, Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University
(Ankara, Turkey)*

Kanat MAKHANOV

*MA (Regional Economics), Research Fellow, Eurasian Research Institute
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

Rashid TAZHIBAYEV

*D.Sc. (International Relations),
Acting Associate Professor, Department of International Relations,
Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International Kazakh-Turkish University
(Turkestan, Kazakhstan)*

Makpal ANLAMASSOVA

*D.Sc. (Political Science and International Relations),
Acting Associate Professor, Department of International Relations,
Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International Kazakh-Turkish University
(Turkestan, Kazakhstan)*

A B S T R A C T

The authors present an analysis of the reasons and factors that explain the absence of integration arrangements and the extremely weak trade and economic relations between the five countries of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan). Despite a very wide range of unifying factors, such as geographical proximity, similar economic structure, common history, socio-cultural aspects, and other circumstances, these five countries have never been members of associations that would promote economic cooperation or regional integration between them. Trade between the Central Asian countries has been and remains negligible. On the other hand, all five countries have actively increased their trade since the early 1990s mainly by increasing exports of minerals. Thus, the EU countries, China, and Russia account for a much larger share of the Central Asian countries' foreign trade than their regional neighbors. The main factor preventing regional cooperation in Cen-

tral Asia is that all its five countries have weak institutions that do not promote the development of the private sector, as well as poorly developed infrastructure. Moreover, the current geographical distribution and composition of exports from the Central Asian countries suit their governments, because export revenues enable them to address, to some extent, acute socio-economic problems. The research method used in this study is that of general qualitative analysis. The study is based on primary sources. The research was conducted using regional and foreign research literature and data from appropriate official organizations, their publications and websites.

The study is divided into the following sections: *The Formation of Market Relations in Central Asia*; *Trade as a Key Manifestation of Economic Integration*; *The Natural Costs of Integration in Central Asia*; *Weak Institutions and Other Artificial Barriers to Integration*; and *The Eurasian Economic Union as a Path to Regional Integration*.

KEYWORDS: *Central Asia, integration, trade, Eurasian Economic Union, Russia.*

Introduction

After the final breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, the newly independent republics of Central Asia, like the other former Soviet republics, were exposed to economic market forces and encountered difficulties in their transition from a centrally planned economy to a new, market system. This process was very painful and caused a steep economic decline in all five countries of the region (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan). Urgent action taken by their governments implied radical transformations, which had a destructive effect on virtually all sectors of the economy and led to a sharp drop in output in many sectors, especially manufacturing.¹ It is interesting to note that despite serious economic difficulties in the initial period and a number of other unifying factors, the Central Asian (CA) countries have never been members or expressed a desire to be members of associations that would include only Central Asian countries or at least all five countries of the region.

¹ See: *Transition—The First Ten Years: Analysis and Lessons for Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, The World Bank, Washington, D.C., 2002, p. 6.

At different times, the CA countries were (or continue to be) members of organizations such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Now that integration between countries is among the most important trends in international relations² and regional cooperation groupings in different parts of the world are being actively used to create regional integration platforms, the unwillingness of the CA countries to move in this direction and even their desire for relative isolation³ in trade and economic relations with their immediate partners in the region raises questions. On the other hand, seeing that all five CA countries have to some extent adapted to market conditions, none of them have sought to limit the influence of global market trends on their economy and have even been working actively to develop trade and economic relations with large foreign markets such as those of the European Union,⁴ China, and to a lesser extent other Asian countries. At the same time, the CA countries have been just as active in developing economic ties and trade with Russia ever since independence. Such a pattern of trade and economic relations between the regional partners and the lack of proactive initiatives for intra-regional integration in a situation of closer interaction with external markets contradict economic laws, and the huge potential for regional cooperation remains untapped.⁵ But along with market laws, trade and economic relations and cooperation in Central Asia are influenced by a number of other factors, which should be considered in other than economic terms.

The Formation of Market Relations in Central Asia

Right after the breakup of the U.S.S.R., there were several concrete attempts to strengthen trade and economic cooperation in the post-Soviet space, with some of the five CA states expressing a desire to take part in this process. The first attempt to adopt a multilateral trade facilitation agreement was made in 1994 within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), established in 1991 and based on a preferential trade agreement. This played a big role in strengthening economic cooperation between the member states and was in large part a response to the economic difficulties of economic transition.⁶

Despite many economic, social, political, historical, cultural, and other similarities, the CA countries took the path of economic integration into the global market at the expense of intra-regional integration: most exports from the countries of Central Asia were oriented towards other regions—Western countries, Russia, and China. But two decades of integration into the global market, mainly through mineral exports, did not mean any deep or comprehensive economic relations with other actors in the world market and, consequently, the real integration into the world economy.

Such development involved lower administrative, resource, and technical costs for certain reasons.

- First, the entire production structure of the Soviet Union was designed so that downstream production processes were concentrated in large industrial centers of Russia,⁷ while the CA

² See: M.A. Rakhimov, "Complex Regionalism in Central Asia: Local, Regional, and Global Factors," *Cambridge Journal of Eurasian Studies*, No. 2, 2018, pp. 1-12.

³ See: S. Tadjbakhsh, *Central Asia and Afghanistan: Insulation on the Silk Road, Between Eurasia and the Heart of Asia*, Paper 3 of the PRIO Project "Afghanistan in a Neighborhood Perspective," 2012, pp. 1-12.

⁴ See: M. Russell, *The EU's New Central Asia Strategy*, EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service, 2019.

⁵ See: I. Overland, "Intra-Regional Trade in Central Asia," *Norwegian Institute of International Affairs*, 2013, No. 9.

⁶ See: E. Kurmanalieva, Z. Parpiev, "Geography and Trade in Central Asia," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, January 2008.

⁷ See: A. Włodkowska-Bagan, "Russian Foreign Policy towards Central Asia," in: *The New Great Game in Central Asia*, ed. by T. Stępniewski, Lublin, 2012, pp. 11-32.

countries were not closely interconnected among themselves by supply chains and functioned mainly as sources of raw materials.⁸ The reorientation of the deteriorating production structure implied high fiscal, economic, and social costs.

- Second, exports of raw materials to extra-regional markets, associated with low costs and expenses, ensured a steady inflow of budget revenues, which enabled the CA countries to cope with the most pressing social problems and balance their budgets. The inflow of foreign currency from mineral exports allowed the CA republics to import consumer goods and capital and thus to maintain acceptable household income levels. This strategy, coupled with mass privatization of state companies, also enabled them to achieve relatively high rates of economic growth.

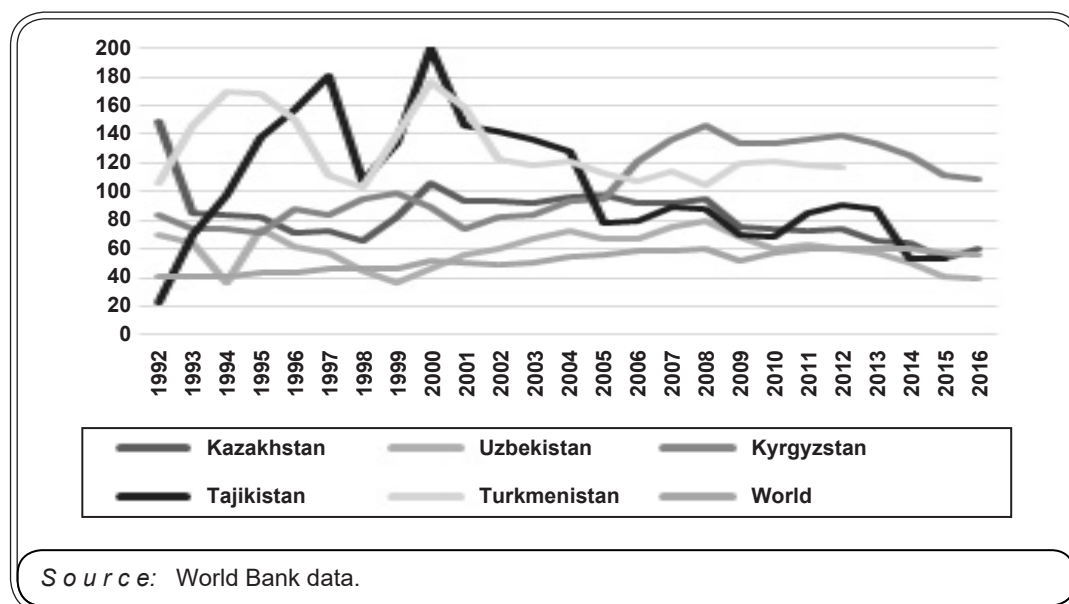
But, in addition to all these factors, there are other, more fundamental ones that prevented regional integration and trade cooperation between the CA countries.

Trade as a Key Manifestation of Economic Integration

Overall, the Central Asian countries have followed a fairly liberal trade policy with a high degree of trade openness. In 2016, for example, the ratio of foreign trade to GDP (trade-to-GDP ratio) was 109% for Kyrgyzstan, 62% for Kazakhstan, and 39% for Uzbekistan.

Figure 1

Trade Openness of the Central Asian Countries
(foreign trade as % of GDP)



⁸ See: C. Oliphant, "Russia's Role and Interests in Central Asia," *SAFERWORLD*, October 2013.

The CA states began to engage in active trade with other countries, mainly by exporting raw materials, right after the breakup of the U.S.S.R. From the perspective of integration, this can be regarded as the continued disintegration of the Soviet Union and a willingness to integrate into the world economy. In the 1990s, foreign trade relative to GDP in the CA countries was very high. The trade openness of the CA region rapidly increased from 5% to 15% in the first five years of the CIS (1992-1997). The trade openness of the CA region as part of the CIS increased rapidly in the first five years of its existence (1992-1997) from 5% to about 15%.⁹ But by the beginning of the 2000s, as GDP increased, the trade openness ratio somewhat declined.

Since independence, the geography of the CA countries' foreign trade has also changed radically. In the 1990s, trade flows between Central Asia and Russia gradually declined, while trade with other regions and countries, especially with Europe, sharply increased. The decline in trade with Russia can be explained by the general economic crisis associated with the transition to a market economy in all post-Soviet countries. Later on, at the end of the 1990s, the Russian economic crisis of 1998 also had a significant negative effect on trade with Central Asia.¹⁰ Nevertheless, that was when the CA countries began to define their integration priorities, which differed from country to country. Thus, in 2001, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan demonstrated their willingness to have integration ties with Russia by joining the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), while Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan took a skeptical view of this process and were in no hurry to join.

At the same time, there were no integration initiatives in Central Asia that would bring together all five countries of the region, as well as no larger structures based on economic relations. In addition, all unifying international treaties and structures in the region have always involved Russia, which has played a key role in them. Although Russia's domination in the foreign trade of CA countries has weakened since the early 1990s, it has always managed to maintain a certain level of economic, as well as political, importance in Central Asia. If we compare the current indicators for the CA countries' trade with each other and with Russia, we will find that Russia remains one of the key trading partners for all countries in the region. China's importance in Central Asian foreign trade increased in the 2000s because of the rise in energy demand in China caused by unprecedented rates of economic growth. Countries with large hydrocarbon reserves, such as Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, quickly responded by redirecting their large-scale oil and gas exports to China.¹¹

Table 1 shows that at present, only 4.9% of Kazakhstan's total foreign trade is carried on with its Central Asian neighbors, while Russia accounts for 22.0%, the EU for 32.6%, and China for 13.5%. The remaining CA countries have larger percentage shares of intra-regional trade while trading with the EU countries on a smaller scale. Russia and China are more or less equally important trading partners for all CA states. For example, the shares of Russia (25.0%) and China (25.4%) in Kyrgyzstan's foreign trade are almost equal. The lowest share of foreign trade with CA partners is in Kazakhstan (less than 5%), and the highest share (34.8%) is in Tajikistan. A point to note is that Kazakhstan has the largest share of trade with the EU (32.6%), while the other countries of the region have a much lower indicator, with the bulk of their foreign trade being carried on, in roughly equal measure, with Russia and China.

Nevertheless, trade with Central Asia's three key partners (Russia, EU, and China) differs significantly in terms of composition (see Table 2).

⁹ See: K. Elborgh-Woytek, "Of Openness and Distance: Trade Developments in the Commonwealth of Independent States, 1993-2002," *IMF Working Paper WP/03/207*, 2003, pp. 1-27.

¹⁰ See: G. Pastor, T. Damjanovic, "The Russian Financial Crisis and Its Consequences for Central Asia," *IMF Working Paper WP/01/169*.

¹¹ See: F. Fazilov, X. Chen, "China and Central Asia: A Significant New Energy Nexus," *The European Financial Review*, April-May 2013.

Table 1

CA Countries' Trade with Other CA Countries and with Key Extra-Regional Trading Partners, % of total foreign trade (2017)

	CA Countries	Russia	EU	China
Kazakhstan	4.9	22.0	32.6	13.5
Uzbekistan	10.6	13.5	7.9	16.7
Kyrgyzstan	21.6	25.0	8.2	25.4
Tajikistan	34.8	18.1	6.2	33.0
Turkmenistan	18.0	17.5	—	—

Source: U.N. Comtrade.

Table 2

Two Leading Sectors in CA Countries' Exports to Russia, EU, and China (2016)

	Russia		EU		China	
	Industry	%	Industry	%	Industry	%
Kazakhstan	Raw materials, except fuels	37.2	Mineral fuels	86.0	Manufactured products	41.0
	Manufactured products	22.7	Manufactured products	8.7	Mineral fuels	23.7
Uzbekistan	Manufactured products	40.4	Chemical products	48.7	Mineral fuels	42.9
	Various finished products	22.3	Manufactured products	22.8	Chemical products	24.5
Kyrgyzstan	Manufactured products	30.4	Unclassified goods	39.7	Raw materials, except fuels	65.7
	Raw materials, except fuels	29.9	Raw materials, except fuels	32.4	Manufactured products	26.3
Tajikistan	Raw materials, except fuels	77.8	Manufactured products	77.4	Raw materials, except fuels	82.9
	Manufactured products	7.4	Various finished products	11.8	Manufactured products	15.6
Turkmenistan	Machinery and transport equipment	65.2	Mineral fuels	92.2	Mineral fuels	98.5
	Chemical products	15.2	Chemical products	2.4	Raw materials, except fuels	1.3

Source: U.N. Comtrade.

The Natural Costs of Integration in Central Asia

One of the most striking and unique features that characterize and determine many processes in Central Asia is its geographical position as a landlocked region located far away from major seaports. From most of the region, locally produced goods have to be transported, on average, over distances of 1,500 to 2,000 km in order to reach the nearest seaport and be exported to distant markets. Uzbekistan, for example, is one of the world's two doubly landlocked countries, which have no access to the high seas and are surrounded by other landlocked countries with no access to sea routes.

Figure 2

Tian Shan and Pamirs



Being a landlocked country implies a number of other serious limitations, which have an adverse effect on foreign trade and overall economic growth. This fact places significant constraints on the economy, because landlocked countries are at a disadvantage and are obliged to negotiate with their coastal neighbors to gain access to the sea.¹² Along with ordinary transport costs, traded goods have to cross borders, which means additional costs. Consequently, landlocked countries usually have lower volumes of foreign trade than their coastal neighbors.¹³ As a result, such countries usually show

¹² See: B. Lahiri, F.K. Masjidi, "Landlocked Countries: A Way to Integrate with Coastal Economies," *Journal of Economic Integration*, No. 27 (4), 2012, pp. 505-519.

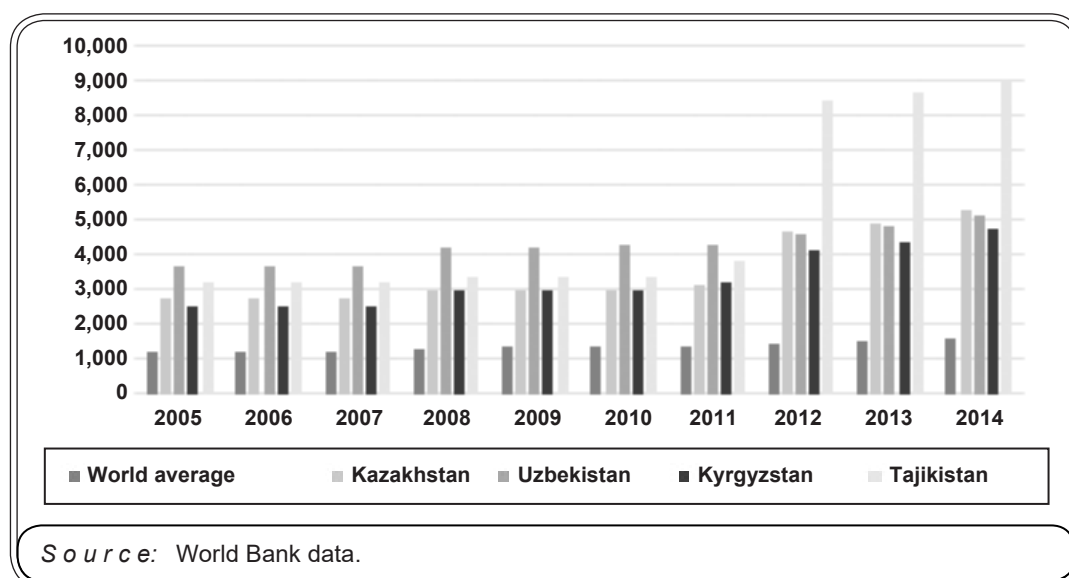
¹³ See: D.A. Irwin, M. Terviö, "Does Trade Raise Income? Evidence from the Twentieth Century," *Journal of International Economics*, No. 58 (1), 2002, pp. 1-18.

slower economic growth.¹⁴ Landlockedness reduces average growth by about 1.5% percentage points per year compared to coastal countries.¹⁵ In addition, transport and border-crossing costs also affect imports and exports, increasing their costs.¹⁶

Apart from lack of sea access, the complex geography of the Central Asian region also places other constraints on the development of infrastructure and access to neighboring coastal countries. The main mountain ranges of Central Asia, such as Tian Shan and Pamirs, serve as natural barriers to land transportation and trade. For example, countries such as Tajikistan are even more isolated than their regional neighbors, because the impassable mountain ranges in the south and neighborhood with Afghanistan make it impossible to trade with South Asian countries using overland routes. This not only increases the cost of trade with other coastal countries, but also limits the opportunities for overland trade with other countries of Central Asia. Trade relations between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and, to some extent, between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan are a case in point.

Figure 3

Cost to Export (\$ per container)



As a result, the Central Asian countries have one of the world’s highest levels of trade costs (in \$, for example) associated with importing or exporting a container of goods (see Figs. 3-4). These trade costs include those related to customs clearance, delivery, material and technical deficiencies, long transportation time, poor infrastructure, etc.

Moreover, trade costs increased in 2005-2014, which goes against the trends observed in many other regions of the world. In 2012, there was a sharp increase in trade costs in all CA countries, while in Tajikistan the figures more than doubled. The most obvious reason for this was the establishment of the Customs Union of Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus in 2011, which led to the removal of tariffs

¹⁴ See: D.E. Bloom, J.G. Williamson, “Demographic Transitions and Economic Miracles in Emerging Asia,” *World Bank Economic Review*, No. 12 (3), 1998, pp. 419-455.

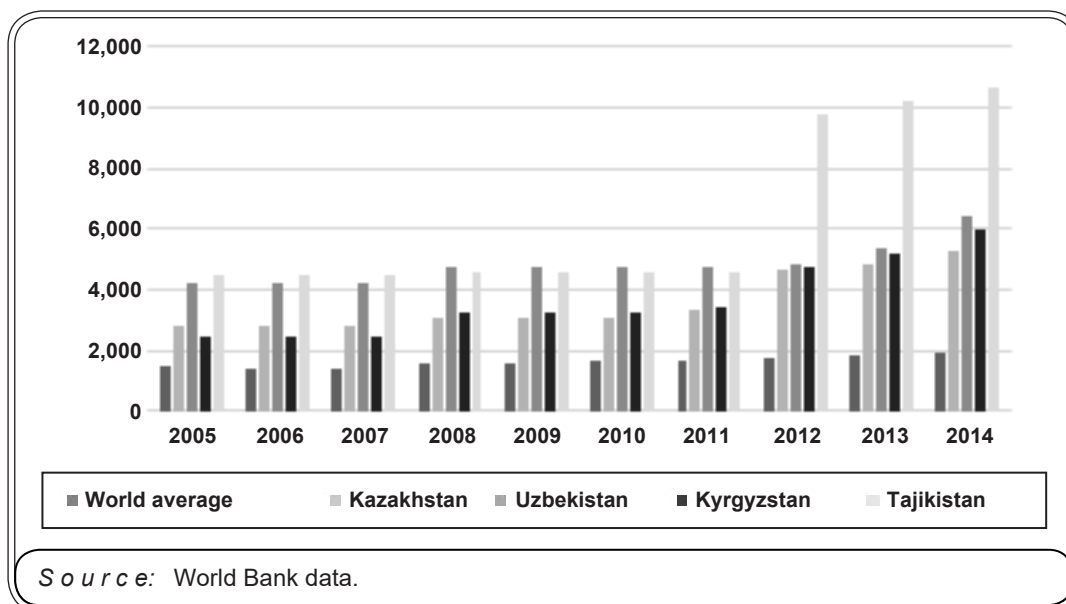
¹⁵ See: L. MacKellar, A. Wörgötter, J. Wörz, “Economic Development Problems of Landlocked Countries,” *Transition Economics Series*, No. 14, 2000.

¹⁶ See: S. Radelet, J. Sachs, “The Onset of the East Asian Financial Crisis,” *National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper*, No. 28 (1), 1998, pp. 1-74.

within the Union, but increased tariff costs in trade between these countries and the rest of the world. Although the Customs Union member countries gained an advantage in trade within the Union, the net result of its creation was negative for the CA countries in terms of overall trade costs, and in the case of Tajikistan this effect was extremely strong because of its relative geographical isolation within the region itself.

Figure 4

Cost to Import (\$ per container)



Weak Institutions and Other Artificial Barriers to Integration

One of the world's highest levels of trade costs in the Central Asian countries is closely connected with lack of intensive cooperation and weak institutions in these states.¹⁷ Although Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan are a single region with historical, cultural, and other connections, they have no official structures capable of ensuring integration in the region. There is yet another problem that prevents integration both within the region and with the outside world: the problem of weak institutions. The political structure in most countries of the region is very personalized. As a result, the most important decisions are often taken by the heads of state personally, and not initiated by institutions. From this perspective, carrying out structural reforms in most CA countries is one of the top priorities, as recommended by many competent international organizations and economic experts. This requires new strategies for economic development through internal qualitative changes and investments in new technologies.

¹⁷ See: Ph. Shishkin, "Central Asia's Crisis of Governance," *Asia Society*, January 2012.

While intra-regional trade in Central Asia is very diverse in composition, trade with the outside world is much more concentrated and consists almost entirely of very low value added mineral products (see Table 2). Thus, the development of intra-regional trade between the CA countries is more consistent with their declared economic policy goals of diversifying exports. Consequently, more intensive cooperation and trade between countries in the region are more beneficial to their economies than trade cooperation with other regions.

Table 3

Selected Development Indicators for the Central Asian Countries

	Rule of Law Index		Corruption Perceptions Index		Index of Economic Freedom		Press Freedom Index		Political Stability Index	
	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank
Kazakhstan	0.52	65	31	124	65.4	59	52.82	158	0.02	102
Uzbekistan	0.46	94	23	158	53.3	140	53.52	160	-0.28	123
Kyrgyzstan	0.48	85	29	132	62.3	79	29.92	83	-0.43	133
Tajikistan	—	—	25	152	55.6	122	54.02	161	-0.67	151
Turkmenistan	—	—	20	161	48.4	164	85.44	180	-0.15	113

Sources: <https://worldjusticeproject.org/sites/default/files/documents/ROLI-2019-Reduced.pdf>; <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2018>; <https://www.heritage.org/index/book/chapter-3>; <https://rsf.org/en/ranking>; https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/wb_political_stability/.

Along with factors that have a direct effect on trade between the CA countries by increasing costs, there are a number of other internal factors that have an indirect negative effect on foreign trade, as well as on any kind of international cooperation in the region. In terms of many general development indicators, the CA countries lag significantly behind many other countries and parts of the world, performing below the world average (see Table 3). Moreover, many of these indicators have not improved since 2010 or have even worsened.

The Eurasian Economic Union as a Path to Regional Integration

The common customs tariffs established between Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus in 2010 led to the creation of the Customs Union, which became fully operational in 2011 with the abolition of customs controls between these three states. In many respects, this was a continuation of the long process started back in the 1990s and supported by most post-Soviet countries. For example, in 1995 the presidents of Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and then of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan signed the first treaty on the establishment of a Customs Union, which was subsequently transformed into the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), whose main purpose was to promote the formation of the Customs Union with a Common Economic Space and, to an insignificant extent, to realize

other goals and objectives associated with deepening economic cooperation between the member states. At a meeting in Dushanbe on 6 October, 2007, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia signed a treaty establishing a common customs territory and forming the Customs Union. In 2009, the parties ratified about 40 agreements that provided the basis for the Customs Union. Later that year, on 28 November, a meeting of the presidents of Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus in Minsk completed this process by establishing a common customs territory in the three countries. A treaty establishing the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) was signed on 29 May, 2014. It came into force in January 2015 with three founding countries (Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus); Armenia and Kyrgyzstan acceded that same year. Thus, two Central Asian states—Uzbekistan and Tajikistan—that were initially interested in the integration process revised their policy and decided to stop taking part in it, remaining outside the EAEU and the whole integration process in the region. The arguments in favor of this decision were mainly political. As for Turkmenistan, its unwillingness to get involved in the integration process was clear from the very beginning, because in its relations with such multilateral organizations Turkmenistan followed an extremely neutral policy bordering on isolation.¹⁸

Today, EAEU membership is an important factor for all member countries, including Kazakhstan¹⁹ and Kyrgyzstan.

Thus, the most promising structure designed to ensure integration in the post-Soviet space has provided the basis for economic integration between its member countries, but at the same time has divided the Central Asian region. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have become full-fledged members of the Eurasian Economic Union, while Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan have remained outside. One should also note that these three republics have largely done so of their own accord, taking a cautious approach to the integration process around the EAEU, while the Union has followed an open policy and its members have repeatedly declared their interest in enlarging it, primarily through the accession of the remaining CA states. On the other hand, one cannot say that the attitude of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan to joining the Eurasian Economic Union is exclusively negative. Take, for example, Tajikistan's repeated statements about considering and making a detailed study of the issue of EAEU membership. Uzbekistan, for its part, has made it clear that it will not join the EAEU in the near future.²⁰ As for Turkmenistan, it has clearly shown its unwillingness to join the Union, but has indicated its readiness for close cooperation with it.

Conclusion

Today's Central Asia remains a very fragmented region in trade and economic terms. In the foreign trade of the CA countries, the share of other countries of the region is relatively small. For Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, it is less than one-fifth of their total foreign trade. At the same time, the markets of the EU, Russia, and China account for a very large share of the CA countries' foreign trade. The country that is most oriented towards the markets of the EU, China, and Russia is Kazakhstan, where trade with other CA countries constitutes only 5% of its total foreign trade. If we compare the composition of intra-regional trade between the CA countries and their trade with other markets, we will find that their exports to Europe, Russia, and China consist almost entirely of very low value added mineral products. Raw materials, minerals, and agricultural products

¹⁸ See: M.B. Olcott, "Rivalry and Competition in Central Asia," in: *Central Asia and the Caucasus: At the Crossroads of Eurasia in the 21st Century*, ed. by W. Hermann and J.F. Linn, 2011, pp. 17-42.

¹⁹ See: R. Mogilevskii, "Trends and Patterns in Foreign Trade of Central Asian Countries," University of Central Asia, *Working Paper* No. 1, 2012.

²⁰ See: H. Usmanova, "Uzbekistan v blizhaishee vremia ne budet vstupat v Yevraziiski soiuz," 12 February, 2018, available at [<http://eurasian-studies.org/archives/7082>].

constitute more than 80% of exports from CA countries to the EU, Russia, and China. Intra-regional trade, on the other hand, is highly diversified, which is preferable and is of primary importance to all CA states.

This unusual geographical distribution is strange and contradicts the basic laws of international trade. Along with minimal geographical distances between industrial centers in Central Asia, the region also has minimal “psychic” distances,²¹ measured by cross-country differences in culture, language, education, religion, time zone, industrial development, and political system. Such unifying factors should not only help to increase the flow of trade,²² but should also serve as a platform for integration.

If we look at the history of the emergence of current foreign trade relations in CA countries, we will find that mineral exports to EU markets and later to Russia and China started and soared right after the relative normalization of the economy in the first half of the 1990s.

Since independence, the Central Asian countries have followed different policies towards groups of states designed to ensure trade and economic cooperation and integration. However, these countries have never established their own regional groupings or joined other groupings in their entirety. There are a number of factors that partly explain the CA countries’ relative unwillingness and inability to have close trade and economic relations among themselves and integrate into regional groupings. Virtually all CA countries have very weak institutions required for development. Many of their development indicators are below the world average. High levels of corruption, the lack of a free press, non-transparent judicial systems, low levels of economic freedom, and a number of other factors create additional costs in economic interaction between these countries. In addition, the actual economic costs caused by high tariff barriers and weak infrastructure in the region undoubtedly have a negative effect on regional economic cooperation. The CA countries’ tendency to compete among themselves for regional leadership, for control over resources and key trade routes also has a negative impact on cooperation.²³ In the current situation, the EAEU remains the most viable regional association capable of ensuring the integration of the Central Asian countries, and Russia’s participation only serves to strengthen it, because Russia (along with the EU and China) is one of the major trading partners for all five countries of the region. On the other hand, as things stand today, the EAEU cannot unite the whole Central Asian region in its entirety. Countries such as Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan are not members of this association and are unlikely to join in the near future.

²¹ See: D. Dow, A. Karunaratna, “Developing a Multidimensional Instrument to Measure Psychic Distance Stimuli,” *Journal of International Business Studies*, 2006, No. 37, pp. 578-602.

²² See: R. Metulini, “Spatial Gravity Models for International Trade: A Panel Analysis among OECD Countries,” *ERSA Conference Papers*, No. 13, p. 522, European Regional Science Association, 2013.

²³ See: P. Kurečić, “The New Great Game: Rivalry of Geostrategies and Geoeconomies in Central Asia,” *Hrvatski Geografski Glasnik*, 2010, pp. 21-48.

RELIGION IN SOCIETY

RELIGIOUS ASPECTS OF THE SYRIAN CRISIS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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Bauyrjan MAKANGALI

*Ph.D. student, Al-Farabi Kazakh National State University
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

Sagynysh AMIRBEKOVA

*Ph.D., Deputy Head, Scientific Training Center,
Gylym Ordasy Republican State Enterprise, Committee on Science,
Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

Marvan KHAMITOVA

*Ph.D. (Hist.), Assistant Professor, Department of
Pedagogics and Humanitarian Disciplines, Central Asian University
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

Erkin BAYDAROV

*Ph.D. (Philos.), Assistant Professor,
Leading Researcher, R. Suleymenov Institute of Oriental Studies
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

A B S T R A C T

The Syrian civil war stands apart as a huge tragedy amid the consequences of the Arab Spring revolutions of 2011 that radically changed the Middle East and North Africa. The country lost over 400,000 civilian lives, a dreadful number for the contemporary world, over 5.6 million became refugees, 6.6 million—internal migrants, and chemical weapons used against non-combatants and other atrocities are the very real details of a real picture of the war.

Inspired by the Arab Spring, which sent shockwaves through the Middle East and North Africa the Syrians joined the process with the slogan “The People Want to Overthrow the Regime.” Unrest developed into

an armed struggle that has been going on for many years now. The authors have posed themselves with the task of analyzing certain religious aspects of information war unfolding in the context of the Syrian crisis. It is manifested, in particular, on the YouTube video-sharing platform. Enemies of the regime are using religion as the central point of anti-Assad propaganda; terrorist groups (Al-Qa’eda, ISIS and others) are doing the same. This makes it highly expedient to analyze the approaches of those who use religious propaganda and the role of YouTube in the process. It is equally important to analyze the role of the Shi’a-Alawi interpretation of Syrian developments.

KEYWORDS: *the Syrian civil war, propaganda, YouTube, Alawis, Nusayris.*

Introduction

The Syrian crisis stemmed from hundreds of various reasons, the strongest of them being the regime change, which united people who poured into the streets and took part in rallies. The regime was not a product of Bashar al-Assad’s personal efforts. He had inherited it from his father Hafez al-Assad and his closest circle who belonged to the Alawi religious minority and who had been building it up for several decades in the latter half of the 20th century. In the early 1970s, Hafez Assad took power to become president of Syria. In the post-colonial period, when the Third World was actively building up new independent states, Assad came to power with Arab socialism and nationalism (the Ba’ath Party) as the ideological cornerstone of his policy. Ba’athism advocated the secular nature of the state, which was highly beneficial for the Alawi religious minority in the predominantly Sunni country. However, Hafez Assad’s Alawi affiliation, on the one hand, and the regime’s secular nature, on the other, have finally led to a clash with Islamists and consolidated their determination to depose the president and his regime. These sentiments reached their apogee in the Hama events of 1982, when Hafez Assad had no choice but to use force to suppress the uprising. National minorities, likewise, caused a lot of problems. The autochthonous Kurds, in particular, were an alien element in the Arabian nationalist regime. All attempts at their Arabization failed. The problem survived until the Arab Spring and, as could be expected, made the Kurds an important side in the Syrian conflict.

As a military leader, Hafez Assad relied on the army and a ramified network of special services in which Alawis occupied the highest posts. In fact, Hafez Assad tailored the state to his own person and his closest circle that relied on power structures. It was a dictatorial or an authoritarian regime. Arab

researcher Adib Nehme defined it as a “neopatrimonial state,”¹ by which he meant the Weber’s concept of patrimonialism adjusted to contemporary realities. In such states political power mainly rests on personal power, which is realized directly or indirectly by the ruler himself.² In the post-Cold War world these states should have revised their political order to avoid a “failed state” tag. Procrastination led to even worse consequences; certain other factors further complicated the situation in Syria. This case reveals numerous political, geopolitical, economic, territorial, ethnic, and confessional problems that have been building up since the very first day of de-colonization, when the political map of the Middle East as we know it today was formed. Previously, these problems were settled by cruel political leaders and repressive regimes, who justified their actions by the realities of the bipolar world and allowed the use of brute force with no consideration for the opinion of the international community. This explains why the Syrian crisis demonstrated a lot of dynamism since the very beginning and why various state and non-state actors were drawn into its orbit while the crisis was unfolding stage by stage.

Back to Syria: from the very beginning, the country was a patchwork of ideological, religious, and ethnic contradictions held together by force. The great number of non-state actors of all sorts involved in the Syrian civil war confirms the deeply rooted fragmentation of Syrian society rooted in the distant past. It is the evidence of the failed experience of building a state out of one of the fragments of the Ottoman Empire. One cannot but agree with Yasmine Mather, who has written: “The collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the way Arab territory was divided immediately after the First World War had a profound effect on the contemporary history of the Middle East,” including Syria.³

Social Networks as Drivers of the Arab Revolutions

Facebook and Twitter became highly popular during the Arab Spring protests, while YouTube found its very special place: it gave the world community the chance to obtain up-to-the-minute information about current events much faster than through the traditional media. In 2011, when the Syrian government limited the access of international media to certain zones, YouTube showed videos that confirmed that the government used force against the protestors.⁴ Social media became a specific feature, or even an inalienable part, of the Arab Spring. Their role in the protest movements cannot be overestimated. Wael Ghonim’s *Revolution 2.0: The Power of the People is Greater than the People in Power*⁵ is a convincing confirmation of the importance of social networks as a space where people can declare their worldviews and pour out dissatisfaction. What is even more important, they can generate ideas, find those who share them and unite with people who also seek changes. The author of this bestseller, one of the activists of the Egyptian uprising, wanted to mobilize people with the help of his page in Facebook to fight dictatorship and injustice. It is not “an insider’s account of what he experienced during the protests”; it is an instruction on how to transform social

¹ A. Nehme, *The Neopatrimonial State and the Arab Spring*, Beirut, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, 2016, p. 38.

² See: J.I. Bakker, “Patrimonialism. Political Organization,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1 September 2017 available at [<https://www.britannica.com/topic/patrimonialism>], 17 March 2019.

³ Y. Mather, “The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and Current Conflict in the Middle East,” *Critique—Journal of Socialist Theory*, Vol. 42, No. 3, 2014, pp. 471-485 available at [<https://doi.org/10.1080/03017605.2014.972151>].

⁴ See: R. Rifai, “Citizens’ Videos Capture Syrian Uprising,” *Al Jazeera*, 7 March 2013 available at [<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/04/201141811535799497.html>], 17 March, 2019.

⁵ See: W. Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0: The Power of the People is Greater Than the People in Power: A Memoir*, New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012, 320 pp.

media into instruments of social change. At that time he was convinced that “if you want to liberate a society, all you need is Internet.” Later, in 2015 at the Ted Global conference in Geneva he admitted that he had been wrong: the platform that had united them in the struggle against dictatorship later separated them. He specified his earlier statement: “Today, I believe that if we want a free society, we first need to have free Internet.” This is debatable, since access to free Internet hardly makes any society free. In any case, social networks were amazingly efficient during the Arab Spring protests. It became obvious that their potentials were unlimited. Facebook and Twitter were best suited to outline positions, mobilize people, and explain what was going on. In Twitter the messages are short and highly emotional, while on Facebook people can clarify their ideas or support their imperatives with logical arguments. Their main function was the centralization of decentralized societies. Wael Ghonim spoke about this in Geneva: “We need to work hard on figuring out how technology could be part of the solution, rather than part of the problem.”⁶

The Internet is not the only source of problems; there are also people who pass the *point of no return* in their thirst for change; the state that can or cannot respond to challenges is also a problem. This has been amply confirmed in 2009 and 2017-2018 in Iran, where protestors actively used social media to no avail. It seems that Iranians have not yet passed the point of no return, while the state is still strong enough to cope with crises of that sort.⁷

Does this mean that those Arab states that could not control the situation behind the façade of autocracy had been failed states for a long time? It seems that American political scientist William Zartman was right in stating that after the Cold War many countries had collapsed, by which he meant that the state structure and the political regime as its part have disintegrated and should be reformed in one way or another. Collapse does not necessarily mean chaos.⁸ This means that peace and stability are nothing more than a screen, behind which very complicated processes are unfolding and running the danger of bursting out with frightening force. This also means that the criticism of the Arab nation-building systems that initially unfolded during the bipolar world is justifiable. Arab regimes should have responded to the change of the world order with real, not decorative changes. They should not have allowed the critical mass to accumulate, but promptly dealt with the urgent problems of internal policy. This means that the Arab governments remained passive for two decades, hence the pitfall into which they fell in 2011. In the world of easily accessible and easily transmitted information, passiveness is worse than a crime, it is a blunder. On the other hand, at the time of state pressure and emotional stress, people resort to social networks to express their feelings and their hopes. Authoritarian regimes do not interfere; they maintain the delusion that their targeted audience is not big and that it is sufficient to control the traditional media to remain in power. To a certain extent, this explains how social media became drivers of uprisings. The uprising in Tunisia, where for the first time in the Middle East and North Africa people achieved regime change in a very short time, triggered similar developments in the Arab world.

YouTube as a Mirror of the Syrian Crisis

From the very first days of Syrian riots, videos of the unfolding developments were pouring into YouTube. Some of them showed rallies, marches and protests as well as the measures taken to dis-

⁶ W. Ghonim, *Let's Design Social Media that Drives Real Change*, December 2015 available at [https://www.ted.com/talks/wael_ghonim_let_s_design_social_media_that_drives_real_change/transcript], 17 March 2019.

⁷ See: “Iran Protests: Social Media Messaging Battle Rages,” BBC News, 7 January 2018 available at [<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-42566083>], 17 March 2019.

⁸ I.W. Zartman, *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 1995, p. 330.

perse the crowds, including the use of force. The conflict was widening together with the number of videos, their content and format that reached YouTube. Its role in the unfolding civil war was increasing rapidly. Justin Kosslyn, product manager at Jigsaw, a technology incubator, has correctly assessed the situation as “the Syrian civil war is in many ways the first YouTube conflict in the same way that Vietnam was the first television conflict.”⁹ The Montage program created by Jigsaw was devised to help collect and analyze the facts of violations of human rights, violence, and chemical attacks caught by the videos of the Syrian war that appeared in YouTube.¹⁰ Having appreciated the importance of analysis, researchers are actively developing different methods of analysis and classification of the videos uploaded to YouTube to be used in possible court cases some time in future.¹¹ There are other, equally important aspects, such as the use of the video hosting site as a universal platform for propaganda through the videos uploaded to it.

These materials have different technical descriptions; they can be very short, under several minutes, or very long requiring a lot of time to watch; some of them are made using a phone, others are properly filmed and professionally edited. Syria-related content on YouTube is uploaded by different authors; videos come from individuals or group accounts; there are supporters of the opposition, such as the Syrian Free Army, among them, as well as those who side with terrorist organizations both big (Al-Qa’eda, Nusra and ISIS) and small, or even practically unknown, such as ASALA (Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia). YouTube is a favorite platform of anti-Assad propaganda, because it is easy to access and very easy to use. This makes it very different from similar programs (Paltalk being one of them) used, in the 2000s, for the propagation of all sorts of ideas (of a religious and ideological nature in particular). It can be accessed from PC or any other electronic device, be it a mobile phone or a tablet computer. As soon as you upload your video to the platform, anybody anywhere in the world can watch it by using all sorts of hashtags to locate such videos; this excludes the Messenger programs. As the number of watched videos increases, the platform offers other similar videos.

There is another, highly important aspect: by circulating the video, the sender can achieve the highest emotional effect, especially if the video shows acts of violence against civilian population. This type of materials stirs up a lot of emotions; religiously loaded videos stir up hatred of the regime among the Muslims all over the world. In fact, this is what the authors need; this explains why in the beginning of the Syrian conflict there were a lot of mixed content, where religious deliberations were accompanied by scenes of violence perpetrated by government forces. Ideological brainwashing easily transforms negative emotions or even anger into an active desire to help, up to and including joining the armed struggle. In the case of Syria, the groups that unfolded the information warfare in social networks (YouTube in particular) attracted the greatest number of foreign fighters. ISIS terrorists waged the most efficient and highly structured propaganda campaign through the Al Hayat service, created for this specific purpose.¹² Some researchers call online organizations of this type The Electronic Brigades.¹³ Much has already been written about ISIS online activity. The authors analyze the content and details of specific resources in different languages, the ways and means by which

⁹ Quoted from: A. Rosen, “Erasing History: YouTube’s Deletion of Syria War Videos Concerns Human Rights Groups,” *Fast Company*, 3 July 2018 available at [<https://www.fastcompany.com/40540411/erasing-history-youtubes-deletion-of-syria-war-videos-concerns-human-rights-groups>], 17 March 2019.

¹⁰ See: J. Kosslyn, Y. Green Y., “Montage —The Next Generation of War Reporting,” Medium, 20 April 2016 available at [<https://medium.com/jigsaw/montage-the-next-generation-of-war-reporting-a04f4176aff>], 17 March 2019.

¹¹ See: J.I. Wessels, “YouTube and the Role of Digital Video for Transitional Justice in Syria,” *Politik*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 2016, pp. 30-52 [DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7146/politik.v19i4.27634>].

¹² See: S. Gates, S. Podder, “Social Media, Recruitment, Allegiance and the Islamic State,” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 9, No. 4, 2015, pp. 107-116.

¹³ See: J. Stern, J.M. Berger, *ISIS. The State of Terror*. London, William Collins, 2016, p. 398.

propagandistic materials are presented, etc. ISIS is the most advanced terrorist organization when it comes to the use of social networks: the results of its religious anti-Assad propaganda cannot but amaze. The top spot on the podium, however, does not belong to ISIS. Religiously tinged anti-Assad propaganda had begun together with the protest movements; the active phase of the collective idea of the “anti-Islamic” nature of the Assad regime had begun before 2014, when ISIS developed into a serious force. Religious propaganda has always relied and relies today on the “anti-Islamic” nature of the Assad regime (supported by the Alawi minority).

The Alawi Issue in the Muslim World

Since the Syrian ruling military and political elite is Alawi, religion and religious issues had moved to the fore in the initial days of the Syrian crisis.

Alawis (Nusayris) belong to a religious sect living in Syria, Lebanon, and Turkey. Sunnis look at Nusayrism as a symbiosis of different faiths; it is a melee of religious dogmas of Islam, Christianity and pre-Islamic Oriental faiths, which makes it a religion on its own right in the eyes of the Muslims. For many centuries, Sunni theologians have remained undecided on whether the Alawis are Shi‘a or they profess their own religion; some believe that Alawi is a religious system unrelated to Islam. The majority, however, throughout many centuries considered them Shi‘a (“extreme Shi‘a, to be more exact, because their convictions contradict, to a great extent, the fundamentals of traditional Shi‘ism). Muhammad al-Shahrastānī, the medieval Arab scholar wrote in his *Kitāb al-Milal wa al-Nihal* (The Book of Sects and Creeds): “The Ghaliya (the ‘Extremists’) are those who went to extremes regarding their imams, whom they excluded from the limitations of creatures and upon whom they bestowed divine qualities. Sometimes they likened an imam to God, at other times they likened God to man. Thus they fell into two extremes. These erroneous ideas of the Ghaliya have their origin in the doctrines held by those believing in incarnation and transmigration of souls [the teachings of Hululites and Tanasuhites] or in the beliefs of Jews and Christians.”¹⁴ In the Islamic literature the term Hululites is used to define those who believe that God can be incarnated in people, that is, followers of pantheism. “Tanasuhites” believe in transmigration of souls. According to medieval Islamic theologian Nuṣayr al-Numayri, one of the ideologists of pantheism and founder of the Nusayri sect, he was a reincarnation of God. This was what medieval Arab scholar Abu Mansur Al-Baghdadi stated in his book *Difference between the Trends*.¹⁵

Shi‘a scholars, likewise, discussed the delusions of the Nusayris; the most prominent of them wrote in his *Kitāb Firaq Al-Shī‘a* (Shī‘a Sects) that Nuṣayr al-Numayr, the founder of Nusayrism “claimed that he had been a prophet sent by al-Hasan al-Askari ... he believed in transmigration of souls ... and said that everything that was banned was allowed.”¹⁶ Those who subsequently studied the teaching of the Alawis (Nusayris) also concluded that Nusayrism was an independent religious teaching. In 1848, the Asiatic Society in Paris and the Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft (German Orientalist Society) in Berlin pooled forces to publish a book (*The Book of Sulaiman’s First Ripe Fruit*) written by former Nusayrist Sulaiman Effendi of Adhanah and translated by prominent Orien-

¹⁴ Al-Shahrastānī, *The Book of Sects and Creeds* available at [https://archive.org/stream/BookOfSectsAndCreedsBy-Shahrastani/Book-of-Sects-and-Creeds-by-Shahrastani_djvu.txt].

¹⁵ See: Abu Mansur Al-Baghdadi, *Al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*. Cairo, Maktaba ibn Sina, p. 320.

¹⁶ Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b Mūsā an-Nawbakhtī, *Shiitskie sekty*. Translation and commentaries by S.M. Prozorov, Moscow, Nauka, p. 255.

talist van Dijk, who wrote the following about the book: “It was written by a Nusayrist whose religion was close to the ideas of Jews, Muslims, Orthodox Christians and Protestants.”¹⁷

Before the Syrian crisis, few of the Muslims, especially at the periphery of the Islamic world, had any more or less comprehensive ideas about the Alawi minority. This relatively widespread ignorance about the Alawis and their religion was caused by the highly private nature of the Alawi community. So far, its religious dogmas and religious practices remain terra incognita for the Muslims and the academic community: the secrecy and reticence of the Alawis who practice *taqiyya* allows them to conceal their true convictions and declare loyalty to other religions in public. That is why at the preliminary stages of the conflict, therefore, a lot of videos merely explained the essence of the Alawi provisions from the point of view of Islamic dogmas.

The complex attitude to the Alawis in the Middle East was caused, in particular, by the secularist policies of the ruling Ba’ath Party. In fact, often enough the secular policies in the Middle East are supported not only by the military, but also by religious minorities and trends. This is what is happening in Syria and in Turkey, where many of those who support Kemalism are the generals who belong to the local Alawi (alevi) community.¹⁸ This explains why it had been difficult, if at all possible, to identify the supporters of the Syrian regime among Arabs; this became even harder after the civil war: the ranks of supporters are limited to the Shi’a community or, to be more exact, to Shi’a activists in the first place.

The Main Methods of Anti-Assad Propaganda

The first and most evident instrument of religious propaganda on YouTube were the materials, mostly excerpts from the media and public lectures of theologians of all sorts, religious activists and agitators from Arab countries about the Alawis, their religious convictions, practices, specifics, etc. These videos were not necessarily moderate; some of them were fairly radical. Their content was more or less identical: due to its highly secretive nature Alawi religious teachings have remained an enigma for centuries. This means that rather often religious figures rely on the opinions of the great medieval theologians, Al-Shahrastānī being one of them. In view of the specifics of the Alawi religious dogmas, many religious Islamic figures apply the takfir procedure (excommunication) to them. Despite the fact that it is the favorite instrument of radicals who habitually abuse it, it is one of the absolutely legitimate norms of the Shari’a. Extremists use the term without going into nuances, norms and rules; often enough they are not aware of elementary norms or deliberately push them aside in pursuance of personal aims. According to the Shari’a, the prerogative of excommunication belongs to prominent and respected theologians, Islamic scholars and the Shari’a courts of justice rather than to the rank-and-file Islamic religious activists. In the case of Syria, damage could be done by propagating theological conclusions related to the Alawi and their faith. For those who have sided with Muslim Brotherhood, as well as those who supported takfir and jihad, this was a chance to organize the masses for the regime change, while the Salafis (those who supported major Saudi Arabia religious figures) were aware that any attempt at regime change in the current realities would spell disaster. Never have prominent Salafi theologians concealed their opinion of the Syrian regime as anti-Islamic and of Alawis as a sect that had lost its bearings. In 1980, the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia

¹⁷ V.N. Sautov, *Alavity v obshchestvenno-politicheskoy zhizni Sirii (40e-90e gody XX veka)*, Candidate thesis, Moscow, 2001, p. 212.

¹⁸ See: V. Nasr, *The Dispensable Nation: American Foreign Policy in Retreat*, Doubleday, 2013.

Abdul Aziz ibn Baz wrote about it in his letter to Hafez Assad, in which he condemned the use of force against religious figures in Aleppo.

Historical events with religious undertones are another trump card in religious anti-Syrian propaganda. References to the events when the Nusayris fought on the side of foreign invaders became especially popular. Videos tell the story of how Nusayris fought side by side with the Crusaders against Salah ad-Din (Saladin); how they captured Damascus together with Mongolian invaders and fought on their side in the Battle of Ain Jalut against the Egyptian Mamluks. In addition, there are even more popular subjects. Prominent Arab theologian and religious figure Ibn Kathir in his fundamental work on the history of Islam *The Beginning and the End* described, in particular, the 1317 capture of the Syrian city of Jableh, in Latakia on the Mediterranean coast, the historical home of the Alawis. Syrian-born Ibn Kathir, one of the contemporaries of the events, left a detailed description of how the city had been captured by the sect of Nusayris led by Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Mahdi. Like many of his contemporaries Ibn Kathir believed that the Nusayris were disoriented heretics. He began his story by saying that the name of al-Mahdi was Muhammad ibn al-Hasan, who insisted that he was Ali ibn Abi Talib, creator of the sky and the earth and that the Nusayris, rather than the Muslims were true believers. In fact, he spoke of reincarnation of God in the Fourth Righteous Caliph of the Muslims, which brought man beyond the borders of Islam. The Nusayris insisted on the postulate "There is no god but Ali" that replaced the Islamic Shahada "There is no god but Allah." Al-Mahdi went even further: having consolidated his position as the ruler of the Nusayris and having knocked together an army out of a great number of like-minded people in the mountains of Latakia, he moved on to the city of Jableh to capture it amid the chaos caused by the Mongolian army. Ibn Kathir further wrote that, having captured the city, Nusayris slaughtered its citizens, forced the captives to admit that Ali was their God and to bow deeply to him (in Islam this honor is limited to God) and drank alcohol in mosques.¹⁹ Finally, Muslims drove the Nusayris from the city. This story gained popularity during the civil war in Syria as part of the information war waged against the Assad regime. Quite often videos of historical events are shown along with the videos of similar recent events.

Much of what is used as religious propaganda against the regime of Bashar al-Assad is supplied by the Syrian army who fight on the side of the regime. There are numerous videos that registered tortures of civilians accompanied by humiliation of their religious convictions. Photos of torture (beatings with iron objects, setting live people on fire, etc.) are actively used for the propagandistic purposes. Here we want to focus on the humiliations of the Muslims' religious convictions by regime supporters. The most frequent form of humiliation is the use of coercion and the threat of death to force people to say "There is no God but Bashar" and bow deeply in front of portraits of Bashar al-Assad. There are videos that display other forms of humiliation of Muslims; mosques are desecrated with inscriptions saying that Bashar al-Assad is the God of Syria and that he alone is worth worshipping; Islamic prayers are parodied; mosques are destroyed by heavy military machinery, etc.

The Problem as Viewed by Shi'a and Alawis

Today, the situation in Shi'a Islam is highly specific. On the one hand, starting with the first half of the 20th century, the Shi'a centers of Iraq and Iran have been treating the Alawis as part of the Shi'a world. On the other, there is no agreement among Shi'a theologians on certain Alawi-related

¹⁹ See: Ibn Qasir, *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (The Beginning to the End), Vol. 18, Giza, 1998, p. 736.

points. The Syrian civil war added fire to these disagreements and moved them over to the YouTube. In the last few years bits and pieces of public lectures, interviews with and commentaries of prominent Shi'a theologians have been published on the Internet. Grand Ayatollah Kamal al-Haydari, a prominent religious figure in Iraq, said that there was no interconnection between the Shi'a and Alawis. Ali al-Kourani, another prominent Shi'a theologian from Lebanon, is of a different opinion. He believes that some of the Alawis are Muslims because they accept and declare the Shahada, the Muslim symbol of faith that contains the most important Islamic dogmas. He admits that not all Alawis recognize the Shahada: those who reject it believe that God was reincarnated in Ali ibn Abi Talib, the fourth caliph of the Muslims. Yasser al-Habib, another Shi'a theologian born in Kuwait who now lives in Great Britain, offered an even clearer classification of the Alawis. He divides them into two groups, the first of the two are Alawis who accept the postulates and ideas of Islam in their Shi'a interpretations. The second are the Nusayris: they are still the victims of the delusions of Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr al-Numayri. Yasser al-Habib interprets the Syrian civil war as the struggle between these groups: the former want to join the Shia's world, while the latter adhered to their previous views.

Recently, Alawis have intensified their efforts to substantiate their belonging to Islam. This tendency is manifested in two different ways.

- First of all, they use videos that explain the ideology of the Alawis accompanied by commentaries of viewers who say that they are Alawis and they accept the Islamic postulates, in particular the Shahada, the prophecies of Muhammad, etc.
- Secondly, some of the prominent Alawi religious figures have been demonstrating increasingly greater willingness to contact the media and have generally become more open to the world. In 2017, for example, the France24Arabic TV channel uploaded a series of programs on Alawis to YouTube. Ali Kaddur, an Alawi religious figure from Lebanon, explained that the Alawis recognized all Islamic postulates (in their Shi'a interpretation as the viewers could surmise from what he said). The Alawis practice the Ja'fari school of Shi'a jurisprudence. Al Kaddur spared no arguments to refute all accusations related to religion and history by saying that they were nothing more than a heap of lies. He said, in particular, that Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr al-Numayri had never claimed to be a prophet.

Religious activity of President Assad is just as interesting. From time to time he meets the religious leaders of his country and attends collective prayers on big holidays, such as Kurban Bayrami. These events are widely publicized: they are covered by TV and uploaded to YouTube. At the early stages of the war, these events caused a lot of noise that forced the president to personally sort things out. On 25 August, 2011, when talking to the Syrian religious leaders during the month of Ramadan he said that those who had forced people to say "There is no God but Bashar" and bow in front of his portrait are "infidels" and should be punished. He deemed it necessary to point out that all military personnel and all special services officers cannot be accused of infidelity indiscriminately, and that the guilty ones should be imprisoned and taught to become true Muslims. Nevertheless, these facts merely fanned the religious propaganda against the Assad regime and escalated the conflict. Each time when the regime used force against its own population was exploited by its opponents to fan the fires of the information war. In 2014, speaking in front of Syrian religious leaders, Bashar Assad emphasized his Islamic identity and tried to present his regime as an Islamic type of state. He pointed out, in particular, that the Constitution and the laws related to public life were based on the Sharia. He, however, resolutely declined the possibility of legitimizing political Islam as an acceptable form of the Syrian state which meant that he had moved away from the policy of Ba'athism on the points related to the place of religion in state governance. Similar trends had been detected in what Saddam Hussein, head of Iraqi

Ba'athists, had said at one time. He used religious paradigms when he saw it fit for the purposes of external and internal policy, while treating religion merely as part of cultural heritage.²⁰

Conclusion

The civil war in Syria attracted a lot of attention across the world not only because of its scope but also because of the level of information transmission, its mobility, quality, and volume. The Internet (and Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.) plays the main role in this process. This has become one of the distinctive features of the Arab Spring and the civil wars that followed it.

Religious propaganda against the Assad regime employed three methods.

- The first and the most popular of the three entailed making references to religious leaders, respected by certain groups or trends. Generally, Islamic groups are highly mobile when it comes to the transfer of information, religion-related information in the first place. The Internet is one of the most important vehicles used by all Islamic trends and groups.
- The second includes references to history and historical events associated with the Alawi. The third displays confirmations of anti-Islamic behavior of Assad's supporters, from among the Syrian military personnel in the first place, confirmed by videos.
- The three methods formed the platform on which the ideas of the "anti-Islamic nature" of the Syrian regime are based.

Each act of violence against civilians has bred the desire among Muslims to help the Syrian Muslims, which created significant flows of people, mainly neophytes, to Syria. They are more responsive because of the fairly shallow knowledge of religion. Those who circulate these videos on the Internet seek to make the greatest possible emotional effect and to use those who succumb to it in their interests.

²⁰ See: S. Helfont, "Saddam and the Islamists: The Ba'thist Regime's Instrumentalization of Religion in Foreign Affairs," *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 68, No. 3, 2014, pp. 352-366.

MODERN PROTESTANT IDEOLOGY AND DENATIONALIZATION OF NORTH CAUCASIAN PEOPLES (CASE STUDIES OF NORTH OSSETIA AND ADYGEI)

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Irina BABICH

*D.Sc. (Hist.), Chief Researcher,
Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Russian Academy of Sciences
(Moscow, Russian Federation)*

ABSTRACT

The article aims to compare the religious/ethnic situation in two North Caucasian republics—North Ossetia and Adygei; the place of Protestantism in the regional context, the growing number of Protestant communities (Baptist, Pentecostals, Adventists) in these republics, the emergence of new ideologies of North Caucasian highlanders and the roots of their increasing popularity. The field ethnographic

materials gathered in 2009-2019 confirm that the process of denationalization is ongoing despite the efforts of the local public figures to revive and expand the sphere of folk traditions up to and including neo-paganism. A comparison of Protestantism in North Ossetia-Alania and Adygei revealed that the trend towards a new foundation remains the same, while the paths, forms and methods may vary.

KEYWORDS: *Protestantism, Ossetians, Adyghe, neo-paganism, mountain ideologies, Orthodoxy, Islam, republican authorities.*

Introduction

Religious revival in Russia is especially apparent in the North Caucasian republics, where Orthodox Christianity, Islam and Protestant Christian trends are on the rise. They have been inherited from the pre-revolutionary period, when Baptists and Molokans, in particular, resettled in North Ossetia and drew local Ossetians into their communities. In 1925, Baptists translated the Gospel into

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Ossetic.¹ In the 1990s-2010s, Protestant movements (Baptists, Pentecostals, etc.) demonstrated quick numerical growth. As could be expected, these Christian churches addressed the republics' Russian residents and gradually attracted the autochthonous population. Today, there are religious/ethnic groups in North Ossetia and Adygei that belong to various branches of Protestantism.

This article is based on the latest field ethnographic materials collected in the republics of North Ossetia-Alania and Adygei in 2015-2019 and analyzes the process of de-nationalization of mountain dweller societies in the context of rising Protestantism and proliferation of its ideology. These two republics and their autochthonous populations (Ossetians and Adyghe) with different combinations of "religious" and ethnic components were selected as subjects for this research study. In North Ossetia, the republic where Christian Orthodoxy and Islam are also present, the so-called ethnic traditionalism constitutes an important part of contemporary ideology. Adygei is living through a period of Islamic resurrection. The results of field studies were used to answer the question of whether the apparent expansion of Protestantism influences the new ideology that has been taking shape in the region over the last decade and the contemporary ethical systems of North Caucasian highlanders.

The Protestant discourse has moved to the fore in contemporary studies of the Northern Caucasus and religious issues.² Today a field of scholarly research, namely, contemporary Protestantism in Russia, is taking shape, while the processes of Islamic resurrection and ethnic traditionalism in the region attract significantly greater attention than in the past.³ The authors of numerous publications on the subject analyze the attempts to transform local deities into objects of worship by all Ossetians. The role of Protestantism in North Ossetia is covered by Olga Oleynikova and in Adygei—by Irina Babich.⁴

The Place of Protestantism in the Northern Caucasus

In the 1990-2000s, the North Ossetian society experienced a resurrection of all sorts of religious trends—Orthodoxy, Islam and a considerable increase in the number of Protestant communities. The following figures for the city of Alagir provide a more or less authentic picture: approximately 30% are Orthodox Christians; 30% percent are so-called traditionalists, who worship the Ossetian Gods; 5% are Muslims (including Mesheti Turks); 5% are Protestants (including South Ossetians); and 30% remained undecided.⁵ In the same period, the number of Jehovah's Witness communities (banned in Russia since 2017) considerably increased their numerical strength in Ossetia as a whole and in its capital Vladikavkaz in particular: 30.4% of the followers are Ossetians.⁶

¹ See: A.V. Isaenko, *Ekstremisty—baptisty i ikh posledovateli*, Orjonikidze, 1968.

² See: R.N. Lunkin, *Rol khristianskikh tserkvey Evropy v razreshenii sotsialno-politicheskikh krizisov*. Doctorate Thesis, Moscow, 2018, 431 pp.

³ See: E.V. Fedosova, "Konfessionalnaia identichnost i religioznye ustanovki molodezhi Severnoy Osetii," *Izvestia SOIGSI*, No. 2, 2013, pp. 86-91; S.A. Shtyrkov, "Traditsianolistskie dvizhenia v sovremennom severo-osetinskom obshchestve i logika religioznogo natsionalizma," in: *Kavkazskiy gorod: potentsial etnokulturnykh svyazey v urbanisticheskoy srede*, ed. by Iu.M. Botiakov, MAE RAS, St. Petersburg, 2013, pp. 331-362.

⁴ See: O.A. Oleynikova, *Problemy sektanstva v Severnoy Osetii*, 2001, Scientific Archive of SOIGSI. Planned Works Record Group, No. 468; Idem., *Konfessionalnaia situatsia v RSO-Alania: vzaimodeystvie razlichnykh konfessiy i verovaniy*, Vladikavkaz, 2000, Planned Works Record Group, No. 446; I.L. Babich, "Protestantskoe dvizhenie v Adygee," in: *Khristianstvo na Severnom Kavkaze: istoria i sovremennost*, ed. by I.L. Babich, L.T. Solovyeva, IEA RAS, Moscow, 2011, pp. 162-185.

⁵ Field materials collected by the author (FMA). North Ossetia-2019.

⁶ See: O.A. Oleynikova, *Konfessionalnaia situatsia v RSO-Alania: vzaimodeystvie konfessiy i verovaniy*, pp. 32-33.

Olga Oleynikova relies on her 2000 poll among the believers to explain the popularity of Protestantism and Jehovah's Witnesses in North Ossetia: 81% of the polled were convinced that they provided answers to existential questions; 76% pointed to the very simple religious rites; 63% acquired the feeling of belonging; 42% appreciated the moral and material support offered to those who needed it. Baptists engage in social aid (in Alagir Baptists help drug addicts).⁷ There is a great number of former Orthodox Christians among the Baptists whom they joined "because the atmosphere is very different and they work with people."⁸ Protestants promoted their religion among those traumatized by the Beslan tragedy, also among South Ossetians, Tbilisi Ossetians and those who had come to North Ossetia in the 2000s.⁹ According to Oleynikova, the Protestants owe much of their popularity to very skillful missionary efforts (40%); socioeconomic and spiritual crisis (60%); support of the West (51%), and their affluence (45.4%).¹⁰

There are "purely Ossetian" churches among the Baptist churches of North Ossetia with Ossetian parishes, where church services are conducted in Ossetic; there are mixed (Russian, Ossetian and other, Armenian in particular) parishes where the services are conducted in Russian. Earlier, all churches were hybrid and services were conducted in Russian and Ossetic on different days or at different times on the same days: i.e., from 9 to 11 a.m. the services were conducted in Russian; from 12 to 2 p.m.—in Ossetic and from 5 p.m. on—in Russian.¹¹

About 150 people (all of them Ossetians) belong to the oldest Baptist church located in the same building since the pre-revolutionary times (51 Kosta Prospect, Vladikavkaz).¹² In June 2019, the Sunday service in this church was attended by about one hundred people: 20 men and 80 women (most of them are older; young families with children are few and far between). The service (sermons, prayers and psalms) was conducted in Ossetic with small inclusions in Russian. Ossetians are the leaders of the local community.¹³ The Baptist community Nadezhda (Hope) (71 Nikolaev Str., Vladikavkaz,) has about 200 members: Ossetians and Russians (who are in the majority). Services are conducted in Russian, prayers and psalms are read in Ossetic. The community has its own Christian Radio, very popular among the Protestants of the Northern Caucasus.¹⁴ Many members of Baptist communities came from the families of those who had attended the church during Soviet times. On the whole, there are approximately one thousand Baptists in Vladikavkaz.¹⁵ There are Baptist communities in the villages of Mizur, Gizel and the city of Alagir. The village communities are not big—some with only 30 to 40 members. Pastors of North Ossetian Baptist churches frequently share their time with other regions of the Northern Caucasus. Baptists of North Ossetia maintain close contacts with the Baptists of Kabarda, Stavropol, Krasnodar and Rostov-on-Don. The Biblical Institute in the village of Prokhladnoe (Kabardino-Balkaria) is very popular among Baptists.¹⁶

There are Pentecostal communities in Vladikavkaz; many of them Ossetian; such is the Pentecostal community headed by Ossetian Sosiev¹⁷ with about 80 members; half of them Ossetians. The

⁷ FMA. North Ossetia-2019.

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ For example, one of my informers, Ossetian R. who had moved from Tbilisi (where he was born) to Vladikavkaz in 2003 and later attended the Adventists of the Seventh Day community; today he belongs to the community of Evangelical Christian-Baptists. Pastor of the Baptist Church of Vladikavkaz Ossetian T. lost four of his children in Beslan; today he lives with his daughter who also attends the Baptist church, FMA. North Ossetia-2019.

¹⁰ See: O.A. Oleynikova, *Problemy sektanstva v Severnoy Osetii*.

¹¹ FMA. North Ossetia-2019.

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ As it turned out later some of the young members had gone to the Baptist community in Alagir.

¹⁴ FMA. North Ossetia-2019.

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ Every Saturday the members study the Bible in the club of the wagon-repair plant; on Sundays services are organized in the House of Cinema in 5 Batoev Str.

services are conducted in Russian. There are Pentecostal communities with the predominantly South Ossetian membership.¹⁸ The Pentecostal community Slovo zhizni (The Word of Life) has about 100 members.¹⁹ Its chief pastor is an Armenian, others are Ossetians. It was previously headed by an Ossetian who became the Pastor of the South of Russia. The community is mixed: there are Ossetians (from South Ossetia and Tbilisi among them), Russians and Armenians among its members. Services are in Russian, in the past services were conducted in Armenian with Russian translation. The Ossetian members prefer praying and singing psalms in Ossetic.²⁰

The Seventh-Day Adventists are less popular in Ossetia; the community comprises approximately 70-80 members, both Russians and Ossetians. The services are in Russian, prayers and psalms are frequently read in Ossetic. The Bible is taught separately in Russian and in Ossetic. The Adventist community is not popular because it does not extend social aid to those who need it. Money is gathered, but nobody knows how it is spent. In Baptist communities, the church council distributes the collected money among the poor. Jehovah's Witnesses preserved some of its followers in North Ossetia even if they are more discreet than before and pray in private houses; the share of Ossetians among them is fairly large.²¹

On the whole, Ossetians do not baptize their children either in the Molokan community or in the Armenian Gregorian church in Vladikavkaz.²²

In Adygei, the share of Adyghe among the Protestants is much lower than among the Ossetians (there are few of them in the republic compared with Russians). In the 2000s-2010s, all Protestant communities acquired Adyghe members mostly from among urban dwellers. Those who live in auls (mountain villages) are much more susceptible to public opinion and criticism of relatives, neighbors and friends. Initially, Adyghe Protestants lived in Adyghe auls; in the 2000s they started moving to the places populated by Russians and Cossacks, where there were Christian communities. Some of the Adyghe Protestants remained in their auls behind closed doors and kept away from their Adyghe neighbors.

The biggest Adyghe Baptist community is located in the city of Adygensk. In June 2016, I attended the service in honor of Holy Trinity organized in a private house in the city's outskirts. The service attracted 15 people (5 of them male; the rest—female, three of whom were girls between the ages of 15 to 20.) The majority of those present were Adyghe, yet the service was conducted in Russian. At the end all those present prayed together in the Adyghe tongue (several people remained silent). Adyghe from the neighboring auls (Gabukay, Ponezhukay, Assokolay) attend services at this church. On the whole, the Baptist community in Adygensk attracts several scores of Adyghe.²³

According to at least some members of Adyghe intelligentsia, in the 2010s about 100 Adyghe attended and continue attending Protestant communities in Maykop today,²⁴ specifically the Nadezhda Church that belongs to the Adyghe Eparchy of the Evangelical Christians (there are about 1,000 members, 200 of them are permanent (including 25 Adyghe); the Maykop Bethany Evangelical Church (including 5 Adyghe women); the Maykop Church of Seventh Day Adventists (including an Adyghe woman); the Maykop community of Jehovah's Witnesses.²⁵ Members of the communities of Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists and Pentecostals are scattered across the republic (they live in the auls of Koshekhabl, Jerokay, the village of Khanskaia, the city of Adygensk, etc.).²⁶

¹⁸ FMA. North Ossetia-2019.

¹⁹ Services are conducted in the National Scientific Library, 43 Kostoev Str.

²⁰ FMA. North Ossetia-2019.

²¹ Ibidem.

²² Ibidem.

²³ FMA. Adygei-2009; FMA. Adygei-2016.

²⁴ FMA. Adygei-2009.

²⁵ FMA. Adygei-2016.

²⁶ FMA. Adygei-2009.

Some of the deeply convinced Protestants from among the Adyghe became heads of their communities and counselors. For example, Adyghe N. heads a community of Pentecostals in a village in the Krasnodar Territory; in his pastor capacity he has already baptized 130 Russians and Adyghe.²⁷

Adyghe become Protestants for different reasons.²⁸ It should be said that throughout the 1990s the Adyghe found themselves an object of foreigners' missionary efforts to a much greater extent than other peoples of the Northern Caucasus. This refers, in particular, to Leon Martenson who learned the Adyghe tongue, translated *The Bible* into it and actively popularized it in the Northwest Caucasus. In the early 2000s, the law and order structures put an end to his activities by rejecting his entry visa application. The results of his efforts, however, survived: those Adyghe who found themselves outside Muslim influence and the Adyghe traditions (Adyghe Habze) joined Protestant communities of all sorts, including Jehovah's Witnesses.²⁹ Those who promoted Christian (or, more precisely, Protestant) ideas among the Adyghe relied on a historical fact that in the past (in the 5th-15th centuries) they had been Christians and that many of their cultural values are similar to Christian ethics.³⁰

According to the words of one of the Adyghe Pentecostals, it can be inferred that some of the Adyghe auls had embraced Protestantism prior to Islam. Islamic revival was unfolding at a slow pace: it started from scratch since the Soviet administration had managed to undermine the fairly weak positions of Islam among the Adyghe; Protestant missionaries spared no effort to promote their faith in auls. At the initial stage, Islamic missionaries demonstrated extreme zeal that frightened people of all ages, including young people.

For certain reasons some of the Adyghe are not attracted by Islam because,

- first of all, in the distant and Soviet past Islam was not as popular among the Adyghe as in the Northeast Caucasus;
- secondly, Islam, which is called the religion of ancestors and which requires the knowledge of Arabic, is viewed as an elitist religion.

The majority does not know Arabic and refuses to learn the prayers in Arabic, which sound strange to them, by heart. Islam is viewed as a *nominal* religion. Many members of the Islamic clergy (imams and mullahs, especially in auls) are poorly educated and do not possess a relatively decent knowledge of Arabic.³¹ The radical wing of Islam, which emerged in the latter half of the 1990s, did nothing good for Islam. Peace-loving Adyghe are repulsed by the fact that in the 1990s-2000s part of the younger generation joined the Wahhabi movements and that terrorist acts were accompanied by the words Allah Akbar. They say that "This kind of Islam is not Islam; the Adyghe Muslims have not cognized God and are following a false road that cannot bring them to Christ."³²

Despite the different extent and, partly, different reasons of popularity of Protestantism among the Ossetians and Adyghe, the interest of highlanders in Protestant ideology is rooted in the crisis of their own "mountain" ideology and identity.³³

²⁷ FMA. Adygei-2017.

²⁸ See: S. Lyausheva, V. Nekhai, R. Khunagov, B. Shkhachemukova, "The Traditional Adyghe Culture in the Context of Globalization: Social Integration as a Factor of Defusing Ethnic Tension in the Caucasus," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 3, 2016, pp. 113-121; S.B. Filatov, R.N. Lunkin, "Respublika Adygeia. Osobennosti istoricheskogo razvitiia religii," in: *Religiozno-obshchestvennaia zhizn' rossiyskikh regionov*, ed. by S.B. Filatova, Letniy sad, Moscow, 2014, pp. 7-32.

²⁹ See: I.L. Babich, op. cit., pp. 162-185.

³⁰ See: A.A. Muzalev, M.S. Shorova, "Khristianstvo v Adygee: istoria i sovremennost'," *Vestnik Adygeyskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, No. 1, 2006, pp. 54-56; *Severnyy Kavkaz v sostave Rossiyskoy imperii*, ed. by V.O. Bobrovnikov, I.L. Babich, Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, Moscow, 2007, pp. 88-111.

³¹ FMA. Adygei-2016.

³² Ibidem.

³³ See: I.L. Babich, "Vzaimosviaz sovremennykh gorskikh ideologiy i natsionalnykh interesov Rossii na Severnom Kavkaze," in: *Severnyy Kavkaz v natsionalnoy strategii Rossii*, ed. by V.A. Tishkov, FSSU Rosinformagrotekh, Moscow, 2008, pp. 171-186.

Denationalization of the North Caucasian Peoples due to the Spread of Protestantism

On the whole, the Protestant ideology and ethics contain no national components: the doors of Protestant churches are open to all irrespective of nationality. Denationalization of North Caucasian peoples, the partial loss of their national specifics is one of the most important effects of the spread of Protestantism in the region. Let us assess the degree to which the ethnic component has survived in the Protestant Ossetian and Adyghe communities.

Ossetian Protestants believe that there is no contradiction between the traditional Ossetian and Christian identities. However, they admit that their life changed when they joined a Protestant community. Many of them still attend weddings and funerals of relatives, friends and neighbors, but refuse to drink alcohol. There is, however, a fundamental problem: their attitude to the so-called Ossetian Gods.³⁴

A public organization, The Supreme Council of Ossetians (Styr Nykhas) supports Ossetian ancient traditions in every possible way. Its followers, the so called traditionalists, do not attend churches; they visit holy places, usually up in the mountains, where they pray to the so-called Ossetian Gods. They are convinced that the pre-Christian Gods are a part of their true national culture, which they refuse to call pagan. Today, there are many similar public organizations in the republic that are registered as religious, rather than public. These organizations³⁵ are founded on the faith in the Ossetian Gods.

They are geared towards the development of Ossetian ethnic identity, yet their status as religious organizations allows them to compete with the religions communities of North Ossetia. The ideologists of the movement Daurbek Makeev, Taimuraz Kambolov and Slavik Janaev created an Alanian Code of Ethics (Iron Agdau) based on the Ossetian Nart Sagas that differ slightly from Christian ethics. Below it is quoted in full:

- You should never forget that you are a descendant of an ancient and noble people, therefore you have no right to commit unworthy acts.
- You should know and respect the history of your people and your land—this will strengthen your spirit, ennoble your soul and support you at the worst moments of life.
- Do not think of yourself as an Ossetian (Alanian) until you learn the tongue, customs, songs and dances of your people.
- Continually improve your physical condition; improve your health by training to be worthy of your great ancestors.
- Know and never forget your family history from the very beginning. Respect old people, and especially your parents, who brought you into this world.
- Learn and accept as the highest value the truth that the greatness of an Alanian (Ossetian) has never been measured by wealth, but by courage and labor for the sake of the homeland.

³⁴ FMA. North Ossetia-2019.

³⁵ There are local religious organizations of the traditional faiths of the Ossetians The District Mozdok Community of the Asses (Atsata) in Mozdok; the Traditional Faiths of the Ossetians True Faith (Atsag Din) in Vladikavkaz; Upper Ossetia (Uallagir) in Alagir; the Community of the Sanctuary Mayrama of the Upper Tower (Tsazziu) (Tsazziu Ualamasyg Mayramy dzuary kord) in the village of Lats, Alagir District; the Religion of Ossetia (Iry din) in the village of Zmeyskaya, Kirov District; Dzivgis (Dzyvgis) in the village of Dzivgis, Alagir District.

- You should never forget that everything bad and good that you do in life will return to you hundredfold.
- When talking to people, listen more and talk less; do not brag—many people are smarter and stronger than you are.
- Beware of thinking: Why are you better than me? This thought has repeatedly destroyed Alania. If you are a true patriot, prove it with your deeds.
- Avoid quarrels and scandals. In a quarrel with a fool you will become more stupid; and it is best to simply listen to a clever person.
- Be moderate in food and drink—this is one of the rules of the Alanian ethics. Celebrations and funerals are not held for gluttony.
- Select your bride (or groom) not only for their beautiful face and body, but also for the intellect, honor and the traditions of their clan and family.
- Never insult national and religious feelings of others. Each people are a gift of God.
- Be proud and honest. Neither hunger, nor cold, nor the fear of death should break down your spirit if you are a true son of the people of Alania.
- Strive to observe this rule of honor. May Xucaw save you from degradation and shame.³⁶

The Supreme Council of the Ossetians opened the Iron Agdau school, in which teachers (historians, experts in local history and in many other fields) familiarize everyone interested with the history of Alania and with Ossetian rituals and customs.³⁷ The Council of the Elders, a traditional folk structure and the congress of the community is an important element of the Supreme Council³⁸ and as such is supported by the republican administration. The so-called traditionalists insist that Ossetians should be present in all power structures of the republic that should acquire its own, specifically Ossetian, statehood.

The traditionalists celebrate the following holidays—the Holiday of the God of Gods, Saint Uastyrdzhi, Patron of the Bread Grain, Patron of Wild Beasts, The Day of the Tsar of Water, The Day of the Patron of Horned Cattle, Patron of Small Cattle, The Day of Mother Maria, The Day of Seven Deities.³⁹ On 23 November they celebrate Djiorgywba, an important holiday in honor of Ossetian dzuar Uastyrdzhi, patron of men and travelers and protector of the weak and destitute. On these days people attend *holy places* and put three pies on the table in honor of One Great God *Iunag yshtyr khusau*. People gather around the table to read prayers, then the pies are consecrated and the elder (histar) toasts the One God (Iunag *Kaddzhyn* Styr Khuytsau).

What do the Orthodox Christians, Muslims and Protestants think about the movement?

Today, Christian Orthodoxy in Ossetia functions within the Vladikavkaz and Alania Eparchies.⁴⁰ There are some 30 to 40 churches and chapels in the republic; the congregations are half Russian and half Ossetian; the share of practitioners comprises 1-2%. On Sundays approximately 500 people attend the St. George Cathedral. In Vladikavkaz there are about 1,500 practicing believers, a number compa-

³⁶ [<https://ironau.ru/allon.html>].

³⁷ See: “V Respublike otkrylas shkola Iron Agdau,” available at [<https://news.sputnik.ru/obrazovanie/5ecc4fa4c0a19361e8535f8341e01870a406dec3>].

³⁸ See: Z.V. Kanukova, “Obshchestvenny sovet v Osetii: traditsii i innovatsii,” *Uspekhi sovremennoy nauki*, Vol. 7, No. 11, 2016, pp. 9-11.

³⁹ See: O.A. Oleynikova, *Konfessionalnaia situatsia v RSO-Alania: vzaimodeystvie razlichnykh konfessiy i verovaniy*, pp. 32-33.

⁴⁰ In 2013, Chechnya and Ingushetia still belonged to this eparchy; later the Makhachkala and Grozny eparchy was set up (Ingushetia also belongs to it.)

rable to that of Muslims and Protestants in North Ossetia, where Orthodoxy is weakened by covert rivalry between Russian and Ossetian priests (Russians comprise two-thirds of the local clergy, one-third are Ossetians); there is an unspoken desire to have an Ossetian at the head of the eparchy. Today it is headed by Archimandrite Leonid, a Russian with many years of service outside Russia. As a rule, the services are held in Russian with bits and pieces in Ossetic. Ossetian priests prefer the Ossetic tongue (which is used in Ossetian churches in Ossetian settlements where priests are Ossetians). The Service Book and other books used by the Orthodox Church are translated into Ossetic. There are contradictions between the Orthodox clergy and parishioners, on the one hand, and the “traditionalists,” on the other. The Orthodox people reject the traditional polytheism of Ossetians, while the “traditionalists” do not invite them to their celebrations (conducted in sacred forests, Hetaga and others). Supported by the republican authorities, these celebrations are held on a large scale. Today, the heads of the eparchy advise the clerics not to object to these holidays during the services. Many Orthodox clerics believe that the revived paganism is an indication of the desired self-identification.⁴¹

There are 29 mosques in the republic, including the mosque in Vladikavkaz. On Fridays it is attended by about 1,000 people.⁴² Khadjimurat Gatsalov, the Mufti of North Ossetia, is convinced that the contemporary Ossetian society can be defined as an industrial one; therefore, he argues that there is no foundation for the emergence of a traditional society, while many local traditions have been weakened or altered.⁴³ Traditional Ossetian beliefs lead to nationalism. The Mufti says that at the early stages young people were strongly attracted by the traditionalist practices, only to distance themselves from them after a while.⁴⁴ Unlike many other traditions, the legal traditions are very much alive, which has a positive effect on the Ossetian society. The Muslim leaders, who are dead set against traditionalism in the form of neo-paganism, are engaged in polemics with its followers.⁴⁵

➤ Muslim woman A. states:

“We are not invited to traditionalist feasts. I help my relatives cook and lay the table, but never sit together with them. Nobody forces me to join. I think that the current burial traditions differ a lot from the old ones. Today, for example, while the dead is being carried to the cemetery, people are already sitting at the table to reminisce about him. There are extremes in the revived traditions.”⁴⁶

On the whole, however, neither the Orthodox Christians nor Muslims deliberately demonstrate their attitude to the traditionalists. Sociologist Elena Fedosova rightly notes that the religious consciousness of regular youths is an intertwining of varied yet practically inseparable elements—Christianity/Islam, paganism, folk beliefs, etc. Both Orthodox Christians and Muslims remain loyal to the Ossetian traditions. Fedosova also points out that an ethnic identity is still much more important for the younger generation than their religious affiliation.⁴⁷

Members of the Protestant community of North Ossetia are of a different opinion: they treat traditional feasts and toasts to Uastyrdzhi, One and Only God as devilish.⁴⁸ Here is what Protestants in Ossetia have to say.

⁴¹ FMA. North Ossetia-2019.

⁴² The capacity of the mosque is limited to 500 so women do not attend services while men occupy the section reserved for women. FMA. Severnaia Osetia-2019.

⁴³ [<https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/330087/>].

⁴⁴ FMA. North Ossetia-2019.

⁴⁵ Ibidem.

⁴⁶ Ibidem.

⁴⁷ See: E.V. Fedosova, “Konfessionalnaia identichnost i religioznye ustanovki molodezhi Severnoy Osetii,” p. 88.

⁴⁸ FMA. North Ossetia-2019.

➤ Baptist Ossetian V.:

“As soon as I joined this church, I stopped attending traditional Ossetian feasts and holidays associated with the ‘three pies,’ toasts in honor of One and Only God and Uastyrdzhi. We heard this from our preachers. There are other holidays that we celebrate: Easter, the Nativity of Christ, the Ascension, the Descent of the Holy Spirit. I know that this separates us from other Ossetians or even from our relatives. Some of my relatives are Orthodox Christians who do not reject paganism. They do not invite me to their celebrations. Anyway, according to our religion these celebrations are manifestations of the devil. Jesus Christ is more important to us than the Ossetian traditions; the knowledge of Jesus Christ is more important than ethnic ties.”⁴⁹

➤ Baptist A.:

“We attend funerals and weddings, but never sit down at the table. If for some reason we do, we never drink alcohol and never pray together with others. My husband and his relatives are traditionalists. On the whole, traditionalists have nothing against our community, although lately they have been objecting to our religion because, they argue, the traditional Ossetian culture and language have been weakening, and all of us should help revive them.”⁵⁰

➤ Baptist R.:

“Christians should not discuss pagan deities. There are no contradictions between Protestants and Orthodox Christians in Ossetia. I am convinced that all communities, be it Baptists, Adventists or Pentecostals, are Christian. The Orthodox believers are also Christians and pray to one god, Jesus Christ. This is what should keep us together, not the pagan gods. Any Christian is my brother. To me, religious identity is more important than nationality, while Ossetian traditions come second. My relatives are fond of typically Ossetian celebrations. I have told them several times that this was wrong. If invited, I sit at the table together with others, yet I do not drink alcohol or toast. Pagan deities are not gods. In fact, the majority of the Ossetians treat this as a tradition; they have no faith in their gods. The faith in pagan gods is a retreat; we should move forward to the faith in the Christian God. There is no salvation in myths. I should say that the celebrations have changed a lot: people smoke at the table and swear.”⁵¹

➤ Pentecostal A.:

“We observe burial rites when one of our relatives dies, but I never attend burials in other families. I take part in funerals where no toasts are pronounced. We do not attend other repasts. When my husband died, there was no burial service and no burial repast.⁵² We treat all Christians as brothers; there is no national component. I think of myself as a Christian; we have nothing specifically Ossetian at home, we do not celebrate Ossetian holidays. Our holidays are the Nativity and Easter. On the other hand, I support the Ossetian moral code, which teaches respect for the elders and for men. This is a part of Christianity as well.”

➤ Pentecostal A.:

“I have been member of my Pentecostal community since 2008. Before that I did not differ from other Ossetians: I observed Ossetian holidays and believed in Uastyrdzhi. After

⁴⁹ FMA. North Ossetia-2019.

⁵⁰ Ibidem.

⁵¹ Ibidem.

⁵² Ibidem.

joining the community, I stopped celebrating Ossetian holidays. We celebrate the harvest festival, but never the holidays of the Ossetian gods. Nearly all our relatives are traditionalists, who invite us to their celebrations. Normally, I accept the invitations and sit at the table, but never drink. Many of us do not accept these invitations. Our relatives have accepted us as Protestants; they do not criticize us. Jesus Christ is my god, and there are no other gods.”⁵³

In fact, Protestants do not support the majority of Ossetian traditions; there are no specifically Ossetian items in their residences.

* * *

On the whole, the Protestant communities of the Adyghe in Adyghei prefer to live separately, to communicate with members of their communities and marry within them. For example, an Adyghe from the Iablonovskiy settlement married a Lak woman from a Pentecostal community in Daghestan. As distinct from North Ossetia, relatives, friends, neighbors and village communities in Adyghei negatively respond to the change of religion. Today, however, they are much less aggressive than in the late 1990s-early 2000s.⁵⁴ Relatives prefer not to notice the Protestant and never invite him/her to weddings and burials.⁵⁵

In the 1990s-2010s the majority of the Adyghe were either “ethnic” or “practicing” Muslims, yet common Adyghe mentality and self-awareness have been preserved in both Muslims and Protestants.⁵⁶ The Adyghe layer that keeps the Adyghe together despite their religious affiliations is illustrated by burial of Adyghe Protestants. They themselves on deathbed (or their relatives ask about that after their relatives’ deaths) prefer to be buried in Adyghe (that is, Muslim) cemeteries. Pastor S. of the Baptist church told me that in 2016, Baptist Adyghe R. had died in one of the Adyghe auls and his close relatives had persuaded the imam to bury him in the Muslim cemetery according to Muslim rites.⁵⁷

The Adyghe who turn to Protestantism remain loyal to their ethnic component and are not willing to abandon it. This was confirmed in June 2017 at a meeting of the Adyghe Christians held in Maykop and attended by members of various Protestant communities.⁵⁸ It should be said that Orthodox Christian Adyghe were not invited.

There is an opinion among the Adyghe Christians that national identity is gradually retreating under the pressure of their new religious identity. Initially, however, the ethnic roots of the neophytes affect their religious life. In the course of time, however, these people mostly communicate with the members of their communities irrespective of nationalities, rather than with other Adyghe.

In the 1990s-2000s, the folk culture of the Adyghe, so-called Adyghe Habze weakened considerably; several traditions—respect for elders, mutual assistance, family values (those that could be supported through Christianity)—survived for the simple reason that Christian values and Christian ideology have a lot in common with what remained of the traditional folk culture.⁵⁹ The crisis of Adyghe Habze is partly explained by the highlanders’ search for new ideologies. Today, the Adyghe society is living amid considerable social and economic stratification, which means that the tradi-

⁵³ Ibidem.

⁵⁴ FMA. Adyghei-2009.

⁵⁵ FMA. Adyghei-2009, FMA. Adyghei-2016.

⁵⁶ FMA. Adyghei-2017.

⁵⁷ FMA. Adyghei-2016.

⁵⁸ FMA. Adyghei-2017.

⁵⁹ Ibidem.

tional Adyghe norms of behavior can no longer unite the people. There is the elite who states that Adyghe Habze is for the poor. People unite into different social strata with different moral codes.

There are Orthodox Christian communities in Adyghei, yet they cannot compete with the far more numerous Protestant communities. Orthodox priest Father Sergy, the dean of the church in the village of Khanskaya told me that he had baptized about 10 Adyghe.⁶⁰ There are Orthodox Christians in the republic's corridors of power.⁶¹ There is an Internet site named "Baptized Adyghe," where Orthodox Adyghe describe their spiritual experiences. In Kabardino-Balkaria, for example, there is a Kabardian priest, yet there are no Adyghe priests in Adyghei. An Adyghe from Adyghei became a monk at the Optina Pustyn monastery. Sometimes unbaptized Adyghe ask Orthodox priests to bless a house or a flat or pray for someone's health.

The director of the Arts Center deemed it necessary to point out that "we, the Adyghe intelligentsia, believe that Adyghe Habze is more important than Islam."⁶² He was convinced that for a long time the Muslims of Adyghei, and Mufti Nurbi Emizh (who headed the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Adyghei and the Krasnodar Territory) in the first place, exerted pressure on the Adyghe intelligentsia because of its atheism.

In their turn, the Adyghe that belong to Protestant communities are convinced that the Adyghe culture and Adyghe Habze as a moral code, lost their significance in the 1990s. This was, in fact, the starting point of a search for a new ideology, and it explains why the Protestant Adyghe treat all others as nominal Muslims who live without moral foundations.⁶³

It is crucial to point out that practicing Muslims based their new Islamic ideology on revised Adyghe traditions. This meant that they pushed them aside to become Muslims rather than Adyghe and developed their religious identities by suppressing their ethnicity. The Christian Adyghe (Protestants, in the first place), on the contrary, never rejected Adyghe values and Adyghe identity. The majority sees no contradiction between the rudiments of the Adyghe culture and the Protestant ideology, with the exception of several norms of the Adyghe etiquette.

- A member of a Pentecostal community told me:

"We observe some of the rules written down in Adyghe Habze—we respect the elders and family values; many traditions, however, have already disappeared, such as defining the future profession of the child by the object he selects from among others, etc. I attend Adyghe burials, they are organized according to Muslim rules; when the mullah reads Arab prayers I say my prayers out loud.

I meet my Muslim relatives and should say that I have preserved my Adyghe roots and self-awareness. For example, if I manage to persuade another Adyghe to baptize into my faith and liberate him from drug dependence I would be very pleased."⁶⁴

- Another Baptist Adyghe added:

"Many sides of the etiquette, viz. the relationships between men and women, husband and wife seem very strange to me. For example, according to the Adyghe rules, a woman should walk at a certain distance from a man, who should walk on the right side, which is considered to be more honorable; I am puzzled by the traditions of paying ransom for the bride, bride abduction, etc. When I joined the Baptist community I stopped observing or supporting them."⁶⁵

⁶⁰ FMA. Adyghei-2017.

⁶¹ FMA. Adyghei-2009.

⁶² Ibidem.

⁶³ FMA. Adyghei-2017.

⁶⁴ FMA. Adyghei-2009.

⁶⁵ Ibidem.

The Protestant Adyghe are convinced that when a person begins attending a protestant community, his Adyghe identity will gradually disappear. This means that his ethnic roots affect his religious life for a certain time.”⁶⁶

New Muslims (“practicing” Muslims) are ready to abandon many of the Adyghe traditions, while “ethnic” Muslims are not ready to do the same; they try to preserve their Adyghe values and identities. Generally, Adyghe Christians do not push their Adyghe values and identities aside, which makes them similar to “ethnic” Muslims.⁶⁷

Conclusion

Apparently, Russia is acquiring new cultural/religious spaces that allow not only for religions traditional for the region—Islam or Christian Orthodoxy, but also for other religious trends that attract people, for example, different forms of Protestantism. Autochthonous peoples of the Northern Caucasus are seeking spiritual answers in these mosaics. Despite the fact that the highlanders are ready to defend their national roots and traditions, the role of national factors in the everyday life of the Ossetians and Adyghe is gradually weakening, giving rise to certain new trends in the mountain dwellers’ search for new ideologies.⁶⁸ Comparative studies of the Protestant movement in North Ossetia-Alania and Adygei demonstrated that the path, forms and methods can be different, yet the search for a new foundation remains the same. Roman Lunkin has justly pointed out that “despite different political experience and the chance to take part in public political discussions, a variety of churches creates a democratic civil environment” that offers a new assessment of the role of Protestant churches in Russia.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ FMA. Adygei-2009.

⁶⁷ FMA. Adygei-2017.

⁶⁸ See: I.L. Babich, “Vzaimosviaz sovremennykh gorskikh ideologiy i natsionalnykh interesov Rossii na Severnom Kavkaze,” pp. 171-186.

⁶⁹ See: R.N. Lunkin, op. cit., p. 23.

ETHNIC RELATIONS AND MIGRATION

MANAGING ETHNIC REPATRIATION EXPERIENCE: CENTRAL ASIAN STATES AND RUSSIAN FEDERATION

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Duman JAMPEISOV

*Ph.D. (Jurisprudence), Vice-Rector for Strategic Development,
Kazakh Humanitarian Law Innovative University (KazHLIU)
(Semey, Republic of Kazakhstan)*

Sergey RYAZANTSEV

*D.Sc. (Econ.), Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences,
Professor, Head of the Department of Demographic and Migration Policy,
MGIMO University, Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs;
Director of the Institute of Socio-Political Research of
the Russian Academy of Sciences
(Moscow, Russian Federation)*

Sergey PEREMYSHLIN

*Chairman of the Non-governmental Foundation
“Center of Support of the Russian Language and
Cultural Heritage ‘Russian Legacy’,” Post-Graduate Student,
Institute of Socio-Political Research of the Russian Academy of Sciences
(Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic)*

Dauren JAMPEISOV

Ph.D. Student,
Kazakh Humanitarian Law Innovative University (KazHLIU)
(Semey, Republic of Kazakhstan)

ABSTRACT

The issues of state and legal regulation of ethnic repatriation in the post-Soviet countries that implement relevant programs are of great practical importance for their migration policy.

The paper discusses the general and specific features of the ethnic repatriation policy in three post-Soviet countries: Ka-

zakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia, aiming to identify the most successful approaches and practices for their execution.

The author analyzes the legislative acts of the three countries related to issues of ethnic repatriation and regulation of return migration between the 1990s and the present time.

KEYWORDS: return migration, ethnic repatriation, comparative analysis, Russia, Central Asian states, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, oralman, kayrylman.

Introduction

Conceptual Framework of Return Migration

Return migration is a specific type of migration, which includes the migration flows of previously departed migrants or their descendants to their historical homeland. Sometimes return migration takes the form of ethnic repatriation and includes ethnically and culturally similar groups of the population. This method is used in the migration policies of Israel, Japan, Hungary, Poland, Germany, Greece and other countries as a tool to improve the demographic potential and maintain a certain ethnic structure of the population.

Although there are no direct universal norms in the regulation of repatriation issues in international law, there are relevant universal principles and norms. For example, Arts 13 and 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 10 December, 1948,¹ and Art 12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 16 December, 1966.²

According to the approach taken by the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2004), “return migration” refers to the movement of persons returning to their country of origin or place of

¹ See: *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)* of 10 December, 1948, adopted and proclaimed by General Assembly Resolution 217 A(III) of 10 December, 1948, available at [<https://www.jus.uio.no/lm/en/pdf/un.universal.declaration.of.human.rights.1948.landscape.a4.pdf>].

² See: *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* of 16 December, 1966, available at [<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>].

permanent residence, usually after at least a year's sojourn in another country. This return may be voluntary or involuntary. Return migration may also take place through voluntary repatriation.³

At present (2019), IOM defines *return migration* in the context of international migration (the movement of persons returning to their country of origin after leaving their usual place of residence and crossing the international border) and in internal migration (movement of persons returning to their usual place of residence after moving away from it).

For statistical purposes, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs defines *returning migrants* as persons returning to their country of citizenship after being international migrants (short or long-term) in another country, and intending to stay in their country for at least one year.⁴

Despite the sufficient unambiguity of the concept of "return migration" proposed by the U.N. and IOM, it differs significantly from the content of the concept of "return migration" at the national level. Different concepts and terms are used to characterize the process of return migration in the regulatory legal acts and programs that are involved in organizing the return in various countries.

In addition, the term "re-emigration" is used in the context of return migration to describe the "movement of a person who, after having returned to his or her country of origin, emigrates again."⁵ In the Russian sources, the term "re-emigration" is often used to describe the process of emigrants returning to their country of origin, from which they had previously emigrated.⁶

The concept of "repatriation" is closely related to return migration, and there are two approaches to it that have developed in international law and migration policy.

The narrow approach defines "repatriation" as *the right of a refugee or prisoner of war to return to the country of which he is a citizen*, based on the provisions set forth in various international documents (Geneva Conventions, 1949, Protocols, 1977, provisions of the Laws and Customs of War on Land supplementing The Hague Convention (IV) of 1907; documents related to human rights, as well as legal customs). The right to choose repatriation belongs to the person himself, and not to the authorities holding him. The right to repatriate also imposes obligations on the state authorities of the host country to release such persons (soldiers and civilians), and on the country of origin to receive their citizens. The term "repatriation" also applies to diplomatic representatives and international officials during an international crisis.⁷

The term "repatriation" is used in the context of international humanitarian law. For this reason, the definition focuses on categories relevant to this area of international law. However, a more general right to return to one's country is also provided for in international human rights law, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted on 16 December, 1966, entered into force on 23 March, 1976). The Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa (adopted on 10 September, 1969, entered into force on 20 June, 1974), stipulates that repatriation must always be voluntary and no refugee can be repatriated against his or her will. It also imposes an obligation upon the country of asylum to "make adequate arrangements for the safe return of refugees who request repatriation" and on the country of origin to "facilitate their re-settlement and grant them the full rights and privileges of citizens of the country, and subject them to the same obligations." The term is also frequently used to refer to the repatriation of diplomatic envoys and in-

³ See: *International Migration Law. Glossary on Migration*, IOM, Geneva, 2004 p. 69, available at [http://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_1_en.pdf].

⁴ See: *Glossary on Migration. International Migration Law*, IOM, 2019, p. 56, available at [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf].

⁵ See: *Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁶ *Demografichesky poniatiiny slovar*, ed. by L.L. Rybakovsky, Second revised and enlarged edition, Moscow, 2007, p. 251.

⁷ See: *International Migration Law. Glossary on Migration*, 2004, p. 55.

ternational officials in time of international crisis as well as of citizens caught in a crisis or in a disaster while abroad.⁸

In a broad sense, a *repatriate* is a person who, for reasons of a socio-economic or personal nature, voluntarily moves to the country of citizenship or origin for the purpose of permanent residence.⁹ In this regard, repatriation is often seen by some governments and the programs they implement as a form of return migration, i.e. the process of returning to the ethnic homeland. The country or region associated by people with their origin (even if they have not emigrated from there earlier) is usually considered their ethnic homeland, and, as a rule, this relationship is determined through ethnic and/or religious identification. The authorities of certain states directly use the concepts of “repatriation” and “repatriate” (for example, Israel and Greece) in normative legal and legislative acts, migration policies and resettlement programs.

Classification of Return Migration. Concept of Repatriation and Repatriates

There are several approaches to the classification of return migration.

Based on the principle of migrants' voluntary return to the country of origin:

— *Voluntarily returning migrants*, people who return to their country of origin of their own free will, without any interference from the host country. Voluntary repatriation can be organized (carried out under the auspices of the respective governments and UNHCR) or spontaneous (refugees return by their own means, with UNHCR and governments practically uninvolved in the return process).¹⁰ The term “stimulated voluntary return migration” is used, denoting a process carried out with the assistance of return and reintegration programs of international organizations or host countries, and refers to migrants who do not have a legal right to stay in the host country and who want to return to their countries of origin. These are the so-called Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration programs (AVVRs);

— *Forced migrants*, persons banished or deported to their country by the authorities of the host country.

Since 1979, IOM has been implementing Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration programs. IOM support for migrants through the AVVR includes a number of activities, usually comprising the following: pre-departure consultations, airline ticket purchase, administrative and tourist assistance and, if possible, reintegration assistance. Between 2005 and 2014, IOM provided assistance to an average of 34,000 migrants annually in returning to their homeland through AVVR. Due to the increase in migration in the recent years, the number of returnees has increased significantly. In 2016, support was provided to 98,400 migrants (32%—women, 27%—children, 3%—victims of human trafficking) who returned from 110 receiving or transit countries to 161 countries of origin.¹¹

In 2016, the majority of the AVVR participants (83%) returned from the European Economic Area (EEA), particularly from Germany, Greece, Austria, the Netherlands and Belgium (see Table 1). The flow of return migrants along the South-South vector, including that from transit countries, is

⁸ See: *Glossary on Migration. International Migration Law*, 2019, pp. 180-181.

⁹ See: *Glossary on Migration: International Migration Law*, ed. by Richard Perruchoud, IOM, Geneva, 2004.

¹⁰ See: *Glossary on Migration. International Migration Law*, 2019, p. 225.

¹¹ See: *World Migration Report 2018*, Chapter 2, IOM, Geneva, 2017, p. 15, available at [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/wmr_2018_en_chapter2.pdf].

increasing. For example, a large number of migrants returned from Niger and Morocco to Cameroon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Senegal, which accounted for more than 6% of all return migrants in the world. The main regions of origin of the migrants who received AVVR assistance in 2016 were Southeastern and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (49%), the Asia-Pacific region (16%), the Middle East and North Africa (16%). In total, the top 10 countries of origin account for 72% of all AVVR recipients.¹²

Table 1

Number of AVVR Program Participants by Key Host (or Transit) Countries and Countries of Origin, 2016

Host or Transit Countries	Number of Participants	Countries of Origin	Number of Participants
Germany	54,006	Albania	17,976
Greece	6,153	Iraq	12,776
Austria	4,812	Afghanistan	7,102
Niger	4,788	Serbia	6,978
Netherlands	4,635	Kosovo/UN SC	5,889
Belgium	4,117	Ethiopia	5,675
Yemen	2,594	FYR Macedonia	4,986
Finland	2,116	Iran (Islamic Republic)	4,485
Djibouti	1,803	Ukraine	3,438
Norway	1,459	Russian Federation	2,058

Source: World Migration Report 2018, Chapter 2, IOM, Geneva, 2017, p. 15.

Based on the degree of participation of state and international organizations in the process of return migration:

- *Directly or actively stimulated return migration* takes place wherever state programs for attracting and settling return migrants (repatriates), as well as voluntary return and reintegration programs (AVVR) are available and functional. The most ambitious return migration programs are currently being implemented by Israel, Germany, Russia, Greece and Kazakhstan. State programs in these countries have been carried out resolutely for several years, have clear goals and objectives, and are funded from the state budget.
- *Indirectly or incidentally stimulated return migration.* In this case, special state programs are absent or temporary, but there are measures in place to support return migrants, including certain sociocultural or professional groups. This approach is in place in certain Eastern and Northern European countries (i.e., Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, Finland), as well as in Japan, Peru and Brazil;
- *Unorganized or spontaneous return migration.* In this case, the state is not involved and people return independently.

¹² See: Ibidem.

Based on the status of returning migrants in the host country:

- *Legal or documented returning migrants* whose status in the host country was completely legal and executed in full compliance with the law, and is accompanied by the receipt by the migrant of all necessary documents and registration procedures in the host country;
- *Irregular or undocumented returning migrants* whose status was unregulated in the host country for various reasons, i.e., they may have crossed the border in violation of the rules, did not register in full compliance with the rules, or did not receive permits to work in the host country.

Based on the historical features of the formation of return migrants' potential:

- *Return migration from states with previously established large diasporas due to mass emigration.* For example, the return migration of ethnic Germans from Russia and Kazakhstan to Germany, Jews to Israel, Pontic Greeks from the former U.S.S.R. to Greece, Japanese from Brazil and Peru to Japan;
- *Return migration from states that were previously colonies or occupied territories that hosted a significant number of migrants from the mother country.* For example, the return migration of the French and their descendants from the former French colonies, Spaniards from Latin America to Spain, Portuguese from Portuguese-speaking countries to Portugal, Japanese and Germans from the occupied territories after World War II;
- *Return migration from other countries that were previously parts of one state before its collapse.* For example, return migration from the former republics of the U.S.S.R. to the Russian Federation, or Serbs from parts of the former Yugoslavia to Serbia;
- *Conditional return migration to a third country, which is launched for ethical reasons.* For example, Germany launched a special program for the return of Jews in an attempt to rehabilitate themselves for the Holocaust and the waves of Jewish emigration caused by the fascist regime.

State and Legal Regulation of Ethnic Repatriation in Kazakhstan

One of the factors in Kazakhstan's development as a state is population growth. An important role in strengthening this aspect is played by population migration. One particular case is the process of repatriation of ethnic Kazakhs to their historical motherland.

After Kazakhstan gained independence in 1991, ethnic repatriation was elevated to the state policy level and work began on its legislative formulation. Thanks to this twist of fate, over 1 million Kazakhs scattered all over the world have returned to their homeland. The share of ethnic Kazakhs in the overall population structure increased from 40 percent in 1989 to 67 percent in 2017. The population of Kazakhstan in 1991 was 16.9 million, and the lowest population size 14.8 million was recorded in 2001. Since 2005 there has been a steady increase in the size of the population, and in 2019 Kazakhstan' population comprised 18.5 million people.

There was a problematic issue in ethnic repatriation, namely, the fact that repatriates tend to move to labor-surplus regions. For example, with regard to the countries of origin of ethnic repatriates, their largest numbers were settled in South Kazakhstan (21.6%), Almaty (16.8%), Mangistau (13%) and Zhambyl (9.3%) regions. The most active resettlement of ethnic returnees occurred be-

tween 2004 and 2008, a period that saw the arrival of 43.7% of ethnic returnees (439,400 people). This is due to the fact that during this period the most favorable social support measures were provided (allocation of state funds for the purchase of housing, relocation subsidies, etc.).¹³

Initially, the term “compatriots” was used in the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the context of return migration. Examples include the Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated 31 December, 1996 No. 3308 On the State Program for the Support of Compatriots Living Abroad; the Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated 21 November, 2005 No. 1673 On the State Program for the Support of Compatriots Living Abroad, for 2005-2007; the Decree of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated 25 April, 2006 No. 325 On the Formation of the Commission on the Affairs of Compatriots Living Abroad; Order of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated 29 December, 2010 No. 161-r On the Establishment of a Working Group to Work Out Proposals for the Development of the Action Plan for Development of Cultural, Educational and Informational Links With Compatriots Living Abroad.

Subsequently, the ethnically labeled term “ethnic Kazakhs abroad” began circulating in Kazakhstan government-level normative documents instead of the neutral concept of “compatriots living abroad,” (i.e., in the Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated 18 May, 2018 No. 280 On Approval of the Action Plan to Support Ethnic Kazakhs Abroad for 2018-2022).¹⁴

On 22 July, 2011, a new Law on Population Migration was adopted. The definition given to the term “oralman” in this law differs from that in the preceding legislation. For example, according to Art 1 of the new law, “an oralman is an ethnic Kazakh who permanently resided outside the borders of the Republic of Kazakhstan when the country acquired sovereignty, and his children of Kazakh nationality who were born and permanently resided outside the borders of the Republic of Kazakhstan, who arrived in the Republic of Kazakhstan for the purpose of establishing permanent residence in the historical homeland and received the corresponding status in the manner prescribed by this Law.”¹⁵ That is, this concept takes into account such criteria as historical homeland, status, ethnic Kazakh and children of Kazakh nationality.

According to the Law on Migration, the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan establishes a regional quota for oralmans, and takes measures to provide state support to oralmans, ethnic Kazakhs and their families.

However, despite the obvious successes in state regulation of ethnic Kazakhs’ return to their historical homeland, there are also certain drawbacks.

The five established state centers for the adaptation and integration of oralmans are unable to fully, or even partially, ensure the flow of ethnic immigrants.

The concepts of “oralmans” and “locals” do exist in Kazakhstani society. Proper clarifications are not up to the mark in the sphere of information coverage and education, where oralmans are isolated as a distinct category of the population. Although Art 25 of the Law on Population Migration clearly states that the status of an oralman terminates after the oralman receives citizenship of the Republic of Kazakhstan, local residents and the repatriates themselves continue to call themselves oralmans.

On 29 May, 2008, the head of state Nursultan Nazarbayev gave an interview to the journalists of the Kazakh-language media, which caused a great resonance in society. In particular, he noted that

¹³ See: *Decree of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, dated 29 September, 2017 No. 602 On Approval of the Concept of Migration Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2017-2021 and The Action Plan for the Implementation of the Concept of Migration Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2017-2021.*

¹⁴ See: *Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, dated 18 May, 2018 No. 280 On Approval of the Action Plan to Support Ethnic Kazakhs Abroad for 2018-2022*, in: *Legal Information System of Regulatory Legal Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan “Әділем”*.

¹⁵ See: *Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 22 July, 2011 No. 477-IV On Population Migration*, in: *Legal Information System of Regulatory Legal Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan “Әділем”*.

it is necessary to abandon the use of the word “oralman,” which, as it were, divides the Kazakhs into permanent residents and newcomers. It is better to say “compatriots.”¹⁶

Therefore, certain preventive work has to be carried out with the media in order to modify their activities and develop an ethical approach to the choice of language in their materials. For example, such headlines in the media as “Here is the oralman—dumber than a rock,” “A stranger among his own people?,” “Hell for the oralmans,” “Oralmans are not just a risk factor. They are a one hundred percent risk!”, “Oralmans settled in a garbage dump in the Almaty region”, etc., do not contribute to the formation of positive ideas about oralman in society, their integration into a new society, and interaction with local residents. Individual cases should not be extrapolated to the state of the entire society or to all oralman in a chase for ratings. The media must be balanced and present positive materials on this subject, since there are numerous examples of the successful integration of oralman in society and their contribution to the development of the region and the country. Negatively tinted informational materials are a criminogenic factor of discriminatory fragmentation of citizens into different categories, especially since the oralman status is temporary and is only valid until one acquires citizenship. If the media covers the subject of low-paying and hard work, then it needs to discuss unemployment and lack of jobs as a phenomenon that exists for all of the country’s population, rather than just for new repatriates. When certain crimes are committed by the oralman or towards them, the “repatriate factor” is also overemphasized, while the motives and causes of these crimes remain unclear, and are unrelated to this factor in the vast majority of cases.¹⁷

State and Legal Regulation of Ethnic Repatriation in Kyrgyzstan

According to the State Migration Service under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, over 900,000 ethnic Kyrgyz live outside Kyrgyzstan; about 50,000 ethnic Kyrgyz have returned to the Kyrgyz Republic; and more than 33,700 ethnic Kyrgyz who have returned to their historical homeland now live in Kyrgyzstan. Despite the fact that the regulatory legislative framework for resettlement processes does exist, resettlement itself today is unorganized and spontaneous. In most cases, the arriving kayrylmans resettle in violation of the state border crossing procedure and existing rules of sojourn in Kyrgyzstan, often with unresolved issues, such as the absence of discharge paperwork from their previous place of residence, unsettled issues of former citizenship, etc. The mechanisms of the migration processes have not been established or fully regulated, and the ethnic Kyrgyz encounter a number of administrative penalties in the form of fines when they arrive in their historical homeland.¹⁸

The first normative legal act related to ethnic repatriation was adopted on 29 August, 2001. It was the Decree of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 264 On Measures to Support the Ethnic Kyrgyz Returning to their Historical Homeland, in which one of the priority directions of state policy was the provision of state support and assistance to ethnic Kyrgyz who arrived in the Kyrgyz Republic to establish permanent residence. In this decree, repatriates were classified into ethnic Kyrgyz refugees and other ethnic Kyrgyz who arrived to establish permanent residence and wish to

¹⁶ See: Interview of President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev “We will Walk the Great Path in Unity”, 04.06.2008, available in Russian at [<https://centrasia.org/newsA.php?st=1212579240>].

¹⁷ See: Kh.M. Mataeva, D.A. Jampeisov, “Problemy i perspektivy preduprezhdeniya prestupleniy v sfere etnicheskoy repatriatsii,” *Kriminologicheskii zhurnal Baykalskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta ekonomiki i prava*, No. 3, 2013, pp. 170-171.

¹⁸ See: Website of the Ombudsman of the Kyrgyz Republic [<https://ombudsman.kg>].

accept the citizenship of the Kyrgyz Republic. The priority task of the state was to provide a simplified procedure for acquiring Kyrgyz citizenship. The Government of the Kyrgyz Republic was entrusted with the task of developing and ratifying the State Program of Support and Assistance to Ethnic Kyrgyz who Returned to their Historical Homeland and Live Abroad, with 1 December, 2001 as the deadline.¹⁹

Subsequently, the Decree of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic dated 9 April, 2002 No. 217 “On Approval of Measures to Provide Support and Assistance to Ethnic Kyrgyz Who Returned to their Historical Homeland and Live Abroad” was adopted.

Five years after the directive of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic adopted the Decree of 19 October, 2006 No. 737 On Approval of the Kayrylman State Program to Assist the Ethnic Kyrgyz Returning to their Historical Homeland, for 2006-2008. This document introduced the term “kayrylman” into conceptual discourse. The term “migrant” is also used to refer to the ethnic Kyrgyz returning to their historical homeland. This state program indicated that the main content of the kayrylman status is to provide ethnic Kyrgyz migrants with a temporary legal status until the acquisition of citizenship of the Kyrgyz Republic, which will resolve the main tasks, namely, their documentation and registration, and also guarantee the execution of the right to work, education, and freedom of movement.²⁰

Six years after the adoption of the first normative legal act to support the return of the ethnic Kyrgyz to their historical homeland, the repatriation process began to be regulated by the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic dated 26 November, 2007 No. 175 On State Guarantees for Ethnic Kyrgyz Returning to their Historical Homeland, initiated, strangely enough, not by the Government, but by four deputies of the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic: S.N. Zhaparov, K.K. Tashiev, A.K. Keldibekov, U.Z. Ormonov. In this law, “a kayrylman is an ethnic Kyrgyz who is a foreign citizen or stateless person who voluntarily returns to his historical homeland and receives the status of a kayrylman. An Ethnic Kyrgyz means a person of Kyrgyz nationality who possesses the citizenship of a foreign state, or a stateless person of Kyrgyz nationality.”²¹

On a positive note, the law clearly defines the list of documents that are required to confirm nationality. Art 7 of the Law on State Guarantees for Ethnic Kyrgyz Returning to their Historical Homeland states that in the absence of a birth certificate, one of the following documents is submitted to confirm the nationality of the applicant:

- birth certificate of one of close relatives (parents, children, adoptive parents, brothers and/or sisters, half brothers and/or sisters, grandfathers, grandmothers, grandchildren);
- parents’ marriage certificate;
- birth certificate of one of the distant relatives (cousins).

The existence of this norm makes it possible to protect returnees from various abuses by authorities in granting the kayrylman status.

The law of Kyrgyzstan clearly states that the kayrylman status is a temporary legal status valid until the acquisition of citizenship of the Kyrgyz Republic.

The Law of the Kyrgyz Republic on State Guarantees for Ethnic Kyrgyz Returning to their Historical Homeland dated 26 November, 2007 No. 175 was amended and supplemented by the Law

¹⁹ See: *Decree of 29 August, 2001 UP No. 264 of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic On Measures to Support Ethnic Kyrgyz Returning to their Historical Homeland*, Centralized Databank of Legal Information of the Kyrgyz Republic.

²⁰ See: *Decree of 19 October, 2006 No. 737 On Approval of the Kayrylman State Program to Assist the Ethnic Kyrgyz Returning to their Historical Homeland, for 2006-2008*, Centralized Databank of Legal Information of the Kyrgyz Republic.

²¹ See: *Law of the Kyrgyz Republic on State Guarantees to Ethnic Kyrgyz Returning to their Historical Homeland, dated 26 November, 2007 No. 175*, Centralized Databank of Legal Information of the Kyrgyz Republic.

of the Kyrgyz Republic dated 27 January, 2015 No. 27, renaming the law and changing the content of certain norms.

In the title of the law, the words “returning to their historical homeland” are replaced by the words “moving to the Kyrgyz Republic.” Accordingly, the concept of “kayrylman” has been altered. According to the amendments, a kayrylman is an ethnic Kyrgyz who is a foreign citizen or a stateless person who voluntarily moves to the Kyrgyz Republic and receives the status of kayrylman.²²

On 30 September, 2016, the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic issued Government Decree No. 518, ratifying the “Kayrylman” program for assisting the ethnic Kyrgyz and kayrylmans residing in the Kyrgyz Republic for 2017-2022. The returnees are divided into two categories: ethnic Kyrgyz migrating to the Kyrgyz Republic and Kayrylmans. This seems to be due to the fact that after migrating to the Kyrgyz Republic, ethnic Kyrgyz continue to experience difficulties associated with defining their legal status and changing citizenship. This program has been specifically adopted to help not only the Kayrylmans, but also those who do not yet have this legal status.

State and Legal Regulation of Ethnic Repatriation in Russia

In the most recent history, Russia has been growing depopulated. The market reforms that followed the collapse of the U.S.S.R. had a significant impact on the physical and socio-psychological health, as well as on the demographic behavior of the Russian population. Fertility began to decline, mortality increased, and since 1993 the country has followed a depopulation trend. The population of Russia at the beginning of 2019 was 146.8 million people. According to the average version of the U.N. forecast, Russian population may decrease by 26.8 million people compared to the 1995 level by 2050.

Since 2006, the country’s leaders has implemented a number of measures to stabilize the demographic situation: ratified conceptual documents, adopting a number of demographic development programs at both federal and regional levels, and enacting social and demographic support measures. First of all, the maternal (family) capital was introduced, which led to an increase in the births of second and subsequent children. The increase in the number of women of reproductive age was another favorable demographic factor. The implementation of demographic policy measures allowed to increase the total fertility rate to 1.777. This is a good indicator against the background of economically developed countries, but insufficient for simple reproduction of the population. All this helped to partially stabilize the country’s demographic development by the mid-2010s: the main indicators established by the Concept of Demographic Policy for 2015 were achieved.²³ However, it was not possible to completely solve the demographic problems.

Since 2016, the country has entered a new phase of depopulation. It is characterized by a reduction in fertility due to a decrease in the number of women of reproductive age. The possibilities of increasing age-specific birth rates have been practically depleted, since delayed births took place in the past. Even if demographic policy measures allow to increase the total birth rate by 0.2-0.3 (which is unlikely for above-described reasons), it will hardly lead to an increase in the birth rate to 1.8-1.9 million, in order to balance out the number of births and the number of deaths

²² See: *Law of the Kyrgyz Republic on Amending and Adding to Some Legislative Acts of the Kyrgyz Republic, dated 27 January, 2015 No. 27*, Centralized Databank of Legal Information of the Kyrgyz Republic.

²³ See: *The Concept of the Demographic Policy of the Russian Federation for the Period until 2025 (Approved by Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of 9 October, 2007 No. 1351)*, available in Russian at [<http://base.garant.ru/191961/>].

in Russia. No particular progress is observed in the death statistics dynamics; stabilization is noted. Thus, one cannot but hope for the increased contribution of the migration component to Russian demographic dynamics.

In order to solve the pressing and urgent issues of demographic development, Russia has taken several measures in the sphere of drawing compatriots to return from abroad. In 1999, the Federal Law on State Policy Regarding Foreign Compatriots was adopted, and 2006 saw the implementation of the State Program to Promote the Voluntary Resettlement of Compatriots Living Abroad to the Russian Federation. Since 2012, the State Program to Promote the Voluntary Resettlement of Compatriots has been declared indefinite. According to the state migration policy concept ratified by the President of the Russian Federation on 13 June, 2012, at the first stage of the settlement, at least 200,000 compatriots are slated to be resettled annually prior to the end of 2015, 250,000 in 2016-2020, and 300,000 in 2021-2025.²⁴ Achieving the intended target figures was a problem. Since the launch of the state program and until 2015, 263,000 people moved to Russia, about 183,000 in 2015, over 146,000 in 2016, 119,000 in 2017, and 108,000 in 2018.²⁵ In total, thanks to the state program, it was possible to attract more than 800,000 compatriots to Russia over 12 years.

Almost half of the new arrivals choose to establish permanent residence in the Central Federal District. Also popular are the Siberian, Northwest and Volga federal districts.²⁶ The number of people moving to the labor-deficit regions of the Far East remains insignificant. The reasons, as even top-level officials agree,²⁷ are the unresolved issues, i.e., housing and difficulties in registration required to file the application for Russian citizenship. The problem with registration may be resolved by providing the opportunity for arriving compatriots to register at the addresses of local administrations in the receiving region.

The concept of compatriot was first formulated on 30 January, 1994 at the Congress of Russian Communities in the Declaration of the Rights of Russian Compatriots: “The following persons are recognized as compatriots:

- a) every person who had permanently resided in the territory of the U.S.S.R. and was a citizen of the U.S.S.R. if they consider the Russian language their native language;
- b) every person who was a citizen of the U.S.S.R. and permanently resided in its territory if they consider themselves a part of the Russian civilization, and have not voluntarily renounced this citizenship;
- c) the descendants of these persons.”²⁸

In the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation On the Main Directions of the State Policy of the Russian Federation Regarding Compatriots Living Abroad, dated 11 August, 1994,²⁹ and the Declaration on the Support of the Russian Diaspora and Patronage of Russian Compatriots of the State Duma of the Russian Federation of 9 December, 1995, the concept of compatriots denoted immigrants from the U.S.S.R. and Russia and their direct descendants, regardless of nationality and ethnicity, language, religion, nature of occupation, place of residence and other circumstances, who are not citizens of the Russian Federation and expressly declare their spiritual or cultural/ethnic con-

²⁴ See: “Putin utverdil Kontseptsiiu gosudarstvennoy migratsionnoy politiki RF do 2025 goda,” available at [http://rus.ruvr.ru/2012_06_13/77991379/].

²⁵ See: Website of the Federal State Statistics Service [<http://www.gks.ru>].

²⁶ See: Website of the Government of the Russian Federation [<http://government.ru/news/34207/>].

²⁷ Ibidem.

²⁸ See: “Documents of the Second All-World Congress of Russian Communities (Moscow, 29-30 January, 1994),” *Information Bulletin*, No. 1 (210), 30 May, 1994.

²⁹ See: *Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of 11 August, 1994 No. 1681 On the Main Directions of the State Policy of the Russian Federation Regarding Compatriots Living Abroad*, in: *Reference Legal System Consultant Plus*.

nection with the Russian Federation or any of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation and confirm this connection.”³⁰

The Federal Law of the Russian Federation on the State Policy of the Russian Federation Regarding Compatriots Abroad of 24 May, 1999, compatriots are defined as persons born in one state, living or residing in it and displaying the indications of a common language, history, cultural heritage, traditions and customs, as well as the descendants of these individuals in a direct descending line.

The following are recognized as compatriots abroad:

- citizens of the Russian Federation permanently residing outside the Russian Federation.
- persons and their descendants residing outside the Russian Federation and, as a rule, related to peoples historically residing in the Russian Federation, as well as persons who have made the free choice in favor of spiritual, cultural and legal relations with the Russian Federation and whose direct ascendants previously lived in the Russian Federation, including: persons who were citizens of the U.S.S.R., living in the republics that were a part of the U.S.S.R., received citizenship of these states or became stateless persons; natives (emigrants) from the Russian state, the Russian Republic, the R.S.F.S.R., the U.S.S.R. and the Russian Federation who had appropriate citizenship and became citizens of a foreign state or stateless persons.³¹

Obtaining the status of a compatriot is possible exclusively through an application, and not automatically.

The above definition gave rise to a number of disputes, since in accordance with international law, in addition to Russian citizens entitled to their country’s protection, citizens of other countries were also mentioned as compatriots. Many scholars believe that the majority of residents of the newly independent states, the republics of the former U.S.S.R., as well as residents of some areas of Finland, Poland and Turkey, which were part of the Russian State at one time, can be classified as compatriots. It was also noted that the isolation of compatriots into different categories can lead to inequality between them.

According to Para 3 of Art 3 of the Federal Law of the Russian Federation on the State Policy of the Russian Federation Regarding Compatriots Abroad, dated 24 May, 1999, recognition of their compatriot status is an act of their self-identification, supported by public or professional activities to preserve the Russian language, native languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation, the development of Russian culture abroad, the strengthening of friendly relations between the country of compatriots’ residence with the Russian Federation, support for public associations of compatriots and the protection of the rights of compatriots or other evidence of the free choice of these persons in favor of spiritual and cultural ties with the Russian Federation.³²

This legal norm is another poignant matter in the federal law. In particular, the first issue is to determine who comprises the “public associations of compatriots,” what the basic condition or principle that allows to consider a certain organization one of them is, who makes the decision on how to classify these organizations, grants this status to them and analyzes their goals and objectives. Secondly, it is important to define who evaluates the effectiveness of organizations and on what conditions. The question of what degree of an individual’s activity or effectiveness is considered sufficient participation also remains open.

³⁰ See: *Resolution of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation of 8 December, 1995 No. 1476-i of the State Duma On the Declaration on the Support of the Russian Diaspora and Patronage of Russian Compatriots*, in: *Reference Legal System Consultant Plus*.

³¹ See: *Federal Law on the State Policy of the Russian Federation Regarding Compatriots Living Abroad, dated 24 May, 1999 No. 99-Φ3*, in: *Reference Legal System Consultant Plus*.

³² *Ibidem*.

All of the above issues are relevant, because if there is no clear legal basis for law enforcement practice, there will certainly be numerous abuses in granting compatriot status.

Conclusion

Summing up the results of the comparative study of poignant issues in state legal regulation of compatriot repatriation, it can be concluded that the problems encountered by repatriates in the countries under consideration are very similar.

In recent years, certain post-Soviet states have also begun to actively attract ethnically and culturally similar populations from abroad. The main goal pursued by Russia, which had launched its return migration program in 2006, was to build up its demographic potential in the context of the demographic crisis and to “gather the Russian population.” Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan aim to increase the share of “titular” nationalities in the ethno-demographic makeup of the population.

There are still very tangible problems in the countries under review, despite the establishment of migration legislation, adoption of special programs, and ratification of concepts. These include topical issues of clarifying certain important legal concepts, registration at the place of arrival, housing and employment. It directly affects the rights and obligations, return and settlement, adaptation and integration of persons involved in migration processes. All these are important elements of state stability and development.

Improving the effectiveness of state legal regulation with the common goal of achieving social stability and harmony, as well as a timely impact on public relations is a vital issue.

Based on both positive and negative sides of international experience, for the purposes of state legal regulation repatriation has to be conceptualized not only as granting of citizenship in a simplified manner, but also as assistance in the subsequent adaptation and integration of returnees. In addition, adaptation and integration cannot be understood in the narrow sense as the provision of work and housing, rather, social, cultural, linguistic, psychological, legal aspects all need to be taken into account.